

UUJEC Economic Justice Spotlight

Unitarian Church of Evanston, Evanston, IL

The Unitarian Church of Evanston in Evanston, IL is actively using their Black Lives Matter sign as a tool for engagement and activism, and their role in the Unitarian Universalist Action Network of Illinois to keep them engaged and involved in social justice efforts and work. The Unitarian Church of Evanston is featured in this UUJEC economic spotlight.

Please be concise, in 300 words or less, what results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?

Economic justice activity at the Evanston Unitarian Church is vibrant and varied. We are organized into a number of separate task forces. The Racial Equity Action Leadership Team (REAL) has been working within our congregation and community to fight racism. We work closely with the local YWCA on their anti-racism projects, we've held two sessions of the UUA's Beloved Conversations program, and every Sunday we hold a brief vigil on the busy street in front of our church building and our 'Black Lives Matter' sign.



In addition, the group provides ongoing education and support for community events and actions. Working with other local UU churches we are a member of the UU Prisons Ministry, which advocates for prison reform and organizes covenant groups in the prisons. The group was founded by a member of our congregation, and church members play a major role in the group. We also recently formed an Immigrant Solidarity Team to lobby for better immigration legislation and to work with other Evanston faith communities to help detained immigrants. Our Inequality task force has held educational sessions on the corrupting influence of Money in Politics and

on the danger of growing Income Inequality. In April of this year the group co-sponsored a conference with UUJEC titled "Insist on Justice! Resist Inequality!" UUs from across the Midwest joined us to learn about the ramifications of the growing US income gap and how we can improve our skills as activists to confront it. We also have a Food and Shelter Team (FAST) that provides direct service to local soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Each year this group organizes a large holiday gift collection for local community organizations. Our Military Bridge Builders group supports liberal religious services at Great Lakes Naval Academy and helps homeless veterans at the annual Chicago area 'stand-downs'.

Please be concise, in 300 words or less, how is the leadership of your congregation involved in your economic justice work?

Leadership in our congregation is involved in this work by providing staff and congregational financial support and by joining us at rallies and meetings in support of immigration reform, the New Poor People's campaign and lobby days in our state capitol.



Their support of our weekly share the plate donations program, where half of each Sunday's loose plate collection is donated to a local or UU non-profit organization, has been invaluable. Recently, when we had to vote to continue displaying the "Black Lives Matter" sign in front of our church building, the board chair played a major role in the public meetings we held to discuss the issue.

Please be concise, in 300 words or less, what results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?

We feel we're beginning to be seen as a major force for social and economic justice within our community. This perception is helped by the prominence of our "Black Lives Matter" sign and our weekly vigils. Within our statewide UU Action Network, we're seen as one of the leading congregations in the movement, as many of our members travel to Springfield regularly to lobby for budget and judicial reform.



We can't take credit for finally securing a state budget for Illinois, but many of us rallied in front of the State of Illinois Building on Valentine's Day, asking the governor to "Have a Heart" and pass a budget that recognizes the needs of everyone in the state, especially those of lower-income. Our congregation now expects us to play a major role in local and state social justice issues. Most of them are proud of the work we're doing and have found at least one activity dealing with social justice or service delivery to participate

in. Our interest in justice extends to Adult Education classes on Totalitarianism, monthly donations of shampoo and diapers to local homeless shelters, and postcard writing campaigns to candidates.

This article, provided by UUJEC incoming administrator Christopher D. Sims, was written with information provided by Unitarian Church of Evanston member Jane Bannor. Pictures were acquired

from the Unitarian Church of Evanston's website and the internet. For questions about the Unitarian Church of Evanston's work, Jane can be reached at jbannon@sbcglobal.net.

Unitarian Church of Evanston Additional Resources:

Website: www.ucevanston.org

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/325912360825550/>