

Economic Justice Spotlight

First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio Texas (First UU) has 420 members and encourages members of the congregation to become active in social justice. This encouragement is manifested in many ways in the San Antonio community.

First UU has been part of the economic development strategy for San Antonio, Texas for over 40 years. The congregation works closely with interfaith community organizations. First UU actively works with an organization called, “Community Organized for Public Service and the Metro Alliance” (COPS/Metro). COPS/Metro has a long history of grassroots community organizing and is an affiliate of Industrial Area Foundation (IAF). The IAF was developed in the 1930s by Saul Alinsky, considered by many to be the founder of modern community organizing. COPS/Metro was founded in 1974 and “projects itself as an agent for fair and equitable distribution of the city’s resources and services.”



Past, Present, and Future COPS/Metro leaders from First UU. Photo from First UU Facebook page

First UU employs the IAF model of a leader, which is someone with many relationships and a following. In the First UU congregation, at least 20 members meet this definition. These 20 key economic justice leaders regularly attend meetings and talk with others about issues of concern including child care for low wage earners, real job training, a living wage, legislation to curb economic abuse of those economically challenged, and immigration.



Fall Assembly “Who Is My Neighbor” Photo from Metro/Cops Facebook page

Through its affiliation with COPS/Metro First UU is a valuable and much-needed resource for the low income working families of San Antonio. For many low income working families the cost of childcare is an impediment to being employed. When the cost of childcare exceeds, or nearly approaches, one’s take home pay, being employed makes little economic sense. First UU has supported San Antonio’s “After School Challenge” and the “Summer Recreation Program”, which offers a safe child day care system, a much-needed resource for the community.

Furthering its goal of social justice, First UU helped develop an award-winning long-term job training program, Project QUEST. QUEST provides scholarships and services for low-wage workers through training at the local community college. The focus is to provide training of skills which are in demand. To date there have been over 6,000 graduates through Project QUEST. The mission statement of Project QUEST is “to strengthen the economy with highly qualified employees for in-demand, living wage careers”.



For many years, First UU has been advocating for a living wage for workers. First UU was the lead congregation insisting that any tax abatement for the city of San Antonio or County of Bexar be tied to a living wage. First UU was a strong advocate for the public sector living wage campaign in the last two years, for which over 6,000 workers benefited from the public sector living wage campaign, with a \$14 an hour wage for 2017 and \$15 an hour wage for 2018.

Diane Duesterhoeft, one of the UU leaders in the San Antonio living wage campaign, testifies before the Bexar County Commissioners Court. Photo by Jorge Montiel

Young adults at First UU have been involved in social justice actions including legislation to curb the out-of-control payday lending business, which preys on low income individuals. The legislation being proposed in the upcoming legislative session is significant in enhancing individuals’ rights and requiring the communication of these rights to the individuals.

First UU helped develop a statewide network called the Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry made up of 48 UU congregations in the state. TXUJMJ communicate and coordinate a focused effort to advance significant issues and is holding a legislative training day in November 2016. TXUJMJ has a legislative action day planned mid-February, 2017 just after the session starts where they hope to get 200 Texas UU’s from across the state to the Capital.



Living Wage Press Conference. Rev. Dr. Josh Snyder, Minister, First UU. Photo by Hank Auderer.

With a history of concern for social and economic justice for immigrants, First UU was part of the sanctuary movement in the 1980s. A Guatemalan family that First UU provided a sanctuary sponsorship to is still working with the congregation today.

The 420 members of First UU make up a small percentage of the population of 2,000,000 in the San



Antonio metropolitan area. Yet through the effort and energy of its members the region has been positively impacted. We at the UUJEC honor First UU's efforts and see them as an example for others.

Article developed in collaboration between UUJEC board member Jim Black and First UU Social Justice Committee member Mike Phillips. To reach out to First UU, please contact Mike at mcmphillips@yahoo.com.

Members of First UU accept the UUJEC Certificate of Recognition for their Economic Justice work. Photo from First UU Twitter page.

First UU Additional Resources

First UU Website: <http://uusat.org/>

First UU Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/FirstUUChurchSA>

First UU Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/First-Unitarian-Universalist-Church-of-San-Antonio-11608568314/>

Cops/Metro Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/copsmetro/>

First UU Social Action webpage: <http://uusat.org/how-we-serve/social-justice/>

TXUUJM Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/TXUUJM/>

Webcast: C.O.P.S./Metro Alliance: Blessed are the history makers:

<http://nowcastsa.com/blogs/webcast-copsmetro-alliance-blessed-are-history-makers>

San Antonio interfaith coalition cheers living wage victories:

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/sanantoniolivingwage>

COPS / Metro Raises Wages AGAIN, Makes QUEST a Line-Item on City Budget:

<http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=18c087e16c4694dafc5d36617&id=148e89aea5>