

# UUJEC Economic Justice Spotlight

## First Universalist Church of Norway. Norway, Maine

*Nancy Lee Piper Office Manager for First Universalist Church of Norway shares their efforts with UUJEC.*

### ***Tell us about the economic justice work in your congregation.***

First Universalist Church of Norway's Social Justice Committee is devoted, dedicated, active, and far-reaching. As a small "Welcoming Congregation" with an enormous desire to positively impact varieties of causes and actions, devotion to social justice not only tops the agenda of the committee, but impacts the entire church community as well as the community at large. At the forefront in 2016 and capturing additional attention with each ensuing week is the Peace Vigil, a regular Thursday afternoon hour of reflection and witness to peace at the front of the First Universalist Church along Main Street.

Demonstrating both the need for and presence of peace in all facets of humanity, participants hold signs with words such as "Witness for Non-Violence", "Standing on the Side of Peace" and "Witness for Peace" to portray a dedication to solidarity and a willingness to stand together for a necessary eminence in all humanity has to offer. The Peace Vigil has drawn significant community attention and the action is to grow the peace vigil locally and beyond.



*Photo from Norway UU Facebook page*

As active participants communicating the need for quality resources for homeless teenagers and other struggling people, to educating the public in the truth and reconciliation of Tribal Native Nations' social justice issues through Maine Wabanaki REACH programs, to clothing drives for immigrants and refugees, to hosting 25 years of Community Lunch Programs with the Area Association of Churches to 4th Sunday collections that reach people, programs, animals, and environmental causes, to communicating the need for climate change focus and responsible gun ownership, First Universalist Church of Norway enormously impacts a multitude of important issues not only in a financial capacity, but involves itself actively with contributions of time, written and verbal communication, outreach measures, and expanding the focus of important issues beyond the intimate church family.

### ***How is the leadership of your congregation involved in your economic justice work?***

Leadership at First Universalist Church of Norway revolves around devotion, dedication, activity, and reaching beyond the walls of the congregation. Leadership asserts itself from the Board of Trustees to the chair of the Social Justice Committee facilitating direction to the committee members themselves to those not directly on the committee coming together to not only support the causes but get involved in the physical, mental and emotional demands of contributing. Individuals, small groups and large groups step

forward to commit to making change and then fostering those actions through execution, completion, and success.

These same individuals and groups, whether directly sitting on the committee or not, collect and deliver food to local food pantries, collect, sort, organize and deliver clothing for clothing drives, contribute household and other goods to Community Lunch for individuals who frequent Community Lunch and can benefit from other sustainable goods to organizing and staffing events that educate as well as inspire, to contributing generously to 4th Sunday collections to organizing and executing fundraising events, concerts, and activities solely for social justice causes as well as donating percentages of other fundraising events to the social justice account for current actions as well as future actions. Social and economic justice issues are at the forefront of conversation both inside and outside the church, and everyone, regardless of their level of dedication, devotion, commitment, or activity is a leader in the sense that they take responsibility for the principles of Unitarian Universalism and ensure those principles are present in the conduct of their everyday lives.



### ***How have you made economic justice a sustainable part of your congregational life?***

Economic and social justice activity as a sustainable part of congregational life is exemplified through multiple communication vehicles to keep our church community informed as well as alert the public to the many church activities that impact the community at large. Whether direct telephone communication to members and friends who don't utilize new technologies, to email blasts that engage and inform everyone through catchy and specific subject lines, to the unveiling of a fresh, modernized website to weekly press releases that exhibit the diversity of First Universalist Church of Norway's social and economic justice involvement, to inbox emails from organizations and UUA supported causes, First Universalist Church of Norway seeks sustainability through communication and awareness.

First Universalist Church of Norway creates and contributes to economic and social justice sustainability by offering low cost long-term, short-term and one-time rentals of the many room and room combinations of the church. Groups such as AA, Community Sing, Choir groups, artist groups, Community Lunch, Safe Voices, Community Concepts, Healthy Oxford Hills and other individual and group programs have all benefitted. Blake House, once the church's parsonage, has long been home to local businesses that enjoy reduced rents and have been long time patrons of the church.

Divesting from fossil fuels and investing its endowment in socially and environmentally responsible companies despite the reality of lower returns has been an important and conscious action of the voting body of the congregation. The saying, "putting your money where your mouth is" certainly is true of First Universalist Church of Norway. Through a generous donation from the son of a now deceased member, First Universalist Church also switched from oil heat to propane to be more environmentally responsible. Communication, outreach, awareness, empathy, and compassion are foundations of First Universalist Church of Norway's economic and social justice sustainability practices.



## ***What results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?***

Paramount to inspiring positive social and economic change for all people is involvement, understanding, participative leadership, and perseverance. First Universalist Church of Norway focuses on these important components and this is apparent in the attention the Peace Vigil is getting from people not directly connected to the church, as well as the conceptual ideas for change that are being addressed as a result of the Peace Vigil.

More new people are attending church on Sunday to "discover what we're all about", as well as individuals and families approaching the minister and office manager about becoming members of the church. Additional groups and organizations are contacting the church to benefit not only from the low-cost rentals but to connect to the social and economic activities and partner with the church to collectively enhance one another's messages as well as implore and seek change.



*Photo from Norway UU Facebook Page*

Participative leadership is a direct result of social and economic justice practices of First Universalist Church of Norway as more congregational members and friends are stepping forward with ideas, suggestions, constructive criticisms, reflections and analysis for improvements, focuses, movements, and initializing direction to connective causes in relationship to current activities. First Universalist Church of Norway continues to seek both changes and results that benefit the focus and purpose of economic and social change for the better, whether that is utilizing concepts and formats that work or revitalizing actions with fresh approaches and ideas that bring better results. As a congregation, open to suggestion and innovation, First Universalist Church of Norway works to optimize positive change for all.

Article developed in collaboration between UUJEC Administrator Rachel Bennett Steury and Norway UU Office Manager Nancy Lee Piper. To reach Norway UU, please contact Nancy at [norwayuu@gwi.net](mailto:norwayuu@gwi.net).

## ***Additional Resources***

Norway UU Webpage [www.norwayuu.org](http://www.norwayuu.org)

Norway UU Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/NorwayUUChurch/>

Norway UU Social Justice webpage <http://www.norwayuu.org/social-responsibility/>

Maine-Wabanaki REACH <http://www.mainewabanakireach.org/>

Fossil Fuel Divestment <http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest/listing-of-known-religious-divestment-efforts>