

# UUJEC Economic Justice Spotlight

Unitarian-Universalist Congregation of Venice. Venice, Florida

*Marty King, Chair and Social Justice Team Leader of UUCOV shares their efforts with UUJEC.*

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

Our congregation works on economic justice on many fronts. Our Community Outreach Committee is part of a national organization called Family Promise, and in conjunction and rotating with other area churches, this year has hosted and fed ten families, six of whom now have permanent housing and sustainable employment. In addition, the committee members have provided for "backpack kids" during the school year, so children have food over the weekend. They participate weekly in sandwich making at the Center of Hope, which also provides help and counseling once the people come in. Food Pantry distribution is done year-round. They also are involved in community dinners, and "coffee talks."



Many members of the congregation contribute their time, skills and money. One Sunday of each month, the collection plate is dedicated solely to a designated charity in our community. Members provide after-school tutoring at the Laurel Community Center. We are developing a program to help public schools provide for needy children.

Our Common Good Committee works to help disenfranchised voters, and for the Move to Amend. They circulate petitions, go to demonstrations and public meetings, and write letters when needed. This committee has worked hard to educate the congregation and inspire them to work toward justice for the poor, and minorities, who disproportionately represented in our prisons in the USA. Members visit people who are incarcerated.



*Photo provided by UUCOV Facebook Page*

Our Green Sanctuary Committee regards global warming as an economic issue, as it will impact most severely on the poor. We have conducted an all-day workshop with the Pachamama Alliance, and our congregation contributed a significant amount of money to put solar panels on our sanctuary roof. We are working hard to share information about gardening and consuming to live more sustainable lives.

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

Our leadership demonstrates a strong commitment to economic justice by supporting the above programs, and working side-by-side with the membership to accomplish our goals. Kindra Muntz, Chair of the Common Good Committee spearheaded an effort to get Move to Amend on the ballot at GA. A few years ago, she was one of the leaders in Florida who sponsored a constitutional amendment to develop a paper ballot. Our previous ballots had been punch cards, which were a problem in 2000, and this was followed by electronic ballots which could not be verified in a close or challenged election. So, this reform has impacted favorably on all voters in Florida.



In addition, Muntz works hard at registering voters and promoting petitions for local candidates to save them the filing fee. Georgia Blotzer and Barbara Griffen, chairing the Family Promise work of the

*Photo Provided by UUCOV.ORG*

Community Outreach Committee, have devoted countless hours to working with the homeless and hungry in the area. Phil Veach and Steve Batchelor have steadily worked and recruited others in the food programs cited above, with the goal of helping less fortunate school children and their families.

The leaders of the Green Sanctuary Committee have provided ongoing connections through the Pachamama Alliance, [Transition Venice](#), and other organizations to alert the congregation to the problem of client change and inform them of ways they can help. A tree planting program has been undertaken. In all these ways, the Executive Board has been willing to devote time and resources to make these things happen, and have supported the various committees with their own help and counseling. Our new Religious Education Director has been instrumental in bringing in community resources, and in offering help to neighboring schools.

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

Everything the Congregation is doing is ongoing, and therefore, sustainable. Long-term commitments have been made, with no end in sight, at least until some of these serious problems might be solved, which we know will take years. By working together, we do not become discouraged. Our Seven Principles guide us, and we are thankful to belong to the UUA, as our hope for the future is that by concerted, determined and long-term efforts, we can work for meaningful change.

None of these problems can be easily solved, which is why it is so important to work together for greater impact. Members donate to a different charity each month, and thousands of dollars are collected each year for the worthiest causes in our community, many of them helping low-income children and families. Our small congregation was able to raise \$40,000 last spring from individual donations so that we could go totally solar. We plant native plants and trees to conserve water, and to avoid the runoff that excess fertilizer and chemicals would engender. The congregation is committed to the ongoing success of all these programs, and investigating ways in which we can do more.

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

Homeless families have found sustainable housing and improved jobs through Family Promise. While the need is great, and this only addresses a small percentage of homeless people, it is a concrete way in which families' lives can be improved. Hungry children and their families are being fed every week because of our efforts providing food. A letter-writing campaign has resulted in the postponement of the execution of a man, poor, badly represented legally, and on death row. Hopefully, there will be time to have his sentence overturned.



Many people have been registered to vote for the first time in Florida. Good candidates have been encouraged to run for election by members helping them to be put on the ballot. The role of big spending in elections that destroys the democratic process is being challenged by a constitutional amendment, the Move to Amend. Voting reforms have been put in place due to the leadership, work and donations by members of our congregation, working with others in the community.

Article developed in collaboration between UUJEC Administrator Rachel Bennett Steury and UUCOV Social Justice Team Leader Marty King. To reach UUCOV, please contact Marty at [mking18@juno.com](mailto:mking18@juno.com).

***Additional Resources***

UUCOV Website: [www.uucov.org](http://www.uucov.org)

UUCOV Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/uucov/>

Family Promise: <http://familypromise.org/>

Center of Hope: <http://www.salvationarmyflorida.org/westpalmbeach/programs/center-of-hope-transitional-housing/>

Pachamama Alliance: <https://www.pachamama.org/>

Transition Venice: <https://www.meetup.com/Transition-Venice/>