

Minutes for Social Action Committee Meeting – Nov. 11, 2019

Attending: Margaret Harloe, Helen Hutchinson, James Galasinski, Teresa Veramendi, Eileen Raymond, Sara Hutcheson, Pat Alden
(all others excused due to heavy snow!)

James read our centering words, about building up faith communities after we are gone

Item One -- Committee structure and preparing for change

Margaret announced that she and Bart will be moving to Boise, Idaho, next summer. Thus the current co-chair scheme could change. But a larger question is: what is the best structure for doing the social justice work of our church? Some of the complexity of this question is reflected in the diagram at the end of these minutes.

Last spring we hired a quarter-time Social Justice Coordinator, who helped organize successful workshops in the spring. These distilled down to several current working groups, which have been meeting and developing actions:

- Climate Change
- Campus Kitchens
- developing as a Welcoming Congregation
- supporting migrant workers
- on race and diversity
- on prisons.

How do these intersect/communicate? (How do the groups on the diagram fit together?)

Teresa thought we'd have reports from the working groups at a meeting like SAC. However, she doesn't want any SAC member's interests to be left out.

Margaret believes that we would be well served by something like a "Social Justice Council" which would help keep track of what's happening – in terms of the calendar and scheduling, in terms of budget needs, etc. Most group needs to have a sense of the big picture, so things don't collide. Then there is the always important question of how to get people involved with diverse initiatives, especially younger church members with demands of young families? How can they get involved without committing to being on a committee? How can the work of social justice be well coordinated without overburdening James?

Could Religious Education provide a model for us, with Teresa as the kind of hub that Carol provides? She'd be the one person that anyone with a social justice idea would know to reach out to. Individual working groups would connect with her. Noted: RE has these differences from social justice work: we assume continuity over years for these programs, and they meet almost every Sunday.

With SAC and Social Justice Initiative and a Social Justice Coordinator, people are uncertain about who to go to. Many ideas for events go to James; Sara Trimm is a huge help with the church calendar. But do new people get a sense of the whole church's involvement in social justice, and of what the active parts are? Jenn Whittaker and Heather Rousell have proposed a pamphlet for newcomers. What should we include about social action committee and social justice efforts?

Noted: several people working with the “working groups” don’t attend our church, at least not regularly. We want to encourage this kind of “reaching-out involvement.”

Noted: all the working groups share needs about how to publicize things, set dates, get events into enews.

James made the point that we are still a pastoral-sized congregation. On the one hand, we have Governance work to get done (finances, endowment, etc) (Much done by Church Council or in standing committees.) Ministry work, including social action, gets done by James or by people to whom he delegates. RE for instance is delegated. Teresa reports to James; she could be the conduit from SAC to James, and vice versa. Church Council is working on a plan for how all of this should happen.

Helen drew attention to the import of a potential name change. If Social Action Committee (SAC) becomes a Social Justice Program, it could have benefits:

A name change would align us more clearly with the church mission statement about “Social Justice.”

It would help bring together the Social Justice Initiative (every 2 years) and the Social Justice Coordinator with the current committee (SAC)

She noted that a “program” is a more institutionalized and ongoing entity (as opposed to a committee). It would have standing comparable to our RE program. A program is continuous. Program more interesting than a committee. Doesn’t assume a tenure of commitment.

Individuals would then get involved in one of the working groups rather than joining a committee.

[Update – since this meeting Teresa is circulating two readings about the organization of Social Justice: [Hierarchy is not the problem... it's the power dynamics](#)
[11 Practical Steps Towards Healthy Power Dynamics at Work](#)]

Item Two -- Grace House has reached out to ask for two kinds of support. They have placed a bin in the social room for women’s health and sanitary products, and people can bring it items (or donate cash) to this. The new director, Christine Downton, also asked for a couple of volunteers to become “spiritual mentors” to one of their women. Sarah Oakley has already volunteered for this work, and the group suggested a few other names (ideally of younger women who have children). Going forward, SAC should again take up whether we’d like some kind of ongoing relationship with Grace House, and what that might be. A possible SASO was raised for the future. [Update since meeting: Rachel Sturges accepted the invitation to be a Grace House mention; however, the resident she was initially to connect with has since left GH, so she will step in when a 6th resident moves in.]

Item three – SASOs

Sara Hutcheson had done some background work on a possible SASO for Child Advocacy Center of Northern NY. They provide a safe house and support and health services for children who are being abused. Sara will talk with Ilene Burke at Renewal House to get more information and develop a contact who might present this SASO.

For December, in lieu of a SASO, we take up a collection to benefit Church and Community Program. James will get out the minister's customary letter to church members about this collection. The donation plate at the Holiday pageant and the service on Christmas Eve will be dedicated to this. Pat will ask Connie Jenkins for some particular stories for James' letter.

Item four – Letters to Prisoners

Teresa would like to follow-up with inmates who contacted her about the poetry context (part of “Justice for All.”) She has about 10 people she’s like to connect with. We agreed that having a table for this work during/after social hour on Nov 17 would be a good way to do this. Eileen mention that Church of the Larger Fellowship would like to have holiday cards sent. This could be intergenerational, involving RE folks. These need to go out by Dec. 1

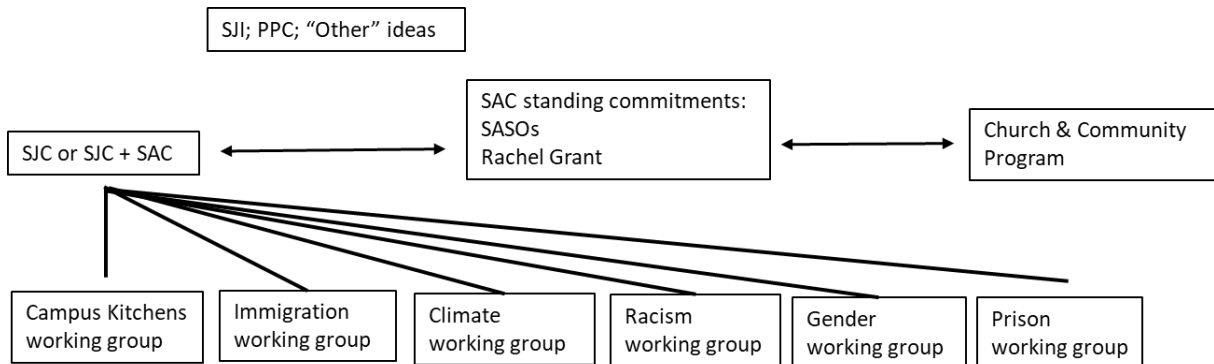
Item five – Tedra Cobb’s donation to a social justice project

Tedra has returned her stipend for a pulpit talk. (Eileen noted that several presenters at the SJI were also declining their stipends.) Teresa mentioned her interest in supporting a van for people attending the HALT march in Albany on MLK day (stop solitary confinement). If there is interest and need, the Cobb money could be spent on van rental. However, it could work just to have people car pool.

Other matters –

Climate Action working group is using CC and More to educate our congregation. On Dec. 8, Brian Gardam will converse about how to talk to climate change deniers. Would other working groups like to use this CC and More time slot? Mention of an idea to make very short videos (UUtube) of CC and More conversations.

Diagram to accompany Item one --



Discussion Questions brought to SAC:

- What is our capacity (Teresa's? congregation's)?
- Does SJC become the central hub?
- Could/would/should SAC host a meeting of working group stake-holders once or twice a year to share progress, budget needs, goals, etc.? (model similar to how DRE and REC work cooperate to support RE program and teaching teams)

- Does there have to be a fixed map of teams, or would projects just have a lifespan (come and go as there is interest)?
- Does SAC just focus on programs for which we want ongoing continuity (SASOs, RSGrant, Church & Community Program)?
- How do we fit in new ideas that are brought to SAC or SJC?
- Rebrand SAC as the Social Justice Program?