

2015 Social Justice Ministry Report (Bruce Christenson)

UniLu's Social Justice ministry represents our congregation's response to social issues and concerns at local, national, and global levels. During the past fiscal year, we used our finances, facilities, time, and talent in support of a number of efforts:

Offering Temporary Shelter for Homeless Women - The congregation held a special congregational meeting on May 3rd at which members voted by consensus to offer to host a temporary winter shelter for homeless women in 2016 in concert with the Heart & Home Collaborative, and to contribute some amount to help underwrite Heart and Home's Conditional Use Permit application fee with the City of Palo Alto. Over the summer members of the Social Justice Committee organized several information fairs to inform neighbors of UniLu's intent to host a temporary women's shelter and circulated notices of our intent and the information fair to our nearest neighbors. Although the information fairs did not generate much turn out, the comments from neighbors during the distribution of flyers indicated that many were already supportive of the church's effort to offer a temporary shelter in the neighborhood. We still have a few neighbors who object to our hosting a temporary shelter and it seems unlikely that we will change their minds. We are currently waiting for Heart & Home Collaborative to decide on a plan and time-frame for obtaining a Conditional Use Permit as they ponder options given that they have not yet found other congregations in Palo Alto offering to host a temporary women's shelter. (There are 12 congregations in Palo Alto that host a rotating co-ed shelter for men and women, but there is currently no shelter that exclusively serves women who, for vulnerability reasons, are often reluctant to use a co-ed shelter.)

Racial Justice Reading Group – An Invitation – In April several members of the congregation formed a reading group aimed at understanding and addressing racism in our selves, our church, and our society. The urgency of this undertaking is highlighted by a series of violent deaths of African Americans and people of color at the hands of law enforcement officials and others. The saliency of this issue for Lutherans was brought home by the killing of nine African Americans in a African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in Charleston, South Carolina by a member of an ELCA church; two of the victims of the shooting, including the church's head pastor, were also graduates of Lutheran seminaries. The reading group invites all members of UniLu to become more educated, to examine attitudes and actions, and to engage on this issue.

- *Becoming more educated* – There are a number of valuable resources, some of which included the following:
 - *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by Michelle Alexander – The author, a legal scholar, documents how the criminal justice system in the U.S., including the so-called “War on Drugs”, has resulted in a new racial caste system through mass incarceration of African-American males and other minorities of color.
 - *Just Mercy – A Story of Justice and Redemption*, by Bryan Stevenson – This New York Times Best Seller is the true story of the author's work dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the criminal justice system.
 - ELCA's *Confronting Racism – Continuing the Conversation*: This is a webcast of a conversation on racism with our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and William B. Horne II, a member of the ELCA Church Council that can be found at <https://www.elca.org/webcast> . It includes links to other ELCA racial justice resources, including ELCA statements on race and ethnicity and the criminal justice system in the U.S.
 - *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* by Tim Wise. In this video, Wise makes the case that racial inequity and white privilege are real and persistent threats to personal and collective well-being, but that resistance to white supremacy and racism is possible.

- *Examining Attitudes and Actions* – This involves reflecting on our own attitudes and behaviors as well the practices and policies of our church and other social institutions. For example, there is an increasing awareness that unconscious biases play a prevalent role in our daily lives and can be seen on a social level in such things as the way in which teachers respond to students, the way medical personnel deliver health care, or in the day to day practices of any number of professions.
- *Engaging on Racism* – Responding to racism requires extensive change in awareness, attitudes, behaviors, and social policies that may come in small steps. To these ends, some of the members of UniLu attended community meetings that the University AME Zion Church of Palo Alto organized during the summer to help further the conversation on racism, while on a social policy level, the state of California passed legislation banning the use of secretive grand juries in making judgments on whether to bring law enforcement officials to trial in cases involving police shootings.

God's Work, Our Hands (GWOH) Service Day – On Sunday, September 13th, UniLu collaborated with Bethel Lutheran Church of Cupertino in providing service to local non-profit organizations and other types of social support efforts. Some of the projects include packing food and restocking food shelves at the Ecumenical Hunger Program's Food Closet in East Palo Alto, helping on a restoration project at the O'Keefe Preserve in Los Altos, putting together care packages that can be distributed to homeless individuals, collecting donations of disposal diapers that can be distributed to low-income families, and renovating signage on our own church campus to make this a more welcoming place.

Habitat for Humanity – UniLu's Children's Ministry, under the direction of that ministry's coordinator, Melissa Gonzalez, raised over \$300 for Habitat for Humanity by building and raffling a number of birdhouses to UniLu and Bethel Lutheran Church in Cupertino. Thank you to Melissa and the children for their efforts, and to Duane and Mary Bay for donating the materials and tools, and to Kelly for his technical expertise. As a special note, during the past couple of years, the Children's Ministry has been on the forefront of UniLu's donations to non-profit organizations. Last year, the children raised \$225 for the ELCA Malaria Campaign by collecting change over the course of that year.

Support for Inter-denominational CROP Hunger fund - The CROP Hunger Fund is a program of the Church World Service (CWS) organization, a collaborative of 17 denominations born in 1946, in the aftermath of World War II, with a mission of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, and sheltering the homeless. In 1969, CWS initiated an annual CROP walk, which became the original charitable walking event in the U.S.; its goal is to end hunger locally and abroad. UniLu members provided \$154 in support of the annual CROP fund drive. More information can be found on-line at www.churchworldservice.org or www.crophungerwalk.org.

Bright Stars of Bethlehem – UniLu contributed \$100 to support student scholarships in Palestine. The scholarship program is directed by Reverend Dr. Mitri Raheb a Palestinian Christian, born and raised in Bethlehem, Palestine. He is a pastor at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem. Scholarship funds are used to support children and youth attending the Diyar Academy, college students at Dar al-Kalima University, and elderly Palestians receiving health, educational and other services at the Ajyal "Generations" Elder Care Program. All programs are based in Palestine.

South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC) – SBSC is an interfaith, non-partisan organization of churches and individuals in the Bay Area from San Francisco to Santa Cruz concerned with peace, justice and liberation for the people of Central America. UniLu is one of four Sanctuary congregations that in 1983 offered to protect Central American refugees. Today SBSC continues to advocate for refugees in local and national policies. UniLu serves as the mailing address for SBSC and helps SBSC maintain a mailing permit so that it can continue its programs. More information about SBSC can be found on-line at: <http://fprespa.org/elsalvador/>