

# **The Unitarian Universalist Church of Brunswick**

## **END INEQUALITY ACTION GUIDE:**

### **Options for Engagement**

Originally presented  
by study groups and attendees at the

End Inequality Forum  
May 21, 2016

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**Background:** The Unitarian Universalist Church of Brunswick embraced the vision of ending inequality in a church-wide session in January of 2015. The intention of the vision was to bring people together with a focus for all elements of church work. Thereafter, the nominating committee created the End Inequality Leadership Team.

**Charge to the Team:** The initial charge to that team from the Board of Trustees was as follows:

- Create a clear statement of purpose for the congregational focus to End Inequality
- Capitalize on the UUA Congregational Study/Action Issue Resources
- Listen carefully to and sort through ideas raised by the congregation
- Work with the Church Council and various committees to coordinate study and action activities within the UUCB community
- Facilitate and/or explore for new opportunities for collaboration with groups outside of UUCB
- Communicate effectively and regularly with the congregation as a whole about opportunities and progress of ongoing activities

**Team formation:** The first meeting of the End Inequality Leadership Team was held on March 11, 2015. The first task was to develop a statement of purpose: *The Purpose of the End Inequality Leadership Team is to guide a compassionate respectful process with the congregation to create a focused approach to ending inequality.*

**Congregational Input:** In June, the Team asked the congregation, in a church service and via the Team's email account, to express thoughts and feelings about priorities in addressing inequality. Analysis of the 143 responses yielded five categories of the highest concern: 1) Education, 2) Health Care, 3) Income, 4) Justice, and 5) Basic Needs for Shelter, Food, and Clothing. These are listed in alphabetical order.

**Study Groups:** Five study groups were formed to examine issues of inequality in these five categories. Each group was guided by two or three facilitators who had participated in a training program to help group members engage in a positive learning experience through open discussion. Groups were charged to meet regularly from December through May at a frequency, time and place of their choosing, in order to study their area of inequality through reading articles, books, and websites and talking together.

**End Inequality Forum:** The five study groups presented their recommendations for congregational action at an End Inequality Forum held on May 21<sup>st</sup> of 2016. (To see the full reports of the study groups, please visit <http://www.uubrunswick.org/church-activities/our-vision-ending-inequality/> and click on "study groups.") In addition to the study group recommendations, attendees were invited to post or share further ideas for actions to be taken, either individually or as church-wide initiatives.

**This Action Guide:** The following pages present the recommendations in each of the five study areas. Those recommendations in regular type are from the members of the study group for that topic, based on their work together. The *italicized* recommendations came from the attendees at the May 21 Forum. All recommendations were grouped as falling under one of three methods or approaches: 1) advocacy, 2) working with others to find solutions and 3) direct service. The final page has general ideas for actions.

<p>GENERAL PROBLEM AREA: Education</p> <p>STUDY GROUP FOCUS: Early Childhood Education and Care</p> <p>SPECIFIC PROBLEM ISSUES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty has a significant impact on child development.</li> <li>• Lack of availability, participation, and quality of early childhood programs all lead to lack of readiness for kindergarten, and contribute to poor outcomes later in life.</li> <li>• Diapers are expensive, necessary for raising healthy children, and difficult for low-income families to provide.</li> </ul> </p>		
ADVOCACY	FINDING SOLUTIONS	DIRECT SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are in business, law enforcement, or the military, consider becoming a member of Ready Nation to support advocacy on behalf of young children.</li> <li>• Support the initiative to raise the minimum wage.</li> <li>• Support legislation to raise the minimum wage for public school teachers.</li> <li>• Support the education surcharge initiative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Join the Vroom planning team.</li> <li>• Contact United Way to get information for getting started on a Diaper Drive.</li> <li>• <i>Create a “Mother Mentoring” program under the auspices of some local organization.</i></li> <li>• <i>Work with military and police organizations who are supporting early childhood education initiatives.</i></li> <li>• <i>Utilize “Parents as Teachers” program (like “Best Start”) with coaching from professionals to provide training.</i></li> <li>• <i>Find international examples of early childhood education. Family assistance program assumes parents are at home.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donate to the United Way of Mid Coast Maine Diaper Project.</li> <li>• Volunteer for the Community Read Aloud.</li> <li>• Donate to United Way (targeted to Best Start, a partnership of hospital and medical organizations providing prenatal support and parenting information).</li> <li>• Volunteer for the CASH Coalition project.</li> </ul>

<p>GENERAL PROBLEM AREA: Health Care</p> <p>STUDY GROUP FOCUS: Health Insurance</p> <p>SPECIFIC PROBLEM ISSUES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 130,000 Mainers are without any health insurance.</li> <li>• Governor LePage vetoed Mainecare expansion.</li> <li>• Current system is wasteful, bafflingly complex.</li> <li>• Despair: providers diverted from professional mission. People are ill should worry about getting well, not money.</li> </ul>		
ADVOCACY	FINDING SOLUTIONS	DIRECT SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call, write legislators. Praise <i>and</i> pressure.</li> <li>• Join Maine AllCare and other advocacy groups (MUUSAN, SMWC, MPA...).</li> <li>• Volunteer - for an advocacy project, such as Maine AllCare's work with 2016 legislative candidates.</li> <li>• <i>Work with Maine AllCare to educate legislators, query with a survey and post and publicize their responses.</i></li> <li>• <i>Work with Maine AllCare to reverse the rejection of LD 633.</i></li> <li>• <i>Support the 2020 citizen initiative for healthcare.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk with friends, others. get a few facts together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer - at Oasis Free Clinic</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Immediate Volunteer Needs at Oasis Free Clinic (Anita Ruff, E.D.)</i></u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>A detailed-oriented and reliable person who is able to commit 1-2 hours each week to assist with financial needs (help get bills coded and organized, data entry, etc).</i></li> <li>2. <i>An empathetic, reliable, warm person to assess financial eligibility for potential patients. S/he would need to commit to a regular date/time. We will provide training.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Someone with newsletter writing skills. Experience with Mail Chimp a bonus!</i></li> <li>4. <i>Someone with development and fundraising skills to help plan and execute our fundraising plan. Or someone well connected in the community who would be willing to introduce me to others. Or someone who would host a house party on our behalf. Hours vary.</i></li> <li>5. <i>A person/people who would plan a fundraiser on our behalf. Our continuous need to raise money is great as we expand access to dental services. It would be fantastic if UUCB would commit to raising enough money to pay for a dental assistant one day/week (~\$8,400)</i></li> <li>6. <i>Someone to do data entry. Must be comfortable using a computer and multiple data entry systems.</i></li> </ol>

<p>GENERAL PROBLEM AREA: Income</p> <p>STUDY GROUP FOCUS: Minimum Wage. Social Security Cap. Guaranteed Income</p> <p>SPECIFIC PROBLEM ISSUES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Cumberland, Sagadahoc, and Lincoln counties, the gap between the current minimum wage and a living wage ranges from \$16.18 to \$17.06 per hour.</li> <li>• All salaried and hourly income up to \$118,000 is taxed at 7.65%, while wages in excess of \$118,000 are not taxed for FICA.</li> <li>• Complex web of benefits and services for low-income individuals: 80+ programs spending \$1 trillion per year.</li> </ul> </p>		
ADVOCACY	FINDING SOLUTIONS	DIRECT SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support “Scrap the Cap”: Letter writing to support Representative Grayson’s (FL) initiative.</li> <li>• Support the November Maine ballot initiative with Maine People’s Alliance.</li> <li>• Canvass local business (training to be provided by MPA).</li> <li>• Write letters to the Editor of local papers (samples provided).</li> <li>• Hand out bookmark cards to tipped workers and other non-tipped low- wage workers rallying support (provided by MPA).</li> <li>• Get out and vote YES in November to support the Fair Wage Maine Citizen’s Initiative!</li> </ul>		

GENERAL PROBLEM AREA:	Justice
STUDY GROUP FOCUS:	Criminal Justice System
SPECIFIC PROBLEM ISSUES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatic increase in U.S. rates of incarceration from 1920-2014;</li> <li>• General decrease in violent crime (44%) from 1991-2010 except for drug crimes, which increased 90%;</li> <li>• US incarceration rate 710 inmates per 100,000 residents compares to the 115 typical of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);</li> <li>• The U.S. employs 2.5 times more corrections officers per capita than other nations, but employs 30 percent fewer police officers per capita;</li> <li>• Racial bias in arrests and sentencing;</li> <li>• Cash bail is in effect a tax on the poor.</li> </ul>

ADVOCACY	FINDING SOLUTIONS	DIRECT SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support policies and policy makers who are committed to putting an end to mass incarceration and criminalization.</li> <li>• Support non-profits that are advocating for and helping incarcerated individuals: Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, the College Guild, the Maine Civil Liberties Union.</li> <li>• Engage our congregation in writing letters to the state legislature on issues such as solitary confinement, fair chance, restorative justice.</li> <li>• <i>ME Council of Churches is sponsoring initiatives to eliminate felony I.D. and Restorative Justice for juveniles.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transform a criminal justice system based on retribution into one based on empirical evidence and best practices.</li> <li>• Be better informed. Suggested Readings: Just Mercy by Brian Stevenson, The Divide by Matt Taibbi, Letter to My Son by Ta-Nehsi Coates, “A Matter of Black Lives” Atlantic Magazine Sept. 2015, or watch the video “Maine Alternatives to Violence.</li> <li>• Reduce the use of prisons and jails and spend the savings on community-based treatment, housing and re-entry support.</li> <li>• Give judges additional discretion to relieve significant numbers of people from unnecessary harsh mandatory minimum sentences.</li> <li>• Give prisoners sentence reductions and early releases if they successfully complete rehabilitation programs.</li> <li>• Eliminate solitary confinement.</li> <li>• Decriminalize drug possession.</li> <li>• Do not force the poor to pay for prison stays, probation, electronic monitoring etc.</li> <li>• There should be significant bail reform.</li> <li>• The state should make better use its supervised community confinement policy to transfer aging infirm and terminally ill inmates to nursing homes and other settings where they can receive appropriate care.</li> <li>• Maine should establish halfway houses allowing the 200 inmates now in the last year of their sentence and eligible for community confinement, to begin rebuilding their lives by working in the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support a community coalition of non-profit organizations for a “safe house” and employment services for newly released offenders.</li> <li>• Support businesses such as Maineworks, a temporary employment agency that specializes in hiring convicted felons.</li> <li>• <i>Provide resources for newly released prisoners which would provide: 1) interview clothing; 2) Interview skills (mock interviews); 3) practice filling out job applications; and 4) an understanding of what they legally must reveal and what does not need to be revealed.</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and sustain our awareness of the state of criminal justice in Maine.</li> </ul>	
<p>GENERAL PROBLEM AREA: Basic Needs</p> <p>STUDY GROUP FOCUS: Shelter, Food, Clothing,</p> <p>SPECIFIC PROBLEM ISSUES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food Insecurity: Many people in Maine do not know where their next meal is coming from (1 in 4 children and seniors, 206 thousand Mainers).</li> <li>Local service providers (Seventh Day Adventist/Gathering Place Clothing Bank, Salvation Army, Good Will) report a need for 1) permanent space to store and display clothing; 2) additional winter coats and clothes.</li> <li>Local service providers (Tedford Housing Alternatives, Public Housing Authorities, Merrymeeting Homeless Youth Program) report 106 unmet emergency housing requests in 6 months. There are unmet needs for homeless youth, temporary and emergency housing, and additional volunteers in local programs.</li> </ul>		
ADVOCACY	FINDING SOLUTIONS	DIRECT SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay current with needs &amp; opportunities.</li> <li>Contact elected leaders (state &amp; federal).</li> <li>Encourage MUUSAN's engagement with food insecurity (Maine UU State Advocacy Network).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Join United Way's Basic Needs Council &amp; other local groups exploring solutions.</li> <li>Involve people experiencing food insecurity in problem solving &amp; advocacy.</li> <li>Keep our congregation informed about needs.</li> <li>Pass out 211 MAINE cards.</li> <li>Involve people experiencing insecurity in problem solving &amp; advocacy.</li> <li>Help Tedford manage Christmas toy/clothing drive.</li> <li>Involve people experiencing housing insecurity in problem solving &amp; advocacy.</li> <li>Join existing advocacy group.</li> <li>Identify funding organizations.</li> <li><i>Create a plan to support Tedford households becoming independent, 1 or 2 families at a time who are exiting from Tedford and in transition.</i></li> <li><i>Partner with other churches to provide space to store, display and distribute donated clothes, toys, etc.</i></li> <li><i>Explore providing emergency shelter at UUCB one night per week. Work with Tedford to offer shelter and supervision.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide meals to Tedford Shelter and People Plus.</li> <li>Volunteer at Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program or Meals on Wheels.</li> <li>Donate portion of your garden to food pantry.</li> <li>Incorporate food donations into UUCB programs.</li> <li>Expand UUCB mitten tree throughout year.</li> <li>Incorporate clothing donations into UUCB programs.</li> <li>Knit mittens, hats, scarves.</li> <li>Volunteer/donate to area toy and clothing drives.</li> <li>Donate household items.</li> <li>Volunteer in UUCB-Habitat for Humanity partnership.</li> <li>Volunteer in Tedford Christmas Gift Program.</li> <li><i>Increase UUCB clothing drive to full year, four-season contributions.</i></li> <li><i>Manage the Christmas gift giving program for Tedford Shelter.</i></li> <li><i>First Sunday of the month becomes "Food Donation Sunday." Request</i></li> </ul>

		<i>specific needs, collect bags, deliver to Tedford or food pantry.</i>
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GENERAL IDEAS FOR ACTION		
ADVOCACY	FINDING SOLUTIONS	DIRECT SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start a letter writing table weekly.</li> <li>• Work with MUUSAN to speak with more voices in Augusta via training, focus on specific issues and a wave of turnout.</li> <li>• Offer “handholding” to train our members how to do advocacy, send e-letters and create volume.</li> <li>• Remind, educate and encourage UUCB members and friends of the value of communication with legislators: flood the legislators with UU voices (like the NRA does) as issues come up, and have systematic support for UUCB actions on them.</li> <li>• Endorse political actions and legislation as a whole church.</li> <li>• “Watchdog” upcoming legislation with focus to influence through organized testimony.</li> <li>• Training members how to do advocacy with legislators, send e-letters, create volume.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To continue the path of information, create a small, simple, reproducible booklet with one page for each initiative providing: 1) bullets with statistics; 2) what is happening in Maine; 3) opportunities for action. Keep booklets available in church foyer.</li> <li>• Provide a monthly report on issues for a new page in the newsletter and for handouts.</li> <li>• Organize a “Town Hall” event in October, sponsored by E I, MUUSAN and Working for Justice.</li> <li>• Work through the three action methods: 1) advocacy; 2) help plan local solutions; 3) direct service.</li> <li>• Consider UUCB study group of <i>The Leap Manifesto</i> which came together following the showing of Naomi Klein’s “This Changes Everything” film.</li> <li>• Consider joining local boards (Oasis, etc.) to help guide future strategy.</li> <li>• Support or partner with local churches, organizations or ongoing programs.</li> <li>• Communicate and encourage opportunities for action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give our time.</li> <li>• Donate food or goods.</li> <li>• Provide resources directly to those who need them.</li> <li>• Highlight, on a regular basis, opportunities to volunteer (“Opportunity of the Month) get real, meaningful UUCB response to already existing calls for help.</li> <li>• Give donations to Minister’s Discretionary Fund.</li> <li>• Give money rather than food items to organizations. Not as satisfying to the giver but the organization can buy in bulk and at discounted prices.</li> <li>• Provide Rev. Stocker with a stack of 2-1-1 cards to assist those who are requesting resources.</li> <li>• Give to United Way. They have just experienced a bad fiscal year giving result.</li> </ul>