# OPPORTUNITIES

**West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church**

# INTRODUCTION

Social justice is a valued component in the work of any Unitarian Universalist congregation. This booklet focuses on active justice committees at West Shore—hopefully giving newcomers and members a current snapshot on what each committee does, and how to contact and engage each group.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are given the right and responsibility to come to our own theological understanding—a freedom of belief… but that freedom calls us to do justice work which can come in many forms of expression (e.g. learning, activism, advocacy). Members can do this

- as individuals;
- as members of congregational initiatives;
- as members of efforts in communities with values compatible with Unitarian Universalism; and
- at the denominational level we are invited to participate in study resolutions and actions on those resolutions adopted at General Assembly. This is explored at West Shore through the Denominational Affairs Committee.

We would suggest that the practice of social justice in any of these forms helps us grow spiritually to build the world we dream about. Please consider joining us in this work.

# Braver Angels

**Contact**

- Lori Haller, lorihaller@yahoo.com
- Joan Clark, jkj.clark@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

Braver Angels is discussed at the Social Action Committee meeting on the first Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

Braver Angels is a grassroots group that was formed in 2016. One of their goals is to help people have conversations with people who have opinions that are different from their own. The Social Action Committee has provided three Braver Angels training sessions and then started a series of Braver Conversations. Conservatives, Liberals, Independents and Undecideds from the surrounding communities address a topic in group discussions. Join us for an interesting evening with lots of good discussion! It's helpful if you have attended Braver Angels training but it's not a requirement.

**Accomplishments**

We offered training and then had up to 30 people attend Braver Conversations. The group included people who identify as Liberal, Conservative and Independent, and they were able to have interesting and civil conversations.

# Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC)

**Contact**

- Cathe Caraway, 310-749-6111

**Meeting Day & Time**

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

Greater Cleveland Congregation unites people across lines of race, class, religion, and geography to take actions that strengthen and improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods. The issues we are working on are: Battle for Democracy, Gun Safety, Youth Bindover, Pretrial Justice and Color of Health.

**Accomplishments**

West Shore is a founding member of Greater Cleveland Congregations. GCC follows the community organizing strategies of the Industrial Areas Foundation. It includes over 30 dues paying congregations and organizations from across Cuyahoga County. It is Christian, Jewish, Muslim and secular.

# Greater Cleveland Food Bank Volunteers

**Contact**

- Tony Couture, toinec99@hotmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

West Shore volunteers meet on the third Thursday and fourth Wednesday of the month either at the church parking lot at 8:20 a.m. or The Greater Cleveland Food Bank, 13815 Coit Road, Cleveland, OH 44110, by 9:00 a.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

We help The Greater Cleveland Food Bank complete their mission to get food to people who need it in a six-county area. Tasks often involve supplemental commodities for seniors, back packs for kids with weekend nutrition and sorting product for distribution. There is some flexibility in choosing tasks that fit your needs.

**Accomplishments**

We are proud to achieve immediate results that benefit people in a meaningful way.

# Queer & Allies (Q&A)

**Contact**

- Kathy Little, drkdlittle@aol.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

We meet on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m., September though May, and once in the summer for a potluck picnic.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objectives**

Our first Principle as Unitarian Universalists states: "We affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all persons," and so it goes without saying that lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and queer persons are not only welcome at West Shore, but expected to participate fully in all church activities. West Shore's Q&A group is composed of LGBTQ people and their Allies.

**Accomplishments**

In the late 1980's, West Shore voted to become a Welcoming Congregation which means that the church took seriously its commitment to educate its members on LGBTQ justice concerns, and serve as active advocates for, and with, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and queer people.

We advocated for marriage equality before it became a reality, celebrated the victory, and support all new efforts to achieve LGBTQ equality.

# Reproductive Justice Task Force (RJTF)

**Contact**

- Joan Grace, jagrace@breezelineohio.net

**Meeting Day & Time**

Regular meetings are following church on the first Sundays of each month, usually in Room 8, but subject to change.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objectives**

Reproductive Justice Task Force works to maintain awareness of reproductive issues and promote issues that affect this. We define Reproductive Justice as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. We work to stay current on issues affecting reproductive and be prepared to take actions where we might make a difference.

**Accomplishments**

RJTF worked to get the abortion rights amendment to Ohio's constitution on the ballot in November, 2023. This included collecting petition signatures and promoting Issue 1 before the election. It was passed by 57%.

# Social Action Committee

**Contact**

- Gloria Bemer, mrsb112@aol.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

The first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m., via Zoom.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

Grounded in our UU principles, we strive through education. advocacy, and action to make West Shore UU Church a force for justice on a local, state, national, and global level.

We maintain the Food Pantry at West Shore and are also responsible for the Social Action Film Series. We organize participants for marches like the Women's March and Protesting Gun Violence. We promote voter registration and often provide information about ballot issues. We support the Cleveland Food Bank, WAAHT, and the Interreligious Task Force to help immigrants. We work with Urban Hope and NEOCH, the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless. We have provided several Braver Angels training sessions which help promote mutual civility and understanding in our politically divisive world. New ideas are always welcome and the Social Action Committee helps new initiatives begin.

**Accomplishments**

We have been able to engage members of West Shore in many social justice issues and have promoted justice within our church and the community.

# Social Action Film Series

**Contact**

- Bob Bemer, bobb849@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

Films are shown on the second Saturday of most months. We usually take off the months of January, July, August and December. Film selection is discussed at the Social Action Committee meeting on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

Our mission is to present quality documentaries that focus on various social justice issues. The films are free and open to the public, but we do ask patrons to consider making a donation to support our work.

The Film Series works with other West Shore justice groups to find suitable films, interacts with film distributors to obtain films with public performance rights, promotes the films in church and the wider community, and runs the actual presentation of the film.

**Accomplishments**

In 2025, the Social Action Film Series will be celebrating it's 16th anniversary.

# TransForum Allies
# Parents & Allies of Trans-People

**Contacts**

- Cheryl Costa, cherylcosta.mystic@gmail.com
- Kelly Galligan, kelly.l.galligan@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

The second Thursday of the month, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

For the past two years, a significant political movement has worked to demonize and discriminate against transgender individuals in state legislatures and Congress. The many trans-people that are in our community need our help. The looming threat of Project 2025's stated objective to "Erase Transgenderism from America" increases anxiety within the trans community, especially since the election.

The objective is to educate friends, relatives and other Allies of Trans-people about what being Trans is all about and how to support our trans loved ones in this scary time of crisis.

# TransForum: Gender Support Group

**Contact**

- Rev. Cheryl Costa, cherylcosta.mystic@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

The third Thursday of each month, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

TransForum is a new sub-group of the Queer & Allies Task Force. It aims to serve individuals ages 18+ who are questioning and exploring their gender expression. **Note:** This group is not meant for Allies. Non-church members who meet the criteria are welcome to attend.

# Undoing Oppressions

**Contacts**

- April Stoltz, aprilstoltz@sbcglobal.net
- Pat Moore, patmarmoore@yahoo.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

We meet the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m., at West Shore and on Zoom.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

Since 2001, Undoing Oppressions (under various names) has worked to educate ourselves and provide educational opportunities with the congregation and the community about the devastating effects of societal and systemic racism and other oppressions. Affecting all of us in different ways, the impacts of racism are challenging and necessary to address with courage, care and compassion. Besides educational offerings, we look for practical steps to deepen West Shore's commitment to Beloved Community and to live out our UU values more fully.

**Accomplishments**

We are deepening our understanding and commitment to creating a more just world through offering an Allyship Workshop, all-church book reads, small group book discussions and outings to Karamu House and the Black History Month exhibit of Cleveland's African American artists at Cleveland City Hall.

# Urban Hope

**Contact**

- Jillian Cook, 216-333-8886 or jilliancook55@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

We meet the third Sunday at the Urban Hope Storefront, located at 4241 Lorain Avenue, from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

Urban Hope is comprised of volunteers from four local UU churches who live their UU Principles and learn from the experience and lives of those in the inner city. Urban Hope is a group of people dedicated to the tasks of caring and service. West Shore Sunday is the third Sunday of the month. We provide a hot meal, toiletries, T-Shirts, bras, underwear for men and women, and socks. Our purpose is to share a nurturing and welcoming presence in the space we share with the community in the Storefront when we gather on Sunday.

**Accomplishments**

West Shore's dedicated third Sunday meal event was started in 2018. Since 2018, we have been able to form a team of regular volunteers that provide the services that are required to provide the people in the community tasks of caring and service. We have created a "Fill the Gap" Program where each church, with the help of grants and personal donations from congregants of the church, purchase underwear, socks, bras, and T-Shirts. It is important to provide the guests with warm dry clothing especially in the colder months.

# Urban Hope Children's Garden

**Contact**

- Cathy Ross, estrogen@yahoo.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

We meet seasonally. Plans are discussed at the Social Action Committee meeting on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

The Children's Garden is a neighborhood program of Urban Hope, a UU outreach to low-income residents on the near west side of Cleveland. Our goal is to show urban children where our food comes from, help them discover how delicious fresh veggies can be, and nurture a love of the outdoors. We work with children from the school across the street during spring planting and fall harvesting seasons.

In the summer, we work with neighborhood children. Each session offers hands-on gardening (including weeding), cooking with the veggies we grow, and a craft. The garden is located in Kentucky Community Garden at West 38th Street and Franklin. We meet seasonally and are always looking for extra helping hands! Our day and time varies from year to year depending on our volunteers' schedules.

# Veg Group

**Contacts**

- Jenny Town, jennifertown@hotmail.com
- Gloria Bemer, mrsb112@aol.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

The second Thursday of each month in the Chapel, 1:00 p.m.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

To try new vegan foods, experiment with dishes, become "plant stronger," connect with and support each other as we share and grow in our quest for healthier, more earth-friendly food choices.

# West Shore Allies Against Human Trafficking

**Contact**

- Joan Clark, jkj.clark@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

Concurrent with the Social Action Committee, the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m., usually on Zoom.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

To bring attention to the crime of Human Trafficking, and to help address the needs of victims of trafficking by supporting the work of the Renee Jones Empowerment Center and other local anti-trafficking efforts. This may include collecting items for distribution to victims, working with victims within the volunteers skill set, assisting with fundraising, speaking engagements.

**Accomplishments**

- West Shore was able to make the connections that resulted in a Human Trafficking initiative in Malawi, Africa.
- Training victims to use computer programs, providing dance lessons to victims, creating opportunities to exhibit victim artwork at various venues, speaking engagements, training sessions to persons from 8 years old to 80, and Gala planning and fundraising.

# West Shore Food Pantry

**Contact**

- Gloria Bemer, mrsb112@aol.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

We meet as part of the Social Action Committee meeting on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m., usually on Zoom.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

To be a resource for anyone who needs food. We have one or two food collections each year and use the food collected to maintain West Shore's food pantry  Volunteers maintain the pantry and restock the shelves as needed

**Accomplishments**

We have made food available to anyone who needs it for over ten years.

# West Shore FaCT
## *Faith Communities Together for a Sustainable Future*

**Contact**

- Linda New, westshorefact@gmail.com

**Meeting Day & Time**

We meet on the third Wednesday of the month from 6:00-7:00 p.m. at West Shore and online through Zoom.

**Group's Mission, Goal or Objective**

West Shore FaCT is a task force of WSUUC and an Anchor Group of FaCT: Faith Communities Together for a Sustainable Future. Our task force promotes clean air, clear water, healthy soil, and a quick, equitable transition to renewable energy sources and just, sustainable living. We create opportunities for education, advocacy, and action by collaborating with community groups who support environmental justice. As an Anchor Group of FaCT, we connect with more than groups from Ohio and West Virginia. Come and join us in confronting the problems that unsustainable practices cause for communities and families in rural, suburban, and urban areas. Your ideas and your energy are welcome to help build safe, healthy, equitable communities!

**Accomplishments**

- Advocated for the passage of the widely supported community owned solar bill, HB197, by inviting congregants and members of the community to write postcards to the Ohio House Public Utilities Committee urging them to bring the bill to the floor of the Ohio General Assembly for a vote. Fifty postcards were written and mailed.
- Supported the Friends of Cudell Commons Park in Cleveland who continue to work to protect one of the few remaining tree-filled spaces in the Cudell neighborhood by sending a letter to Cleveland City Council, Mayor Justin Bibb, and Cleveland Metropolitan School District.
- Co-sponsored the movie, "Dark Waters" with the Social Action Committee followed by a powerful discussion and call to action.

The discussion was lead by Tish O'Dell of CELDF (Community Environmental Defense Fund) and OHCRN (Ohio Community Right Network).

- Amended the soil and began planting veggies in West Shore's raised beds to share with congregants over the summer.
- Worked with FaCT to publish a monthly newsletter featuring articles and commentary from local environmental leaders and community activists.
- Promoted and participated in FaCT's monthly Distinguished Speaker Series with guests such as widely acclaimed author and investigative journalist Justin Nobel on May 17. The May 17th event was held at West Shore in collaboration with Mac's Backs Books, Third Act Ohio, and the Northeast Ohio Sierra Club. Justin Noble spoke to an audience of nearly 100 people about his newly published book, "Petroleum 238: Big Oil's Dangerous Secret and the Grassroots Fight to Stop It."
- Worked with FaCT as a community partner for the Cleveland International Film Festival's screening of "Impossible Town" featuring a post-movie conversation with local environmental leaders and activists.

WESTSHORE
*Unitarian Universalist Church*

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