

**First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist  
Social Justice Council**

**2015-2016 TASK FORCE APPLICATION FORM**

***Draft due May 10<sup>th</sup> to the Social Justice Council.  
For presentation at the May 17, 2015 Social Justice Open House.  
Finalize the proposal by May 23.  
Congregational vote on Task Forces: June 7th Semi-Annual Mtg.***

<b>Task Force Name: GBIO Organizing Task Force</b>	
<b>Lead organizer's name: Allegra Stout (Contact—ongoing leadership structure TBD)</b>	<b>Phone:</b>
	<b>Email: allegra.stout@gmail.com</b>
<b>Primary purpose/mission of TF (describe the <i>Issue, grounding, accountability, fit, and the opportunity to make a difference</i>):</b>	
<b>Primary purpose and issue:</b>	
<p>The purpose of this task force is to involve First Parish members in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's interfaith relationship-building and social justice work and explore with the congregation the benefits of formal membership in GBIO. GBIO is a highly successful interfaith organization that fosters internal reflection and discussion at the congregational/faith organization level, builds effective interfaith relationships across its member faith communities and organizes effective collective, multi-racial and multi-ethnic action on social justice issues in the Boston area and statewide. There are currently 50 faith organizations (Catholic, Protestant, UU, Muslim, and Jewish), as well as community organizations, in GBIO, which have had a major impact on issues such as housing, health care and education. For the coming period, it has identified five issue areas: criminal justice reform; public education; gentrification, affordable housing and homelessness; health care cost containment; and gun violence. Congregations or clusters of congregations, that choose to do so, will work in other areas such as climate change, student debt, addiction, recovery and behavioral health reimbursements with an eye towards seeing if they evolve into larger GBIO campaigns.</p>	
<b>Grounding</b> (How is the purpose grounded in our UU theology and past work---for instance its relationship to our mission, covenant, UU Seven Principles and commitments of the congregation and UU)	
<p>In 2014, the Standing Committee approved a Strategic Planning Goals and Recommendations prepared by the strategic planning committee, which met in the fall of 2013. The plan was grounded in our FPC mission and covenant, and one of the two major goals to advance our mission over the next three years was "working consistently and effectively for justice, and creating deep and accountable relationships between congregants and community partners". The specific recommendation was to join GBIO in order to (1) build multicultural relationships across faiths through effective joint social justice work and (2) deepen relationships within the congregation as part of the GBIO process of choosing/implementing priorities.</p>	
<b>Opportunity to make a difference:</b> What conditions make the work likely to be successful in making a difference? How will you do this---this can include service, public witness, education, advocacy and community organizing)	
<p>GBIO has a long track record of success, most famously in crafting Massachusetts's healthcare reform. Bringing together so many faith communities gives GBIO the power to influence public decision makers with large numbers of people. Intentionally developing relationships both within and across congregations makes GBIO sustainable for the long haul, including in times of defeat or strife. Training and developing leaders, and employing skilled, experienced organizers, ensures that GBIO crafts effective, realistic strategy and tactics. Working within this well-established group would give great leverage to First Parish members' efforts</p>	

towards social justice, as they would be combined with the efforts of many other individuals and congregations.

In order for First Parish to make meaningful contributions to GBIO's campaigns, we will need to develop widespread understanding and support of GBIO within the congregation, and momentum for increasing the numbers of members to attend specific actions. We will achieve this by using the community organizing approach that GBIO trains congregational leaders to use, such as holding one-on-one conversations and house meetings.

**Accountability** (How will the Task Force work in partnership and be accountable to the communities affected by the issue being worked on? How will it follow our Covenant of Right Relations?)

Working in coalition with 50 other faith organizations from the Greater Boston area will create accountability to diverse communities, including those directly affected by the issues being addressed. As stated above, the five issues on which GBIO is currently focusing are criminal justice reform; public education; gentrification, affordable housing and homelessness; health care cost containment; and gun violence. GBIO includes congregations from very different neighborhoods, with very different racial and class compositions. Because goals, strategies, and tactics will be decided by the coalition as a whole, First Parish will be participating in social justice work led partly by the communities most directly affected by each of the issues in question.

In addition, working in coalition will give First Parish members opportunities to build relationships with people from these other, diverse congregations. Beyond the fact that political decisions are made in coalition, the nature of GBIO means that we will develop personal understandings of the experiences of members of other faith communities, thus deepening our accountability. For example, at a March GBIO action of 500 people, organizers divided all participants into small groups to share personal stories about how the five issue areas have impacted our lives. GBIO also emphasizes the process of creating consensus by deep listening and mutual respect.

In our internal meetings at First Parish and in our relations with GBIO partners we will follow the Covenant of Right Relations in order to share our views and experiences honestly, with a commitment to addressing differences or conflict in a productive manner and by assuming the best intentions of others.

**Fit:** (How does the Task Force work fit into congregational life as a whole, including worship, caring for one another, educating all ages, and moral discussion and action)

The work of this Task Force will enhance many areas of congregational life by building stronger relationships and a sense of shared purpose among First Parish members. Community organizing is a process of learning about one another's values, of developing a shared vision of what is possible, and of encouraging people with whom we are in relationship to act on their values. Turning out the numbers of people at actions that will enable us to be effective participants in GBIO will necessitate building connections across social/age/interest/activity groups in the church, and strengthen our community as a whole.

In addition, the specific skills First Parish members can learn in GBIO trainings, such as one-to-ones and power analyses, can be useful for all social justice work and other efforts to effect change within the church.

Because GBIO is an interfaith organization, all actions begin and end with prayers from the many traditions in GBIO, including UU. Some of these prayers may be quite different from the invitation to "pray, meditate, or dwell on ultimate things" within our First Parish services, but this diversity can enhance the spiritual life of our congregation by giving members opportunities to reflect on what types of inspiration are meaningful to each of us and on our reactions to the prayers of other faith communities.

Participating in GBIO is a natural fit with our commitment to become an increasingly multicultural and justice-making community. It will connect us with people of many different races and cultures, providing many

opportunities for learning and reflection, and enable us to participate in powerful social justice campaigns.

**Task Force Objectives for church year 2015-2016**

- Build awareness, understanding, and enthusiasm about GBIO among First Parish members
- Develop a First Parish presence at public GBIO actions
- Formally join GBIO as a congregation

**Possible strategies, activities or events planned for church year 2015-2016**

- Hold a vote on whether to join GBIO at the semi-annual meeting in October or June
- Conduct one-on-one conversations, congregational conversations, and possibly house meetings to better understand one another's stories, interests and values, so that we can contribute fully to the broader conversations of issues and strategies in GBIO, educate First Parish members about GBIO, and explore ways that participation in GBIO connects with the interests and values already present in our community.
- Invite First Parish members to participate in GBIO actions
- Arrange for First Parish members interested in taking leadership to participate in GBIO-led community organizing trainings

**Organizers commit to serving on the task force and actively working on this issue. (must be members of First Parish)**

**Identify Organizers\*:**

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|--------------------|--|
| 1. Allegra Stout   |  |
| 2. Chris McElroy   |  |
| 3. Marcia Hams     |  |
| 4. Rashid Shaikh   |  |
| 5. Elizabeth Kline |  |
| 6. Rosalie Anders  |  |

**Supporters agree to participate in activities of the task force. (must be members of First Parish)**

**Identify Supporters\*:**

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Laura Heath   | 6. Margaret Drury |
| 2. Beth Reagan   | 7. Claryce Evans  |
| 3. Marcus Graley | 8. Linda West     |
| 4. Karin Lin     | 9. Rebecca Balder |
| 5. Peggy Kraft   | 10. David Light.  |