**GBIO Task Force Report and Proposal for 2016-7**

April 2016

When our congregation voted almost unanimously on October 25, 2015 to join GBIO we fulfilled a priority goal as stated in our board-approved 2014 Strategic Planning Goals and Recommendations. The plan is grounded in our mission and covenant. Moreover, one of two goals to advance our mission over the next three years is “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 join social justice work and (2) deepen relationships within the congregation as part of GBIO’s process of implementing its five priorities (i.e., criminal justice reform; public education; health care cost containment; homelessness, affordable housing & gentrification; and gun violence).GBIO has almost 50 faith communities as members.

In joining GBIO, First Parish UU builds on and expands our ability and opportunities to further our work on social and environmental justice issues. Our Social Justice Council (the overall coordinating body), Environmental Justice Task Force, Beyond Borders/Sin Fronteras and Transformation Team conduct numerous educational forums for congregants and guests alone and in conjunction with other faith-based, academic, and community-based organizations (i.e, film viewings and discussions; speaker events; workshops) and participate in demonstrations holding our UU Stand on the Side of Love Banner. For more than seven years, our congregation has deliberately sought to be a more multicultural, anti-racism, diverse, and welcoming place. We voted to be a Welcoming Congregation in 2002.We recognized our sixth year’s Courageous Love Award recipients on February 14h, 2016 (Sebastian Robins and Mona Haydar for their “Ask a Muslim” initiative. In addition, the Middle East Group educates people through speakers, films, discussion groups, and foods provided after a church service.

Our congregation is already benefiting from joining and becoming active in GBIO, and through GBIO we have contributed to progress on key public policies and in building interfaith collaboration in the area. GBIO’s key approach is to build relationships within and among faith-based and community-based organizations. We held an afternoon gathering of 45 FPC people on January 10, 2016: a very large and enthusiastic group enjoyed small table facilitated discussions that drew out people’s personal experiences and stories. This approach is a foundation for motivating people to work on strategic actions that touch their lives.

We have not only organized one-on-one exchanges with people within our congregation, we have also participated in working groups on two GBIO issue priorities (gun violence and housing);the monthly GBIO liaison team (two of us join with liaisons from five other congregations and synagogues); a GBIO wide gatherings to stand in solidarity with the Muslim community; the spring delegate Assembly (FPC sent 9 of the 160 people); and the big Assembly in May with public officials (our goal is to send 20 FPC people of 900 people from GBIO organizations).Through these activities we have met people from a wide diversity of religious and geographical places. One of our desired objectives in joining GBIO is just these kinds of connections.

We are also attracted to GBIO because of its successful track record in achieving substantive social justice reforms. Some of our members attended a May 12, 2015 large public gathering at Trinity Church in Boston. More than 1600 people from urban and suburban churches, synagogues, mosques, and community organizations showed its power in numbers and heard the governor, attorney general, speaker of the House, and Boston mayor commit to specific actions in implementing GBIO’s five priorities. It was a remarkable and memorable experience.

GBIO won a recent victory when the governor signed a bill, actively supported by GBIO, to allow drivers licenses for former offenders.

Thirdly, GBIO provides its members with leadership training and experience. We look forward to gaining more skills, techniques, and tactics as we participate in their training sessions.

From us, GBIO benefits from having a very enthusiastic, engaged, activist member with a strong social justice tradition. We also hope to bring other aspects of our Unitarian Universalist theological/philosophical perspective into the organization and encourage more UU congregations to join. (We are one of two presently).

In the addendum we have included a more complete list of our activities this past year.

In the next year we will build on these internal and external relationships and strategies in order to strengthen our congregation, build the power of GBIO and make a difference in public policies that affect our members and the wider community.

***Plans for Year 2016-2017***

1. Internal: within our congregation, we will:

* Conduct training in the fall of GBIO’s “one-on-one” relationship building exercises (Explore our co-facilitators Beverly Williams and Nicholas Hayes as trainers);
* Follow-up this training with conducting one-on-one’s with interested congregants;
* Expand the number of First Parish members and friends who participate in GBIO related events (especially reach out to encourage young adults);
* Get some involvement from members of the Sanctuary Movement (Chris will talk with Matt Myer about how to invite this participation, especially at the May 24th GBIO large meeting);
* Seek to integrate worship services/sermons with GBIO priorities and interests;
* Formalize a communications/”in-reach” strategy within First Parish;
* Explore a clergy exchange with a GBIO member.

1. External: with others outside of First Parish, we will:

* Participate with on-going activities (monthly Liaison Team meetings; monthly Task Force meetings; periodic GBIO Delegate Assemblies; Large GBIO annual meeting);
* Encourage anyone to participate in any GBIO activity;
* Be actively involved in GBIO’s priority and special interest issues (Gun Safety; Affordable Housing/Homelessness/Gentrification; Criminal Justice in conjunction with First Parish’s participation in the UU MA Action; Climate Change through the MA Interfaith Climate Action with includes 10 GBIO member organizations).

***Organizers***

1. Chris McElroy
2. Marcia Hams
3. Rashid Shaikh
4. Elizabeth Kline
5. Rosalie Anders
6. Sharon deVos

***Supporters***

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

***Addendum: Major GBIO Related Activities 2015-2016***

* 2014 Strategic Planning Goals and Recommendations: join GBIO to “advance our mission over the next three years” by “working consistently and effectively for justice, and creating deep and accountable relationships between congregants and community partners”.
* More than 7 years: builds on Social Justice Council, Transformation Team, Environmental Justice, and Beyond Borders/Sin Fronteras initiatives (film viewings & discussions; speaker events; workshops; demonstrations holding our UU Standing on the Side of Love banner; vigils).
* May 12, 2015: 10 attended GBIO’s large event at Trinity Church.
* June, 2015. GBIO Organizing Task Force established by unanimous congregational vote to continue organizing discernment about joining.
* September 7, 2015: Elizabeth Kline and Fran Early (GBIO volunteer organizer) meet for a one-on-one exchange.
* October 4, 2015: congregation-wide educational event explaining GBIO (guest: Fran Early)
* October 8, 2015: FP represented at GBIO Assembly in Boston
* October 25, 2015: congregation voted almost unanimously to join GBIO.
* December 2, 2015: First Parish GBIO Task Force’s 1st meeting: Marcia Hams and Elizabeth Kline are co-liaisons to GBIO. Agree to meet monthly.
* January 10, 2016: 45 people participated in an after service GBIO event
* January 31, 2016: Participate in GBIO Gun Safety education/strategy gathering.
* February 22, 2016: applied to UU Funding Program for a $2,000 Congregation Based Community Organizing Grant.
* February 14, 2016: latest Courageous Love Award (This is 6th year giving out this award).
* March 8, 2016: 8 attendees, including the co-liaisons, at the GBIO Assembly at the Roxbury Presbyterian Church (with Senate President Stan Rosenberg).
* April 14, 2016: participant in the monthly Liaisons meeting
* April 20, 2016: monthly Task Force meeting: plan for May 22nd Task Force event at Social Justice Council’s gathering and organize to bring at least 20 from First Parish to the annual large GBIO event tentatively scheduled for May 24, 2016.