

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS SOCIAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

(Approved by Board of Trustees, March 2010)

Executive Summary:

The Task Force believes that modifications in the structure of the Social Justice Council (SJC) would strengthen existing and future social justice efforts, make social justice more pervasive throughout the congregation, bolster advocacy on moral imperatives and enhance community at Temple. The 2003 Task Force urged a structure built around Advocacy, Education, Mitzvah and Israel. The current Task Force has concluded that the SJC should focus on specific projects: Just Congregations, for example, Vickery Meadow and others. A structure is needed that focuses organization and leadership on action. Further, the structure needs to incorporate a communication plan that makes social justice work more visible and inviting to congregants. In addition, staff support is needed to strengthen our efforts and ease the administrative burden on the rabbi assigned to social justice. Lastly, the Task Force recommends that the Israel Committee be redefined in a manner to be determined by a study group, after recommendation to and approval by the Board.

History:

Tikkun Olam, repair of the world, is central to Judaism and Temple Emanu-El. Torah (study), Avodah (worship) and Gemilut Chasidim (acts of loving kindness and compassion) are the three pillars on which our faith and our community stand. Throughout the history of our congregation, social justice has been woven deeply and tightly into our fabric. Our Mission Statement declares we are "ever mindful of our heritage of social responsibility." Our Core Values statement states "We emphasize the ethical ideals of social justice at the core of the Jewish tradition," and adds, "It is Temple Emanu-El's obligation to engage in the ongoing task of world repair. We value being an integral part of and contributor to the total Dallas community."

And our actions have spoken louder than those words. As a congregation, we have developed and implemented the Rhoads Terrace Pre-School, the East Dallas Health Coalition and Jacob's Ladder. Our congregants and our congregation have helped build a day care center for the children of homeless. We have provided money and manpower throughout the Dallas community and beyond. We have worked in collaboration with other groups, provided numerous volunteer opportunities and brought issues of concern to the attention of our congregation. We have responded to crises from genocide in Darfur to settling hurricane refugees in Dallas. Our rabbis have taken an active leadership role on social issues, from Rabbi David Lefkowitz's stand against the Ku Klux Klan to Rabbi Levi Olan's "conscience of the city" leadership in the 1960s to Rabbi David Stern's global efforts

to focus attention on genocide in Darfur and local efforts to focus attention on poverty in Vickery Meadow. We have contributed mightily to the Vickery Meadow neighborhood, playing a key supportive role at Jill Stone Elementary School, named for one of our congregants, and feeding residents through a food pantry. Our food pantry in Vickery Meadow has now partnered with other organizations and is feeding hundreds of people in need each month. The food pantry serves as a powerful example of the tremendous need in our community, the power we can bring to a problem by teaming up with other organizations. We have built seven homes in West Dallas for Habitat for Humanity and taken on numerous other projects. We are currently involved in our Just Congregations efforts, beginning with conversations within the congregation and extending to working with 50 other faith-based organizations in the Dallas area. We have identified issues of shared concern and are working toward long-term advocacy on these issues. The work extends far beyond the efforts of our Social Justice Council. WRJ, Brotherhood, Religious School, Pre-School, Bar/Bat Mitzvah program, Youth, Young Adults and Celebrations have all facilitated social justice projects as well. Social justice is a significant element of who we are.

Social Justice Evaluation:

In 2003, a Task Force charged with evaluating Temple's social justice efforts recommended a new structure as a means to better manage the efforts and increase participation and impact. The 2003 Task Force recommended four efforts: a new organizational structure, stronger rabbinic leadership and involvement, broader education for both Religious School and adult learning, and more-effective community advocacy. The 2003 Task Force suggested replacing the Social Action Committee with a new Social Justice Council under which would be several committees: Advocacy, Education, Mitzvah Matters and Israel. The 2003 Task Force recommended assigning a rabbi to the Social Justice Council as a primary focus of his or her responsibility. The 2003 Task Force report was a major step forward for Temple, reviving social justice efforts and focusing much-needed attention on a more complete organizational structure. It also gained national attention within the Reform movement as a blueprint for strengthening Tikkun Olam within congregations. Temple is deeply indebted to the work of the 2003 Task Force.

The current Task Force set out to evaluate how the reorganization has fared several years after its implementation, whether it continues to be the right structure for Temple and how we could further improve our social justice work. The group was charged with assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Temple's social justice efforts and how effectively those efforts are in engaging members of the congregation. Members of the Task Force interviewed Social Justice Council leaders, both current and past, studied social justice efforts and structure at other large congregations and looked closely at the effectiveness of Temple's current programs.

The Task Force found that the structure of these committees provided for a system with a limited number of Temple volunteers working, but often resulting in the frustration of these dedicated volunteers. The Education Committee, for example, says that it has few activities other than doling out a few thousand dollars of contributions each year. The Mitzvah Matters Committee reports that it is essentially one person working to increase visibility of mitzvah opportunities for congregants. There is no solid and visible structure for new ideas to be put forward by congregants, clergy and lay leaders and then evaluated. The Israel Committee tells us that it suffers from a lack of ability to generate interest in Israel issues and projects. While we have a vibrant series of congregational trips to Israel, there are few follow-up activities for those interested in Israeli culture, issues and involvement. The Social Justice Council itself takes little authority and acts simply as a depository of updates from various activities, with little effectiveness at team-building or cross-campus communication. Advocacy has successfully morphed into our strong Just Congregations initiative, effectively hearing the issues that are relevant and important to our congregants and seeking opportunities for advocacy and action.

We found challenges with a variety of our current projects. Many social justice efforts are orbiting independently without connection to or understanding of each other.

- We have several major Vickery Meadow initiatives, but no coordination among them. The food pantry group has been working effectively on its own. We assist Jill Stone Elementary School with a Fun Saturdays program, with school uniform purchases, with tutoring and now even with evaluation of real estate needs and a possible playground construction and land swap project. Yet all those efforts are largely independent of one another. Despite our success, Temple's Vickery Meadow projects lack a coordinating structure.
- Habitat for Humanity has been an enormously successful effort for Temple. With the generosity of donors and the passionate efforts of several hundred volunteers, we brought change to the lives of several families by providing homes. Now without our legacy funding, Temple is exploring new avenues for this project.
- Dolls for Darfur has been a significant success. Engaging our Temple family in a project that elevated Temple and community consciousness, Dolls for Darfur received national recognition. Over time, however, the project lost momentum. The program now is run by one volunteer with little engagement of other congregants.
- In recent years, our congregation has become involved in Just Congregations. This involvement has been effective at hearing the issues that are relevant and important to our congregants and seeking

opportunities for advocacy and action. Yet, Just Congregations has not been fully integrated into the structure of the SJC and has largely been operating as a separate entity.

- We have numerous other social justice efforts all orbiting independently. We have a group engaged in the study of affordable housing solutions. We have Meals on Wheels volunteers, reading volunteers and other efforts. Traditionally, committees at Temple provide leadership continuity, plus volunteers, ideas, stewardship and momentum; however, when projects operate independently, they lack these important benefits.

The Task Force believes that modifications in the structure of the SJC are necessary to strengthen efforts, make social justice more pervasive throughout the congregation, and enhance community at Temple.

Recommendations:

- I. Restructure the Social Justice Council
- II. Determine foci for social justice initiatives
- III. Develop a communication/education plan
- IV. Obtain staff support
- V. Redefine Role of Israel Committee

Recommendation I: Restructure the Social Justice Council

The SJC needs to be expanded and strengthened, providing more oversight, more evaluation, more education and communication about efforts and issues. A strong SJC will also provide leadership continuity and create a venue to develop potential new leaders. The Task Force believes the SJC can be built into a vibrant and effective governance vehicle for social justice. The SJC will oversee the work of two new main branches: Just Congregations and Service Projects.

Role

The SJC will:

- Be the decision-making group for all social justice activities throughout Temple, including the evaluation of existing and new opportunities.
- Coordinate and communicate social justice efforts throughout Temple, providing opportunities for both advocacy and service projects to Temple members.

- Allocate funds given by Temple to various social service organizations.

Advocacy

Action and advocacy go hand-in-hand, and the Social Justice Council will reflect that. It is not enough to work to feed the hungry, for example: We must also work to end the causes of hunger. Advocacy is central to Reform Judaism and to Temple Emanu-El. The SJC will foster advocacy among all its committees and projects, not only the Just Congregations effort, which includes specific advocacy goals in its charge, but also from all service projects. The SJC will seek Board approval of new advocacy positions and efforts. Our advocacy is issue-oriented; not partisan, but often political. In the past, we have worked to support funding for a new public hospital in Dallas, for example, and opposed cuts in the Texas children's health insurance. We will regularly and tirelessly work to encourage government and elected leaders to respond to the needs of our community.

The current Task Force is in agreement with the following principles, outlined by the 2003 Task Force:

- Temple rabbis have always had, and continue to have complete freedom of the pulpit. Temple rabbis have the same right as any congregant to speak out as individuals in other arenas.
- There are certain moral imperatives that we, as Reform Jews, agree are bedrock principles of our sense of social justice.
- Reform Judaism's belief in social action is not synonymous with a particular partisan agenda.

The current Task Force also agrees with these concepts from the 2003 Task Force (which have been adjusted to be consistent with the modified structure). The congregation should:

- 1) Speak out powerfully as a congregation on the contemporary moral imperatives that are identified through the Just Congregations listening process and approved by the Board. Advocacy issues should be brought to the Board by the SJC for congregational approval.
- 2) Avoid channeling the congregation into one partisan point of view.
- 3) Assess specific legislative issues, educate the congregation with solid information on all sides of the issue enabling them to make individual decisions on their stance, and promote any appropriate "call to action."
- 4) Commit sufficient staff and financial resources to make public affairs and advocacy work more effectively.

- 5) Empower the senior rabbi, the president of the congregation and the officer over Social Justice, in consultation with the Executive Committee, to decide upon a course of quick action when an issue is urgent enough that it demands an immediate response based on our moral imperatives to speak out as a congregation.

Composition

The SJC will be structured differently than other Temple Councils. It will be chaired by the Officer over Social Justice. The Council's vice chairs will be the Vickery Meadow Committee Chair, the Service Projects Committee Chair and the Just Congregations Committee Chair. The council will include a member of Temple's clergy, Issues Chairs (up to 3, based on the identified issues being focused on through Just Congregations), a social justice communications and education representative (who will work with the SJC to effectively promote and communicate all social justice opportunities and educate the congregation on the issues raised through the Just Congregations listening campaigns) an Israel Committee representative (pending recommendations of an Israel Study Group), a Religious School representative, DAFTY Social Action Vice President and a proposed staff liaison. In addition, the President, in consultation with the Officer over Social Justice, may appoint a representative from WRJ , Brotherhood, Pre-School Committee, and Young Adults to also serve on the Council. A representative from Temple's Adult Education Committee would be desirable as well.

The Task Force believes that room should be left for discretion for Temple leaders to adjust the Social Justice Council composition as they see fit in order to find the best operating size. The SJC is purposely large, encompassing a broad swath of Temple. Coordination among the many constituents at Temple is both a major challenge and an opportunity. Our goal is to expand social justice, to make it pervasive throughout Temple, and to enhance community through our work.

The Task Force recommends that the committee composition under the SJC be consistent with other Temple governance committees. To that end, the Task Force believes that members of the Social Justice Council and the committees under the SJC should be appointed for specific terms in order to generate new vitality and new ideas on a regular basis. All committee chairs at Temple typically serve for two years (and often two years as a vice chair before that), fostering a culture that prevents committees from becoming stale. The Task Force recommends that consideration be given by the Social Justice Council to committee members serving no more than four years on a particular committee, unless the member is moving into a leadership position as vice chair or chair of a committee.

Social Justice Council Branches

The Social Justice Council will contain two branches, each serving a different purpose. Both branches report to the SJC for discussion and approval when appropriate.

1. Just Congregations Committee (Core Team)

This committee is focused on issue-based advocacy, education and action. This committee will conduct listening campaigns to help determine what is going on in the lives of congregants and what issues they are facing. On the basis of information gained from these listening campaigns, the committee will identify the issues that are widely and deeply felt within the congregation and will become the congregation's social justice concentration for a period of time. Issues chairs will be appointed after the listening process learns what issues are affecting our congregants. The length of time devoted to such issues will be determined by the SJC. The listening campaigns will also be used to identify and develop new leaders and interested members; the "bottom up" nature of each listening campaign should effectively determine consensus, or lack thereof, within the congregation with respect to the issues.

Once the issues have been selected, the Just Congregations Committee will research winnable solutions for the identified issues. It will use internal as well as community resources to identify and define appropriate actions. Further, the Committee will work in conjunction with the Service Projects Committee if it is deemed that a project developed by the Just Congregations Committee should be maintained in an ongoing way.

The Just Congregations listening process will ensure that social justice at Temple focuses on the issues about which our members are most passionate. Just Congregations will also foster community, leadership, and relationship within the synagogue, build partnerships within the broader Dallas community, cultivate Jewish learning about social justice (in coordination with the SJC communication and education representative), and advocate for social change.

When a winnable issue is identified and researched:

- 1) Once the JCC has researched a winnable solution to an identified issue, an action plan is developed for approval by the SJC and the Board. Our rabbis would guide us in defining the issue in terms of our faith.
- 2) The action plan may include a proposal for:
 - a. How the congregation will become informed of the issue (such as the Window, website site, and on-going education)

- b. How our congregation will take action on legislative and/or city-government advocacy (when appropriate).
 - c. How our congregation will speak out externally through op-ed pieces, our website, public forums and meetings, and other appropriate public demonstrations.
- 3) If approved, the action plan is supported by staff time, volunteer time and money, if necessary. After approval, Temple's leadership will move on the issue in an appropriate manner.
- 4) When an issue does not move forward from the Board, a congregational position is not taken publicly.

2. Service Projects Committee (SPC)

The Service Projects Committee will oversee current and new service projects as deemed relevant by the Social Justice Council. This SPC is responsible for developing and establishing criteria to be used when evaluating and selecting new service projects. If the SPC determines that a new service project is desired, it will develop an action plan which is to be passed by the SJC and, when needed, the Board.

The SPC will be responsible for examining the effectiveness and viability of all our service projects, identifying organizational partners, developing lay-leadership for Temple projects, and helping to recruit volunteers as needed. If the SPC determines that a project is not succeeding or meeting Temple's goals, it can recommend to the SJC that the project be discontinued.

The SPC will work with the SJC to coordinate communication and education for all service project opportunities. The committee will identify and nurture leadership, participants and potential organizational partners.

Temple leadership has determined that we have a moral obligation to the Vickery Meadow neighborhood. In support of that commitment, the new SJC will include a Vickery Meadow Committee (VMC). The VMC will be charged with the task of determining projects and evaluating partnerships that we have in Vickery Meadow. It is possible that the VMC, after full deliberation and discussion, will determine that Temple no longer desires to continue certain partnerships or projects in Vickery Meadow. They may also decide to develop new partners.

The Vickery Meadow Committee (VMC) will coordinate activities by different congregants in the Vickery Meadow neighborhood and increase interaction between different projects in order to strengthen our impact and deepen the social justice experience for our members. The VMC will identify leaders and build awareness throughout the congregation of volunteer opportunities.

Recommendation II: Determine Focus on Social Justice Scope

The Task Force has determined that the current structure of social justice promotes a multitude of different projects. Rather than continue to spread social justice resources widely and thinly, the Task Force recommends engaging in fewer projects in order to increase the coordination and concentration of our efforts. These efforts will be selected based on issues of primary concern and will undergo ongoing evaluation.

The SJC will develop an evaluation tool that will help it set the agenda for Temple's social justice efforts. This tool will allow it to use specific criteria to research the history and need as well as examine the effectiveness and viability of each project. The tool will be used to evaluate new projects that congregants, committee, clergy or staff propose, as well as ongoing projects.

Projects that are not selected to be foci of the SJC and committees will still be recognized by Temple for their social justice contribution. Promotion of projects and opportunities may be on the website, in *The Window*, or through other means of publicity that Temple uses.

Recommendation III: Develop Communication and Education Plans

In order to promote pervasiveness of social justice throughout the congregation, we strongly recommend the development and implementation of a communication and education plan. All social justice work will be coordinated through the SJC to ensure communication and Temple-wide connections.

Both youth and adult education should incorporate Temple's social justice foci throughout the curricula.

Additionally, the Task Force will work with the Communications Representative to ensure that all social justice initiatives are identifiable.

Recommendation IV: Staff the Social Justice Council

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the funding for an additional staff position dedicated to social justice.

A budget is a moral document, and Temple's values are reflected through our budgets. The Task Force strongly believes that Temple needs to commit additional resources towards social justice in accordance with Temple's articulated Core Values and priorities. Social justice is the only area of Temple programming and member engagement that doesn't have a staff coordinator.

We do amazing work through the commitment of volunteers and efforts of rabbis and lay leaders, but we have reached the point where we clearly need staff

assistance to reach our goals and make social justice pervasive throughout the congregation, one of the charges to this Task Force.

We envision that the social justice staff member will:

- 1) Work with our Just Congregations Core Team and Temple's collaborative partners (e.g., Dallas Area Interfaith) on Temple-wide listening campaigns, advocacy and community actions that are derived from the organizing process.
- 2) Help make social justice service projects and initiatives pervasive throughout Temple and increase the effectiveness of volunteer efforts in coordination with the Social Justice Council and partner organizations.
- 3) Work with the Social Justice Council and the Program Department to engage Temple's members in every area and constituency of congregational life, including Pre-School, Religious School, WRJ, Brotherhood, Young Adults, youth groups, etc.
- 4) Coordinate the growing Vickery Meadow initiatives with our lay-members. Expand volunteer base, handle key administrative functions, and work with the lay leaders to build sustainable service projects.
- 5) Provide administrative functions for all service projects and Just Congregations efforts. This will provide much-needed administrative relief for the clergy liaison to social justice, who currently is handling the load and sharing an administrative assistant with another rabbi.
- 6) Develop and facilitate B'nai Mitzvah family and community *mitzvah* projects.
- 7) Work with lay-leaders and programming staff to coordinate social justice components into existing Temple programs.
- 8) Help lay leaders develop educational materials, programming and Temple-wide events focused on the social justice issues that are identified by the Social Justice Council.
- 9) Work with the Israel Committee to help make Israel education, engagement and advocacy pervasive throughout the congregation.

Recommendation V: Redefine Israel Committee

Israel has always been an important part of the fabric of worship, education and social justice at Temple and must continue to be so. The Israel Committee has struggled for a sense of clear mission and purpose, since its establishment in 2003. To determine the manner in which the Israel Committee should be redefined, the

Task Force recommends that the structure and goals of the Israel Committee be studied by a small group of congregants, including rabbinic and professional support. The study group will examine where Israel fits in with Temple governance, determine the right governance structure at Temple, and then make recommendations to the Board. The study group would be charged with the task of focusing on what was learned from a discussion held earlier this year on the ways to elevate Israel in worship, education and youth, and creating a structure for follow up with Israel trip participants. The general impression of the Task Force is that social justice issues in Israel (e.g., status of Progressive Judaism in Israel) should remain within the purview of the SJC; however, the Task Force believes that a decision with respect to this topic should be made after full consideration by the study group of the entire range of topics bearing on how Israel can be better woven into the congregation's tapestry, and the adoption of a recommendation by the Board.

The social justice staff person, once hired, might be the individual who can help the Israel Committee provide the tools to volunteers to identify opportunities for collaboration with the other programming committees to become an important and necessary partner.

2010 Social Justice Task Force Members:

Melanie Rubin, Co-Chair Marcia Grossfeld, Co-Chair

Larry Ginsburg Scott McCartney

Harold Kleinman Bert Fischel

Barry Greenberg Julie Bleicher

Ladd Hirsch Eric Goldberg

Hanne Klein

Clergy and Staff: Rabbi Asher Knight and Karen Hoffman