

ANNUAL REPORT

2014-15





May 21, 2015

Dear Friends,

This has been a busy and exciting year for Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice. We have added new programming and events, increased our congregational and individual membership, revamped our website, and enhanced our social media reach through our new Twitter account (@Wifaithvoices). Our reach has increased beyond Madison and Milwaukee, and we have developed strong connections with sister organizations around the state.

As an all-volunteer organization, we could not have accomplished what we have without the help and support of many friends, volunteers, and allies. We most especially want to thank:

Madison-Area Urban Ministry for being a warm and supportive incubator and to **Linda Ketcham** for all your help and advice!

Our wonderful **Board of Directors!** (find the list on p. 10)

Reverend Kerri Parker, who created our new website and joined our Communications Committee!

Rabbi Renee Bauer, Executive Director, Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin, and **Stacey Rasmussen**, ICWJ intern, for being great partners in all aspects of our joint-Living Wage Campaign!

Most especially to **Kristin Gorton**, who has been interning with us this year. Kristin has done amazing work this year, greatly increased our capacity to offer programming, increased our communications capacity immeasurably, and generally been a joy to work with. I'm delighted she will be staying with us in the capacity of a member of our Communications Committee!

And to the following congregations for hosting our Economic Justice Film Festival:

McFarland United Church of Christ
Lake Edge United Church of Christ
Memorial United Church of Christ

First Unitarian Society
Temple Beth El

I am very grateful for all your commitment, support and passion for our work!!

Bonnie

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis, President of the Board

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

“In these days of difficulty, we Americans everywhere must and shall choose the path of social justice..., the path of faith, the path of hope, and the path of love toward our fellow man.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt

“The opposite of poverty is not wealth. In too many places, the opposite of poverty is justice.” Bryan Stevenson

From our beginning, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice has advocated for social and economic justice, focusing particularly on health care reform, hunger and food insecurity, housing and homelessness. Over the last year, our efforts have broadened to address overarching issues of economic inequality and systemic policies that keep people in poverty. In this work, we partner closely with the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin. Together, we have implemented several new programs and joined together in support of efforts to raise the minimum wage in Wisconsin.

Our programs and activities this year included:

➤ **Why Poverty? An Economic Justice Film Festival**

- Over the course of three months, WFVJ and ICWJ sponsored five films on various issues of economic justice. Each film was followed by an expert speaker who addressed issues raised in the film. Five congregations around Madison



hosted the films.

- In response to requests outside Madison to duplicate the Film Festival, we created a Toolkit with information on how to sponsor a film festival, and suggestions for films to show. The Toolkit can be found on our website at <http://wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.weebly.com/host-a-film-festival.html>

➤ **Minimum Wage Challenge:**

- In previous years, WFVJ has sponsored Food Stamp Challenges, asking participants to live for a week as if they only had a week's allocation of food stamps to live on. This year, we expanded the challenge to a Minimum Wage Challenge. Participants spent a week living on only \$77, the amount of money left in a weekly paycheck for those making minimum wage, after paying taxes and a week's rent (see <http://www.livethewage.com/>).
- Participants could take the Challenge in real time, spending only \$77 for the week. Or they could take it 'virtually', using our on-line 'virtual checkbook' to track every time they spent money for the week, how much they spent, what they spent it on, and how they paid for the item. We framed this as an exercise in

mindful spending, to pay attention to what we spend our money on and how much we spend in a week, noting when the \$77 runs out.

- Participants shared their experiences on our Minimum Wage blog - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1441306156156072/>
- Dane County Executive Joe Parisi took the Minimum Wage Challenge. He said of his experience: “My brief experience demonstrates the obvious: It is impossible to survive on the current minimum wage. And what was a simple record keeping task for me is the very real and painful experience of too many citizens throughout Wisconsin and the nation.”

➤ **Fight for \$15:**

- WFVJ has been active in the ongoing struggle to raise the minimum wage to \$15 and safeguard workers’ rights. We have been a presence at rallies and press conferences; accompanied workers as they staged one-day strikes and accompanied them again when they’ve gone back to work;



Fight for \$15 rally, Madison, April 15, 2015

- WFVJ signed onto a letter sponsored by Wisconsin Jobs Now – **Raise Up WI** - from faith leaders expressing our support for a living wage and the right to unionize.

➤ **Right to Work:**

- We engaged in efforts to educate the public about the dangers of the so-called ‘Right to Work’ legislation. We published a letter in the Wisconsin State Journal (http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/mailbag/rabbi-bonnie-margulis-right-to-work-laws-hurt-workers/article_0f477a97-d5cb-578e-a8a3-39f16f8da4fc.html) and spoke at a rally organized by AFSCME.

➤ **Anti-poverty advocacy:**

- We also signed onto a letter sponsored by WISDOM, The Wisconsin Council of Churches and the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families – **Faithful Citizenship** – to help raise the conversation in an election year about the systemic policies that keep people in poverty. http://wichurches.org/sitecontent/pdf_files/events/Faithful%20Citizenship%202014.pdf
- WFVJ signed onto a letter sponsored by the **Coalition on Human Needs**, urging the US Congress to create a budget that supports workers and their families by fully funding safety net programs, instead of lavishing funding on the military.

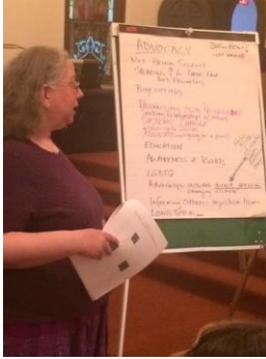
<http://www.chn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SAVE-for-All-Letter-03-24-2015.pdf>

- We also signed onto a national letter to President Obama, urging him to protect funding for child nutrition programs. <http://frac.org/more-than-1000-organizations-urge-obama-to-invest-in-child-nutrition-programs/>
- **Living Wage Campaign:**
 - Over the last year, WFVJ has reached out to over 40 organizations and faith leaders to gauge interest in building a long-term, state-wide coalition to fight for issues around a living wage.
 - We define ‘living wage’ as more than just wages. We include wages, hours, paid sick leave, paid family leave, affordable health care, affordable quality childcare, and access to public transportation. All of these are necessary in order for a worker to be able to provide for her family.
 - On May 7, 2015, we partnered with ICWJ and convened the first organizing meeting of the Living Wage Coalition. Over 20 individuals participated, representing faith communities, labor organizers, health care advocates, direct service providers (shelters, food pantries, etc.), and advocates for a better, more humane budget. Enthusiasm for this project was high and plans for an expanded next meeting are in the works.

ADVOCACY WORKSHOP

From the ancient Israelite prophets crying out on street corners, to modern-day Buddhist monks immolating themselves in protest against tyranny and injustice, religious leaders and people of faith have been inspired and impelled to speak out in the public square. Social justice is a fundamental concern of the majority of faith traditions, manifested both through service and through activism. To help us live out our commitment to faith-based social justice advocacy, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice has created **Moving From Charity to Justice: A Workshop in Advocacy.** This three-session workshop introduces participants to the challenges and opportunities for congregational engagement in advocacy; explores the many forms advocacy can take; dispels myths about whether a non-profit can engage in public policy work; and trains participants in the nuts and bolts of advocacy – how to write a Letter to the Editor or an Op-ed; how to conduct an advocacy campaign; how to present testimony before a school board or a legislative committee hearing; and how to make a lobby visit to your elected official.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Southwest Wisconsin Association United Church of Christ Social Concerns Division, we are able to offer the workshop to UCC congregations outside of Dane County free of charge. The workshop is currently being piloted at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Platteville.



Rabbi Bonnie Margulis leads brainstorming activity on “what is Advocacy?” at First Congregational United Church of Christ, Platteville, May 6, 2015

HEALTH CARE REFORM

As people of faith, we believe that health care is a right that should be available, affordable, and accessible to all our citizens. Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice continues to advocate for Wisconsin to accept the federal funding to expand BadgerCare to include everyone earning up to 138% of the federal poverty line. Accepting this funding will not only extend health care to thousands more Wisconsinites, it will also fill in a large part of the gap in the proposed 2015-17 state budget, eliminating the need for drastic cuts to the University of Wisconsin system. We helped raise awareness through letters to the editor explaining why accepting the federal funding is both the moral, and the fiscally sound, thing to do.

http://host.madison.com/news/opinion/mailbag/rabbi-bonnie-margulis-urge-scott-walker-to-preserve-uw-and/article_e4f5675b-6f48-5b1b-82ba-7d09852d5856.html#ixzz3Qniq6mTh

In addition to advocating for federal funding for BadgerCare, WFVJ has also joined in efforts to preserve other vital health care programs, such as Long Term Care, Family Care, Senior Care, and IRIS. We have signed on as part of the Wisconsin Long Term Care Coalition in support of a resolution to that effect <http://www.wilongtermcarecoalition.org/#!resolution/cee5>. We also signed on to a national effort to persuade Congress to preserve funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for the next four years.

BIENNIUM BUDGET PROPOSAL 2015-17

Following Governor Walker’s State of the State speech, where he unveiled his 2015-17 Biennium proposal, WFVJ issued a statement expressing our dismay at the policies and proposals in the budget. We decried the plans to make drastic cuts to the University of Wisconsin, the public school system, and vital health care programs such as Family Care, Senior Care, and IRIS. We also expressed our outrage at proposals to institute drug testing for recipients of public benefits including SNAP, BadgerCare, and unemployment insurance. Our statement was published in the Wisconsin State Journal.

http://host.madison.com/wsj/lifestyles/faith-and-values/religion/in-the-spirit-faith-group-accuses-scott-walker-of-shaming/article_81fbec9a-43a4-5f3c-ab12-a090d5ab236e.html

WFVJ has been an active partner in a coalition headed by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, which has created a **Better Choices Budget** proposal. WFVJ has been working to help publicize this document as a better alternative to Governor Walker's budget proposal <http://www.wisconsinbudgetproject.org/better-choices-a-summary-of-an-alternative-plan-for-the-wisconsin-budget>.

We also helped craft, and signed onto, a letter sponsored by the Wisconsin Council of Churches, opposing the drug testing proposal. http://www.wichurches.org/home_page_news/religious-organizations-letter-to-the-legislatures-joint-finance-committee/

PARTNERSHIPS

More and more, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice is asked to partner with sister organizations on areas of mutual concern.

- Among our many collaborations this year, was an effort to bring the religious voice to the debate on frac-sand mining. We worked with the **Snow Flower Sangha Buddhist Community and Wisconsin Interfaith Light and Power** to craft a petition opposing the GogebicTaconite Mine. Over 900 people signed onto the petition on Change.com - <https://www.change.org/p/wi-governor-candidates-bring-ethics-to-wisconsin-mining>.
- In March, WFVJ co-sponsored **Safe Harbor Lobby Day** with the **Lutheran Office of Public Policy of Wisconsin**. A day of learning about the issue, followed by lobbying at the Capitol, was held on March 19.
- **People of Faith United for Justice Advocacy Day** was held on April 29. Nine faith-based organizations, led by the Wisconsin Council of Churches, organized the day. The key issues we chose to focus on included threats to the social safety net, especially drug testing BadgerCare, SNAP, and Unemployment Insurance recipients; drivers licenses for undocumented workers; prison reform; and transit.

COMMUNICATIONS

Thanks to our wonderful intern, **Kristin Gorton**, and our graphic designer **Reverend Kerri Parker**, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice can boast of a tremendously enhanced web and social media presence.

- Visit our beautiful new website at www.wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.org.
- Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/WisconsinFaithVoicesForJustice
- Follow us on Twitter @WIfaithvoices
- Read news, announcements, action alerts, and share sermons, prayers, and stories on our new e-newsletter.

MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT

Funding for Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice comes solely through membership dues and the generosity of our supporters. Your dues and in-kind donations go to pay for all our programs – for web and listserv hosting; Xeroxing and materials for workshops and events; for outreach and publicity materials; for food at events; and for travel around the state. We continue

to expand our membership donor base, and are exploring grant options from local and statewide foundations and other funding sources.

Madison-Area Urban Ministry serves as our organizational incubator and fiscal agent. MUM is an interfaith social justice organization that has spurred social change in and around Dane County. MUM's mission is to be "a prophetic voice for justice, neighbors working together for social change." MUM serves as an incubator and fiscal agent for innovative ideas and new projects in the Madison WI region. WFVJ is one of those projects. **As MUM is our fiscal agent, all membership dues and contributions should be made via check, made out to MUM, with a note that identifies them as dues or contribution to WFVJ.** Contributions made to WFVJ through MUM are tax-deductible.

Our dues structure is:

Congregation/Organization Over 200 members	\$100
Congregations/Organizations Under 200 members	\$ 50
*Individuals	\$ 25
*Students	\$ 10

*In cases of financial hardship, pay what you can, but please pay something.

All contributions and dues payments are much appreciated. Make checks payable to MUM and send to:

Rabbi Jonathan Biatch, Treasurer, WFVJ
c/o Madison-area Urban Ministry
22 Chautauqua Trail
Madison, WI 53719 Earmarked for WFVJ

WISCONSIN FAITH VOICES FOR JUSTICE 2015-17 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(* - new members)

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis - President
Reverend Stephen Marsh – Vice President
Rabbi Jonathan Biatch – Treasurer
Reverend Khyati Penney Johns
Reverend Ellen Rasmussen
*Rabbi Marc Berkson
Linda Ketcham
*Vicki Berenson
*Reverend Michael Rehak
Reverend Larry Sexe
*Reverend Joseph Baring

WISCONSIN FAITH VOICES FOR JUSTICE MEMBER CONGREGATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS

Madison-Area Urban Ministry
PEPartnership
Lake Edge Lutheran Church
Temple Beth El
Beth Israel Center
Still Point Zen Center
First United Methodist Church and Society Mission Team
Lutheran Office of Public Policy
Lake Edge United Church of Christ Mission Team
Wisconsin Friends Action Network (WisFAN)
Snowflower Sangha

Please join us on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/WisconsinFaithVoicesForJustice

Visit our website:

www.wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.org

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