

## *The History of The Temple Social Action/Justice Committee*

The Temple Social Justice Committee was established by the Board of Directors on April 18, 1961, to study UAHC materials on social action, and to educate the congregation about them. It could then present any resolutions developed to the Executive Committee of the congregation.

*The establishment of a Social Justice Committee came about  
during the civil rights struggle.*

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation of the public schools was unconstitutional. On April 4, 1955, at an open board meeting, the Nashville Section of the National Council of Jewish Women adopted a resolution that they, "in cooperation with other groups,...educate and inform its members and the community and...work toward an effective implementation of the Supreme Court decision on segregation." On May 25, 1955, an integrated workshop on desegregation, cosponsored by eight organizations, was held at the Jewish Community Center, on West End Avenue. Leah Rose Werthan, the President of Council at the time, said later that "Everybody was scared to death....We alerted the Mayor and the police department. We had policemen there. We had detectives there." The meeting was open to the community, and over five hundred people attended. Two hundred people registered for discussion groups to be held on May 26, 1955.

In a plan required by Federal Judge William Miller, the Nashville school board decided to desegregate the Nashville schools one grade a year, starting with the first grade in September, 1957. Hattie Cotton Elementary School was bombed on September 10, 1957.

Originally, when Rabbi William Silverman came to the Vine Street Temple in October, 1950, the Board of Directors granted him freedom of the pulpit, and he became involved in the civil rights movement. The president of Fisk University was invited to speak from the pulpit. Rabbi Silverman started an integrated Institute for Christian Clergy. After the bombing of Hattie Cotton School, he campaigned against the White Citizens' Council, who called him a "nigger-loving rabbi." He was attacked in April, 1957, while leaving a Methodist church where he had given a sermon.

At 8:07 PM, Sunday night, March 16, 1958, a dynamite explosion destroyed the front of the Jewish Community Center, where integrated meetings had been held. Rabbi Silverman received a phone call which said that The Temple would be blown up and Judge Miller would be shot. Among the outpouring of support from the community was a statement from Dr. Lou Silberman, a Reform rabbi and professor at Vanderbilt University, who was chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Committee of the Nashville Jewish Community Council, predecessor of the Jewish Federation. Silberman accused John

Kasper, a long-time anti-Semite, of causing the problem of integration to become a Jewish problem. The perpetrators of the dynamiting were never caught.

Rabbi Randall Falk came to The Temple in 1960. He was a charter member of the first Metro Human Relations Commission in 1963. He was involved in the sit-ins at the lunch counters of Woolworth's and Morrison's Cafeteria. In 1964 he led a march of 130 clergy to the Metro Courthouse to present then Mayor Beverly Briley a program for civil rights in Nashville, which included completing integration of the public schools, the passage of a public accommodations law, providing adequate public recreation facilities such as swimming pools, and desegregating the staff of all Metro government agencies.

Officially in 1961, under the leadership of Rabbi Falk, the Social Justice Committee was established at The Temple. Dr. Fred Goldner became the first chair. In 1963 the committee sponsored a series of parlor meetings for the congregation, presenting a Decalogue of Human Rights to those who attended. The Temple Board of Directors adopted a modified Decalogue of "Guiding Principles in Human Relations," in 1964, stating that Temple membership "is open to all Jews, of every race," supporting freedom of speech for the rabbi, and urging the congregation to further racial justice and equality.

Annette Levy Ratkin became the next chair. Interfaith dialogs were started: one with the professional staff, with Southern Baptists; one with congregants, with St. George's Episcopal and St. Henry's Catholic churches. Volunteers were recruited to serve Metro after-school study centers. The Vietnam War triggered a "World At Peace" resolution, which was sent to our congressmen and President Johnson. The Temple went on record opposing a constitutional amendment permitting prayer in the public schools. The committee became involved with Project Equality, which urged religious institutions to use their purchasing power to foster equal opportunity employment. Volunteers were recruited to help staff employment referral centers. A clothing drive was held for South Street Community Center. Temple Youth bought, wrapped and donated Christmas gifts for the children in South Street's day-care program.

During Ted Paillet's tenure as Social Justice chair in 1971, the Temple board created a Social Justice Fund, using funds from the Lee Kuhn Memorial Endowment Fund.

Bernard Werthan, Jr., enhanced Temple's support for South Street Community Center, co-sponsoring a Girl Scout troop there. Temple sponsored a Family Life Education program, along with Family and Children's Services.

Davine Levison's focus in 1976 was on a weekend emergency food pantry along with other churches, and contributions of canned goods to the Ladies of Charity food pantry.

In 1977 the name of the committee was changed to the Social Action Committee. Chairs Ethel Lutin and Molly Slabosky joined the board of the Second Harvest program. They also sponsored a Laotian family of four, the Rachaphoumys, providing housing, jobs, and

medical care. The committee participated in the Juvenile Justice Coalition, helping to remove juvenile, non delinquent offenders from the criminal justice system. In 1981, Molly Slabosky, chair (after the death of Ethel Lutin), began the process of allocation of funds from the Theresa Kuhn Trust Fund. The committee sponsored a Sukkot food collection for Second Harvest Food Bank. The committee, in cooperation with Hope, Inc., United Way, and Mayor Richard Fulton's Adopt-A-Home, undertook the rehabilitation of house in West Nashville. Thirty volunteers, headed by Calvin Buchman and Gilbert Fox, completed the house in 1983, and made it available to a low income family at cost. Temple also joined the West Nashville Covenant Ministry, which provided needed social services and emergency assistance to the needy in the area.

On May 25, 1981, federal agents were able to intercept three Ku Klux Klan members in the process of attempting to dynamite The Temple, with Rabbi Falk inside. The perpetrators also planned to bomb the WSM tower and several Jewish-owned pawnshops. In the newspaper on June 6, 1981 was a full page "Statement of Commitment" speaking out against the "acts of violence aimed at the Jewish Community," signed by hundreds of individuals and organizations.

Sue Morris joined Molly Slabosky as co-chair in 1983, and the committee became a charter member of Congregational Help Line, created to act on requests congregations received from those in need. The Calvin Buchman Social Action Fund was established to promote social action.

In 1984 Molly Slabosky was chairman again, and the committee allocated over \$2000 from the Theresa and Lee Kuhn Fund to the West Nashville Covenant Ministry, Congregational Help Line, and Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), an organization which helps disadvantaged Nashvillians prepare for the labor market. A special Freedom Seder was held for Black clergy and laity, along with The Temple's officers and members of the Social Action Committee. In 1986, almost \$5000 was allocated from the Theresa and Lee Kuhn Fund. For the third year the committee alternated with other congregations to provide hot meals at Edgehill United Methodist Church. A Jewish-Catholic dialogue was conducted with members of Saint Henry's Church.

In 1986 William Kuhn (now Rabbi William Kuhn) became chair. The committee became involved with Room in the Inn, sheltering over 130 homeless in the Youth Lounge once a week from December through March. The Second Harvest Food Bank received 600 pounds of food last year from the annual Sukkot food drive.

Robert Eisenstein and Esther Cohn became co-chairs in 1988. The committee supported deserving community projects with volunteer and monetary commitment, such as the Edgehill United Methodist Church meals program. The West Nashville Community Shelter was a new recipient of funds from the Theresa and Lee Kuhn Fund. The committee continued purchasing a table for \$500 at the awards dinner of what was then the National Conference of Christian and Jews.

In 1990, Esther Cohn co-chaired with Molly Slabosky, and the roster of community organizations included FOCUS (Faith Organizations in Covenant for Understanding and Service), United Methodist Urban Ministry (hot meals at Edgehill United Methodist Church), OIC, West Nashville Family Shelter, Matthew 25 (opportunities for the homeless), Manna, Room In the Inn, NCCJ, Special Olympics, Reconciliation Ministries (for families of prison inmates), CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) for children in the judicial system, Metro Human Relations Commission, Shepherd's Center (senior citizens), Volunteer Adult Literacy Council, and Partners in Education, an after-school tutoring program. \$10,780 was allocated from the two social action funds and from the Memorial Tablets Fund of The Temple.

Molly Slabosky and Paula Cohen became co-chairs in 1991. Operation Exodus, the resettlement of Jews from the Former Soviet Union, was added to the funding roster. A total of \$12,800 had been allocated. A model seder was hosted for the members of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue. \$14,500 was allocated for the next year, and Single Room Occupancy, a new shelter in the Mercury Hotel, was added to the list. The committee also joined the Lions' Club Eye Bank in collecting discarded eye glasses. In 1992, the committee became a sponsor of TNT, Tying Nashville Together, a grassroots movement dedicated to teaching and empowering those bypassed by the political process.

Molly and Paula turned the committee over to Sharon Bell, and from 1993-2000 the committee assisted in Mitzvah Day, involving hundreds of people throughout the congregation. Twenty programs or agencies were on the list for allocations. 250 guests were served by Room in the Inn. Starting in 1994, and still continuing, the committee participated in the Boulevard Bolt to raise money for the homeless.

Robert Elman became chair in 1996, the tenth anniversary of the Room in the Inn program. In 1997, co-chairs Michael Attias and Sally Levine organized a survey to determine how The Temple should distribute the available Social Action Funds. The responders wanted to include more agencies, particularly those which rely on congregational support, whether or not Temple members participate in the agencies. The responders also wanted to fund the agencies' budgeted needs, rather than emergency claims, and they wanted to fund agencies that taught skills, as well as agencies that provided food, clothing, and shelter.

Pat Halper became co-chair with Sally Levine in 1998. Room in the Inn and Mitzvah Day continued to operate with only volunteers. A list of agencies providing aid to Kosovo was distributed to the congregation.

On December 5, 2000, the committee, chaired by Pat Halper and Joan Conroy, sponsored a Hunger Forum, spotlighting Second Harvest, Matthew 25, Luke 14:12, Manna, Campus for Human Development and Room In the Inn. Room In the Inn moved to West End Synagogue during the renovation of The Temple, and Temple members were invited to

special classes in cooking kosher so that they could assist in preparing the food at West End.

As part of The Temple's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, on Martin Luther King Shabbat, January 19, 2001, The Temple recognized Rabbi Randall Falk for his commitment to social justice and established the Randall M. Falk Fund for Social Justice and Community Relations.

In February 2001, Pat Halper, co-chair of the Social Justice Committee with Joan Conroy, stated that the committee targeted homelessness, domestic violence, senior citizen concerns, children's issues, job training and retraining for people who have been incarcerated. The committee allocated \$20,520 from the funds to sixteen agencies in Nashville. Letters had been sent out to twenty-one agencies, mainly organizations in which committee members had been involved. The committee was still involved with the Boulevard Bolt, Room in the Inn, and Tying Nashville Together. At a kickoff on April 24, 2001, congregants were invited to assist in building a home for Habitat for Humanity in September, working with Belle Meade United Methodist Church, and the Cathedral of the Incarnation.

In 2002, Pat Halper, Chair, announced a new recipient of funding, Better Decisions, a program to assist women of all ages incarcerated in the Nashville area in learning problem-solving and life-planning skills. Volunteers and funding were still being provided to Luke 14:12, which served over eight thousand meals a year to the homeless and residents in the Edgemoor area. Allocations totaled just under \$25,000 in 2002. Mitzvah Day brought out 200 congregants, who went to nineteen social service agencies. Also in 2002, Rabbi Emeritus Randall Falk was honored at the Kelley Miller Smith, Sr., and Memorial Prayer Breakfast at the First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, for his work in civil rights.

In 2003 The Temple, the Islamic Center, and Belle Meade United Methodist Church built another Habitat for Humanity House, under the direction of Alan Mazer. Pat Halper and Cathy Karmiller thanked the congregation for a very successful Mitzvah Day on April 13. During 2004 there was an exchange of pulpits with the Village Church, in East Nashville. At Social Action Shabbat, representatives of the agencies funded by allocations from the Social Action Committee were invited to demonstrate their activities to the congregation. Members of the Village Church were invited to a special seder. The tenth anniversary of TNT was held, celebrating their work in education, neighborhoods, transportation, and after-school care.

In 2004, the some committee members in conjunction with Rabbi Allison Flash and Adrienne Yontef from Jewish Family Services established a Jewish based program for recovering alcoholics, drug addicts, and their families. That year 15 individuals met for the first "JACS" seder. The committee allocated \$24,000.00 to various social service agencies in Nashville

In 2005 another Habitat for Humanity house was built, in cooperation with the Hermitage United Methodist Church, the Sri Ganesha Temple, and West End United Methodist Church. After the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, Rabbi Shana Goldstein, along with members of the Social Action Committee, and Congregation Micah, appealed to both congregations for food, clothes, and supplies to be sent to “Jacob’s Ladder” in Mississippi. The Sprintz family, kindly supplied a truck and a driver for the project to enable us to be one of the first responders to this major catastrophe. Allocations that year were made to OIC, Alive Hospice, Better Decisions, Nashville Cares, Homework Hotline, Youth Villages, Temple Playschool scholarships, Tennessee Infant Parent Services, JACS, Jewish Family Services, Planned Parenthood, Community Resource Center, Senior Citizens, Room in the Inn, CASA, with a total allocation of \$24,350. Room in the Inn started housing women also. A Social Action Shabbat was held to bring recognition to the agencies funded and to provide congregants with opportunities to become directly involved. Robb McCluskey was chair.

In 2006 The Temple, through Nechama and Operation Blessing, teamed with Sherith Israel and the Jewish Federation to assist in renovating houses damaged by Hurricane Katrina in Slidell, Louisiana. Room in the Inn and TNT are ongoing projects. The Committee was proud to offer a “Teen Workshop” on Homelessness under the direction of a Teen member of the Social Action Committee Jana Bregman. The program brought teens from Metro Public and Private schools together to investigate, and address the issues faced by the Homeless population of Nashville. This was coordinated with the Campus for Human Development. Following the tradition started in 2005 a Social Action Shabbat was held at which time the funds from the allocations were handed out to the agencies. This has proven to be a great benefit for all. The allocation of funds and agencies is listed on the website for the Temple.

In 2007, the Temple has continued every Monday evening throughout the winter, (November thru March) to house 10 homeless women, a project done coordinated by the Campus for Human Development. The Campus has always been funded in part by the Boulevard Bolt, (a Temple program in conjunction with St. George’s, and Emmanuel Baptist). The Social Action Committee sponsored a Seder for the JACS program as well as the first Seder for Gay and Lesbian Jews held on congregational property in Nashville. The allocations and the recipient agencies were again honored at a Social Action Shabbat in the Spring. The agencies and the amounts are listed on the Temple website.

Social Justice has changed from a passive educational committee to a proactive, community-wide part of The Temple

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