



Social Justice Newsletter

June 2016

Calendar

June 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sundays 8:45 MVUUC Founders' Room The Free Thinkers' group meets on these Sundays and often discusses social justice issues. *On June 5 they will be reviewing ballot measures.*

Second and Fourth Sundays, after church at MVUUC Come to a lively discussion on the patio at the Afterthoughts Table! Topics may include something addressed in the service or an area of interest or concern from those at the table.

Third Sunday after church at MVUUC Write a letter or two about issues that are important to you! Materials provided. See Teresia Santee on the patio.

June 15 7:00 p.m. at The Claremont Forum Bookstore, 1st St. in Claremont The monthly film presented by the group Conscientious Projector will be *Where to Invade Next*, the recent Michael Moore film. Free, discussion to follow.

June 18, 9:00-12:00 Data Gathering Event at Anne and Tom Thorward's home Come with your laptop or tablet to search the internet and gather community resources for Syrian Refugees. For more information: http://montevistauu.org/index.php/news-events/events/?event_id1=108

Film Series

MVUUC has talked for quite some time about hosting a social justice film series. Due to faulty equipment and some difficulty obtaining films, this has not come to fruition. Fortunately, there is an existing film series, Conscientious Projector, that meets on third Wednesdays monthly at the Claremont Forum Bookshop in the Claremont Packinghouse at 7:00. They show excellent films and have a post-film discussion.

The MVUUC justice committee recommends attending these film showings. It would be great to have more of us there, perhaps meeting beforehand for dinner. More information to come.

Special Recognition



Renee Oehler with Julie and Jackie

Renee Oehler was a long time member of our congregation, once known as The Unitarian Society of the Pomona Valley. He died at the age of 104 and gave a very generous financial legacy to our church. In small recognition of the ongoing donation and especially for the fine person he was, here are some thoughts about Renee.

From Harry Ragland: Renee and his wife, Dean and Ann Thorpe, Diane Boydell, Jeanne Kaufman, Janet Falconer, Nella and I were the regular attendees of a social concerns group that met in homes. Renee and Ann were the best informed and we came back to the congregation with ideas, wrote letters, had stickers for our cars, and talked with anyone who we could corner. When Renee lost his wife he continued to come but due to health problems he moved to Woods care facility at Hillcrest Homes and small groups of would visit him there. At 104 years old Renee still read the paper daily and kept up with world events as well as local issues. As fellow engineers we had many discussions about social justice and engineering. He worked on paper manufacturing and had invented some devices. Once we talked about how he was told not to bother about a device he had designed that would save water because "water is so cheap", he ignored his boss and when he put in another device he included the water saver without telling anyone. I told Renee one time that he was like a "father" to me. He never had any children nor were there any relatives around and he once said he was happy that we were his "family". He dismissed my "father like" comments in his usual modest manner. He won the hearts of the staff at Woods. Up until the last month of his life he not only remembered Nella and me but often the last conversation we had. I loved Renee and his legacy of friendship will never be forgotten. The fact that he also left a financial legacy is completely consistent with the way he lived his life.

For more about Renee, please go to the very end of the newsletter. Rev. Schranz shared her comments from his memorial service. It's an interesting story and, as she said, "A life well lived". Not many of us here today knew Renee, so it's worth learning more about this wonderful and generous person!

SJCC Committee Update

As we near the end of the fiscal year at MVUUC, so the social justice coordinating committee draws to a close of the year as well. The group will be looking at revising our focus areas as we do each year, and will begin designating recipient groups of Share the Plate offerings. We meet on the fourth Thursday of each month in the Founders' Room at 6:00 p.m.

Fair Trade Update

MVUUC is now officially registered with Fair Trade Campaigns: <http://fairtradecampaigns.org/campaign/monte-vista-unitarian-universalist-congregation/> Now the work begins. We already have a great start with fair trade merchandise for sale, coffee/tea/honey served at coffee hour, and many committed congregants. Here are a couple additional fair trade actions you can take now:

Purchase goods from UUSC's online store, **The Good Buy**, which offers fairly traded items. <http://www.thegoodbuy.com>

If you use a Smart Phone, add the app, **Buycott**. This allows you to scan UPC bar codes on many products and tells you if they are fairly traded. You can also set the app to let you know about animal testing, genetically modified items, etc.

A reminder of the actions to which we are committed:

1. Incorporate Fair Trade into the social teachings of the congregation
2. Replace goods purchased by the congregation with Fair Trade products where and when they are available
3. Incorporate Fair Trade products into any pre-existing events

Each year we must add to our efforts, but we are already well on our way. Watch for further updates and jump the Fair Trade bandwagon by looking for *products provided by farmers and workers who are justly treated and fairly compensated.*



3rd Sunday Letter Writing

Seize the opportunity to join in letter writing on the patio after church every third Sunday. All materials including information are provided, but you are welcome to bring your own ideas and issues to write about. Previously written letters are getting great responses from legislators. Hand written letters carry a lot of weight so let's keep this up! Thanks to Teresia Santee for coordinating this important opportunity.

Share the Plate (Monthly Social Justice Offering)

Please make checks out to the organization receiving the offering. The May offering is the choice of our Religious Exploration youth, and will be for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Association.

The March collection for UUSC was \$834.00, and the April collection for IWC was \$511.00. Thanks to our generous congregation!

Traveling?

Don't forget to save those hotel toiletries for IVHP. Collection box on the fireplace.

Afterthoughts and More

Join a lively discussion after church on *2nd and 4th Sundays* after church. Topics include homily response, current events, etc. Look for the Afterthoughts sign on the patio.

MVUUC Liaisons

Equal Exchange and Fair Trade *Catherine Rowlee*

UU United Nations Office *Jeanine Little*

Hope Partners Beta Center Food Security Program *Teresia Santee and Doris Warren*

Progressive Christians Uniting & Death Penalty Focus *Colleen Bennett*
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Pomona Valley *Rev. Ann*
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee UU Justice Ministry of California
Anne Thorward
Citizens' Climate Lobby *Margaret Davis*
Philippines Partnership,
International Women's Convocation,
International Council of UU's
Julie Steinbach

UU Social Justice Links

UU Justice Ministry of California! <http://uujmca.org/http://uujmca.org/>
The Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry of California advances justice in our state by cultivating and connecting leaders and communities, and by empowering the public voice of those who share UU values and principles. They seek to develop the skills of civic engagement that we may educate, organize, and advocate for public policies.

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee! <http://www.uusc.org/> The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a human rights organization powered by grassroots collaboration. In 15 countries throughout the world, UUSC fosters social justice and works toward a world free from oppression. UUSC's innovative approaches and measurable impact are grounded in the moral belief that all people have inherent power, dignity, and rights.

Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office From involvement in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to leading the faith caucus to establish the International Criminal Court, to overcoming UN apathy about sexual orientation & gender identity issues, the UU-UNO has a long history of providing strong leadership in all aspects of human rights at a policy level through UN consultative status.

Contributions to the Newsletter

If you have calendar events or community justice actions pertaining to any MVUUC social justice areas of focus, please send them to socialjustice@montevistauu.org The Social Justice group email list is an open forum. If you have events or references that would be appropriate for others to

hear about, particularly in regard to our five focus areas, the best way to relay the information is to make your own group mail list with the addresses in this newsletter or simply “reply all” to the newsletter.

MVUUC Social Justice Areas of Focus for the Congregational Year 2015/16

1. Global Warming
2. Economic Inequality
3. Immigration and Refugees
4. Criminal Justice

Note: With each new congregational year, these areas of focus will be re-evaluated.

Purpose of the Social Justice Coordinating Committee

The social justice team coordinates activities that promote human rights and social justice locally and globally.

Celebrating the Life of Rene Oehler by the Rev. Ann Schranz Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation November 17, 2012

Rene Oehler was born on January 31, 1908 to Felix Oehler and Mary Bossong. Felix was born in Germany, and he immigrated to the United States to join his brother. Mary, Rene’s mother, was born in Illinois. After their marriage, Felix and Mary lived on their dairy farm in Illinois. Mary was a progressive, modern woman. She knew how to drive a Model T car, though she was not strong enough to use the hand crank to start the motor, Rene told me.

Rene had three older brothers, but circumstances prevented the brothers from being particularly close. In 1914, when Rene was six years old, his father and mother returned to his father's native town in Germany for a visit. Each of Rene's older brothers was left with a different German-speaking family in the area. Rene was taken in by his teacher in Elgin, Illinois. The teacher had an easy job because there were only two children in the school – Rene, who was in second grade, and a sixth grade student.

The run-up to World War I prevented Rene's parents, Felix and Mary, from returning to the United States as planned after their trip. It would be five years later, 1919, before they could return to the United States. It is hard to imagine the impact of this early childhood experience. On the one hand, he grew up without the presence of his parents and siblings during his formative years of ages six through 11. On the other hand, he and his brothers were cared for, and the “nuclear family” as we sometimes think of it today actually only dates from the mid 20th century.

Rene's intellectual gifts were, no doubt, nurtured by the teacher who cared for him. Less than one month before he died, in the same visit when he told me about his early childhood experiences, Rene said to me, “Arithmetic was a good weapon for me, so to speak.” I was left speechless by his ability to remember details and also by his ability to communicate in metaphor at age 104. Rene was amazing!

Rene attended college in Wisconsin and Illinois. He started at Beloit College in Wisconsin, where, he said, there were just two Ph.D.'s in chemistry. At the University of Illinois, in contrast, the chemistry building was three stories high, and there were dozens of chemists ("not as many as UCLA," but many chemists, nevertheless). Rene majored in organic chemistry in college. He met his wife, LaVerne, in a physics class. LaVerne had a career in social work in St. Louis and Chicago.

After receiving an advanced degree, Rene worked at the Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C. For some of his time at the Bureau of Standards, he focused on how to make the leather soles on soldiers' boots last longer. Then rubber soles made leather soles obsolete. He was also employed by American Can Co. and Riegel Paper Co. in New Jersey. In the conversations that Rene and I had over the years, most often he talked of working as a chemist for a paper manufacturer. Rene related specific, decisive moments of workplace conversations. For example, he described one supervisor as a "stinky pinhead boss"!

While in New Jersey, the Oehlers became members of the Unitarian Universalist Church and joined Palomar Unitarian Universalist Church after they retired and moved to Vista, California. During their retirement, they made five R.V. trips across the United States. Rene and LaVerne moved to the Hillcrest retirement community in 1986. Sadly, LaVerne died in 1996.

In terms of religion, Rene's father was raised Catholic but had become an atheist. His father-in-law was affiliated with the Church of the Brethren. Rene and LaVerne first heard a Unitarian minister in a Chicago suburb. People lined up to hear him. "I had never heard anything like it," Rene said. Rene and LaVerne were atheists and yet religious. They were not behind the times but rather ahead of the times. Rene and LaVerne can help guide us through the times in which we are living. When "none of the above" is the fastest growing religious affiliation, we have a lot to learn from Rene and LaVerne.

Reading the daily newspaper was part of Rene's way of engaging with the world. His Los Angeles Times newspaper subscription was only canceled on the day after he passed away. Rene was engaged with the wider world, especially in his later years. Philanthropy was important to Rene. Whether the dollar amount was large or small, what mattered was Rene's connection to the mission of the organization. Over the years, the beneficiaries of his philanthropy included Greenpeace, the American Farmland Trust, People for the American Way, Food First, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (the lobbying arm of the Quakers), radio station KPFK, and the Unitarian Universalist congregation in the village of Calapayan, Philippines.

Rene was fundamentally and deeply grateful for life and for the opportunities that life offered to him. He was connected with the people

and the causes that mattered to him. The grip of his hand was shockingly strong until the very end. He had an appetite for lunch, an appetite for a milkshake nutrition drink, and an appetite for life until the moment when his spirit moved on.

There was a time when Rene was not sure that he wanted to continue living. After all, why bother? Thanks to the wise counsel of several friends, Rene decided that life *was* worth living. There *were* ways to leave a legacy, even for those who have no children. While Rene and LaVerne had no children, their love for future generations is without question. Rene will have an impact for decades through his bequests to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and to Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Rene is also survived by a niece, Leslie Bachman, and a nephew, Glen Bachman.

Thank you, Rene, for being your amazing self through the past 104 years. You have shown us a life well lived. Amen, and blessed be.