

Brief History of Social Justice Committee

The Social Justice Committee, formerly Committee to Combat Prejudice, is one of St Andrew's Christian Social Witness programs. It was formed in late 1996 when a group involving Fr. Larry Hofer, Fr. Ed Messersmith, Jean Najjar, Lynn Hade, Hugh Urban, Kathy Palmer, and others first met as "Committee to Combat Racism". The group decided to focus on racism and issues of human sexuality as well as other related social issues. In early 1997 the name was changed to "Committee to Combat Prejudice".

A Mission (General Objective) Statement was approved in February 1998:

"That we may educate the parish about the manifold forms of prejudice and the grievous harm which it causes to individuals and society, and that we may combat its occurrence in our local and global communities".

In late 1998 the committee strongly supported the State College Area School District in its plans to introduce "diversity training" for their professional staff and to add "sexual orientation" to the District's policy listing personal characteristics that warrant explicit protection from oppressive actions by others.

During the year 2000, the committee submitted a welcoming statement to the Vestry for approval. A final version was adopted by the Vestry on Nov 20th, 2000.

"St. Andrew's Episcopal Church is an inclusive community of faith, seeking 'to promote charity, which is the chief of Christian graces.' We welcome all persons, regardless of race, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, capability, or circumstance of life."

The welcoming statement initially appeared on the front page of the weekly service bulletin and on St. Andrew's previous Web Site on the "Welcome to St. Andrew's" page and clicking on "Who We Are." The welcoming statement currently appears in the Weekly Messenger, a part of the Weekly Bulletin. On our present Web Site the Welcoming Statement can be found on the "About Us" page and clicking on "Mission". The statement occupies a place of prominence in the recently issued St. Andrew's Episcopal Church 2010 directory of parishioners.

The Committee was instrumental in the formation of Integrity of Central Pennsylvania, a local chapter of Integrity, an affiliate of the Episcopal Church. The Integrity mission: "to be a witness of God's inclusive love to the Episcopal Church and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community." Full chapter status was granted in early 2002.

Over these past years the Committee was very active in the Parish, the Diocese of Central PA, State College churches, the State College Area School District, and the Penn State Campus. The Committee lobbied the Borough Council on various issues and engaged interfaith and community groups including the Gay Affirming Interfaith Network (GAIN), the Women's Resource Center, The Peace Team, The Interfaith Community Coalition against Violence and Prejudice, and the Centre County Affordable Housing Coalition. Members of the Committee also served on the Diocesan Commission on Human Sexuality and the Diocesan Commission on Racism and participated as panel members for Diocesan Forums discussing issues of human sexuality.

A partial list of activities shown below were sponsored by the Committee to Combat Prejudice or sponsored in partnership with Integrity of Central PA and/or St. Andrew's Christian Education Director.

- Annual Recognition of Martin Luther King Day
- Host to Bishop's Commission on Racism Workshop
- Visit of Fr. Michael Hopkins, President National Integrity to preach at Sunday services and guest speaker for Integrity of Central PA meeting
- Three-Session forum on Islam
- Workshop addressing problems of Ojibway Indians
- Celebrate Family Day, a half-day program that featured a screening of the censored episode "Sugartime" of the PBS- TV show *Postcards from Buster*
- Hosted Dr. Barbara Farmer as Forum leader on Bullying and other forms of harassment
- Annual presence and exhibitor at the Diocesan Convention for eight years
- Maintained Bulletin Board, Frazer St. entrance of Parish Life Center
- Wrote Letters to the Center Daily Times editor on various issues
- Exhibited at the 100th Anniversary of the Diocese of Center Pennsylvania
- Hosted forum on "Marriage/The Church/Same-Sex Partnerships"

During recent years many of the same parishioners have been active in both Integrity/Central PA and the Committee to Combat Prejudice. In 2007 the Committee to Combat Prejudice was renamed the Social Justice Committee, and the chapter of Integrity/Central PA became an Integrity Network for the Diocese. Even with these changes, there were some who felt that an identity problem existed between the two organizations. There was also a strong sense that the mission of the Social Justice Committee needed to be redefined.

A meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 16, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 325 for the purpose of redefining the mission of the Social Justice Committee, keeping in mind the many other Christian Social Witness activities of St. Andrew's parish. Prior to attending the meeting, it may be useful to review volume 10, *Christian Social Witness*, by Harold T. Lewis, of the New Church's Teaching Series (Boston: Cowley Publications, 2001). This very readable booklet surveys the teachings and witness of Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church concerning the Christian vision of a righteous social order, and examines the challenges of the new millennium. The later chapters discuss the challenges of a new social order that face the church today raised by liberation theology, third-world debt and economic justice, and questions of race, gender and human sexuality.

Fr. Richard Wall has also suggested reading *What Can One Person Do? Faith to Heal a Broken World*, by Sabrina Alkire and Edmund Newell (New York: Church Publishing, 2005). The book aligns its call for prayer and action with the Millennium Development Goals, which address problems of dire poverty around the globe.