

## The Needs of the International Community

### Partnering with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Our Social Action Committee has partnered with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) for most of our international initiatives. UUSC is the national umbrella organization of the Unitarian Universalist movement dedicated to social justice.

It was started by Waitstill and Martha Sharp, a Unitarian minister and his wife, who entered occupied Europe during World War II to help Jews and others living there to escape. UUSC has offered its assistance in virtually every humanitarian crisis and social justice challenge for well over sixty years.

**[CLICK HERE to visit the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's website.](#)**

The beauty of partnering with UUSC is that its initiatives are quite obviously consistent with Unitarian Universalist values. Further, its reputation is beyond reproach for fairly and efficiently utilizing the moneys donated to for humanitarian goals.

Our Social Action Committee works with UUSC by selecting a particular UUSC initiative and using the offertory plate to fundraise for it. We educate the congregation on the issue, select a clear financial target tied to a concrete outcome and encourage our members. The response and generosity from the congregation has been overwhelming.

### **Darfur – 2009**

In 2009, our Social Action Committee opened a dialogue with UUSC in which we learned that it was seeking to construct ten women's centers in the refugee camps in Darfur. Each would essentially be a large structure with four walls and a roof in which the women of the camps could gather. They could obtain medical care for their children; coordinate their forays outside of the camps to gather firewood so they would coincide with the UN Peace Keeper patrols; start small microenterprise businesses to feed their families; and so forth. In essence, they could begin to rebuild a community for themselves.

Each center was estimated to cost \$7000.00, which included both the construction and one year of staffing. The goal was to ultimately construct ten. The UUSC and its partner in Darfur had built two. Our Social Action Committee decided to build a third.

We made this our goal for four successive Sunday offertory plate collections. We invited representatives of the UUSC to come to our Church to present a slide show of what was going on in Darfur and why the women's centers were such a vital part of addressing the deteriorating humanitarian crisis there. As an added bonus, they flew in a woman from Darfur who was working directly on the project. We collected more than enough to build the center.



A women's center in a Darfur refugee camp constructed with funds raised in 2009 by The Unitarian Church in Summit (UCS). This is one of ten centers that the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and its partners are seeking to fund and construct in the refugee camps. The women use the centers to create a community in which they can provide for their children's basic healthcare; share food and supplies; and (as pictured) start microenterprise businesses to provide an income for their families.

### **Uganda - 2010**

In 2010, we turned to Uganda. The UUSC had commenced an oxen project by which a donation of \$500.00 would purchase one ox. That may not sound like much, but in that part of the world, an ox can sustain an entire family. It not only helps till the soil to grow food, but it can be rented out to fund the family's needs.

Our congregation collected nearly \$8000.00 to fund this initiative. The UUSC calculated that this was enough to buy enough oxen to sustain 119 people. That was 119 people in Africa who did not go hungry because of the efforts of a Unitarian Church in Summit, New Jersey.

While we were collecting for the Uganda oxen initiative, there was a concerted effort to pass legislation in that country making homosexual conduct punishable by massive prison terms and even execution. It was reported in the media that there was a group of American Fundamentalist Christian leaders who were behind this effort.

During our appeal to the congregation for the oxen initiative, we made the point that the only thing many Ugandans knew about American religious leaders was that they hated homosexuals to the point of wanting them killed. This made it incumbent upon Unitarian Universalists to show the Ugandans that there was another side to American spiritual values, a side that wanted to feed their hungry children and make things a little bit better for the war torn population.

That appeal anchored the initiative to our congregation on a completely different level. It resonated. And it led to more starving children being fed a world away.



Oxen grazing in Uganda purchased by the UCS in 2010 through a project spearheaded by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and its partners. The oxen were shared by families to till their soil for food and to rent to other villagers for a modest income. This is especially important since so many families need to replace oxen killed or lost in the civil wars that have ravaged Uganda. The UCS was able to fund a sufficient number of oxen to sustain 119 people.

### **Haiti - 2011**

In 2011, our Social Action Committee launched an offertory plate collection for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's (UUSC) project with Camp Oasis in Haiti. The initiative was geared to allow Camp Oasis to feed, clothe, house and provide education for twenty Haitian girls for one year.

Our congregation set the ambitious goal of raising \$8,520 over four Sundays. That level of giving had never been achieved by our congregation in the previous UUSC collections (the 2009 offertory collection to fund the construction of a women's shelter in Darfur and the 2010 collection to fund a farming initiative involving the purchase of oxen in Uganda). We were pleased that our congregation took up the challenge and actually exceeded the \$8,520.00 goal, donating a total of \$11,843.81.

The collection by Summit was leveraged by a 3 to 1 match by the Veatch Program of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y., so the ultimate amount collected through both the offertory and the match was over \$40,000.00, more than enough to provide the initial funding for the entire Camp Oasis project.

It was truly an enormous demonstration of our congregation's commitment to international social action. More importantly, it will have a huge impact on the lives of twenty girls whose lives have been so disrupted by that country's devastating earthquake.



In 2011, the UCS funded a project spearheaded by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and its partners to build Camp Oasis, a pilot project in which schoolgirls in Haiti are provided with living quarters and a program of education and extracurricular activity analogous to a boarding school. Importantly, Camp Oasis also provides security for their basic safety and access to healthcare and social services to help them recover from the trauma of the earthquake and its aftermath. The amount collected by the UCS greatly exceeded its initial goal and was tripled by a matching grant from the Veatch Program at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock. The total provided for the initiative was well over the \$40,000 threshold to fund the entire Camp Oasis pilot project.



The living quarters constructed for the girls living at Camp Oasis.