

## WISCONSIN FAITH VOICES FOR JUSTICE ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13



June 18, 2013

Dear Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice members and supporters,

The past two years have been challenging ones for the people of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice was born out of turmoil at the state capitol, as the religious community gathered to support workers' rights to collective bargaining and to advocate for a state budget that reflected the morals and values of our citizens. WFVJ, then known as Concerned Religious Leaders of Wisconsin, brought our concerns directly to the Governor's office, and worked to educate our congregations and communities through our document, "A Religious Witness to the breach in the Social Covenant for the Common Good between the People and the State of Wisconsin, January through June 2011." (<http://concernedreligiousleaders.blogspot.com/>)

The issues currently facing our state are reaching crisis proportion. Assaults on voting rights followed hard upon the attack on worker rights. Deep cuts to our public education budget in the last budget cycle are being compounded in the new budget by an ill-conceived school voucher plan which diverts needed funding away from public schools to unaccountable private schools. BadgerCare, for many years a source of pride to Wisconsinites who value government support for a healthy citizenry, is being sharply curtailed under the guise of fiscal responsibility. In these difficult economic times, when the need is greater than ever, Wisconsin's social safety net is being shredded beyond recognition.

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice stands up for those least able to stand up for themselves, raises the voices of the voiceless, and brings the power of our faith to the fight for social justice for the hard-working families of Wisconsin. As we reflect on the past two years, and look to the future, we thank you all for your persistence and passion, your faith and your fortitude in joining in this work. We look forward to working together to build this movement and create a moral and just society for us all.

L'Shalom,

Bonnie

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis  
President

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

### Membership

Since our inception in the winter of 2011, our membership has grown from the 32 original clergy and religious leaders who met with the Governor's staff, to 211 members, Christian, Catholic, Quaker, Unitarian Universalist, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist.

Madison-Area Urban Ministry (MUM) took us on as our fiscal agent and incubator organization in the spring of 2012 and we officially formed Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice. Today, our organizational members include:

1. MUM – our fiscal agent
2. PEPartnership
3. Wisconsin Friends Action Network
4. Beth Israel Center
5. FUMC Church and Society Mission Team
6. Temple Beth El

### Outreach:

Over the past year we have set up various systems to reach out to our members and the public, including:

1. Visit our Facebook page for frequent postings on timely events; updates and background information on our issues; and information about upcoming events:  
[www.facebook.com/WisconsinFaithVoicesForJustice](http://www.facebook.com/WisconsinFaithVoicesForJustice)
2. Our website is a rich repository of information about our organization, our mission, our issues, and current and ongoing programs. It will soon include a searchable database of background materials, secular and faith-based, on a variety of social justice issues, plus a searchable database on social justice organizations in Wisconsin:  
[www.wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.org](http://www.wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.org)
3. We are beginning to grow our 'Discuss' listserv, which is an interactive email list designed to be both the avenue by which our members receive action alerts and notices of upcoming programs and events, and also a means for all of you to communicate with each other. Subscribe to the list and use it to share information about what's happening in your part of the state and in your congregations, share your stories, ask each other questions, share sermons and programming ideas. To subscribe, send an email request to [rabbibonnie@charter.net](mailto:rabbibonnie@charter.net).
4. As we grow our "Discuss" list, we continue to send out to our members action alert emails on BadgerCare/Medicaid expansion; the school voucher program; the federal Farm Bill and Wisconsin's FoodShare program, and all the other issues we care about.

### Health care reform

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice was out in front this year in the struggle for health care reform. Working on our own and in coalition with the Save BadgerCare Coalition and the Wisconsin Access Network (WAN), we engaged in a variety of activities, including:

1. Sponsoring a petition to Governor Walker and the state legislature on accepting federal funding for expansion of Medicaid and for setting up state health insurance exchange.

120 signatures were gathered, and the petition was co-signed by MUM, ICWJ, and Wisconsin Peace and Justice Network

2. We testified at the Senate Committee on Health, Revenue, Tax Fairness and Insurance in favor of taking federal dollars to expand BadgerCare. Testimony covered by Wisconsin Eye.
3. We testified to the Joint Finance Committee and to the Dane County Board of Supervisors urging the acceptance of federal funding to expand BadgerCare.
4. Working with the Save BadgerCare Coalition, we created a 'plain language' overview paper (<http://wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.org/documents/4-3-13OverviewofBadgerCareBudgetDecision.pdf>)
5. We provided a letter of support to WAN for Navigator application for federal funding
6. We spoke at/participated in press events bringing attention to the Affordable Care Act during the year with Citizen Action
7. Last fall, we presented a conference call for WFVJ members with then-regional director from federal Dept of Health and Human Services Kenneth Munson to explain aspects of the Affordable Care Act.

### Hunger and Food insecurity

This spring we launched our Food Stamp Challenge Lent/Passover 2013

1. We had 50+ individual participants, 10 congregations and organizations
2. We formed partnerships with Community Action Coalition and Second Harvest Food Bank
3. We organized a gathering at a showing of the new documentary "A Place at the Table" and had 70 people join us for a discussion afterward.
4. Advocacy – we delivered grocery bags and flyers outlining the issues facing low-income Wisconsinites to Rep. Kevin Petersen, Senator Terry Moulton, Rep. Scott Suder; Senator Fred Risser; Rep. Terese Berceau, Senator Shilling, Rep. Nerison, and Rep. Brett Hulsey.

### Housing and Homelessness

The religious community has always been in the forefront of addressing the needs of the homeless in our community. Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice partners with MUM to bring short- and long-term solutions to our city, county, and state officials. Some of our actions in this area have included:

1. Meeting in partnership with MUM with Dane County Executive Joe Parisi to discuss issues of homelessness in Dane County in connection with the proposed county budget
2. Participated in housing tour organized by Greater Isthmus Group and Madison-Area Urban Ministry
3. Member, Medical Shelter Task Force convened by MUM

### Year-to-Come

***Our Board of Directors has created a plan of action for the year to come. We look to our members to help us bring these plans to fruition. If you have expertise, experience, skills, energy and passion for this work, please be in touch with us about joining a committee,***

***becoming a member of our Board of Directors, or participating in specific actions, programs, and events.*** Some of our plans for the coming year include:

1. We will sponsor our Second annual Food Stamp Challenge
2. To further our work in raising awareness of issues of poverty in Wisconsin, we will create a Poverty Simulation for congregations to role-play the hurdles low-income families have to navigate on a daily basis..
3. We believe every issue of social justice should have an educational component and an advocacy component. To help our members and congregations learn how to engage in advocacy within the guidelines of a non-profit organization, we will create an Advocacy Workshop for congregations and individuals.
  - a. To further our mission of educating our congregations and communities about the vital issues facing our state, we will hold educational and informational conference calls with speakers of statewide or national note; hold outreach meetings in various locations around the state; and further develop Resource and Organizational databases on our website.

### **Financial Report:**

Engaging in this work requires professional staff, office equipment and supplies, travel expenses, web-hosting and website management and development; and materials for outreach and programming. Right now our funding comes from membership dues and good-will offerings. In the coming year, we will develop our messaging, engage in membership outreach and development, and identify foundations and other possible funding sources and submit grant proposals to these sources. We have projected a Vision Budget which will help us grow our organization and our movement in the coming year. Look to our website to see our budget projections.

### **GET INVOLVED!**

The best way to support our work is to get involved. Please be generous, not only with your financial support, but also by attending our actions, programs, and events; join our listserv and add your voice to the conversation; serve on a committee; lend your expertise to one of our projects, to developing our website, to building the usefulness of our Facebook page; join our Board of Directors!

To find out how you can get involved, email [rabbibonnie@charter.net](mailto:rabbibonnie@charter.net). We look forward to hearing from you!