Grant Application to the UUA
For 2021 CBCO Funds

The First Parish Church in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist, requests a matching grant of $2,000 from the UUA’s Congregation Based Community Organizing Grant Fund. The money will be used, together with our own budgeted funds, to pay for our annual dues as a member of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO).

When our congregation voted nearly unanimously on October 25, 2015 to join GBIO, we fulfilled a priority goal in our Board-approved 2014 Strategic Planning Goals and Recommendations: “working consistently and effectively for justice and creating deep and accountable relationships between congregants and community partners.”

Moreover, our involvement in GBIO furthers our mission: “Awakened by worship, nourished by tradition, and united by love, we strive to create a multicultural, spirit-filled community that works for justice, fosters spiritual curiosity and faith formation, shares joy, heals brokenness, and celebrates the sacred in all. We welcome people of all beliefs, ages, classes, colors, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.” We are ever more intentionally seeking to “walk our talk.”

This year our congregation joined with other UU congregations across the U.S. to consider and vote for adoption at our annual meeting in June 2021 the 8th Principle in further pursuit of our many years’ activities (education, training, church services, social justice actions). Led by our Racial Equity Team, we held a church service on February 7, 2021 followed by a congregational discussion explaining the intent, value, and importance to our implementing our beliefs. We are also holding an all congregation workshop on
March 14, led by Paula Cole Jones – one of the architects of the 8th Principle, that will help us deepen our understanding of the 8th Principle and all that it calls us to do to accountably dismantle racism.

The 8th Principle states:

*We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism.*

While we explore the meaning of the 8th Principle and how we aspire and will actively implement its meaning our congregation embraces and deepens our involvement in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

GBIO began a transformation when its members unanimously voted to “Refound” the organization in April 2019. The basic desire and commitment of this multi-faith organization is to return to its roots of more than twenty years ago by expanding its membership, voice, and power through hiring organizer staff who are people of color; engaging and attracting new congregations comprised primarily of people of color and working-class unions; and infusing anti-racism through its programs, trainings, and decisions.

GBIO as an institution and its leaders have honored these commitments by elevating African American Beverly Williams to become co-chair; by hiring several organizers from BiPoC communities; by joining with the Black and Latino Caucus in the MA legislature to fight for and accomplish far-reaching police reforms; by continuing, in partnership with Health Care for All and other organizations, to achieve state-wide health
care reforms; and by adding at least 15 new members (They will be formally welcomed at a March 16, 2021 virtual Assembly).

First Parish in Cambridge is a very active participant in GBIO’s actions and successes. Moreover, GBIO staff have infused our congregation with knowledge; relationships built across religions and faiths; training techniques (i.e., how to conduct a 1-1 personal exchange; how to organize “house meetings” to listen deeply to congregants’ concerns and stories; and training for advocacy and opportunities to affect public policy and legislation. Marcia Hams, the church’s first co-liaison to GBIO, was elevated to join the GBIO leadership Health Care (renamed Racial Justice) Team. In October 2020, a new young church member became the co-liaison and encouraged the reactivation and expansion of our church’s core GBIO Ministry Team. We now have more members; new leaders; and more connections to other groups within our church community.

In essence, we are increasing our capacity to build community within our congregation and with outside organizations. Simultaneously, we are achieving these results by living our mission, covenant, and values and working with GBIO to meet the aspirations embodied in our values.

First Parish goals in joining GBIO in 2015 have endured: (1) build multicultural relationships across faiths through effective joint social justice work, (2) deepen relationships within the congregation as part of GBIO’s process of implementing its priorities, (3) learn about and apply specific GBIO organizing techniques to activities within our congregation, and (4) expand our ability and effectiveness in partnership and
coalition with other organizations. These four benefits have been just as important this past year, and we expect them to guide us in the future.

Individually, through virtual one-on-one exchanges with members from GBIO organizations and through participation in monthly Liaison Team meetings, police reform, and health care meetings with representatives from synagogues, mosques, and other churches, many of us at First Parish UU have met people whom we otherwise might never have encountered. The one-on-one meetings allow us to share personal stories and perspectives so that relationships can be established that lead, over time, to collective action. This result is certainly happening, as many of our congregants were engaged in GBIO’s police and health care campaigns. The mental health-substance use disorder issue continues to attract new participants and leaders within First Parish, including Sharon DeVos, our FPC health care co-captain (along with Marcia Hams), Rae Simpson (pastoral care member), and Chris McElroy.

One of GBIO’s objectives in applying the 1-1 technique is to identify new leaders. This outcome is evident at First Parish. A relatively new member (Lois Markham) quickly participated in GBIO trainings and was tapped to coordinate one of the In-District Meetings (IDM) with state legislators to get their commitments on specific provisions in GBIO’s priority list of police reforms. She became a member of our Core Group and uses his skills and talents writing announcements and other documents. And other new leaders are emergent.

Since our church lives “virtually” as of last spring, we rely on written notices in weekly church announcements and in our newly created weekly Social Justice
Newsletter. All on the church’s e-list (members and friends) receive these emails. We highlight special messages through additional all-congregational emails.

Congregational support is evidenced through annual votes to allocate $2,500; the growing number of participants organizing and attending GBIO events; and the synergies which are taking place connecting our various other congregational teams (for example, the Beyond Borders/Sin Fronteras; Environmental Justice; Social Justice Council; Racial Equity; 8th Principle Working Group; the BiPoC caucus; and Religious Education.

This year, the church’s GBIO Ministry Team (“Core Team”) has expanded to 14 people who will engage the congregation in several months of “listening circles”. This campaign will build from the personal stories and concerns of GBIO members to formulate the agenda for the next three years – the issues and tactics for change which we will pursue at the local and state levels. Marcia Hams is an active church member; the designated coach to our church during these several months; and a member of the GBIO leadership. We expect to use these sessions to expand our connections within our congregation; elicit the many and different concerns; capture personal stories that give meaning to and illuminate the issues; and advocate for the highest priority issues from our collective voices.

Our minister, Rev. Adam Lawrence Dyer, sees these GBIO-related activities as aligned with and useful for his desire to urge relationship and community building within our congregation and with people and groups outside of our church.

In addition, we will take advantage of the GBIO trainings to educate more of our potential leaders in power organizing and leadership development; to take on
responsibilities organizing and leading our discussions and GBIO’s interfaith conversations; and to further encourage and support our congregation and GBIO as an institution to undermine racism and oppression in ourselves and the Greater Boston region.

List of Major GBIO Ministry Team Activities in 2020-2021

- Monthly meetings of GBIO liaisons.
- Participation in the health care campaign including distributing announcements; hosting discussions; sending emails; making phone calls; helping organize and attend GBIO events such as In-District Meetings (IDM) with state legislators; meeting with state legislators (May - December 2020; January 2021)
- Participation in the police reform campaign including similar actions as listed in the health care campaign
- Receive GBIO training (April 21, 2020; June 16, 2020; anti-racism monthly training from January-March, 2021)
- May 2020 and January 2021: FPC’s weekly undesignated plate collections donated to GBIO.
- GBIO core group meetings
- 8th Principle meetings (listen to national video events hosted by Paula Cole Jones; discussions during the Racial Equity Team meetings; congregational presentation and discussion (August 2, 2020; February 7, 2021)
• Beloved Conversations Graduates meet to get to know each other better and learn about social justice (July 26, 2020; August 2, 2020; October 31, 2020; November 28, 2020; January 28, 2021, February 28, 2021)
• 6 participate in New Day Rising National Conference (February 27, 2021)
• Workshop with Paula Cole Jones on the 8th Principle (March 14, 2021)

GBIO Task Force Core Members
Elizabeth Kline, co-liaison to GBIO; member of the Racial Equity Team and Social Justice Council
Cassie White, co-liaison to GBIO
Marcia Hams, member of GBIO’s Health Care Strategy Team and Steering Team and Listening Circle Steering Team; Co-chair of Social Justice Council
Chris McElroy, former chair of the Board
Lois Markham, member of the Racial Equity Team and 8th Principle Working Group
Patrick Sullivan, member Beloved Conversations Graduates
Alison Altman, member of the Environmental Justice Team
Jenny Fitch, member of the Worship Team
Juliette Cusick, relatively new member
Rob Moir, member of the Environmental Justice and Beyond Borders
Sonia Voskuil, relatively new member
Rosalie Anders, Co-chair of Social Justice Council; member of the Environmental Justice Team
Sharon DeVos, co-lead at First Parish with Marcia Hams on GBIO’s Health Care initiative
Rashid Shaikh, former chair of the Board; Racial Equity Team member; 8th Principle Working Group Co-chair
Tod Hibbard, chair of the Development Management Team, Board member