OMNI NATIONAL STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE DAY NEWSLETTER #1, FEBRUARY 14, 2012. (Alternative to Valentine’s Day.) Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace.

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters: http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

The transformation of Valentine’s Day to Standing on the Side of Love Day is a campaign by Dan Furmansky of the Unitarian Universalist Association (dfurmansky@uua.org) (standingonthesideoflove.org). The Day is a part of OMNI’s National and International Days Project, which celebrates Days of nonviolent peacemaking, social and economic justice, rights of all species, and earth stewardship, and re-visions and re-defines, transforms to transcend Days hostile to those values. The present general trivializing commodification of Valentine’s Day troubles many members of faith and humanist communities. For a week or more leading up to Valentine’s Day, the newspapers are full of ads commercializing love and relationship as a ring, or box of candy, or a massage, or really anything someone will sell to someone who will buy.

Dan Furmansky welcomed OMNI into the campaign in 2011 in these words:

“We’d be thrilled to have you participate in our National Standing on the Side of Love Day campaign in this way. We consider this an open source campaign, and we hope you will both use our materials as they work for you, as well as share what you are working on so we can uplift it.

Here is more information about what we accomplished this year: http://www.standingonthesideoflove.org/blog/what-we-did-on-national-standing-on-the-side-of-love-day-2011/

Please keep in touch!

Best, Dan

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ANNOUNCEMENT: Beginning in 2012, While UUA is still honoring Feb. 14th as National Standing on the Side of Love Day, they have also developed National Standing on the Side of Love Month, with thirty days of concrete actions. 

Turning Valentine's Day into a day for social justice (title in UU World Summer 2011: “UUA Anti-Oppression Campaign Inspires Valentine’s Day Events”)

Related Stories

UUA launches 'Standing on the Side of Love' campaign New public advocacy initiative on behalf of marginalized people. Jane Greer

Unitarians Turn Tragedy Into Lesson of Tolerance. Washington Post article, 2/11/11

Related Resources

Standing on the Side of Love Campaign UUA-sponsored national anti-oppression campaign. (standingonthesideoflove.org)

“Unitarian Universalists demonstrate for LGBT rights, immigration reform, religious tolerance” by Michelle Bates Deakin 2.21.11

Valentine’s Day may never be the same.

This February 14 [2011], the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Standing on the Side of Love campaign set out to transform a day once reserved for romantic love, chocolates, and flowers into a celebration of courageous love and social justice. In congregations and in public squares across the country, Unitarian Universalists gathered on Monday, Valentine’s Day, and on the Sunday before to rally for marginalized communities and to speak out against oppression. At hundreds of events, UUs demonstrated their support for LGBT-identified youth, humane immigration policies, same-sex marriage rights, and tolerance for Muslim Americans, among other issues.

“We are re-envisioning Valentine’s Day as National Standing on the Side of Love Day,” said Dan Furmansky, campaign manager for the Standing on the Side of Love Campaign. “Re-imagining Valentine’s Day in this way shows that love knows no border, no gender, no race, and no religion.”

The February 13 and 14 events generated more than 75 newspaper articles, television broadcasts, and radio segments about Standing on the Side of Love Day. “With this much media, millions of people have read about the values that we espouse,” said Furmansky.

First celebrated last year [2010], the day about love was created in response to an act of hatred—the 2008 shooting at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, Tenn. In a
letter found in his car, the shooter, who killed two people and wounded six others, wrote that he targeted the church because of its liberal values—including its openness to gays and lesbians.

After the shootings, the church vowed to remain inclusive and welcoming. Inspired by the courage of the church’s members, the UUA launched the Standing on the Side of Love campaign, also known as SSL, and pronounced “sizzle.” It is based on the UUA’s First Principle, which affirms and promotes the “inherent worth and dignity of every person.” The campaign helps UU congregations mobilize support in their communities for marginalized groups.

UU’s promoted a variety of causes during the two days of events and celebrations. Congregations were encouraged to present “Courageous Love” awards to groups in the community who were standing on the side of love.

At First Parish Unitarian Universalist in Cambridge, Mass., the Sunday service focused on immigrants’ rights. The Rev. Fred Small invited leaders of the Student Immigration Movement to share their stories from the pulpit and to highlight the importance of the DREAM Act, which would give children of illegal immigrants a path to legal residency in the United States. The congregation presented the students with “Courageous Love” awards, and members of the congregation pledged to work with the students to lobby for the DREAM Act’s passage.

At a reception after the service, more than 150 people signed cards urging Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick to keep the state out of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Secure Communities Program that has been detaining and deporting immigrants. The following day, representatives from the Cambridge church, along with fellow UUs from the Follen Church Society in Lexington and First Parish in Waltham, delivered the cards to the Massachusetts State House. Representatives of the group were able to arrange a spontaneous 20-minute meeting with Gov. Patrick, who pledged to hold a series of community meetings around the state to listen to people’s concerns.

Susan Leslie participated in the First Parish Cambridge events at the church and at the state house. She is a member of the Cambridge church and is also Congregational Advocacy and Witness Director for the UUA. “I’ve been working at the UUA for 18 years, and I’ve never seen anything grab fire like this in the congregations. UUs have really been embracing the campaign,” she said. She added that more than 125 congregations registered National Standing on the Side of Love Day events through the campaign’s website.

In Ogden, Utah, members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ogden held a rally in support of the rights of undocumented immigrants. The church led a public witness event at Ogden City Hall with songs and prayer, asking that “love, justice, and compassion be used as the guides for whatever decisions are to be made” in immigration policy.

Members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y., prepared a giant valentine to send to U. S. Rep. Peter King (R-NY), the House Committee on Homeland Security chairman, urging him not to hold hearings on what he has called “the radicalization” of American Muslims.

Around the country, congregations held screenings of The Laramie Project to address the recent string of suicides by LGBT youth. Several Arizona congregations set up phone banks to call legislators to oppose restrictive immigration policy.

In Maryland, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis helped organize a rally, along with Equality Maryland, to support a state senate bill that would allow same-sex couples to marry in that state. On Valentine’s Day, more than 500 people gathered, and Furmansky was among the speakers. He led the crowd in the singing of the South African freedom anthem, “Siyahamba,” which means “We are marching.” Furmansky and the Maryland crowd included the lyrics, “We are standing on the side of love.”

Furmansky had sung the song the day before as well, when he was in Knoxville to present
Courageous Love Awards on behalf of the Standing on the Side of Love Campaign to Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church and Westside Unitarian Universalist Church, both in Knoxville. He said he was recognizing them in the wake of the shootings “for their inspiring resilience and their long-standing efforts to bring love forth in their community.”

The two churches in turn presented a check for more than $11,000 to an organization providing services to local homeless families.

“The fact that the frame of the entire Standing on the Side of Love campaign was born out of a violent event that galvanized communities across the country into action with love is an unquantifiable measure of success,” said Furmansky. He imagines that in the future, February 14 could be a day that anchors an entire week of public witness events and actions.

“The whole idea of Valentine’s Day as a re-imagined holiday of love and acceptance for all people resonates tremendously,” Furmansky said. “And if we stretch ourselves in a way that we’re out in the community forming partnerships and spreading our message broadly by promoting this through social media and local print and broadcast media, the value of that cannot be overestimated.”