**SOME ELEMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL ACTION AT CONGREGATION B’NAI B’RITH**

Our initial project in 1979 was the sponsorship of a Laotian family of 5 who had come to SB as part of the national effort to resettle “boat people.” Churches and synagogues were asked to become sponsors. There were a couple of prominent rabbis, including Erv Hemann, the Regional Director of the UAHC, who were trying to persuade Reform congregations to participate—which we did.

On the Jewish side, HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) was involved in the resettlement effort. In our case, our family members were not “boat people” as such, but were Laotian farmers/peasants who had cooperated with the U.S. during the Vietnamese war, and were in danger for having done so. Settling the Vannasap family was a project that the congregation embraced and felt good about.

ARZA was a vital part of the congregation at the time.

MAZON began receiving much attention. People were being asked to lend additional meaning to their celebrations by allocating 3% of what they spent on food for the celebrations in order to help address hunger in America. We also began participating in the Corners of our Fields, a food collection initiative, at High Holidays.

The Sanctuary Movement was a compelling (and controversia) project in which we participated in the 1980s. We became a Sanctuary Congregation, giving shelter to a refugee from Guatemala who had fled her home country after her husband, a union activist, was killed in front of their 3 children. Marta was told that her life was in danger. She set out across Mexico where she was gang raped. Mercifully she encountered the Underground Railway of the Sanctuary Movement and was helped to safety in the U.S. Our congregation was contacted to see if we could offer her sanctuary, for by then she was pregnant. Some in the congregation were afraid we would be breaking the law by helping her. Others saw aiding her as a Jewish imperative, particularly given Jewish history with fright and flight. Judy Meisel’s role as a survivor was significant and persuasive.

A Jewish Straight-Gay Dialog formed, not just for CBB. After we had been meeting for some time, we felt it would be important to introduce the blessed diversity of Jewish life to the congregation. We did so in a panel format, with some trepidation, but ultimately considerable validation.

We became involved with Transition House, an involvement that continues to this day.

Under the leadership of John Teton, we became a home for the project that was to become the International Food Security Treaty. The purpose was and is to make the right to access to food an internationally recognized human right.

John felt that we didn’t need a social action committee as much as we needed to bring together on an occasional basis people who were leading particular projects in behalf of the congregation. He also initiated an annual Social Action Shabbat that celebrated work done by so many of our congregants to help repair the world. At this service, a special honor was given to one or two congregants who had made exceptional contributions to the work of social justice through the congregation.

Occasionally we opened a Message Center during Onegs to allow people to communicate with legislators regarding a particular issue that had been identified by our Movement as needing advocacy.

A synagogue garden was planted to begin to raise issues of ecology and also to help feed hungry people in the community.

The Church Rebuilding Project was launched in response to a national call for groups to help restore churches that had been destroyed by arson—of which there were many during a certain period. The Santa Barbara effort became an important interfaith effort, building relationships with the local Methodist Church (?) while re-building the devastated churches, most of which were African American, mostly in remote rural areas of the South.

Other present projects: Rwandan Preschool, Mitzvah Day, Pershing Park, Greening Project