



Social Justice Timeline

1862

Care for Civil War Soldiers

The Park was among many churches converted to temporary hospitals during the Civil War. Minutes of the Dorcas Society, a women's group with a mission to serve the poor, reported that the women of the Christian Chapel, First Church of the Disciples (as The Park was first known) were "taking immediate steps for the sick and wounded soldier now arriving in the city from the seat of war."

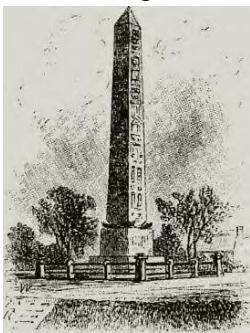
1863

Abolition of Slavery

Because it was "good business," New York City in large opposed the abolition of slavery. The Park's courageous young pastor, Urban Brewer, offered a major public address, "The Bible And American Slavery: A Discourse," which he feared would cost him his job. He concluded his speech, "The National Executive, inspired by lofty moral courage, which will make his name immortal, has pronounced an edict for the expulsion of this monster of iniquity. Shall that edict be sustained by a Christian people? Or shall the hand go back on the dial of human progress, and we relapse into the darkness of barbarism?" The congregation responded - his salary was raised -and the speech was published "and widely disseminated throughout the land."

1880

Celebrating rather than inveighing a "Pagan Monument"



While a number of New York pastors inveighed placing a "pagan monument" in Central Park, Pastor Joseph Cleaver offered the dedicatory benediction for the public ceremony for the laying of the foundation in Central Park for the obelisk, a gift from the Egyptian government.

Early 1880s

Response to the Needs of Immigrants

Sarah Barton Tyler, wife of Pastor B.B. Tyler, was a key leader in responding to needs of immigrants. She organized a large sewing school for young women, enabling them to become self-supporting. She also created the Penny Provident Fund, an educational program to train children of poverty in habits of thrift.

The church itself initiated the Chinese Sunday School Union to welcome the surge of immigrants and in particular to teach the English language. The school served several generations of Chinese immigrants until 1948.

Early 1900s

Leadership in Social Justice



Mrs. Elizabeth B. Grannis, a long-time church member, was a noted national leader of social justice causes, especially women's rights, racial justice and the prohibition of corporal punishment for children. When she died in 1926, the New York Times described her as "humanitarian, editor, social reformer, pioneer suffragette." Mrs. Grannis also adopted a young black girl (whom she named Christian League), took the child to church, and sent her to Tuskegee Institute. Mrs. Grannis's progressive activities led to a church trial in 1906 resulting in her removal as a member. In March 2012 under the leadership of Senior Pastor Alvin O'Neal Jackson, the congregation reinstated her membership - making right a wrong - and established

The Elizabeth Bartlett Grannis Award for Outstanding Contributions by Women to Church and Society that is presented annually during Women's History Month.

1919

Service to the Immigrant Community Grows

During the height of European immigration, the church established the Disciple Community House, a community settlement program, in the Lower East Side, offering job-skill training, children, youth and family support programs. The market crash and depression consequently resulted in the closing of the program.

1915

Contributions to the "Good Neighbor Policy"



Samuel Guy Inman, a missionary, social reformer, and associate pastor (1901-1904), was a prominent leader in US-Latin American relations helping to formulate the national "Good Neighbor" policy of the United States toward Latin America. In 1915, he began to speak out on hemispheric affairs and continued to do so throughout his career. In 1956, Inman initiated the Hermosa Center, a Puerto Rican cultural center and was a leader in establishing La Hermosa Christian Church that today continues to serve at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 110th Street.

1930s

Knitters (and a Pastor) Fight Fascism

The Women's Association of the Central Christian Church (the church name preceding The Park) knitted sweaters to help those who were resisting the Nazi and Fascist regimes in Europe. Early in that decade, Pastor Finis Idleman, a stalwart peacemaker, nevertheless challenged popular isolationist opinion through his writing and preaching in which he urged America to stem the Nazi powers with every effort possible.

Early 1930s

Equal Employment – Interfaith Acceptance

The congregation embraced interfaith acceptance. An example was the calling (or hiring?) of Jewish Solon Alberti as organist and music director. Alberti had become a permanent resident of New York City after "rising evil" in Nazi Germany made it impossible for him to accept a position as conductor of the Munich Opera House. He often remarked that the opportunity to offer sacred music was "a major turning point in his life."

Late 1950's

Service to Haitians in Need

Dr. Larimer and Gwen Mellon, founders of the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Haiti, became active members and supporters of the congregation, having been drawn to the church's openness and altruistic ministries. For several years, the Park's women's group prepared garments for the hospital.

1960s

Progressive Education

The International Play School, related to the United Nations (now a city-wide program) serving children from more than 80 countries, was founded at The Park.

1980s

Shalom

The congregation elected to become a "Shalom" congregation, dedicated to peacemaking and international friendship and understanding.

1989

Serving the Homeless

The Park established the Saturday Community Lunch Program for hungry and homeless people. Now supported by five area church/temple groups in total, the Program serves more than 200 persons weekly.

1991

Welcoming GLBTQ Clergy

The Park led the successful struggle for the ordination of openly gay Associate Pastor Allen Harris, in the midst of tensions in the church's regional organization.

1993

Affirming Acceptance for All

The congregation became an "Open and Affirming " church, meaning "open to and affirming of all people whatever their gender, race, age, culture, ethnic background, sexual orientation, religious tradition, economic circumstance, family configuration, or difference in ability. The Park also confirmed "We honor other holy histories and respect those who profess no faith or have chosen different paths to the sacred."

1997

Furthering Civil Rights



The congregation, together with reform Temple of Universal Judaism, established the Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Interfaith Service held each year on Martin Luther King Day. The service is now enhanced by the annual presentation of the Heschel-King Award to an individual who has made a significant contribution to interfaith understanding.

1999

Communicating Messages of Social Justice

Forward, The Park's news publication, celebrates its 100th anniversary -- one New York's oldest and continually published church based publications.

2010

The Park became a founding Congregation Partner of the Disciples Center for Public Witness, the denomination's Washington, DC presence for advocacy and public policy.

2010

Publication of *Park Avenue Christian Church: 200 Years of Seeking Justice, Embracing Diversity, and Inspiring Imagination*, by Rev. John Wade Payne, Pastor Emeritus.

2012

Serving the Immigrant Community in the 21st Century

The congregation, in partnership with Church World Service (CWS), begins a series of free Legal Service Clinics to support immigrants in their immigration processes. These clinics, hosted by The Park and staffed by CWS attorneys and paralegals, provide opportunities for immigrants with questions and concerns about their immigration status issues.

2016

Ministry Council resolution supporting sanctuary provided by churches.

Ongoing

- Supporting the rights of all immigrants, regardless of country of origin, especially those illegally detained, threatened with deportation or displacement and children and families who have been separated at U.S. borders.
- Advocating for the equal status of women and against all gender-based violence against, including but not limited to: sexual harassment, sexual assault, physical, emotional and financial domestic violence.
- Participation, on national and state levels, in the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival, challenging racism, poverty, militarism, and ecological devastation.