

HAYSTACK AWARD CRITERIA

INTRODUCTION

The Justice and Witness Council, under the authority of the Massachusetts Conference Board of Directors, administers the annual Haystack Awards. The Council offers the Awards annually for Justice and Charitable Ministries in the Massachusetts Conference.



The award symbolizes the social action and social service dimensions of mission. Its name is taken from the setting where the first groups of missionaries made their decision to go into the mission field. In 1806, five young students of Williams College, after praying together under a haystack during a thunderstorm, committed themselves to spreading Christianity overseas. Their interest led them in 1808 to form the Society of Brethren, the predecessor organization to our current United Church Board for World Ministries, the instrumentality for common global mission within the United Church of Christ. These pioneer missionaries encountered the need for social justice such as standing against caste systems, oppression of women, etc., as well as social service: education development, health care and relief measures. The Haystack Award preserves the two-fold dimension of being in Mission: Justice (Social Action) and Charity (Social Service) as witnessed by those first missionaries to go abroad for the sake of the Gospel.

PURPOSE AND ELIGIBILITY

The purpose of the award is to encourage participation in charitable mission outreach and social justice ministry. In a variety of ways churches are inspired to engage in local and global mission. Our aim is to recognize the exemplary initiatives currently underway in churches throughout the Conference, express appreciation and offer incentives for new initiatives. Any individual, group and/or institution affiliated with the Massachusetts Conference is eligible for consideration.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The Haystack Awards will be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference. All nominees will be recognized.

In the area of Charity, the Haystack Award is given to the individual/organization whose words and deeds significantly embody the Biblical notion of charitable social service made possible by benevolent giving. Particular attention will be paid to the nominees giving of significant time, talent and treasure to those who suffer in mind, body and spirit. Ministries in the area of Social Service will be considered specifically in the categories of (1) RELIEF: Disaster and Famine, Food Distribution, Sheltering, Emergency Aids, etc. and (2) DEVELOPMENT: Home Ownership, Skill Training, Business Development, Medical School Education, Basic Education, etc. The theological concept of charity most sought after for this award is illustrated in the New Testament story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

In the area of Social Justice, the Haystack Award is reserved for the individual or organization that engages in significant social actions that lead to positive changes in the socio-political system. Activities aimed at correcting injustices will be considered. Priority consideration will be given to model ministries that correct injustices by addressing the root causes of chronic hunger and malnutrition, homelessness, poverty and social dysfunction. The theological notion undergirding the Social Justice award is found in the prophet Isaiah's words regarding the type of fast required by God (Isaiah 58:6,8a).

Although geography is not a major concern on matters of charity and justice, actions occurring in Massachusetts by members of churches based in the Commonwealth will be strongly considered. The duration of a particular endeavor is important and will be duly considered. However, a single event that occurred in the recent past which produced dramatic, life changing results for a significant number of people will not be excluded from consideration. Awards may be given to contemporaries and posthumously where warranted.

Names of nominees and background information will be solicited yearly from Pastors, Moderators, Conference staff, Officers, and Councils. Local, Area and Association Mission and Social Action Committees, Massachusetts Council of Churches, Peace and Justice network members and national instrumentality officers/staff. *Updated 3-14*