

December Diversity Tip Sheet:

Universal Human Rights

By Phil Harmon, CPA – Legal Aid Society of Cincinnati

www.alanet.org/diversity

We, as humans, have a special place on this planet. Our actions can be so pervasive as to affect the very processes that allow our home to keep an environment capable of sustaining life. We are slowly becoming aware that we have responsibilities as the dominant life form on Earth. The awareness that we are damaging our planet has led to legislation, social movements and many organizations devoted to preserving our planet in its best form. Unfortunately, and like many events associated with the human condition, we learn what should be done by experiencing what should not be done.

The same process of learning from our mistakes applies to our behavior towards each other. Time has proven that humans are capable of treating each other with an astounding lack of compassion and respect for life. Our capacity for indifference to human life has led to many attempts at codifying what we, as humans, are entitled to by merely being human. Once again, we try to repair and preserve what is right and good after we have acted in an inhumane manner. The topic is so fundamental that philosophers such as Plato and Kant felt the need to address it.

During the formation of the United States of America in the 18th century, a young Thomas Jefferson made several drafts of what would become the second section of The Declaration of Independence. The second section, after being edited by the Committee of Five and the Committee of the Whole, became:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. —

What Thomas Jefferson did not know was that an event, 150 years later, would require the leading powers of the world to come together and further codify what is guaranteed by being human. The event, World War II, witnessed unspeakable atrocities. The United Nations commissioned a drafting committee, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, to write what is now the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The process was lengthy and not without conflict, but ultimately derived thirty articles that apply to humans everywhere. The articles are not limited to country of origin, religion, political persuasion, or any other factor. By merely existing as a human, the articles are guaranteed in concept. Please take a moment to visit the [United Nations website](#) to learn more about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The document itself is a wonderful reflection on what we value, as well as what can no longer be accepted.

