

UUC Social Justice Council Re-envisioning Retreat, November 16, 2024

Minutes

The Mission of the UUC Social Justice Council is to facilitate communication and cooperation between the Council members, Social Justice Committees, UUC Board of Trustees, UUC congregation, and the wider community.

Meeting Chair: Linda Stoller, Event Organizer: Cibby Orozco, Secretary: Trude Diamond

Participants: Eliseo Santana, Carol Hamilton, Christina Bellamy, Bob Hedlund, Eloise Hardman, Maryann Hamilton, Cibby Orozco, Carole Vaughn, Sue Hand, Rev. Amy Kindred, Mike Freedman, Bill Foley, Barbara Foley, Barbara Brandt, Carl Hansen, Lore Eargle, Pan Godchaux, Margie Manning, Gary Clayton, Jeanine Clayton, Chris Muller, Donna Polhamus, Kay Murray, Najah Phillips, Kathy Krohn, Bob Hedlund.

9:00 DANCING! We danced and played hand-held percussion instruments.

9:30 Chalice Lighting and Opening Words, Brief Check-in

9:35 Grounding Activity

- Small groups shared *each person's strengths* that we bring to social justice.
- Spectrogram scale: Quantify your *energy level for social justice* (0=Exhausted; 10=Energized) When you had low energy, how did you regain higher energy? Sit with my feelings, research what I can do for social justice, find opportunities for local . Gather together; together, this “we” community can do a lot. St Augustine on hope: Hope has two daughters: Anger (that things must change) and Courage (to make those changes).

10: 15 FISHBOWL ACTIVITY – SJ Team Reports and Appreciation

Each SJ team sits in the middle of the circle, reports their year's activities, and everyone in the circle expresses our appreciation. Specific acknowledgement of each other's contributions in a public forum like this session is personally meaningful and enables all of us to discover what,

1. FAST: This Year is Different – Everyone is Invited to the FAST Assembly

- The ground has shifted once again in our congregations and community. So many are suffering the shock of two major hurricanes taking so much from so many. Yet we also recognize that our two issues of focus: increase of affordable housing and storm water management have taken on new urgency in our community. We also recognize that people living on the margins are impacted the most in any catastrophic event and we must be vigilant that their needs are met. Therefore, while recognizing that our people are in a fragile condition, we are going to have our Assembly as planned *on Monday October 28th at 7PM at Holy Family Catholic Church, 200 78th Ave. NE, St. Petersburg, FL.* This will be an opportunity for folks to come together and feel the power of community. We will affirm our priorities! Candidates running for St. Petersburg City Council have been invited to attend and voice their support of our affordable housing issue. New FAST Board members will be introduced. Everyone interested in FAST is invited to attend this year. I hope you will be able to be there. People wanting to carpool to the event will meet in the UUC parking lot at 5:45. Lore Eargle will meet you there to organize the carpool.

Wear your UUC tee shirt if you have one. Please contact Linda Stoller at socialjustice@uuc.org if you have any questions.

- FAST now rents a room at UUC as its office

2. **Racial Justice:**

- *Ongoing participation in online wider community racial justice dialogues:* attended the Pinellas County African American Museum's "Florida Talks" series, volunteered at the N. Pinellas NAACP's MLK Jr. Day breakfast and parade, bought a table of attendance at BurGALA celebration of Black Leadership Achievements, discussions of race-related publications at Tombolo Books.
- Participated in Juneteenth events
- Outreach to performing and visual artists to participate in the multicultural *Arts Unite Us* events on the UUC campus: May 13, June 30, and December 16
- Wrote "UU the Vote" postcards in affiliation with the NAACP of North Pinellas.
- Networked with Green Book of Tampa Bay, Pinellas Remembers, Alianza, and RaceWithoutIsm to support each other's events with participation and sponsorship.
- Participated in Rev. Amy's workshops on resisting Christian White Nationalism
- Identified online resources for ongoing racial justice work, including UUA's new "The Mosaic" library of books and blogs.
- Purchased tickets for Motherland Music Festival to support non-profits such as group homes, homeless shelters, and youth organizations.
- Participated in the Interfaith Walk for Peace.
- Facilitated Open Issues for Black History Month: "Inspiring Quotations by Black Thought-Leaders."
- Attended Race Amity Day at the Bahai Center
- Participated in Diapers Giveaway to Hispanic families in need, Anti-immigration Law Information Community forums
- Welcomed to the UUC campus a meeting of the Hispanic Women's Coalition
- Attended meetings of the Pinellas School Board and the Clearwater Affordable Housing Committee
- *Future Plan:* Monthly, Trude and Aryna gather from community calendars and RJ members events and projects we can participate in as allies to the organizations that produce the events and projects, and email the upcoming month's opportunities to the RJ mailing list. Hold Zoom meetings quarterly if needed to conduct business and plan for activities.

3. **Environmental Justice**

Discovered organizations and companies doing environment preservation/improvement in Pinellas. Held three Open Issues sessions on environmental issues. Petitioned for clean water, encouraged use of solar panels/clean energy. Cleaned toxic materials out of UUC campus buildings. Initiated automatic monitoring of thermostats for efficient use of electricity. We are a certified UUA Green Sanctuary.

- **Community Garden:** We belong to the [Tampa Bay Coalition of Community Gardens](#), through which Cibby got 200+ plants free from a nursery in Odessa, and we gave those plants free to people who need to start their own garden. Food forest activities increasing community awareness of UUC and benefiting from our presence. Created videos for the YouTube channel "Building My Veggie Garden," demonstrating how to start and

maintain backyard and community gardens. Reached more than 200 people (including small agricultural businesses whose inventory was wiped out by the hurricanes) in the larger community with classes, seeds and plants.

4. **NAMI:** National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) Pinellas continues to support our community, especially after our double whammy weather events. The NAMI monthly Family Support Group continues to meet every second Wednesday, noon to 1:30 in the Patio Room and on Zoom. This is our second year, and we plan to continue until at least Sept. 2025. Contact Composting Christina Bellamy for further questions.

5. **Education – Anti-Book Banning:**

- Hosted book give-away (& discounted sale) by Foundation 451, which gets banned and challenged books directly into the hands of students and builds a society that truly honors freedom, justice, and inclusivity
- Installed Banned Book Library on campus

6. **Cooking camps** for our youth, to create nutritional, inexpensive meals

7. **Voting rights:**

- 500 postcards to Hispanic Clearwater residents
- 1000 to Black people in Polk County
- 200 postcards to general Pinellas populace

8. **LGBTQ+ Support**

- PRIDE parade in St Pete
- PFLAG meets on campus

9. **Bodily Autonomy (Amendment #4)** petition signing and collection hub

10. **Community Outreach:**

- June 2023: Equality Florida, \$800
- July & August 2023: Clothes for Kids, \$950 + lots of socks
- September 2023: Pinellas County Public Schools program: [HEAT, PCS aide to homeless children](#), 497.72
- October 2023: [The Haven \(Clearwater\)](#), \$790.17
- November 2023: Guest At Your Table, \$1,570.47
- December 2023: [Feeding Tampa Bay](#), \$1561.06. The Better World Fund, \$1000.
- January 2024: [Florida Rights Restoration Coalition](#), \$460.45
- February 2024: [Florida Indigenous Alliance](#), \$473.28
- March 2024: [Elevated Access](#): (Volunteer pilots) 482.43
- April 2024: [We Care Family Connections](#) is the only child placement agency in the State of Florida currently founded and led by a woman of color and foster mother. \$480.76

- May 2024: [Habitat for Humanity of Pinellas and West Pasco Counties](#)
- [“Faith Build”](#) (100% donation matching by Pinellas United Methodist Churches), \$437.21
- June 2024: Community Tampa Bay cultivates inclusive leaders to change communities through dialogue and cross-cultural interaction., \$302.30
- July 2024: [Clothes to Kids](#), \$1562.62
- August 2024: [Recovery Epicenter Foundation](#), \$154
- September 2024: Poynter Institute, \$382.92 (inc. today's \$20)
- October 2024: Pinellas Meals on Wheels, \$329.30

11:30 Break

11:45 Re-visioning Activity – Looking Ahead/Transforming

- Act locally, partner with organizations whose work we can support (instead of merely replicating it) – open our activities like weekly meditation to support them
- Spiritual values – we are a faith with love at our center that partners with other faiths, individual, and diverse institutions that share our values
- Value our pluralism, where everyone is welcome in this safe, active space
- Value transformation – expanding our understandings and our activities
- Engage with people who have demonstrated very different values and ask them what they hope to see, to accomplish, so we can identify shared purposes to work on together
- Share information about how to maintain our inner strength and external outreach: protect people, defend civic institutions, disrupt/disobey authoritarianism, build alternatives

Brainstorming Results/Love in the center (collated sticky notes) – FOR DISCUSSION NOV. 23

- *Focus on our value of Equity and Pluralism* – Create a sanctuary for persons at risk of deportation. Learn about immigration in the US. Identify laws that are being introduced on the federal and state level and challenge elected officials to protect these marginalized group. Be ready to take action to protest deportation. Support as allies, groups defending immigrants. Focus our financial giving on groups providing legal representation to immigrants and defending groups in court.
- *Support groups protecting the LGBTQ+ community.* Establish a point person or persons at UUC to spreadhead coordination with other groups. Support teachers and school boards by showing up at meetings and speaking in support.
- *Focus on our values of Interdependency and Transformation* – Provide a physical space for like-minded groups to come together. Participate in social justice related actions with others. Let other groups know we support their issues. Learn from vulnerable groups how we can support their work. Continue to build relationships with other faith groups which share our values. Create regular letter writing campaigns to politicians and news media to react to any actions that take away our rights, including a free press. Meet regularly to assess how we are doing.
- *Focus on Justice and Generosity* – offer to UUC and the community at large trainings or book discussions on climate justice, white privilege, civic involvement, and civic discourse. In addition, learn how to engage in nonviolent disobedience and how to participate in other forms of disruption or disobedience.

- *Internally* – Have the monthly SJ report available digitally, have someone available at the social justice table weekly, engage more of the congregation in SJ work, revamp our mission to include the word love, incorporate our values in our bylaws.

Noon Closing Activity

Bestowing on each other the qualities of the interconnected web – We formed two circles. In each circle, participants tossed one large ball of thick, strong yarn up and back among them, wishing the recipient of your toss a quality (compassion, energy, creativity) that characterizes UUC social justice work. When you receive a toss, you keep holding the attached end of the string of yarn, reel out another length, and toss the ball along with your wish to another person. In the end, each circle had a beautiful web in our midst, and the more taut we pulled our points, the stronger the web became.

12:15 – Lunch & Bringing the Joy

We all chipped in to reimburse the team that bought lunch of wraps, fruit, chips, and juice. And most people brought a dessert to share. One of our favorite visionary entertainers, Priscilla Velez and her drumming collaborator Eon Parkinson inspired us with poetry and song (with sing-along and a little dancing for those in the mood).

MORE JOY: Next Saturday's SJC meeting will begin the process of planning the 2024-25 congregational year Social Justice activities that manifest the vision and goals generated today. Looking forward to the joy of *being* together and *doing* together what none of us can do alone.