

Congregational Social Justice Program Update

As many of you know, about 1 1/2 yrs. ago we began a discernment process for developing our congregational social justice programming. We started with the Active Hope Project, a series of individual and small group discussions with congregants. We then gathered in late October 2023 for the first summit, at which we discussed the components of a social justice program, our congregational social justice identity over time, why we would want a *congregational* social justice program, and what assets we bring to that effort, as individuals and as a congregation. We then took the next few months to investigate potential non-profit organizations in the community with whom we could partner, since we are a relatively small congregation.

Part II of the summit was held January 28. The goal of that gathering was to utilize tools for evaluating social justice organizations and projects, in combination with the knowledge we had gained about our congregational passions and assets, to decide on partnerships and projects for our 2024 congregational social justice program.

We briefly reviewed what we had learned so far from the Active Hope project and our first summit in October, as well as our decision to focus on housing issues. Then we looked at the activities we already participate in, and connections we have with community organizations.

Finally, we discussed ~ 5 potential organizations to partner with, through the lens of a matrix of fit and opportunity. "Fit" refers to alignment with our congregational resources and interests, and "opportunity" to the ways in which we might be able to contribute to making a difference. We also took into account lessons from our book discussion on Toxic Charity, such as including and empowering those who are most impacted by the issues we are trying to address, and also actually being of help and filling a need, rather than creating extra work for the organization.

We decided on 3 potential non-profits to partner with: Gateway 180 (<https://gateway180.org/>), Wellston Loop Community Development Corporation (<https://www.wellstonloopcdc.org/>), and Tabernacle Community Development Corporation (<https://tabdev.org/>). We agreed that we needed more information about the organizations and specific ways we might engage with them, in order to really discern which would be the best fit, and so we are now in the process of meeting with leaders and gathering information. Once that process is completed, we will provide the information to the congregation, and plan for a congregational vote at our annual meeting May 19.

In the meantime, we are in the midst of Gimme Shelter, an excellent series of videos, lectures and discussions on housing issues in St. Louis, organized by Toward Justice with assistance from Social Responsibility and Welcoming Congregations. We also continue our current programs such as collections for Trinity Food Pantry and Gateway 180, Trinity Hot lunch, designated collections, and Social Responsibility coffee hours.

In addition to deciding on specific projects for congregational engagement, we plan to develop some type of communication and networking hub so that the congregation and community can access up-to-date information about opportunities for engagement. We are also looking at the possibility of reorganizing the Outreach and Social Action cluster, in order to better promote communication and collaboration within the church and between the church and the surrounding community.

As always, we welcome participation from anyone and everyone! Please look for ongoing updates in the E-news, and contact Lisa Ross if you would like to get more involved in the planning.