

Social Justice Council Meeting
December 23, 2023

The Zoom-only meeting was called to order at 9:35 AM. Present: Linda Stoller (chair), Bob Hedlund (treasurer), Eloise Hardman, Eliseo Santana, Trude Diamond, Marlene Calderone, Christina Bellamy, Carole Vaughn, Rev. Amy, Sue Hand, and Anne Burnham (secretary). Check-in followed a powerful reading from *To Wake, To Rise: Meditations on Justice and Resilience*.

Minutes (for Nov. 25th): accepted, with corrections that were sent out to SJC group earlier.

NEW AND CONTINUING ISSUES

- 1) White Christian Nationalism Workshop: Rev. Amy spoke about a powerful workshop she attended in Orlando that Faith in Florida led, addressing how racism creeps in, how churches are getting involved and how we can get word out about underlying oppression. She will be leading three workshops—“Unitarian Universalists Resist White Christian Nationalism”—at UUC following the catered lunches on Jan. 7, Feb. 4 and March 3. Signup is through the *Octagram* and it is strongly recommended that people attend all three sessions to get full benefit. Linda will make up a flyer that we can share with friends.
- 2) MLK Events, Jan. 15th: Trude reported that we have four UUCers signed up to help serve breakfast at the North Greenwood Rec Center but could use cars/drivers for the parade. The Lifelong Learning team is on board and seeking teens and families for all activities, especially to help set up and tear down our canopy in Coachman Park. Linda mentioned that the SJC table will be operational in the new year so that people can sign up and buy “vintage” UUC t-shirts to wear to the event. Linda, Sue and Carole will help with staffing, as Trude will have to leave at noon to rest her post-op shoulder.
- 3) 30 Days of Love, (Jan. 15-Feb. 14): UUA’s Side with Love will be sending out info that can be used for services, etc. Linda will post about events in the *Octagram*, such as:
 - Feb. 15th, the “kindness ladies” (kindness.org) may be available for the Sunday service; Margie, worship associate that day, will follow up with them and link their topic with 30 Days of Love. They offer solid curricula on the effect of kindness in society, based on scientific findings, and address how to talk with people re: social justice and the election season with loving kindness.
 - Jan. 28th, United Faiths Walk of Peace in Dunedin, starting at Pioneer Park at 2 PM (refer to November minutes for more details).
- 4) Family Promise: Anne talked with Denis recently and learned that the organization is waiting to move over to the First United Methodist campus in Pinellas Park pending some updates there, then there will be changes to the program: each church will be responsible for serving suppers, evening activities and staying overnight with the homeless families for 3-4 times per month. We feel that even though this new plan wouldn’t involve housing the families on our campus, it still seems as if it is more than our aging population at UUC can handle at this time. Anne will tell Denis that we’re on hold for now, perhaps will invite him to speak at Open Issues again in the new year.
 - Christina and Carole V. mentioned that other groups have found smaller ways to help the homeless, like providing socks, hygiene products and Showers to Empowerment. Anne wondered if we might find working with HEP (Homeless Empowerment Program in Clearwater) a good fit, would have more options for volunteers. Trude mentioned HEP is expanding its campus to address

the growing number of low-income homeless families with children who need shelter and support services. Linda reminded us that we contribute \$1K to them each year. Marlene suggested we take a tour of the campus; Anne will call HEP to set up a field trip in February and have a signup for carpooling at the SJC table.

- 5) Budget discussions: Bob and Linda will be meeting in January to discuss UUC's 2023-2024 budget. Committee chairs should be ready to submit their requests for funding; e.g., Linda will ask for \$250 for Pride Parade in May + annual donations to UUJF, etc.
- 6) Abortion petition update: Linda expressed appreciation to Sue for her dedication tending the hub at UUC every week for petition drop-offs from volunteers in our geographic area and to Anne for her weekly petitioning at the Palm Harbor Library. Sue said that 1.4 million signed petitions have been submitted to the state, with about half validated so far. The Florida attorney general's suit to not allow the abortion amendment on the ballot is still pending in the FL Supreme Court (stalling suspected). Florida Protecting Freedom, the lead organization, is still needing donations to educate the populace and urge residents to vote in 2024. Rev. Amy's message at the March 3rd service (in honor of International Women's Day on the 8th) will be "Bread and Roses," which is the name of the abortion clinic in Clearwater where she volunteers as an escort once a month.

Treasurer's Report (Bob):

Community Outreach donations that have been disbursed since last meeting:

Oct: The Haven in Clearwater - \$764 (total of 2 checks)

Nov: Guest at Your Table (UUSC): \$1420.47; will check with UUSC re: direct contribs from UUC members so that amount can be added to this.

Dec: Feeding Tampa Bay: \$573.79 so far; final will include 2x matching and all plate contribs at Christmas Eve service. Huge kudos to Anne G. and Dale (bookkeeper) for finding a way to make the December disbursement happen by year's end, especially with holiday closures.

Marlene reported, as former treasurer, how smoothly the reimbursement process is finally working (e.g., can submit a photo of the receipt along with the form for speedy processing). Eliseo praised Marlene for all her efforts to make the system work better, as well as UUC treasurer Joe Pace, Rev. Amy, Trude and Bob.

Community Outreach (Trude):

Jan: FRRC (Florida Rights Restoration Coalition)

Feb: Florida Indigenous Alliance - selected and voted on at today's mtg. Christina had mentioned earlier that chair Robert Rosa was one of the participants in a recent UUJF presentation; also, the FIA is the most active locally of the 3 groups we considered, e.g., it is monitoring Pasco County development of Anclote River Park, along with the Sierra Club and other groups.

March: Elevated Access (a group that flies women to other states for abortions)

April: WeCare Family Connections (foster group, Stephena Pierre)

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- 1) Racial Justice: Trude reported for Arts Unite Us that ROD the Artist (Chris Aikens) has installed four paintings with a theme of "Positivity through Creativity" in the Social Hall. They are for sale and will remain exhibited through the end of January. She urges viewers to take time to read the texts as well. Rod will be speaking from the pulpit on January 14th. (Also see MLK Events above.)

The Black Lives Matter banner on the front wall at UUC was vandalized twice recently. The Executive Committee said the issue needed to be addressed immediately. Rev. Amy reported it to

the police, who came out and recommended UUC install a motion detecting light in the area. There is \$42 left in the BLM budget that could be used to remove the oil paint and restore the sign.

- 2) Refugee Task Force: no report from Barb Foley at this time. Christina mentioned that she continues to be active with RAMWI (Refugee and Migrant Women's Initiative). Current activities include making African fabric creations and holding healing circles for Afghan (Tampa) and Ukrainian (St. Pete) refugee women.
- 3) FAST: Loré Eargle and Linda, co-captains, are building towards Nehemiah (April 30th) with a network meeting on March 10th and Open Issues on March 24th. Rev. Amy said that probably half of the attendees at a recent Clearwater Council meeting were from FAST, including 6 speaking about rain gardens. Council member Kathleen Beckman supports an ordinance for developers to include rain gardens for all new buildings, wants FAST members to come to future meetings for backup. Linda cited this as a good opportunity to make a difference for clean water. She also noted that Jungle Jay made a model system in the UUC Beacon Garden a long time ago.
- 4) Compassion & Choices: Anne mentioned that the Clearwater chapter was featured in C&C's 2022-23 Annual Report. She has signed up for two team leader training sessions in January.
- 5) LULAC: Eliseo and members of LULAC attended a national demonstration in Miami recently to protest housing discrimination, especially against the Chinese, who are singled out because of legislation in Florida limiting the ability of people affiliated with China to buy property here. Eliseo spoke, along with Andrew Yang and members of Congress.

On Dec. 30th the Highpoint Neighborhood Family Center is expecting 1,000 people to attend their Hispanic festival; Eliseo will be dressed up as one of the 3 Kings and giving out gifts. UNIMEX is organizing a two-week day camp for local Hispanic youth in January, which LULAC also supports. Eliseo reported that the Democratic Women's Club had an event in our Social Hall recently and its leadership expressed appreciation to him for UUC's hospitality and space. The Santana's Family and Friends New Year's Eve Party, the largest, family-friendly New Year's Eve party in Pinellas County, will be held in the Social Hall at 8 PM, potluck, no charge.

- 6) Environmental Justice: Roger Young presented an update on the status of going solar at UUC. There are currently two possibilities: Lunex would install solar panels on the Octagon portico and flat surface of the roof for \$77K, less \$23K for rebate from the Inflation Reduction Act, with potential for free or extremely low-cost electricity for the next couple of decades; or UUC could join Duke Energy's new Clean Energy Connect program, which would require a small monthly charge (estimate of \$400 with a credit of \$393), thereby expanding solar use for more people in Florida. There is no commitment or risk and it guarantees that all electricity used by UUC would come from renewable sources. Eliseo confided that LULAC is currently suing Duke for fraud in this program because by lowering costs for major users like Publix, they are actually promoting more use of fossil fuels. These represent two very different ways for UUC to go, which Roger will present to the board at its monthly meeting next week.

Eloise spoke about the Hope Spot Festival on February 17th in Dunedin, which the EJC will promote as a field trip for UUC members as well as an opportunity to network with the various environmental groups there. She mentioned that renowned oceanographer Sylvia Earle is a resident of Dunedin and the one who designated a global network of Hope Spots that are critical to the health of the ocean. Eloise will post info re: the festival in the *Octagram*.

- 7) NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Pinellas: Christina reported that the NAMI Family Support Group met monthly last fall on second Wednesdays. It is free and held in the Patio Room and on Zoom. NAMI is good at getting grants locally and UUC will host a new group which is all you would ever want to know about Mental Health and the impact on families and our communities. Family to Family classes are also free, in person only, and will be held Thursdays, Feb. 8- Mar. 28. Watch for details on the UUC Octagram soon.
- 8) Interfaith Tampa Bay: no report at this time. See info re: United Faiths Walk of Peace in Dunedin on Jan. 28th (under 30 Days of Love, above).

Social Justice Calendar: Carol Hamilton doesn't seem to slow down, even with her recent hip replacement. As usual, she welcomes info about SJ-related events in the community for the calendar.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM. The next Zoom-only meeting will be on Saturday, January 27th, from 9:30 AM to noon.

Respectfully submitted,
Anne Burnham