



Unveiling the Sacred Spiral of Leaven: 2023 Leaven Retreat and Proposal for Next Steps

November 24, 2023

"Love and Justice are not two. Without inner change, there is no outer change; without collective change, no change matters."

- Rev. angel Kyodo williams, sensei



On October 27-29, 35 adults and 14 children and youth within Leaven Community participated in the community-wide Leaven retreat, following the Listening Season in September 2023.

The primary purpose of the retreat was to unveil the next steps for the community emerging out of the Listening Season. [Retreat design](#) centered around aligning Leaven's existing values ([Diversity](#), [Justice](#), [Story and Action](#)) with its existing activities, as well as holding them alongside the [hopes and dreams](#)

[that had been discussed at House Meetings in the listening season.](#)

Leaven member Stacy Carleton led those gathered in somatic activities throughout the day to prepare and ground our bodies as we continue to move through change and uncertainty. Then, Director-Organizer Alison Killeen shared the [Sacred Spiral framework](#), grounded in Rev. angel Kyodo williams' insight, "Love and Justice are not two. Without inner change, there is no outer change; without collective change, no change matters."

Understanding that all our activities at Leaven are connected at a fractal level through relationships and shared values, we were able to physically map on the floor Leaven's existing programs and the hoped-for ideas that had been expressed [in the listening season](#).

Building momentum from the sacred spiral mapping, the group engaged in an ideas-creation activity led by Rev Julia Nielsen, director of the Leaven Community Land and Housing Coalition. Each individual wrote one bold idea on a notecard. Notecards were then passed anonymously from person to person, stopping five times for individuals to review and score each idea on a scale of 1 (no thank you) to 5 (love this idea!!) for a total of 25 points. [Ideas with scores 20 and higher](#) were then added to the spiral map, but could be grouped into four broad categories:



- Organizing mutual aid at Leaven;
- Developing secular sacred spaces;
- Creating a space for BIPOC members of Leaven Community; and
- Considering becoming a [Community Resilience Hub](#)



In the afternoon, participants were invited to select an idea on the spiral (either current programming or an idea for the future) to form small groups.

Any group of three or more people were encouraged to gather to discuss the idea or activity they had selected. Each group was provided a worksheet with questions to support a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens, and prompted to complete a wall sheet responding to the following prompts:

- What is the idea?
- Who are group participants?
- Offer key thoughts
- What questions do you have about this idea?
- Write a haiku to share summarizing your group's conversation

Groups returned to the large group space to share takeaways and next steps from their conversations.

Throughout the day, the Leaven kids and youth present had a blast together due to incredible planning by Jane Keating and support from several Leaven members, with arts and crafts, a labyrinth walk, basketball and games, a Halloween party and talent show all wrapped into one day. More relationship building happened for the kids in that one day than in the months before, a takeaway that we are taking to heart as we continue to plan our children and youth programming.

The Leaven Retreat was well-received and [responses to the Retreat Evaluation form](#) were thoughtful, with positive and constructive feedback and a strong suggestion to hold a retreat again in 2024.

What's Next: Proposed Goals for Leaven Community in 2024 and 2025

Based on feedback from both the September Listening Season and October retreat, the following five goals are proposed by the Leaven Board as a two-year strategic plan at the 2023 Annual Meeting on December 10.

1. **Recommit to Community Organizing as a Core Sacred Practice of Leaven Community** - At the retreat, we noticed that every single one of the ideas generated are made better and require community organizing at its core. Community Organizing and Action is one of our four core values, but we have fallen away from these practices in recent years. It's time to scale back up, training our leaders and use the lens of community organizing to guide our strategy.
2. **Build a Culture of Radical Belonging** - One of the top ideas at the retreat was to create a space for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color) members of Leaven to gather. This idea, when held alongside Leaven's House Meeting for BIPOC moving to 1-1s due to low turnout, prompted those gathered to wonder whether Leaven's culture fosters belonging for people of all races, genders, ages, abilities, sexualities, incomes, and other identities and experiences as much as we thought it did. We want to learn and do better by creating a team at Leaven that attends to Leaven's culture and communal sense of belonging.
3. **Explore Leaven becoming a Community Resilience Hub** - Nearly all of the desires named during the listening season about climate change mitigation, anti-capitalism, and mutual aid fall under this goal. We will initiate and deepen our existing neighborhood relationships to understand what needs there might be for increasing resilience in a time of climate emergencies, as well as whether Leaven is the best fit to support, lead or partner in these efforts.
4. **Develop Relevant Sacred Spaces at Leaven** - In both the listening season and at the retreat, we named deep, meaningful relationships as an essential part of who we are. We long for more spaces to cultivate strong relationships, and for more secular spaces to explore our diverse spiritualities. Some people also named breathing new life in Salt and Light and BBB as an interest.
5. **Develop a Sustainable and Abundant Resource Pool for Leaven's Financial Stability** - All of these activities require resources to support them! Leaven has a strong foundation of generous and longtime individual donors who are committed to our vision. To strengthen our financial stability, Leaven's Raising the Dough team will experiment with and evaluate the development of additional revenue streams such as grants and earned income and build on what we learn.

How would we do this?

Objectives to pair with these Goals and Work Plans for these goals in 2024 would be determined at a **Leaven daylong Retreat January 20, 2024, 10am-4pm**. All of the Leaven teams will gather at this time to kick off the year, clarify their purpose and roles, review and edit [their team's objectives](#), plan and timeline their work, and coordinate with other teams.

These retreats would happen quarterly in 2024 (April, July, and October) for all Leaven teams to track, share and coordinate work, and also offer training and workshops on community organizing, bridging and belonging, or other skill building activities that emerge as needed from within the community. We will also gather to eat, play, sing, connect, and plan child care throughout the day for our children to build relationships with each other as well.

Toward the end of these two years, the community could engage in an evaluation of these goals - what we learned, what we want to grow, what we want to change, what we might sunset, what we might begin anew.

May Leaven Be Love

One the final day of the retreat, just before departure, those of us who remained reflected on Leaven and change. We wondered aloud how our relationship to change is that we must accept it – or work to shape it as best we can.

Together, we each wrote a blessing for Leaven as we continue to wind our way through this emergent and unsteady path before us.

But we remember that a spiral is not linear - it is iterative. And so I offer these blessings as a balm as we continue to walk directly into change, trusting that with love as our footing, we will find our way.



May the love in our community fill our community.

May our time and capacity to change grow with love and trust.

May we live with one another and in this wide world with LOVE as our rudder to guide our path.

May the broad web of love invite you to live in it as we are all previous and crucial in this web of life.

May our hearts stay open. May our hearts stay connected. May God be with us and guide us.

May we not take for granted the great people and beauty that surrounds us.

May Leaven Community and the individuals who co-create it experience compassion and courage at every pivotal step and breath.

May we be aware, whenever possible, of the present. Show and appreciate our surroundings. Be still and know the powerful.

May Leaven find its way towards love. May Leaven receive and hold love, from the cosmos. May Leaven be shaped and changed by love. May Leaven grow and extend love, to the cosmos. May Leaven be love.

May Leaven be blessed with sabbaths and bless others with its sabbaths (in the midst of its community organizing naturally).

May we find love, power, and strength in change, in our life together and in each other.

May we at Leaven embrace changes in life with love and respect for others.

May we stay centered in love through every change.

Appendix 1: Top Ideas Generated at Leaven Retreat (Notecards Activity)

- Create a Climate Resilience Hub (23)
- Processing spaces / rituals (23)
- Develop a BIPOC space within Leaven (small group? Building strength in community, building relationships) (22)
- Mutual Aid: Disrupting the culture that blocks people from trusting one another. We *model* mutual aid, trust and connection in ways that *invite people in*. Low barriers to entry!! (21)
- Deepen Inner Being (21)
- Secular spiritual (21)
- Leaven becomes an intentional model for how we (the greater community of PDX and beyond) can have the future of justice and well-being in our climate crisis. We have the relationships and the tools already... (20.5)
- Secular shared community spaces (Events) (20)
- LEAVEN-AID! A community mutual aid network/time bank/barter system/educational hub. Functional and adaptable. (20)
- Radically secular services. Storytelling, facilitated meaning-making, modern texts and songs, co-create agendas service-to-service... with some rituals! (20)
- Space/story for each other in our daily lives (20)

Appendix 2: Bold Ideas Work Sheets

BIPOC SPACE IN LEAVEN

Brian, Spencer, Mike, Jules

Ideas

- Audit of ourselves
 - Dominant culture readiness (male)
 - Storytelling (BIPOC)
- Analysis about/clear and trustworthy evidence of hard things in the world
- Lead with belonging and notice intersectionality
- Prove the community can have hard conversations
- Case studies—a time of repair/restoration/learning?
 - Need analysis of BIPOC listening seasoning gathering
 - Exit interview/feedback loop with LaVeta?
 - Which part of Leaven? (Outside of Salt & Light)
- Culture of organizing = culture of evaluation

Where Leaven BIPOC Spaces Exist or Existed

- Zoom BIPOC Small Group (15)
- Intercambio
- Bi-lingualish Salt & Light
- Cully Organizing
- RAGs in Coalition (30-40)
- Garden Youth

Leaven BIPOC space?

It's a lil' complicated.

A time of repair.

LEAVENAID

Cheryl, Ali, Anneliese, Amy, Micah, Hilary, Fumi, Baby Jonas

Ideas: Short-term experiments

- Reboots/2.0
 - SWAP (Swap Work And Play)
 - NAT (Neighbors Acting Together)
- Cooking/Food Prep

Key Thoughts

- Community Care Survey—what do people need?
- Class/generational barriers to mutual aid—for some people, mutual aid is a way of life; for others, asking for help is a weakness

Next Steps

- SWAP
 - Cheryl shares experience/relevant docs with Hilary
 - Hilary shares SWAP ideas with Leaven Littles
- Elder/Community Care
 - Create a Care Survey
 - Host conversation(s) around care needs
- NAT
 - Research Ordering
 - Conversation with LaVeta (organizer of NAT)

**Let's Get Better
Asking for Help is Helpful
Changing Unhelpful Patterns**

SECULAR HARVEST

Mary Pete, Doug, Matt, Jenna, Stacy, John, Joe, Ben

Ideas

- Storytelling
- Somatic Practice
- Book Group
- Monthly Potluck—"better world"
- Quarterly Potluck
- Neighborly Potlucks, house meeting-style
- Grow Intercambio

Key Thoughts

- Community of Communities
- Space for diverse experiences
- Cultivate Connection
- Organizing & Relational Modeling
- Belonging
- Foster small gatherings

Questions:

- For what are we connecting? In service of what? (Justice.)
- Why would I do this at Leaven?
- What connects us/makes the world a better place?

Next Steps:

- Be in joyful relationship
- Intentional one-to-ones in this 8-person group
- Two per month
- One within the community
- One outside the community
- Specifics for quarterly gathering (potluck?)
- Propose & outline what each idea looks like

**Joy is our birthright
One to one is where it's at
Re-commit today**

RE-COMMITTING TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Lois, Greg, Jenny

Ideas

- We have the tools and knowledge in house (LCLHC & deep leadership)
- Organizing is key to who we are

Next Steps

- Reconnect reps to MACG and LCLHC
- Communicate what we're currently doing that is organizing
- Set goals to move to specific actions

Questions

- Is "RwR" organizing training?
- Where does "Leaven" currently fit within the LCLHC organizing cycle?

**Love means list'nin' to our stories
We want to train our people
You learn by doing**

CLIMATE RESILIENCY COMMUNITY HUB

Brent, Arvella, Barb

Key thoughts

- Education is where we can start
- Involve youth
- Encourage everyone to take the next step in their lives to positively affect our climate
- Everyone is harmed in the climate crisis
- Everyone benefits by steps

Questions

- How to evaluate whether proposed solutions do more harm than good?

Next Steps

- Find youths to survey/become members of the core team (young adults too!)
- Develop education program

**Our world is in crisis
We must all do our part
What is your next step?**

Appendix 3: Draft 2024-2025 Strategic Plan with (very drafty!) Objectives

Recommit to Community Organizing as a Core Sacred Practice of Leaven	
	Plan and ensure quarterly trainings take place in 2024 that equip Leaven leaders with community organizing tools
	Host a community-wide one-to-ones campaign to strengthen and expand the web that connects us
	LCLHC Objective(s)
Explore becoming a Community Resilience Hub	
	Assess the neighborhood for other communities/groups exploring becoming or creating a CRH
	Assess whether the neighborhood needs a “hub” or what other resources might be needed
	Build relationships with others interested in creating a CRH, especially communities that have typically been marginalized/excluded from community development
	Make recommendations for how Leaven can support development of a CRH - in our building or elsewhere in the wider community
	Explore opportunities for Leaven-based Mutual Aid Projects, elder care and food growing, processing, cooking and sharing
	Support development of spaces for children and the people who love them, including child care and youth engagement
	Nurture the environmental and economic sustainability of the building to support becoming a CRH
Develop Relevant Sacred Spaces at Leaven	
	Run two more small group series through "Small Groups at Leaven"
	Host two somatics workshops
	RTD Workshops/Events (may be in collaboration with Secular Sacred Spaces Team)
	Host one sacred-secular speaker event
	Incorporate a diversity spiritual practices at Salt and Light services
	SPA objective(s)
	BBB objective(s)
Build a Culture of Radical Belonging	
	Develop Leaven Community Guidelines and Accountability Processes
	Host crucial conversations that center truth and healing

	Facilitate actions that emerge from crucial conversations
	Research and make recommendations regarding completing an Organizational Equity Audit
Develop a sustainable and abundant resource pool for Leaven's ongoing financial stability	