



Speaking of Justice

Social Justice Program & Action Group Weekly Update || Thursday, July 14, 2020

“Love calls us to the sacred work of seeking justice.” This is the core of our social justice covenant at First Unitarian Portland. As we adapt our organizing and actions to this period of physical distancing, the sacred work of justice continues. What follows are updates from our Social Justice Program and our Social Justice Action Groups.

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HUMAN RIGHTS & ANTIRACISM

Grounding Our Activism in Gratitude

By Dana Buhl

Waking this morning, after the 55th day of protest of police brutality and demand for the city to defund and reallocate *our* tax money to care for *our* people, I sit in gratitude.

Aaron Campbell. Kendra James. Deonte J. Keller. Keaton Otis. Quanice "Moose" Hayes. Patrick Kimmons. André Gladen. Matthew Burroughs. Jason Washington. May they each rest in power. May their families know that the heart-crushing, spirit-bending fight for Justice for their loved ones is the root of the transformation we demand. Though their Black lives did not matter to the armed agents of the City, the University, the State, their lives are the taproot for a Portland movement for justice.

Thank you to the brave and loving families.

Thank you...

to all of the Black and Indigenous Queer and Trans people, youth, parents, uncles, aunties, and grandparents who continue to organize and speak their truth about the oppressive state structures of colonization, racism, and the delusion of white supremacy. You guide the way.

Thank you...

to First Unitarian's Police Accountability Team for the deep analysis and advocacy to transform policing as we know it. Thank you as well to the Immigrant Justice Action Group, which shines a spotlight on the destruction of families and communities at the hands of the same militarized federal law enforcement, including Border Patrol, occupying Portland streets during these protests.

Thank you...

to each of you who has protested and witnessed night after night at these demonstrations, boldly placing your bodies in harm's way to demand change to the fundamentally racist and militarized police.

Thank you...

to each of you who sacrifices sleep to help protect our beloveds on the front line with your watchful, guiding presence.

Thank you...

to the jail support teams greeting people released from jail in the night and in the wee hours of the morning.



Thank you...

to the solidarity of thousands of other protesters, journalists, clergy, legal observers, medics, community activists, bringers of water and food, and tear gas solution and goggles and ear plugs, and courage and love.

Thank you...

to the letter writers, the letter signers, the phone callers, the word crafters and speakers, the coalition builders working relentlessly to remind us of what is truly important.

Life over property.

Love over fear.

Justice over order.

Thank you...

to the union members and the paralegals and lawyers, the nurses, EMTs, doctors, the people of faith, and to all who have used your sphere of influence to press for change.

Thank you...

to all the people who continue to look through the discomfort of a worldview crashing to the ground toward a vision of a world free of tyranny, with liberty and justice for all. This is the essential work of decolonizing and dismantling white supremacy culture in our hearts and minds.

Thank you...

to First Unitarian Church, to all of our members and congregants and supporters from afar who have upheld us to take the lawsuit against the federal militarized law enforcement adding more violence, tear gas, munitions, to what was already an assault on our people. Thank you to our lawyer Cliff Davidson, the Western States Center, Sara Eddie, and Representatives Janelle Bynum and Karin Power for the courage to speak up against tyranny.

Through the exhaustion, the fear, the anguish of these times, I bow to the collective in solidarity for love.

Stay together. Stay tight.

First Unitarian Sues to Cease Federal Presence on Our Streets

By Jamie Marucha

On July 21, First Unitarian joined others in filing a [lawsuit](#) alleging that the federal government is in violation of the Tenth Amendment by deploying federal law enforcement to the streets of Portland. The Tenth Amendment states that any power not specifically granted to the federal government belongs to the states. According to the lawsuit, "The point is this: whether, and how, to police is left to the states, and their municipalities. Presidents cannot change that."

The plaintiffs include the [Western States Center](#), which works to pursue racial, gender and economic justice; an ACLU legal observer; and two Oregon State Representatives.

The lawsuit purports that the federal government exceeded its prerogative to protect federal property when, without arrest warrants, they began to “pluck Portlanders off the streets, stuff them into vans, secret them to unknown locations, and release them – merely for walking home or protesting peacefully, and away from federal property.”

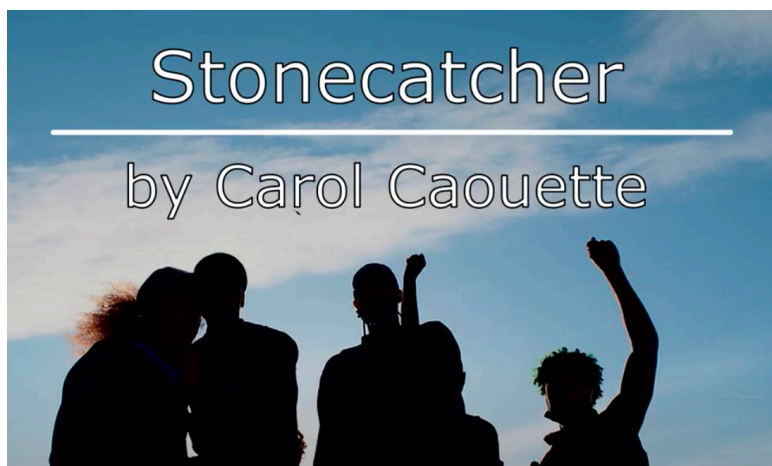
Within the [mission](#) of First Unitarian is to act for social justice. Unitarian Universalist [faith principles](#) recognize that we are part of an interdependent web of all existence, so that what happens to any of us affects all of us; and that we pursue peace, liberty, and justice for all. As Director of Social Justice for the congregation, Dana Buhl’s goal is to encourage and facilitate faithful action for justice. “The presence of the federal agents has escalated violence and created a very unsafe environment for our congregants to protest.”

First Unitarian Board member Caitlynn Hill has been participating in the protests and shares, “For the past two months I, along with other community members, have witnessed and been subject to the nightly police and federal agent violence in our city. We are all tired, scared, physically injured, and traumatized. This public action by the church is a balm for those wounds and affirms that I am firmly on the side of love.”

With a focus on community-conscious policing, First Unitarian’s Police Accountability Team continues to advocate to transform local and state policies and practices. The danger initiated by the federal occupation may temporarily reduce our presence at the protests, but, according to Dana, “This federal law enforcement presence doesn’t take away our focus on addressing local policing; we will continue to do that. With city and local elected officials, and in collaboration with our community partners, is where we have influence over police practices. We will continue to push for change.”

[Stone Catcher - VIDEO](#)

Music & Lyrics by Carol Caouette



Watch this video from First Unitarian’s Amity Choir About this song and music video:

"Stonecatcher" was written by Carol Caouette, Assistant Director of Music at White Bear Unitarian Church in Minnesota. [The song](#) was inspired by the book *Just Mercy*, an account of lawyer Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative, which defended Alabama death-row inmates who didn't have legal counsel. The song

won the Sillman Hymn Competition at the AUUMM conference held in Portland in 2018, and Amity Choir performed the song for a First Unitarian service that fall.

A stonecatcher is the opposite of a stone thrower (as in the cruel form of mob justice: death by stoning). There are many ways to be a stonecatcher in the fight for justice. In the context of Black Lives Matter, we may see the stonecatcher as an ally, one who is willing to stand for those who face discrimination and violence. The stonecatcher may use their own voice, body, and resources to amplify calls for justice for the dispossessed. The stonecatcher uses their power and privilege to intercept the stones of institutional racism and break down the ugly systems that perpetuate racial oppression and violence.

The photographs in this music video depict protests in the Portland area. They were generously shared by choir members and other local photographers. In light of the risk of police reprisal, the photographers will remain anonymous, and the photos show faces that are mostly hidden or in shadow.

The music was recorded by 22 Amity Choir members in their own homes, and their submissions were meticulously woven together by choir member Alyssa Eldridge. Choir director John Boelling recorded the percussion and hand-claps and assembled the video slideshow. We hope you enjoy our music video and find renewed inspiration for our collective fight for racial justice in our city and country.

ACTIONS & ADVOCACY

From Immigrant Justice Action Group (IJAG)

Join a Sacred Circle for Justice

Join Us in a Sacred Circle to Build Relationships, Study, and Act...

We are in a movement moment — a whirlwind — like many of us have never seen in decades — or a lifetime. With the confluence of a global pandemic, the climate crisis, and the Black Lives Matter uprising, compounded by an election this fall and a rising white nationalist movement, now is the time to go all in.

First Unitarian is working with longtime partner organization [IMIRJ](#) (Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice) in a new endeavor called Sacred Circles.

We want to launch two Sacred Circles at First Unitarian. They will not replace or supersede existing social justice groups. One will work within the existing Immigrant Justice Action Group and help direct its activities for the coming program year. The other will be formed from folks interested in a variety of social justice issues — racial, environmental, immigrant, and economic



justice – and will work together looking at issues, studying, and advocating through that intersectional lens.

We hope Sacred Circles will offer an opportunity for NEW PEOPLE to join in relationship with like-minded folks at First Unitarian.

As we join with other Sacred Circles in Portland and throughout Oregon, we hope to build a stronger, more diverse, and justice-seeking future.

A “Sacred Circle” is a grouping of 7-15 people who covenant to:

- Be in relationship with and accountable to one another
- Meet (virtually) on a regular basis from now through the election (each circle decides on its own rhythm for relationship; our suggestion is that Circles meet at least once a month)
- Stay in touch with one another between Circle meetings
- Share learning and action to advance immigrant and racial justice, in coordination with IMIrJ, immigrant and Black-led partner organizations, and other Sacred Circles in the region and throughout the state.

Interested? Please contact Linda Craig (lindacraigpdx@gmail.com, 971-285-1505) or Laurie Lester (lesterlaura@gmail.com, 240-298-4211). We hope to meet for the first time before the end of July, but will add people (and Circles, if need be) as there is interest.

From Africa Connections

Connections with Africa During the Pandemic

Here in Portland, we are watching in dismay both the US response to the pandemic and the federal response to the downtown protests. It is easy to forget that this is a global pandemic and that millions are put at risk not only of the disease but also by the often-chaotic attempts to stop its spread.

Reports from our two Africa Connections organizations, the Imani Project in the coastal villages of Eastern Kenya and Quilts for Empowerment (QFE) in Western Kenya, paint a terrible picture of what is happening on the ground. After being closed down since April, Kenya is facing a surge of cases throughout the country since reopening in mid-July. Testing is not available, and access to appropriate hospital care is essentially non-existent. Food is scarce and prohibitively expensive. Norah Amisi Otondo, the on-the-ground director of QFE, reports that families are starving and parents are even said to be boiling rocks to give their children the illusion of having food. QFE is making sure that over 70 Kenyan adults and children have adequate food during the pandemic. To add to the distress, Kenya is bracing for a massive locust invasion. As Norah says, “First there is Covid, then locusts, then famine, then death”.

Meantime in the coastal villages of Eastern Kenya, no one knows how prevalent the disease is, but the Imani Project has worked hard to educate people on the need for social distancing and has

distributed jerry cans to help make water available for hand washing. Besides supporting around 100 AIDS orphans with monthly support, the Imani Project works in around 60 villages to address famine, water shortages, and health care needs.

But in addition to supporting families on the ground, Africa Connections members have been working with RESULTS, a national advocacy organization. Our members have met with our local members of Congress to ask them to support funding for US foreign assistance to address the global impact of the pandemic, its impact on existing efforts to address infectious diseases, and the anticipated increase of 80 million worldwide who will be thrown into extreme poverty.

We are delighted to report a very positive response from Representatives Blumenauer and Bonamici, and also from both our senators. Senator Merkley in particular has been taking a lead role, including protests to the Administration on the United States' withdrawal from the World Health Organization.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Go to the Imani Project Facebook page for information on how to donate or become a Child Sponsor.

Visit Quilts for Empowerment's website, www.quiltsforempowerment.org, and purchase their products on their Etsy Store.

ADVOCACY: to get involved with RESULTS, contact Patsy O'Shea (poppishea@hotmail.com) or Janet Brumbaugh, RESULTS chapter co-chair (janetbrumbaugh@comcast.net).

From the Economic Justice Action Group (EJAG)OR UU Voices for Justice

Please contact your state representative and senator.

Learn more on public banking at <http://www.publicbankinginstitute.org> and/or watch this [cute, short video](#) about public banking.



From Advancing Racial Justice Action Group (ARJAG)

Stop Face Recognition Surveillance

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has launched a campaign to urge Congress to “[Stop Face Surveillance Technologies](#),” which not only “threaten everyone’s privacy rights” but also “will unquestionably be used to target Black people and all people of color” and have “been found to be

racially biased.” The ACLU also asserts that “military-grade surveillance equipment has been deployed by police during protests for Black Lives.”

Address COVID-19 Outbreaks in Prisons

The numbers of COVID-19 cases in U.S. prisons and jails have soared in recent weeks. The number of prison inmates known to be infected has doubled during the past month to more than 68,000. Prison deaths tied to the coronavirus have also risen, by 73 percent since mid-May. Currently, the nation’s five largest known clusters of the virus are inside correctional facilities.

LOVE RESISTS of the UUA is urging people to write to Congress about releasing federal prisoners, noting that 55 percent of federal prisoners are there for drug or immigration-related offenses and that none was intended to receive a death sentence. “Yet deaths are beginning to mount with the rapid spread of COVID-19 in prisons – especially with the willful neglect of the [Bureau of Prisons] towards people who are incarcerated without access to Personal Protective Equipment, space to practice social distancing, or even basic cleaning and hygiene supplies in some cases.” [Find additional information and a form letter to send to your representative.](#)

OREGON JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER Governor Kate Brown announced June 12 that the state will begin releasing medically vulnerable prisoners who also meet multiple other criteria later this month. This follows a lawsuit filed by the Oregon Justice Resource Center (ORJC) on behalf of incarcerated persons who were elderly, HIV-positive, or asthmatic. They argued that the Department of Corrections had taken only “half measures” to stop the spread of COVID-19 and had “willfully and wantonly ignored the public health threat.” [The Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem is one of the state’s largest virus outbreaks](#), another large outbreak was reported on July 13th at the [Snake River Correctional Institution](#), and Oregon has one of the oldest prison populations in the nation.

There is more to be done. OJRC continues to monitor COVID-19 issues in Oregon prisons and provides [sample letters to the governor and other state officials here](#).

If you would like to be added to the ARJAG mailing list for updates, contact [Kathryn Scotten](#). If you would like to contact someone regarding proposing/oining ongoing projects sponsored by ARJAG, [contact Ethel Gullette](#) .

Reduce Racially Inequitable Incarceration

Help get Initiative Petition 44 on the November ballot! The Drug Addiction, Treatment, and Recovery Act would expand access to addiction and recovery services and eliminate harmful – and racially inequitable – criminal penalties for personal drug possession. Sign the petition [here](#).

From Community for Earth (CFE)

Being Advocates for Climate Justice

Activists and policy analysts are working to craft comprehensive legislation to address the climate crisis and promote the transition to a just economic future. These efforts are being led by the

[Climate Crisis Policy](#) organization, with the goal of having federal legislative proposals ready to launch in 2021. While the legislative pipeline already contains various measures related to greenhouse gases, forests, alternative energy, etc., the goal is to unite these efforts and fill in missing pieces. The scientific framework for this project is based on the climate solutions defined by [Project Drawdown](#), a comprehensive plan to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere “as quickly, safely, and equitably as possible.” Faith communities are part of the broad policy coalition as well, with leadership provided by the [Center for Earth Ethics](#).

Work on comprehensive climate legislation is currently underway on many different fronts. The House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Chair Kathy Castor, has released a roadmap for climate action called "[Solving the Crisis](#)." The DNC's Unity Task Force, which is creating policy platforms for Democratic nominee Joe Biden, has released its recommendations for "[Combating the Climate Crisis and Pursuing Environmental Justice](#)." Climate activists are encouraged that these proposals by political leaders are heading in the right direction but recognize that they are not aggressive enough to respond to the magnitude of the challenge. Grassroots pressure to energize and guide the legislative process remains essential.

Those interested in the specifics about the legislative and policy proposals can view [past webinars by the Climate Crisis Policy](#) and keep updated by joining [this mailing list](#). If you would like to connect with fellow church members committed to climate justice, [contact Community for Earth](#) to learn more about our social justice group.

Advocate for Taxing Timber Fairly

In 1999, Oregon granted Oregon timber companies and individuals who own more than 5,000 acres of forest land a huge tax loophole — an exemption from paying the timber harvest severance tax. This tax revenue giveaway has caused timber towns and counties to lose billions of tax dollars over the years, resulting in the loss of important government services like library, fire, and police services! Now it's time to get our legislators to act. Click [here](#) to learn more



End Gerrymandering in Oregon

The fight for redistricting reform continues – and we need your help NOW.

Last week, a federal court granted relief for our efforts in getting IP 57 on the November 2020 ballot, and the Secretary of State has agreed to the terms.

What does this mean? It means we still have a chance to collect enough signatures to get on the November 2020 ballot, but we have only a short time to make it happen. We need to continue to collect signatures, and we need your help.

If you haven't signed and sent in the petition, you still have time, and we need your signature as soon as possible. Your voice can still be heard, and your signature can still be counted. Get the petition [here](#).

If you have signed and turned in your petition, THANK YOU! The next step is to help us by sharing the petition with friends and family, or by forwarding this email.

Our goal is to receive mailed-in petitions by August 1st. Click here to read IP57, then follow the instructions to print and sign your petition.

Please mail your petitions immediately:

People Not Politicians

PO Box 3226

Salem, OR 97302

We have fought against lengthy court processes, a pandemic, and the challenge of gathering enough signatures to make the ballot. We are still in this fight, and we are counting on you.

Let's make redistricting reform a reality for Oregonians.

KEEPING INFORMED

From Community for Earth (CFE)

I'm a Black climate expert. Racism derails our efforts to save the planet.



People march through San Francisco's Financial District during a climate protest on Sept. 20. (Eric Risberg/AP)

We invite you to read this [article](#) and join First Unitarian environmental activists in discussion and work to improve our climate. From the article:

Toni Morrison said it best, in a 1975 speech: "The very serious function of racism ... is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being."

Community for Earth continues Zoom meetings to talk about the intersectionality of race, gender, income...all forms of "otherism" and climate justice. We are

growing in our awareness of the huge disconnects in our white culture across human dignity, equity, and preservation of our Earth home.



I Am Willing, Song by [Holly Near](#)

The Speaking of Justice Editorial Team shares this for reflection.

I am open and I am willing
To be hopeless would seem so strange
It dishonors those who go before us
So lift me up to the light of change

There is hurting in my family
There is sorrow in my town
There is panic in the nation
There is wailing the whole world round

May the children see more clearly
May the elders be more wise
May the winds of change caress us
Even though it burns our eyes

Give me a mighty oak to hold my confusion
Give me a desert to hold my fears
Give me a sunset to hold my wonder
Give me an ocean to hold my tears