



Speaking of Justice

Social Justice Program & Action Group Weekly Update || Thursday, July 30, 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.

Contents

This is an interactive [clickable](#) Table of Contents

HUMAN RIGHTS & ANTIRACISM	2
First U PDX Files for Temporary Restraining Order on Federal Law Enforcement	2
Volunteer for the Protest Aid Station at First Congregational UCC	3
ACTIONS & ADVOCACY	4
Join a Sacred Circle for Justice	4
From Africa Connections	4
Connections with Africa During the Pandemic	4
From the Economic Justice Action Group (EJAG)OR UU Voices for Justice	5
Contact your state representative and senator.	5
From Advancing Racial Justice Action Group (ARJAG)	6
Support July’s Shared Plate Recipient - Portland Freedom Fund	6
Stop Face Recognition Surveillance	6
Address COVID-19 Outbreaks in Prisons	6
Reduce Racially Inequitable Incarceration	7
From Community for Earth (CFE)	7
Being Advocates for Climate Justice	7
From Economic Justice Action Group (EJAG)	7
Advocate for Taxing Timber Fairly	7
End Gerrymandering in Oregon	8
KEEPING INFORMED	8
From Advancing Racial Justice Action Group (ARJAG)	8
Sweet Honey in The Rock - Wade in the Water	9
Be Water - A Poem	9

HUMAN RIGHTS & ANTIRACISM

Continuing the Fight: First Unitarian Files for Temporary Restraining Order on Federal Law Enforcement

By Dana Buhl

As you know, First Unitarian Portland is a plaintiff in the lawsuit filed last week to require that the recently-deployed federal law enforcement agents cease their operations and militarized tactics in Portland streets. What we have witnessed over the last week is an escalated and violent attack on the people of Portland. As of this writing, though the Governor announced an agreement with the Department of Homeland Security to withdraw these law enforcement agencies, DHS Director Chad Wolf maintains that the agents will stay in Portland until the “violent activity toward our federal facilities ends.” We are continuing with the lawsuit, and, on July 29, we filed for a temporary restraining order.

Many of us from First Unitarian have been involved since the murder of George Floyd in the Black Lives Matter protests to address police brutality and to defund and redistribute our tax money from violent and unnecessary policing to peaceful public safety response and community care. We have given accounts of the extreme and indiscriminate use of tear gas and munitions by the Portland Police Bureau. These actions by PPB necessitated the letter to Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler that we sent on July 9th signed by over 300 First Unitarian congregants. We have yet to hear back from the mayor regarding our specific requests to stop using tear gas and extreme violence on our community members.

The federal lawsuit that we joined with the Western States Center argues that the presence of federal agents on our streets is a violation of the Tenth Amendment guaranteeing the separation of powers. Further, the extreme tactics by federal agents have had a chilling effect on our congregation's faithful call to protest. Ramped-up violence, abductions of citizens, and the unpredictable location of their activities have created a much more dangerous environment than before their arrival. We cannot in good conscience encourage people to show up to protest the federal agents. Those of us who do continue to be a presence have taken extreme precautions, including wearing gas masks/respirators and shatter-proof goggles and helmets, and otherwise carefully watching out for each other. It is unconscionable that we should have to wear protective equipment in order to exercise our First Amendment Rights.

On Wednesday this week, we joined the plaintiffs to file for a Temporary Restraining Order. Our hope is that, if granted, the injunction will severely limit the scope of federal law enforcement operations in Portland, thereby setting a precedent for the rest of the country.

The federal overreach is frightening and infuriating, and we must work to stop it. We must also be clear that the federal law enforcement agencies on Portland streets are the same agencies that have been abducting and terrorizing our immigrant families and communities even before this latest invasion. Our tax dollars are being spent on munitions, chemical agents, and military-style

law enforcement here in our communities and across the country. Those same tax dollars should be going toward care of our communities, especially in the midst of a global pandemic, not toward the ongoing terror of our communities.

Our work to transform local policing continues. We demand an end to police violence and to the targeting of our Black siblings in Portland and across our nation.

There is much work to be done, and the uprising of activities in all arenas — direct action, demonstrations, mutual aid, legal recourse, legislative action, and voter mobilization — is necessary! Thank you to this church community for continuing to keep the focus on moving us toward a city and a world where liberty and justice prevail.

You can read more about what the UUA Love Resists campaign shared about the lawsuit that First Unitarian Portland joined here: [We Must Resist Fascist Federal Attacks on Our Cities](#)

Volunteer for the Protest Aid Station at First Congregational UCC

First Unitarian Portland has partnered with First Congregational UCC (on SW Park and SW Madison) to provide an *AID STATION* for the ongoing protests in downtown Portland. It is open for 3 hours each night, going from 10pm till 1am. This is a respite center and aid station for protesters. It is a place where protesters can stop in to use the restrooms or to get help from a medic, as well as to seek psychological first aid. Fellow congregant Christine Cha has been volunteering as the on-site medic many nights, helping to organize the medical and psychological first aid parts of the aid station. Troy McKinlay is coordinating volunteers from First Unitarian to be hosts. These are the folks who welcome people in, direct them to where they need to go, and offer hand sanitizer and masks or other safety equipment. Our best efforts are made to maintain social distancing, and hosts and medics wear masks at all times.



If you are interested in being a host, please write to UU Congregant Troy McKinlay:
4troymckinlay@gmail.com. All personal information will remain confidential.

ACTIONS & ADVOCACY

Join a Sacred Circle for Justice

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.

Join Us in a Sacred Circle to Build Relationships, Study, and Act...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. One will work within the Immigrant Justice Action Group (IJAG) 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.



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
- 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 email [Linda Craig](#) (or call 971-285-1505) or [Laurie Lester](#) (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

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)



Support July's Shared Plate Recipient

Portland Freedom Fund

The [Portland Freedom Fund](#) "is a volunteer-run abolitionist organization currently dedicated to reducing harms perpetuated against our Black, Brown, and Indigenous neighbors by the criminal justice system through posting bail so they may navigate their case from a position of freedom." [Contribute here.](#)

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. 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/joining 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.

From Economic Justice Action Group (EJAG)

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.

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 Advancing Racial Justice Action Group (ARJAG)

Here are two news articles of interest during the Black Lives Matter movement:

"You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument. The black people I come from were owned and raped by the white people I come from. Who dares to tell me to celebrate them?" [Read more](#) from Poet Caroline Randall Williams, for the New York Times.

Liberal, progressive – and racist? The Sierra Club faces its white-supremacist history.
The group is repudiating as racist the most important man in its history, John Muir.
[Read the article](#) by Darryl Fears and Steven Mufson, for the Washington Post.

Sweet Honey in The Rock - Wade in the Water

[This VIDEO](#) is offered as a reflection from the Speaking of Justice Editorial Team.



Salmon River (photo credit Barbara Ford)



Be Water - A Poem

by Barbara Ford

Offered as a reflection from the Speaking of Justice Editorial Team. [Also Read the poem here.](#)

That is the plan in the Hong Kong resistance
Flow through streets, leaderless
emergent, responsive to the moment
impenetrable to infiltrators

Be Water

The stuff left in plastic jugs in borderlands
for comfort and salvation of those seeking
refuge
Be the sweat of those who leave the jugs
Be the moisture forming at the point of
contact with the handcuffs

Be Water

Be the dew formed at sunrise on the spider
web
A shining mandala of beauty and survival
Be the steam
rising at the edge of the lava bed
the insistent creation of new land
in this time of decline

Be Water

be herbal tea for healing
the sick and the hopeless
be the blood of the one offering
the cup in an outstretched hand

Be the one in the bed, loved.
Be the IV fluid
restoring balance in the emergency
until things change back
until the Body remembers

Be Water

Be the unapologetic tear
of grief
or gratitude

Be the storm

Be fury and change and unpredictable
uncovering of the predicament we are in

Be the tide, breathing in and out
reminding us of the daily fullness and slack of
life,
the rhythms of the universe in our bodies

Be the river, undammed,
welcoming the salmon

Be the rain
Be the silence before the rain
the rivulets after, seeking the parched

Be Water

Be the blessing of baptism
no matter your faith
the drops of water landing with love
on the newly born

be the amniotic fluid
holding safe, with or without hope,
the future
because it's there anyway
in the fragile sac of becoming.