

## USH SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL MEETING

**Minutes—October 17, 2023, 7:00 p.m.**

**Attendees:** Judy Sullivan, Chair, Gloria Bent, Louise Harmon, Diana Heymann, Susan Hope, Rev. Bob Janis, Fred Lewis, Gloria Mengual, Joanne Orlando

**Minutes:** Minutes for the September meeting had already been adopted by email voting and posted online.

Judy called the meeting to order and read the USH Mission Statement.

**Report on Website Changes:** Judy, Joanne, and Louise are meeting next week for the final meeting on the social justice website updates. Once it is completed, Judy will work with Laura Cipriano and Karolina to put it on the website. It will be a word document that can be changed, edited, and added to when we want to make it current or advertise future events.

**Reflections on Mission Statement/Social Justice:** We asked how our efforts in social justice live up to the commitments in the USH Mission Statement. We discussed the sentiments of some members that they are no longer interested in social justice or are more interested in spiritual matters. We noted that people tend to silo ‘justice’ and ‘spiritual matters’ into two separate entities, when in fact, they are one and the same. We talked about how to develop empathy in the congregation, using personal stories and education. It was agreed that using guilt to motivate people to be activists was ineffective. This will be an on-going conversation.

**Report by Gloria Mengual re upcoming movie and podcasts:** On November 10th, the Social Justice Council will be sponsoring the film at USH, *I am Not Your Negro*, a 90-minute documentary about James Baldwin and systemic racism. Gloria M. will be leading the discussion afterwards. Gloria M. will also be leading a discussion about a podcast series, *The Sum of Us*. We discussed the advisability of including a larger, community and faith-based, audience. It was decided that the series would be held on zoom, one session a month on Thursday evenings, starting in January 2024 and probably extending to June. It was suggested that we use GHIAA to help market the event. Rev Bob suggested that we use the breakout feature on zoom to encourage more active participation and interaction. Gloria M. asked for assistance in both marketing the series and in managing the zoom technology.

**Report by Gloria Bent on the Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry:** Gloria B. reported that Judy, Susan, and Louise would be working on this ministry. She had four suggestions of areas where we might do some good: 1) Review the UUA resources to see whether USH is making appropriate use of our spaces. The UUA has good checklists for congregations. We ought to investigate whether USH is embracing those; 2) Review ADA requirements to see areas where USH might improve our accessibility. While USH is not bound by the ADA, the law embodies good standards. We also ought to make certain that our website has a clear statement about our current accommodations, as well as naming a contact person in case a special accommodation not listed needs to be made; 3) Compile a list of resources for people with disabilities, local, state and federal; 4) Investigate the shift suggested by the UUA away from advocating for access to understanding the lived experiences of disabled people, the impact of ableism on their lives, and

how ableism limits the views of those who are deemed 'able.' Susan suggested that the congregation ought to address mental health issues in the congregation. Joanne mentioned the need for some people to withdraw from the sanctuary from time to time, due to sensory overload or other conditions. Rev Bob suggested we make clear that people could come and go at any time during a service, and that on Zoom, it should be clearly stated that turning your camera off was acceptable. Louise suggested that these problems arise in the Caring Network Committee, and that we might join forces with them to address them, particularly the mental health issues. Fred also raised the problem of how to help potentially suicidal members of the congregation, or how to help the congregation deal with the death of a congregation member by suicide.

**Report by Diana on GHIAA core training and the Horace Bushnell Children's Food**

**Pantry:** Diana explained the purpose and content to the GHIAA core training and encouraged others to take it. She expressed concern that members of the congregation had stopped delivering canned goods and other food to the bin for the Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry. We discussed several ways of generating interest. This is a community connection that USH has had for a long time, and we are eager to continue it. In November and December, we are going to launch a campaign to get more participation---perhaps by making a more central, attractive bin. Diana suggested we explore with our contact there, Lisa Marie, about what other types of contributions we could make during the holiday season, perhaps a book drive for children's books.

**Report by Judy on GNOs:** PFLAG was pleased with the \$891 donation that USH made in September. This month Hawkwing is the recipient, and Diana Heymann arranged that connection. In November, Sherry Manetta is working with Greg Nickett to arrange something with IRIS. Judy is arranging with CT Foodshare for December and will probably also reach out to Operation Fuel for January.

**Climate/Environmental Justice:** This was backburnered for another meeting due to time constraints.

**Follow up on last month's meeting:** Judy briefly summarized some of the themes we raised from the September meeting, assessing our impact in Hartford, how to become better educated about community resources, and how to "do with" instead of "do for."

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.