

Social Justice Meeting
March 19, 2024

Attendees: Judy Sullivan, Chair, Gloria Bent, Gloria Mengual, Joanne Orlando, Dana Donovan, Susan Hope, Fred Louis, Mary Sherwin, Rev. Bob Janis, Sherry Manetta

Judy called the meeting to order and gave the reading. Minutes of the February meeting had been approved by email.

EqUUal Access/Disability Justice

Gloria Bent reported on the chancel walk through meeting on March 10, which was well attended. The safety of the organ pit steps was addressed and Aaron and Paula Bleck had workable suggestions. Replacing hand railings on the center and side steps to comply with current ADA standards was discussed and Aaron and Louise Harmon offered to obtain estimates. General safety concerns about the choir side of the chancel were raised. The electrical box, multiple electric cords and narrow access due to arrangement of choir seating raise concerns regarding mobility, low vision issues and general barriers and hindrances for all participating on the chancel. Suggestions for a smaller box and rerouting cords are a possible solution. The wooden box used to raise the height of the speaker at the podium was brought to our attention by Sue Smolski. Paula demonstrated how the lectern shelf can be lowered, but the question of visibility was raised. Dana reported on the lift – it has been serviced and two batteries replaced and is now working well. A copy of the key and directions for use will be mounted near the lift.

Race Matters

Gloria Mengual reported on The Sum of Us discussion series. The next date is Thursday, March 21 and covers Episode 5 – how immigrants strengthened local farms and the overall economy nationwide. The April 4 podcast/discussion examines sundown sirens in our country and Gloria will invite a local speaker to speak about CT sundown laws. May 16 discussion will be about reproduction rights, again with a local speaker, and June 6 is about reparations and also include a local speaker. The final discussion is June 20 and will be held at USH to listen to the final podcast together in person and discuss taking action locally.

GNOs

Based on information shared via emails this week, it was decided that Disability Rights CT, which is a collection of attorneys supporting the filing and prosecution of disability claims, might not be the best disability GNO. Independence Unlimited may be a more appropriate GNO. Independence Unlimited serves 38 towns primarily in Hartford County and helps individuals with disabilities live independently in their homes (including conducting safety assessments of the homes) and to transition safely from institutions to home. Susan Hope and Gloria Bent will visit Independence Unlimited to learn more. Sherry will also put Gloria in touch with a colleague who is very involved with disability issues.

The April GNO will be the Brother Carl Hardrick Institute. The Youth Group will select the GNO for June, which is likely to be Church Street Eats.

GHIAA House Meetings

Folks from USH (Dana, Fred, Tina Davies) have attended or will attend various House Meetings. Feedback so far has been positive.

The House Meeting at USH on March 20 will be hosted by USH, Urban Hope Refuge Church and New Antioch Missionary Baptist Church. We expect about 50 participants. Participants will separate into small groups, each with a facilitator and notetaker. The goal is to capture personal stories about concerns and experiences, and to tie the stories together into themes. GHIAA will analyze the themes arising from the House Meetings to help decide on their upcoming agenda. Dana will provide information on logistics. Susan and Mary volunteered for the registration table. Rev AJ from Urban Hope Refuge is chairing the meeting, and Rev Bob will talk with him about delivering the prayer.

Veterans for Peace

Fred Lewis proposed that USH get involved with a Veterans for Peace initiative to support draft legislation at the federal level that would require the U.S. to enter into multi-national treaties to eliminate global nuclear arsenals and to limit the U.S. President's authority to launch a nuclear attack. There are Back from the Brink chapters in various states urging legislators to co-sponsor the bill. The bill currently is languishing in Congress.

USH involvement could potentially include: an informational presentation at USH, a letter-signing/calling/emailing campaign, and/or an information table in fellowship hall. Fred will email more information to the Social Justice group.

Election

CT's primary day is April 2. While USH as a nonprofit can't promote individual candidates, we can encourage everyone to register and vote so that their voice is heard. Mary Sherwin will draft something for the enews.

At the national UU level, UU the Vote is just getting started and information will be available in the future related to the November election.

Service Animals

The Board approved a policy on service animals a few months ago. The policy has yet to be fully implemented. The SJ council suggested that the policy be communicated and followed, and that Nancy Kemmerer and Rev Bob have a private conversation with one member who regularly attends services with a dog.