

USH Social Justice Meeting May 21, 2024

Attendees: Judy Sullivan, Chair, Gloria Bent, Joanne Orlando, Dana Donovan, Sofia Rosselet, Susan Hope (partial), Fred Louis, Rev. Bob Janis (partial), Sherry Manetta

Judy called the meeting to order, we did check-ins, and Judy gave the reading from MLK Jr. Minutes of the April meeting had been approved by email.

USH Leadership/Mentoring

Judy suggested we consider stretching ourselves more in volunteering through and for USH, that we invite other people, particularly new members, to participate in various activities. New member Sunday was a good reminder to all of us to do more to make connections.

EqUUal Access/Disability Justice

Gloria Bent reported on progress and activities.

- She and Susan Hope attended an Inclusive Arts VT workshop last week and among other things was reminded of the importance of language, that we should pay more attention to the words we use to describe disabilities and that we should abandon idioms that reflect insensitivity to disabilities. For example, “having my needs met” vs. “being accommodated”, “wheelchair user or rider” vs. “wheelchair bound”, something “won’t be heard” vs. “falling on deaf ears”.
- We discussed the practice of wearing a sunflower lanyard, to identify oneself as having an unseen disability. This practice is more common in Europe than the U.S. We might consider asking USH members to wear a lanyard on a Sunday with a disability service.
- We discussed the definition of hidden or unseen disabilities and that this term includes much more than mental health disabilities.
- The speaker from Keep the Coalition GNO provided an opportunity for members to ask questions after the service, indicating the relevance of mental health disabilities in our lives. Judy has invited the speaker to join one of our SJ meetings to talk further.
- The project to install rails in the chancel is coming along.

The Sum of Us

The last two sessions in the series will be rescheduled from June 6 and June 20 to a combined in-person session after service on June 23 or 30. Attendees who are not USH members seem to have dropped off.

Horace Bushnell Food Pantry

Diana brings the food donations to HB on Wednesdays. HB will be a GNO next year. USH started working with HB in the 1980s.

MIRA Dissolution Authority/Environmental Justice

USH (Diana and Judy) was instrumental in working with GHIAA to engage the Hartford mayor in getting state funding for tipping fees related to the dissolution of the MDA. The result was that a \$50mm fund set aside for remediation of the MDA trash facility, now closed, is not being depleted to pay tipping fees.

GHIAA Spring Assembly

The GHIAA Spring Assembly will be held June 20, 6:30 to 8:30, at the Franciscan Ministry at St. Patrick and St. Anthony Church in downtown Hartford. The themes will be presented to the assembly and to legislators and other politicians and their support will be sought.

Judy is participating in the synthesis of the themes that were documented in the GHIAA house meetings, which approximately 500 people attended. We discussed the theme of being safe that was a major theme for at least one group at the house meeting at USH. The theme was reinforced by reports from committee members that, at New Antioch Church, Pastor Jeff monitors multiple outside cameras until the last person leaves any assembly at the Church, and that Beth El has armed security guards. Rev Bob visited New Antioch on a Saturday morning and participated in their ministries of serving food to those in need and praying outside for those who live in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is impoverished and rough. Despite safety concerns, Pastor Jeff is not in favor of armed neighborhood watch groups.

The Brother Carl Hardrick Institute was a recent GNO which is a preemptive safety organization operating in the North End. Perhaps we should consider other safety organizations as future GNOs.

The new GHIAA representative for USH is Bea (Beatrice) Santiago who is the minister of the Ministerio Nueva Creacion (New Creation Ministries) in Manchester. Judy and Rev Bob will each be meeting one-on-one with her.

UU the Vote

Judy and Fred will coordinate with Karolina, and Gloria Bent offered to assist, to organize a postcard writing campaign with Fern Street in connection with UU the Vote. Phone banking (via computer, not your personal phone) or texting initiatives may follow. More to come on this.

UU SJ Ministry

Dana reported on an initiative of 8 UU churches in CT to organize a statewide group focused on social justice to broaden the reach of our efforts and to get the attention of more legislators statewide, outside the GHIAA focused legislators. The Manchester church is very active. Judy and Dana are participating as is someone from Fern Street. Meetings are in New London. This is still in the organizing stage.

Some questions: How should the UU group coordinate with other organizations such as GHIAA?
Will the focus be on action or advocacy?

Sherry will provide Judy and Dana with information on CT Shoreline Indivisible which is a very organized and active social justice group, operating in Guilford and other shoreline towns.

GNOs

Funds raised for GNOs have been very positive, in the \$1,500 range. Church St. Eats will be our last GNO for this fiscal year, selected by the youth group. Judy will ask if a member of the youth group can do the monthly GNO presentation at a service.

Judy asked everyone to think about GNOs for the upcoming church year. GNOs will start again in September. The summer is used for fundraising for school backpacks for The Village.

We should consider new GNOs so we continue to get to know our neighbors. As noted above, Horace Bushnell Food Pantry will be on the list and we should consider safety organizations.

Noah Webster Tutoring

Judy will be meeting with Peter Meny to discuss how to reinvigorate tutoring at Noah Webster school. Peter is the only remaining tutor from USH.

Pride Festivals

West Hartford Pride Festival is 6/26. USH and Fern Street are on the waiting list for a table.

Pride Celebration in Middletown (the largest in the state) is 6/1. Middletown and Meriden UU churches are participating. Dana may attend.

Judy will investigate getting swag such as T-shirts.

Back from the Brink

Fred will arrange for the Back from the Brink group to set up a table in Fellowship Hall one Sunday to provide information and request support in advocating for federal legislation to ban nuclear weapons. He will discuss with Rev Bob before proceeding.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12p.m.