



The Center for Sustainable Justice: Working Religiously for Justice

Brief History and Purpose of the Center for Sustainable Justice

As we embark on our second full year of work as The Center for Sustainable Justice, here is a reminder of what our work entails:

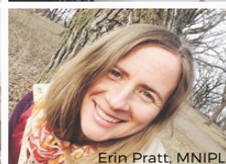
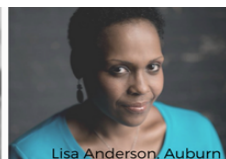
The Center for Sustainable Justice was started by Lyndale United Church of Christ in 2015. Our primary purpose is to help build the movement of religious leaders and communities working together on LGBTQ, racial, food and environmental justice in the Twin Cities and across the Midwest. We focus on connecting and building coalitions among people and organizations across lines of difference with a special emphasis on relationship-building over the long-haul.

The Center for Sustainable Justice does our work amidst the reality that much religiously-based justice work is “siloeed.” Folks tend either to work in ecumenical and multifaith ways around one justice issue or within one movement (ex., pro-LGBTQ, environmental justice, racial justice) or to work within their own religious community on one or a variety of justice issues. While these are important efforts, we also need enduring spaces where people come together around an ecumenical and/or multifaith vision of justice that includes the dreams of many different people and bodies (in other words, that is intersectional). This is true in the Twin Cities, in the Midwest, and nationally. The goal of the Center for Sustainable Justice is to foster, create and “hold” just such spaces.

As we do this work of “tending the connective tissue” of the religious movement for justice, we hear excitement, desire and support for the vision. We hear that folks long for this kind of connected, healing, relationally-based, intersectional space. We hear that an organization focused on leveraging coalitions, building relationship among people and organizations, and helping us “paddle in the same direction” toward a vision of a world that more fully reveals God’s just and equitable dream is deeply appreciated.

The work of the Center for Sustainable Justice can be seen in these areas:

1. Annual Movement Building Convening:



We know that justice work is sacred work. And building intersectional movements for justice that take seriously racial, LGBTQ, economic, climate and food justice all at once is critically important.

But we cannot build justice movements that are populated with broken bodies, traumatized bodies, exhausted bodies. We must find a way to heal, build resiliency and practice new habits... personally, communally and as an earth-body.

The Center for Sustainable Justice hosted its first conference in the Fall of 2016 that featured skills-building, deep reflection, celebration and ceremony to help us all learn to work religiously for justice. In particular, a ceremony at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers (both a place of

deep sacredness to Dakota people and the site of a large concentration camp during the Dakota-US War) that featured both confession, repentance and repair as well as deep healing was very well received. Supporting organizations in 2016: The Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice and Social Transformation, Healing Minnesota Stories, Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light and Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, have asked that they be co-sponsors for the 2017 conference.

Presenters included: Lisa Anderson from the Sojourner Truth Healing Circle through Auburn Seminary; The Give-Get Sistet; Jim Bear Jacobs and Bob Klanderud from Healing Minnesota Stories; Steve Newcom from Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice and Social Transformation; Erin Pratt from Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light; Kandace Montgomery and Michael McDowell from Black Lives Matter Minneapolis.

2. Sacred Intersextions: Bodies, Culture, Sexuality & Spirit

This Long-Weekend Retreat co-sponsored by The Center for Sustainable Justice, The Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC and Interplay took place March 31–April 3, 2016. Here is a description of what transpired as twelve participants engaged this intensive workshop.

Do you want to find new ways to claim the unique story of your sexuality? Are you curious about the ways in which your racial identity, physical ability and class are intertwined with you experience of sexuality and gender? Do your religious or cultural contexts either ignore or deny the sacred power of sexuality? Do you long for wholeness and connection rather than disembodiment? Do you desire to engage your body as blessing and as impetus for transformational justice in the world?

Rebecca Voelkel & Phil Porter
a long-weekend retreat exploring the sacred relationship between sexuality and spirituality—connection, exploration, embodiment and celebration

March 31-April 3, 2016
 Thursday dinner (6 pm) through Sunday noon

Oak Ridge Conference Center
 A beautiful location near Minneapolis, MN with well-appointed rooms and great food

REGISTER ONLINE
<http://sacredintersextions.com>

CO-SPONSORS
www.sustainablejustice.org
www.openandaffirming.org
www.interplay.org

Download a full brochure
<http://sacredintersextions.com>
 Questions?
 Contact Rebecca (@sustainablejustice) or Phil (@philinterplay.org)

Sacred Intersextions looks at bodies, culture, sexuality and spirit. Through experiential exercises, writing, movement and conversation, we will reflect upon, grapple and play with the extraordinary, complex gift of our bodies.

We will have opportunities to explore our own history and experience, share conversations with others both formally and informally, and engage our own physicality through simple and accessible activity. Facilitators, Rebecca Voelkel and Phil Porter, have spent decades thinking, writing and playing with these topics and will share some of the ideas and constructs that they have developed in their own exploration.

This retreat is geared toward deepening and exploring. This may mean taking a step further than we have before. Although each person will have their full choices about how they engage and what they share, we hope that you will come with a high level of willingness to explore and be curious about your own experiences of your body. Respect for the experiences of others will be key to our

interactions.

People of all sexual orientations, gender expressions, gender identities and cultural and life experience are welcome. No particular faith tradition is required. “Spirit” will be part of the conversation, but can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Each individual story is part of the whole story. Rebecca and Phil are both committed to including, supporting and honoring the diversity of our experience.

3. Facilitate and Convene MARCH (Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change and Healing):



MARCH (Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change and Healing) is a network of people of faith in the Twin Cities with two primary purposes.

Rapid Response Network—religious leaders and people of faith who are interested in being mobilized for action in support of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, Standing Rock and other racial justice work are connected through a list-serve and a Facebook page. Actions are sent out and members of the network are asked to participate as they are able and led.

Sacred Solidarity Congregational Network – A pilot cohort of twelve Christian, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist congregations are engaged in a process of planning, implementing and reflecting on congregational racial justice processes. The Center for Sustainable Justice is one of the leaders in this process both through our work within the Lyndale community as one of the pilot congregations as well as through Rebecca’s role as facilitator and co-designer of much of the MARCH curriculum and retreats. Here is a more detailed description of that cohort:

MARCH
(Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change, & Healing)
Sacred Solidarity Network

What is MARCH?

MARCH has its roots in twenty years of multi-faith relationships and commitment to pro-LGBTQ work, including the Marriage Equality campaign. We have come together as MARCH to help organize predominantly white faith communities in support of and solidarity with Black Lives Matter and other efforts to dismantle racism and white supremacy.

What is the Sacred Solidarity Network?

The Sacred Solidarity Network is a project MARCH is piloting. We are inviting 6-12 ‘pilot’ congregations to be part of a one year cohort, working in collaboration to address racism and white supremacy in ourselves, our congregations, and the wider world.

MARCH is collaborating with a number of other organizations to pilot the Sacred Solidarity Network project. Partner organizations include: The Center for Sustainable Justice, Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice & Social Transformation, OutFront MN, and the MN Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance.

What’s required of participating faith communities?

Sacred Solidarity Network Members agree to participate in the following:

- ▶ A ‘launch’ retreat on September 11th, 2016 from 1:00–7:00 for each congregation’s project team (clergy + lay leaders)

- Clergy preparation/support lunch, August 11, 2016
- A monthly meeting with congregational team leads
- A system of support for team leads and congregations
- Shared accountability
- Capturing learnings
- Refining framework & process
- Assessment and Renewal Retreat - Spring 2017

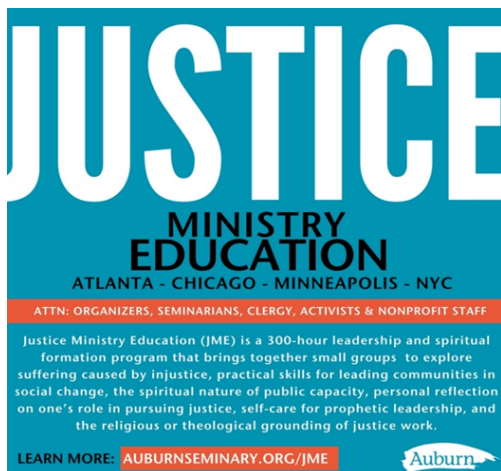
What do participating faith communities get as a result of their participation?

- Access to trainings and curated resources
- A collaboratively developed framework that helps you evaluate your faith community's efforts to realize a vision of racial justice in six key areas of praxis: Encounter, Education, Advocacy, Organizing, Envisioning, Proclamation
- Support and consulting from MARCH colleagues where needed/appropriate
- Being part of a multi-faith network of faith leaders sharing challenges and developing solutions in collaboration

You can find MARCH's work at

- <https://www.facebook.com/changeandhealingmn/>
- www.SacredSolidarity.org

4. Justice Ministry Education



Justice Ministry Education is a new form of leadership and spiritual formation for people who want to strengthen their approach to faith-rooted social justice work. The program is 300 hours: 150 hours of intensive hands-on work in a field site combined with 150 hours of small group theological reflection and learning. The program is open to leaders of any faith from a variety of professional and educational settings, including organizers, seminary students, clergy, activists and nonprofit staff. Participants who complete the program will be awarded a Certificate of Justice Ministry Education (1 unit) from Auburn Seminary. The Center for Sustainable Justice is partnering with Auburn Seminary in order to provide a Justice Ministry cohort in the Twin Cities with Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel as its supervisor. 2016 saw Rebecca engaged in a lot of

curricular design work and the pilot group will launch February 7th meeting here at SpringHouse Ministry Center with six participants in the group.

5. Finalize and Distribute *The New Q Desire Book Project*:

Because the Center for Sustainable Justice seeks to build an intersectional, religious movement for justice, we are very interested in supporting the latest in religiously-based, pro-LGBTQ thinking and organizing. We have spent the last year developing an anthology called *The New Q Desire: Learning What the Movement Is All About: Anthology of Queer People Sharing Intersectional Wisdom*. It includes the stories, examples, wisdom and reflections from about twenty, mostly people of color, religiously-

based LGBTQ activists. Contributors include: Rev. DeWayne Davis, Rabbi Joshua Lesser, Minister Louis Mitchell, Beth Zemsky, Bishop Yvette Flunder, Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, Miss Major, Peterson Toscano, Lynn Young, Urooj Arshad, Dr. Wendy Harbour, Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong, Alba Onofrio, Rev. Malcolm Himschoot, Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel and others. It is due to be released in the Winter of 2017.



A brief video which introduces the project is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Smq7FSnHoE>

6. Theology of Solidarity Writing Project:

Emerging from the MountainTop Movement Building Convening in 2015, a collaborative of organizations around the country, including the Center for Sustainable Justice, has participated in creating several circles for multifaith theological reflection on religiously based understandings of solidarity. The Center for Sustainable Justice hosted a Theology of Solidarity Writing Circle in October of 2016 in the Twin Cities. Out of that reflective space, participants will return home and write, from their religious tradition and experience, on the topic of Theology of Solidarity. The writing will be used in a variety of contexts including as educational materials for the Sacred Solidarity Cohort described above and will be submitted to be included in an anthology published by Auburn Seminary.

7. Standing Rock Solidarity:

In three different visits to camp Oceti Sakowin on the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota, through blogging and preaching and through organizing efforts in the Twin Cities, including presence at the Minneapolis City Council meeting that voted to oppose DAPL, meeting with Hennepin County Rich Stanek, working on the Steering Committee of Healing Minnesota Stories, and helping to organize and MC a #NoDAPL action at the Minneapolis City Hall, the Center for Sustainable Justice has been deeply engaged in the #NoDAPL efforts. Here are two examples of the writing that Rebecca has done around Standing Rock that were originally published on Auburn Seminary's blog (<http://auburnseminary.org/protecting-the-water-at-standing-rock/> and <http://auburnseminary.org/standing-rock-collective-confession-and-repentance-was-our-first-action/>)