

Center for Sustainable Justice at Lyndale UCC Annual Report for the work of 2020



As we continue to work together in the creation and work of the Center for Sustainable Justice, this report seeks to highlight our shared work in 2020. It represents the time and energy of the staff at Lyndale (Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel, Daniel Romero and Rev. Ashley Harness) and it represents many hours of faithful, strategic work by the membership and colleagues of Lyndale UCC.

Mission and Vision and Work of the Center for Sustainable Justice

Lyndale United Church of Christ's Mission Statement:

Lyndale United Church of Christ is a growing faith community:
Deepening our questions and spirituality,
Embodying God's healing and love,
Building a more just world here and now.

Center for Sustainable Justice History, Mission and Commitments

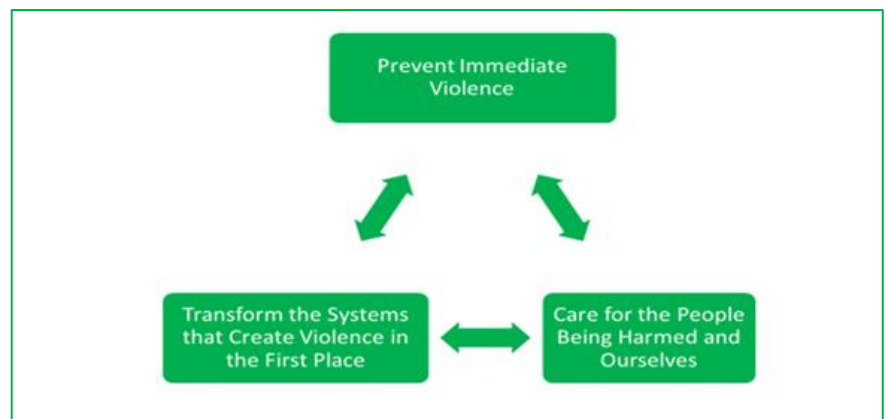
The Center for Sustainable Justice helps build the movement of religious leaders and communities working together on LGBTQ, racial, food and climate justice in the Twin Cities and across the Midwest. We do so rooted in an understanding that movements for justice are strongest and most successful when there is simultaneous work in four areas: 1. setting and sharing the vision of how the world ought be, 2. helping individual organizations work better and creating and tending the “connective tissue” between organizations, 3. mobilizing people for ethical spectacle, direct action and/or campaigns, and 4. cultivating healthy people (bodies, relationships, communities). This is illustrated below.



The Center for Sustainable Justice does work in all four areas with an emphasis on connecting and building coalitions among religious and spiritual people and organizations. Most of our work brings pro-LGBTQ people together to work on questions of racial, food and climate justice through deepening the web of relationships and the infrastructures of justice-making.

Additionally, the Center for Sustainable Justice works out of a “healing justice” framework. We are seeking a world in which there is no distinction between that which is healing and that which is justice.

The Center for Sustainable Justice seeks to act and live in ways that practice the cycle of Healing Justice with three intertwined and inextricable moves. As seen in the graphic to the right, we are called to prevent immediate violence (perpetrated by systems, by individuals, by communities); we must care for the people who are being harmed, including ourselves; and we must transform the systems that create violence in the first place.



CSJ actions, vigils, liturgical work

The work of the Center for Sustainable Justice is multi-focal. It is directed inward to educate, nurture and support the people of Lyndale. It is directed outward to build, facilitate and nurture the religiously-rooted justice ecosystem in the Twin Cities and beyond. And it is a combination of inward and outward designed to support the collaboration of Lyndale folk with wider justice movements. In years past, we've sought to distinguish these foci in describing the work. But, as with many other things, Covid made these categories more porous. And so what follows is more a chronological recounting of the year.

Work at the Intersection of White Supremacy and Anti-Semitism

Over the course of the Trump presidency there has been a growing and deepening alliance of white supremacists and anti-Semitic activity. The melding of these movements is known as white nationalism. In response, CSJ worked on several levels to educate about the ways in which racism and anti-Semitism act together in white nationalism and how Christianity is distorted to baptize the movement. We started with a pastoral letter in late 2019:

Following a series of Anti-Semitic attacks, Lyndale's pastors worked with Rev. Jeff Sartain of Edina Community Lutheran Church and Liz Loeb of the Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice and Social Transformation to write this letter that was shared with the whole Lyndale community.

Beloved Lyndale,

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus with candlelight and feasting, with cheer and carols of good news of great joy, we also face the heartbreaking discord of recent violence against our Jewish kindred. A rash of anti-Semitic attacks in our country draw us to some of the most difficult parts of our own story as Christians. As with so many horrific events, the news comes at us with what seems to be more pain that we know how to take in. We write today out of love because we know so many of you are distressed by the reports and find yourselves wondering what you might do.

There have been nine anti-Semitic hate crimes that occurred over the past week and coincide with Hanukkah, with the majority of the attacks targeting those who Orthodox and visibly Jewish. This at the end of a year in which Anti-Semitic hate crimes have sky-rocketed.

This news strikes close to home. Many of you have family members who are Jewish, and dear friends and neighbors who both fear and grieve these attacks. Because we live in a community of deep interdependence here in the Twin Cities, we are all deeply pained by the attacks against any of our neighbors—particularly our Jewish neighbors, especially Jews of color who are facing anti-Semitism and racism at the same time. And the fact that these are happening during the Advent and Christmas season is particularly poignant.

As Christians, we are also painfully aware that our Christian religion itself bears responsibility for anti-Semitism. Throughout our scriptures, our hymns, our prayers and liturgy are both egregious and subtle messages that our faith is superior in some way, or a fulfillment of what is lacking in Judaism. Most of us have done too little to make our congregations aware of these hateful messages woven into the fabric of our faith. This may even be surprising to you now to read this, yet it is undeniably true that Christians carry a particular responsibility for anti-Semitism. And much of the Christian tradition has been distorted and twisted to condone and support a movement known as white nationalism which weaves anti-Semitism with racism, hatred of Muslims and violence. We, as Christians, also carry a particular responsibility to respond to this growing tide.

There is much we can do, and not much of it is easy. Anti-Semitism is so much a part of our story that it takes great care and intention to begin to develop both awareness of and a commitment to undoing the harm. Still, we can start, and while these horrific attacks leave us feeling helpless we are not.

1. Reach out to a neighbor, a friend, a nearby synagogue with a message of love and concern. We can be so afraid to say the wrong thing we say nothing at all. Try this, "My heart is aching since I learned about the recent violence against your people. I pledge to pray, and also to stand with you in this time of fear and grief."
2. Donate to a cause that works to end anti-Semitism. Locally, Jewish Community Action is working at the intersections of racial, economic and religious justice: <https://secure.everyaction.com/wEKrwFM3R0GHuZ3-uk3D8A2>

3. Educate yourself on the roots of anti-Semitism in Christianity. Here is a resource we suggest. <https://ifrej.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JFREJ-Understanding-Antisemitism-November-2017-v1-3-2.pdf>
4. Support and encourage your pastors and your congregations to do that difficult but important work of dismantling the anti-Semitism intrinsic in our Christian tradition. With humility, let us confess and then open ourselves to the ways our tradition has perpetuated the hate that erupts into violence.

Finally, take care of your own tender hearts. If we are to foster open and loving care for those who are suffering, we need one another. We write with deep gratitude and care for our own communities of faith that allow us to hold the pain of the world while also orienting ourselves toward hope.

In love and in hope,

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel and Rev. Ashley Harness



This was followed by a series in Adult Education about the History of Anti-Semitism which featured the teaching of two Jewish leaders, Carin Mrotz, Executive Director of Jewish Community Action and a white woman and Enzi Tanner, a community organizer and an African American transgender man. They had originally been scheduled to lead a community forum but when Covid hit, we moved their teaching online and various local congregations were able to use their wisdom with their congregations.



For Good Friday, a day that, historically, has been used as an excuse for pogrom and other anti-Semitic violence, we collaborated with our partners at Healing Minnesota Stories, the Interfaith Coalition on Immigration and several churches to produce the *Good Friday Walk for Justice: Stations of the Cross*. This powerful film project also invites participants to enter into ritual and reflection about the interweaving systems of crucifixion that have perpetrated slavery, genocide and colonization historically and continue to deal in death today. It can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/405958256>

Covid-19 and Pandemic as Portal

For the Lyndale newsletter, the Lyndaily that came out in mid-April, Rev. Rebecca wrote these words:

I can hardly believe how much the world has shifted since last I wrote for the Lyndaily. It has been only a month, and yet our daily lives have been completely transformed. The same is true for our world. This is both painful and tragic AND opens up a portal for us to make our dreams for a different world possible. As Arundhati Roy says ...

"[U]nlike the flow of capital, this virus seeks proliferation, not profit, and has, therefore, inadvertently, to some extent, reversed the direction of the flow. It has mocked immigration controls, biometrics, digital surveillance and every other kind of data analytics, and struck hardest — thus far — in the richest, most powerful nations of the world, bringing the engine of capitalism to a juddering halt. Temporarily perhaps, but at least long enough for us to examine its parts, make an assessment and decide whether we want to help fix it, or look for a better engine.

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to "normality", trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality....

*Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a **portal, a gateway between one world and the next**. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. **And ready to fight for it.**"*

And so, in this time of COVID-19, we continue our work of naming, calling out and calling in, resisting all that seeks to harm and mar God's creatures and creation itself. AND we seek to respond to this pandemic by dreaming and scheming and preparing ourselves to break with the past and go through the portal into a new world: one of justice and love.

This theme of pandemic as portal guided our efforts for much of the rest of the year. In April and May we held a series of virtual gatherings to consider what a world of climate justice would look like given the positive impact that global pause had on the worldwide environment? What would a racially just world look like? What would a world of equity look like with a public health system that actually served people? What would a world of economic justice and living wages look like? Each of these conversations emerged from the wisdom that dreaming and envisioning another world being possible is the first step in creating it.

Climate Justice

One of the areas in which Covid has opened up new dreaming and renewed work is that of climate justice. The Center for Sustainable Justice at Lyndale has long understood the ways in which questions of religiously-rooted justice are intertwined and inextricable. But this is particularly evident in the work around climate justice. Economies of extraction primarily pollute and destroy the health of communities of color and indigenous peoples; pipeline projects violate treaties with indigenous nations; and it is young queer, indigenous, Black and people of color whose work represents an amazing future.

CSJ worked closely with the Lyndale/SpringHouse Green Team to host a powerful Earth Week. Here were the offerings:



Earth Week

The Green Team has created a powerful list of possibilities for the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. They will be providing daily activities for action and art; and offering opportunities to gather over Zoom for education and community. Keep on the lookout for eblasts!

Sunday, April 19th

9:15 am: Adult Education will focus on COVID-19 and Climate Justice

10:30 am: Earth Day Worship will feature Rev. Brooks Berndt, national UCC Minister for Environmental Justice and a special Earth Day liturgy

Afternoon: Families with children and youth should keep a lookout for a special gift package from the Green Team to arrive at their doorstep!

Monday, April 20th

➤ Daily Action Alert will arrive in your email with activities and actions for the whole family!

1:00 pm- Zoom gathering to watch "The Story of Stuff" and "The Story of Bottled Water."

Tuesday, April 21st

➤ Daily Action Alert will arrive in your email with activities and actions for the whole family!

1:00 pm- Zoom gathering to watch a short collection of nature films from Defenders of Wildlife.

Wednesday, April 22nd, 50th Anniversary of EARTH DAY

1:00- 3:00 pm JOIN MNIPL and our religiously-rooted partners for an Earth Day Multi-Faith Livestream. Our own Rev. Dr. Rebecca will be helping lead prayers.



This moment of pandemic reminds us how deeply connected we are to each other and to the earth. We know that many of us are suffering, and we are finding new ways to care for one another and for our planet. **On the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, join us for a virtual gathering of prayer, storytelling, art, and wisdom from our diverse spiritual teachings** that speak to this current moment of crisis. We invite you to connect and support one other as we navigate this difficult time, and to send a powerful message to decision-makers that climate justice is a top priority.

Thursday, April 23rd

- Daily Action Alert will arrive in your email with activities and actions for the whole family!
1:00 pm- Zoom gathering to watch the UCC-produced film, Troubled Waters.

Friday, April 24th

- Daily Action Alert will arrive in your email with activities and actions for the whole family!

Saturday, April 25th

- Daily Action Alert will arrive in your email with activities and actions for the whole family!

Sunday, April 26th

9:15 am: Special Adult Education with Dwight Wagenius exploring climate-justice investing strategies



Throughout 2020, the indigenous-led opposition to the Enbridge Line 3 project (which would transport tar-sands oil and would endanger all of Minnesota’s watersheds (including passing under the Mississippi River three times) worked diligently. CSJ followed their leadership and organized members of Lyndale and the wider CSJ network to participate in a number of prayer vigils and letter writing campaigns as we sought to block the project. In December of 2020, CSJ participated in two events led by Honor the Earth and Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light. The first was a clergy call for prayer and resistance in Palisade, Minnesota in which 75 religious leaders participated in a water ceremony led by Sharon Day (Ojibwe) who is known as the Water Walker. The second was an opportunity to participate in the daily protests at the site of construction at Palisade. Here are Rev. Rebecca’s words from the clergy call and a description of the daily protest by Lyndale member, Claire Klein.

Over five hundred years ago, my European Christian ancestors embarked on a well-thought, well-strategized plan to dominate the world. It started with the invasion and subjugation of African Muslim’s and pagans and became the Atlantic slave trade. And it continued with Columbus’s campaign of terror in the Americas. This well-thought, well-strategized plan to dominate the world was and is known as the Doctrine of Discovery and there is a bold and direct line between the actions of those terrorists and their blasphemous colonizing in that era to pipelines and extractive economies in 2020. The Doctrine of Discovery is rooted in Empire Christianity and it was blasphemous then and it is blasphemous now. It wreaked untold suffering then and it threatens the very existence of our planet in this moment.

It is as an act of repentance and reparation that I stand before you and with you as a white Christian pastor today, seeking to stop Line 3, particularly in this season. Dec 17, 2020 stands in between the third and fourth Sundays in the Christian season of Advent which is a time of waiting and preparation for love and justice to be born in our world. It is also a time when we Christians believe we are invited to find ways to embody the same kind of solidarity with love and justice that God demonstrates in the birth of Jesus.

And, so, it seems particularly appropriate to be here with you: in repentance and solidarity.

But one of the things about repentance and solidarity is that they are not one-time things. We must practice them again and again if we are to experience healing. And that is certainly true about our work around Line 3. The other thing is that in the face of well-thought, well-strategized doctrines of discovery and destruction, we must pray and organize in well-thought and well-strategized ways, too.

For the past almost three years, I've gathered with many of you in prayer and ceremony to say no to this pipeline. Following the leadership of indigenous kindred, we've protested, we've attended committee hearings, we've participated in comment periods, we've sung and meditated and lamented and organized. We've taken action through the Poor People's Campaign and the Water is Life Ceremony in the Governor's Receiving Room. We've participated in coalitions of all kinds.

And now we are here because we know the danger, the destruction and the death that this pipeline represents: for our planet, for the waters that support life and for each of us and all of us.

But we are also here because our action isn't just no-saying, it isn't just protest and strategic resistance. We are here because we know that water is sacred, that all of creation is bound together in a blessing and is kin to one another. And so I stand here in deepest gratitude for being bound to and with you and these waters and these lands and these creatures. And I return thanks to the Sacred whom I call God for all who are saying no to this pipeline and yes to life.

...



When Rev. Rebecca invited us to drive up north to bring supplies to and stand with the water protectors in Palisade, MN, my initial thought was "Oh - I couldn't do that." But when I looked on my calendar and saw the empty square, I was thinking more and more that I could do this.

Before departing, I picked up some of the items and supplies listed on the website - First Aid kits, batteries, hand and foot warmers, a gift card to REI, gloves and hats, warm socks... It was hard to decide if it would be better to purchase the supplies or just give the money director as needs change quickly. I ended up doing a little of both.

Though there was ice on the roads, I found my way to the address given to me and the property was decorated with signs and flags proclaiming indigenous rights. There were two folks at the entryway greeting (and I think "screening") all those who were coming in, asking about our connections to the cause. There were a number of tents and oodles of donations lined up on a table but not very many people out and about.

I found my way down the road a few hundred feet to a group gathered directly across from the driveway into the construction site. There were some younger folx from the Cities and a woman from the Ojibwe tribe, Tanya. Tanya wasn't shy about taunting the workers and truck drivers on the megaphone - she joked about surreptitiously zip tying the workers in the porta-potty and chanted "You're raping your mother!" While this was alarming to hear at first, the truth of the statement sunk in the longer I stood there. While we stood together, I learned more about the details of the pipeline plan including that it will cross the Mississippi three times and touch every major watershed in Minnesota.

The group grew as some that walked down a path to observe the construction came back - including our very own Meyerhoffs and Fred & Mary. We saw huge sections of pipe being brought in by the truckload. The group ventured closer to the construction site and formed a line across the county highway, with the guidance of the veteran water protectors who gave a preview of how the police may respond. I was grateful for my training during the Poor People's Campaign that reminded me that although I wasn't up for doing this direct action, my presence on the sidelines would still be valuable. I took over the mega-phone and shared some songs ("There are more waters rising" and "Somebody's hurting my sibling") and chants. Trucks came to a gentle stop in front of the line and waited until the police came and told the group to disperse. They came back across the road to the private property where we started.

After that, we warmed our toes by the fire then the Lyndalians walked down to the Mississippi River - only a few feet from where they were building. It was a beautiful winter scene - quiet tall trees, shadows growing, snow blanketing it all. It was devastating to think what would be coming through that very area in just a few days or weeks. The Meyerhoffs and I stood quietly together and took in all that was around us before we went our separate ways home.

#FreeThemAll

The Covid-19 pandemic also created an urgent moment in the #FreeThemAll campaign as detainees and prisoners in all kinds of facilities were singularly vulnerable to the spread of the virus. Particularly in his role as Community Minister for Immigration, Pastor Daniel Romero worked Lyndale member Mary Vanderford to collaborate with MIRAc (Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee) and ICOM (Interfaith Coalition on Immigration) to hold a series of vigils to protest against people dying in ICE custody from COVID-19. Pastor Daniel and Rev. Rebecca spoke at the second of these actions. Here are their words.

Pastor Daniel:

"To engage injustice is to confront it and tonight we will do both. We have lost a brother and the systemic oppression that killed him is to blame. At 2:15am on May 6th, Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia died of COVID-19 after he was hospitalized in San Diego, and on a ventilator for more than a week. Tonight, we honor him and his family. Carlos would have been 58 years old later this month and we now invite you into 58 seconds of remembrance. During that time, I ask you to pray, chant, meditate, shout or otherwise call for justice in your own way for him and for the 30,000 immigrant detainees being held in 200 ICE jails across the United States. [pause]

Carlos died after being held in the Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego County and his death was not only preventable, it was predictable! Doctors and nurses had asked for protective equipment for staff and for detainees, and they called for detainees to be released because they knew that people would be infected and would die. And, 224 faith based organizations and more than 1,000 leaders in 46 states had sent a letter to the President, to Congress and to Governors begging for more protective equipment, more testing and for the jailed to be released. Sadly, their please were ignored.



The Otay Mesa facility where Carlos contracted COVID-19 is owned and operated by Core Civic, the largest for-profit private prison company in the U.S.. Otay Mesa is the jail where 705 Coronavirus cases have been confirmed. But they are only one of the U.S. empire's henchmen. We lay the responsibility for Carlos's death in the lap of:

- President Trump, whose racist anti-immigrant policies have led to racial profiling and a surge of white nationalism around the world.

- We hold responsible the United States Congress who have failed to enact comprehensive, compassionate immigration laws
- We hold responsible Thomas Homan, the Director of ICE, one of the chief architects of heinous ICE policy.
- We hold accountable Chad Wolf, the Secretary of Homeland Security
- We hold responsible, Damon Hininger, CEO of Core Civic and,
- We hold responsible, Chris LaRose, the Chief Warden at the Otay Mesa Detention Center.

This was a preventable and a predictable death. Say his name with me...

Carlos! Ernesto! Escobar! Mejia! (3x)

Free them all! (3x) People over profits! (3x) Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia presente! (3x)

Rev. Rebecca

I stand before you as one ordained as a minister. And in my Christian tradition, there is a portion of the gospel of Luke, in the fourth chapter, where we hear about how Jesus begins his public ministry.

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

To proclaim release to the captives... release the captives, release the captive, release the captives...

At the core of the gospel is the call to release the captives.

But I also stand before you as a white woman and as a lesbian. And these pieces of my identity have given me enough experiences to understand that my beloved Christian tradition has been deeply marred by centuries of racism and theologies of domination.

And my beloved Christianity has become, too often, a tool of Empire and oppression. There are pastors who proclaim that children and adults incarcerated by ICE are there because the United States is acting as an instrument of God. There are people who preach that detaining people is a just treatment for those who have broken the law. But it is the same law of Empire that allowed the Central American Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement to be signed. It is the same law of Empire that allowed the United States to invade Central America dozens of times and for a private citizen to set himself up as president of Nicaragua. It is the same law of Empire that sees refugees of war, climate change, violence and oppression as those to be imprisoned instead of the perpetrators of greed, depravity and moral vacuousness.

Who's the real criminal? Who's the real criminal? Who's the real criminal?

My friends, as a Christian, I am called to follow Jesus in good-news-proclaiming, captive-releasing, oppressed-freeing, Year of God's favor-announcing justice loving ways.

No matter what your religious practice, will you join me?

Release the captives, release the captives, release the captives.

Say yes to love! Say yes to love! Say yes to love!

George Floyd Murder



It was in the midst of our work on white nationalism and our dreaming of what portals the pandemic might open that George Floyd was murdered just two miles from our church by Minneapolis Police. In response, members of Lyndale joined with community partners and CSJ in protest, prayer, lament and action. Amidst the Uprising that followed Floyd's murder, CSJ organized the Lyndale/SpringHouse building to serve as a medic station, participated in a whole host of "community aid" projects (such as donating food and medical supplies to local homeless encampments and to George Floyd Square organizers), and continued to follow the leadership of Black Visions Collective (a largely LGBTQ Black organization) and their Reclaim the Block initiative. In the days following Mr. Floyd's murder, Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel wrote in an Action Alert to the 550-person CSJ list:

The Center for Sustainable Justice has signed on to the following letter from **MARCH (Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change and Healing)** and offers the action steps at the bottom as a concrete way to respond to the horrifying, traumatizing murder of George Floyd.

As faith leaders from diverse religious backgrounds, we join with the calls of our broader community in demanding the immediate arrest of Officers Derek Chauvin, Thomas Lane, Tou Thao, and J Alexander Kueng. While Minneapolis burns and our city suffers collective trauma, the man who killed George Floyd and those who stood by and passively watched a murder are free. This cannot stand. Any further delay stokes the fires of rage, despair, and hopelessness.

Let us be clear: while attention in the media and from politicians turns to the uprising we are witnessing in the streets, we know that these protests are a reflection of the breaking hearts of the Black community whose lives have again and again been treated as disposable by police, the legal system, and our elected officials. What we witnessed last night in Minneapolis is the direct consequence of this generational pain--not just the pain of the present injustice, but of a decades- and centuries- long legacy of white supremacy.

Nothing will bring George Floyd back, but we are committed to fighting for the long-term solutions that bring real safety to the people: living wages, affordable housing, accessible health care, elected officials who prioritize people over politics and profits, alternatives to mass incarceration and criminalization. And we follow the lead of people from the most impacted communities, knowing that they are the experts in their own experiences and they are the visionaries who can help us imagine a more just and equitable world.

But in this particular moment, we echo Mayor Frey's question, "Why is the man who killed George Floyd not in jail?" We urge you to immediately charge and arrest Chauvin and his accomplices, and declare unequivocally that the murder of Black people by police is despicable and utterly unacceptable. There cannot be peace until there is justice.

We pray for our city and the trauma that is boiling over as justice has been denied so long. We demand action from the leaders who claim to seek justice. We invite our faith leader siblings near and far to speak boldly and prophetically toward collective liberation and justice.

Thus far, this letter has been signed by over 100 multifaith clergy. If you'd like to sign on: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeJYBoPu6barwOX3nXBbwZbfP-iMbdg_aNjwyafwLfB50J4ig/viewform

And here are some more concrete suggestions:

1. **Phone a friend.** Take ten minutes and have a conversation with someone you know about police violence and George Floyd's murder. Ask what the other person thinks, listen to their responses, and share your own perspective.

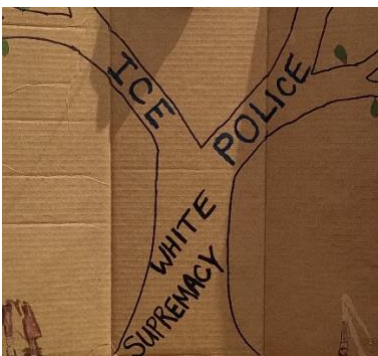
2. **Phone a decision-maker.** Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman will decide whether or not the officers who killed George Floyd are charged with a crime. Call Attorney Freeman at 612-348-5550 and demand that he press charges against all officers involved with the incident.
3. **Donate** to the George Floyd [Memorial Fund](#).
4. **Support front-line organizations** who are leading work on the ground: [Black Visions Collective](#), [Reclaim the Block](#), [Minnesota Freedom Fund](#), [CTUL](#), [COPAL](#), [Black Lives Matter Minneapolis](#), [NAACP Minneapolis](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#)
5. **Read and educate yourself.** MPD150 has released a thorough and insightful [report](#) asking us to imagine a different relationship to policing as a society. Join in the discussion.

Grateful for all of the ways that we are praying with our feet, our hearts, our bodies,

Rebecca

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel
Director, Center for Sustainable Justice

Abolition Movement



Woven with the response to the murder of George Floyd is the work focused on the ways in which white supremacy, theologies of punishment and notions of law and order all manifest themselves in policing. The Center for Sustainable Justice sought to follow the leadership of BIPOC (Black, indigenous and People of Color) organizations as the world protested and organized following Mr. Floyd's death. CSJ put out this Action Alert to its list:

The Center for Sustainable Justice is part of a coalition of groups led by Black Visions and Reclaim the Block to support efforts to #DefundPolice and #FundCommunity. Here are several action steps you can take to both learn about the police abolition movement and the specific work that is happening in Minneapolis and nationwide in light of the police killing of George Floyd.

The New York Times ran a very helpful opinion piece by Mariame Kaba on June 12, 2020. It succinctly outlines some of the basics of police abolition. You can read it [here](#).

There is a very helpful four-day course being offered online by SONG (Southerners on New Ground), Dream Defenders, Sunrise Movement and Afrosocialists that promises to:

- Understand what *exactly* the demand "Defund the Police" means
- Envision what a world without police could look like
- Get ready to take action to defund police in your community

To register for the class go [here](#).

If you would like a reading list to educate yourself on abolition, The Abusable Past has compiled a great [list](#).

For a very helpful connection between immigration and police abolition, Freedom for Immigrants has a great resource [here](#).

To take local action to urge the Minneapolis City Council to put Changing the City Charter to abolish the police, here is a [Color of Change petition](#).

If you would like to phone bank to urge that the Charter Amendment be put on the 2020 ballot, here is a [sign up](#) for calling times tomorrow (June 24) and Thursday, June 25.

This is an important time when we, as religious, spiritual and people of moral conviction can pray, learn and act for God's justice. I invite you into it.

Grateful for all of the ways that we are praying with our feet, our hearts, our bodies,

Rebecca

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel
Director, Center for Sustainable Justice

Additionally, CSJ shared the following in the Lyndale newsletter, The Lyndaily:

It has been quite a month in the life of Lyndale, in each of our lives and in our Cities and world. In many ways, the definition of what we thought was possible six weeks ago has shifted dramatically. The ways in which this pandemic is acting as a portal (Arundhati Roy) are becoming increasingly clear. One of those areas is racial justice in general and police abolition in particular. That the Minneapolis City Council has voted to move forward an amendment to the City Charter is a reality that even those who have been working for decades in the abolition movement could not have foreseen.

I know that it has only been in the last two or three years that I have known about the police abolition movement and begun to educate myself. It was in June of 2018 that many of us participated in the Minnesota Poor People's Campaign action at the Minneapolis City Hall. Several folks—mostly from the Catholic Worker community—went into Mayor Jacob Frey's office and poured dirt on the floor to create a grave. They then held a symbolic funeral for all of those who had been killed by Minneapolis police. While that was happening, two or three of us distributed copies of [Enough is Enough](#), a report on the first 150 years of the Minneapolis Police Department which calls for police abolition. Simultaneously, we held a rally in which Junauda Petrus (author of the Coretta Scott-King award-winning book, *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them*) read her poem COULD WE PLEASE GIVE THE POLICE DEPARTMENTS TO THE GRANDMOTHERS? Which reads in part:

... If you up to mischief, they will pick you up swiftly in their sweet ride and look at you until you catch shame and look down at your lap. She asks you if you are hungry and you say "yes" and of course you are. She got a crown of dreadlocks and on the dashboard you see brown faces like yours, shea buttered and loved up.

And there are no precincts.

Just love temples, that got spaces to meditate and eat delicious food. mangoes, blueberries, nectarines, cornbread, peas and rice, fried plantain, fufu, yams, greens, okra, pecan pie, salad and lemonade. Things that make your mouth water and soul arrive...

These were very helpful, invitational and challenging introductions to the police abolition movement that several of us at Lyndale experienced. And now it seems as if the whole world is talking about police reform, change and abolition. We, at Lyndale and the Center for Sustainable Justice, are including conversations about police abolition as it relates to our racial justice work and our immigrant justice ministry. Recently, CSJ sent out an action alert that has both educational suggestions and tangible things to do. We ask that you read and consider what is best for you. You can see the list [here](#).

In the gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples, "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8: 32b) This phrase is used in many settings but most scholars argue it is intended to talk about the ways in which sin (oppression, violence, hatred) imprisons and the ways in which justice-love liberates. In this moment, it is critically important that we as a community recognize the role that systemic sin: racism, extractive capitalism, rape culture — imprisons. And the work of justice-love calls us to grapple with what makes for liberation. In this context, how do we liberate ourselves and our Cities from the sin of police violence as a manifestation of systemic racism? I am prayerful that our journey together will both bless us and be a blessing in our community

Journey to Freedom Series



SERIES THEME: **INTERSECTIONALITY**

Another profound experience from 2020 was the Journey to Freedom Series which the Center for Sustainable Justice helped organize. Focusing primarily on the voices of LGBTQ people and people of color, this series was dreamed of and sponsored by First Covenant Church of Minneapolis and the Rev. Jia Starr-Brown. In addition to the six sermons which were used by several congregations (including Lyndale), there was new music written and performed by LGBTQ artists of color, there were fifteen workshops, book groups, Bible studies and discussion forums to help lead participants through an understanding of the interconnections of LGBTQ and racial justice. Rev. Rebecca and former CSJ Intern, Rev. Matta Ghaly were two of the featured preachers and workshop leaders. This series, which ran for six weeks at the end of July and the month of August was a very important space to reflect theologically and biblically on the murder of George Floyd and how people of faith were and are called to respond.

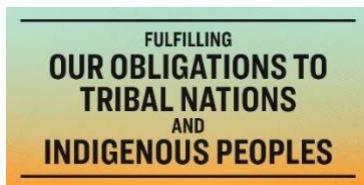
Reparations

Another impact of the pandemic as well as combined with the murder of George Floyd is that the conversation about reparations—for indigenous and Black (American Descendants of Slaves) folx—has expanded rapidly. Reparations has been a focus of the work of the CSJ for several years, mostly through the work of MARCH (Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change and Healing). But 2020 has provided an opportunity for an expansion of the work—both within Lyndale and in the broader community. Weekly, the Lyndale community begins worship with a Land Acknowledgement which grounds the work. Here is what we shared in August of 2020:

The Center for Sustainable Justice and Lyndale UCC are in good company as we seek to respond to George Floyd's murder. Many multifaith organizations are grappling with questions of how we are healers and repairers of the breach as we are called to be in our tradition.

CSJ is one of several organizations that is planning community-wide conversations and truth-telling around our nation's original sins of indigenous genocide and slavery that can lay the groundwork for the work of

repair/reparations. CSJ is working with Healing Minnesota Stories, Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, ASDIC, the Racial Justice Program of the Minnesota Council of Churches, MARCH and local Jewish leaders to start to hold public reparations conversations.



What do we mean by reparations?

In all of this, we are all exploring what we mean by reparations. MARCH's reparations fund, CommunityWell, uses these definitions as a guide:

- Reparations as Spiritual Practice (how do I grow an awareness about ownership, hoarding wealth, whiteness as access to transgenerational wealth, own family history, personal daily action)
- Reparations as Relationships (building genuine relationships with folx who have experienced the harm of oppression—showing up in solidarity, organizing relationships, who's leading and who's following, centering Brown, Black and Indigenous leadership, knowing each other)
- Reparations as Resources—shifting patterns of hoarding so that resources can be shared equally (money, land), divesting
- Reparations as Truth-telling—making sure the true history is told about Doctrine of Discovery and Slavery, White Supremacy, Extractive Capitalism

As a way to broaden the coalition of those working to bring about reparations, Lyndale's Racial Justice Task Force is leading **Adult Education in September around Reparations**. We want to encourage you to attend.

Sept 13th will feature Rev. Rebecca providing definitions of reparations and theological frames

Sept 20th will feature Jonathan Stegall situating police and prison abolition in relationship to reparations work

Sept 27th will be a group discussion about how Lyndale can engage the spiritual/organizing work of reparations

Advent Las Posadas Prayer Journey: Sacred Sites of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love

As we drew near to the end of 2020, we asked what we could be doing liturgically to ground ourselves and our wider community in light of the twin pandemics of Covid and racial injustice. Because the experience of our *Good Friday Walk for Justice: Stations of the Cross* collaboration was received so well (and was seen as such a creative response to Covid), we decided to collaborate with the same partners for a series of short Advent films. These were designed to be used in worship, but they could also stand-alone as an Advent practice. Created by the collective of participants, directed and filmed by Jimenez Photography and produced by the Center for Sustainable Justice, this project followed the practice of Las Posadas. The description of the series shares, “Join us for an Advent Journey of Las Posadas as we visit several sacred sites in the Twin Cities and practice place-based story-telling. Liberation amidst desperation, justice amidst oppression, resistance and solidarity amidst seeming annihilation, these are some of the stories we hear on this Advent journey. We light the first candle of Hope at the Four Oaks and tell the story of these grandmothers. We light the second candle of peace and ask what makes for peace at the Survivors of Sexual Violence Memorial. We light the third candle and claim the joy that comes from resistance and persistence at B'dote. And we light the fourth candle and tell the story of love at George Floyd Square.”

As with the Good Friday experience, dozens of churches used these films for their worship and hundreds used them for their individual Advent practice. Each of the films can be seen on the CSJ Vimeo page:

<https://vimeo.com/user112322978>

Ongoing CSJ Work and Partnerships

Most of CSJ's work is done in deep partnerships. While the above sought to chronicle the work of the Center for Sustainable Justice, the descriptions below are of the ongoing work that happens on a monthly or regular basis.

Social Justice Forum



There exist five justice teams, task forces and committees within Lyndale: Social Justice Committee, Racial Justice Task Force, Green Team (this is a SpringHouse-wide committee), Sanctuary-Supporting and Immigrant-Welcoming Task Force (this is a SpringHouse-wide committee) and Activistas. For the past three years, these committees have met together monthly in order to leverage the intersections of oppression and justice and to collaborate. These meetings, known as The Social Justice Forum, are also open to anyone who wants to become involved in the justice work of Lyndale and SpringHouse.

Each month, the Director of the Center for Sustainable Justice helps plan, support and facilitate the Social Justice Forum. It is in this context that all five teams have developed and done their work.

Community Immigration Ministry

One of the ministry's that CSJ supports and helps supervise is that of Pastor Daniel Romero as the Community Minister for Immigration (CMI). The CMI's primary ministry involves acting as a Consultant to the Interfaith Coalition on Immigration (ICOM), and also supporting and promoting Lyndale's mission. What follows is Pastor Daniel's summary of his work in 2020.

As with all facets of society, the COVID-19 pandemic and local and national political events have profoundly disrupted and challenged this ministry and while we continue to assess and adjust our important work, we have also managed to realize significant successes.

Vigils and Courtwatch

Due to COVID, ICOM monthly vigils were suspended in April and May but resumed in June with in-person participation limited to 50 people or less to allow for distancing. In December 2020 and January 2021, vigils were held online.

- In June, we held a vigil at the Sherburne County jail in support of Gregorio Montejo.
- Springhouse hosted the vigil in August. (Using signs made the SpringHouse youth)
- At the October vigil, Episcopal Bishop Craig Loya recommitted to the What Would Whipple Do? and Sanctuary State campaigns.
- Courtwatch has been suspended due to COVID.

Accompaniment

In-person accompaniment of immigrants has been severely impacted by COVID with volunteers understandably being reluctant to work directly with immigrant families. In August, intake for new family referrals was suspended.

- We created a new model for working with families using “Accompaniment Plans” and “Accompaniment Teams.”
- We provided more than \$20,000 of financial support to 22 individuals and families.
- The range of other supports we provided includes legal referrals, donating to legal expenses, dental care, providing funds for a deported Somali woman to rebuild her life, and to help find housing.
- We supported four detainees who were released back to their families and advocated against ICE regarding five people who were eventually deported.
- The CMI visited three immigrant detainees at the Kandiyohi County jail.

Organizing and Advocacy

We have remained active by engaging with community partners in more than a dozen in-person and online actions to advocate for release of immigrants from Minnesota jails and promoting progressive policies.

- The Sanctuary State Coalition (SSC) started with five interfaith institutional partners and now claims 16.
- The SSC held a 3-part webinar in December that had more than 100 registrations.
- We are providing key leadership for the Hennepin County Separation Ordinance campaign.

MARCH (Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change and Healing)



The Center for Sustainable Justice is a key member of the Steering Committee of MARCH and Rev. Rebecca serves as facilitator of the MARCH table.

MARCH is an open coalition of explicitly pro-LGBTQ faith leaders from diverse communities, religious institutions, and spiritual traditions. Our primary focus is building a movement of people of faith and conviction and spiritual and religious communities focused on dismantling white supremacy. In recent years we’ve become increasingly aware of the ways in which white supremacy is woven with anti-Semitism and our focus has broadened.

Our methodology is to work as partners in solidarity with movements for justice led by frontline communities. MARCH works to build a connected community of congregations, spiritual traditions, and faith communities working to leverage their resources in solidarity with movements for collective liberation rooted in intersectional racial justice that are led by Native, Black, and Brown communities, and by the communities most impacted by the systems of oppression we seek to change.

MARCH works in the following areas:

Sacred Solidarity Network:

The SSN is a cohort-based program that is designed to train congregational/community teams to lead their congregations/communities through a racial justice/dismantling white supremacy process. Since the Fall of 2016, we've trained 21 Christian, Jewish and UUA congregations. SSN's plan for 2019-2020 was to run a "Sacred Solidarity Network Lab" in which graduate congregations would meet monthly to workshop issues with which they were grappling. The Lab ran through February but was interrupted by Covid. In its stead, the Sacred Solidarity Network is involved in two different projects: to create an online Sacred Solidarity Network 101 curriculum that can be used asynchronously and in hybrid settings. As of this printing, the first session (of five) has been written, filmed and edited and the second is in the writing phase.

Additionally, in response to the murder of George Floyd, the Sacred Solidarity Network developed and is running a five-part series on Police and Prison Abolition for SSN graduate congregations and any community affiliated with the MARCH network. We've had 17 congregations represented (with an average of 40 people per session) as we've explored the history of abolition, definitions and theologies of punishment and abolition from various religious traditions. Here's what we said about the series:

Policing, Abolition and Transformative Justice

Over the past month, uprisings in the Twin Cities and across the globe have crystallized what many frontline communities have been demanding for generations - that we must dismantle the system of violent policing that has always disproportionately targeted Black, Brown, Native, POC, and Indigenous people, and that we must re-imagine a world in which safety and wellness are resourced and maintained by the people.

This year, MARCH's Sacred Solidarity Network is offering a five-session interactive [seminar](#) intended to engage members of congregations around issues of abolition, policing, and transformative justice.

These sessions will provide:

1. Tools and support for leading broader conversations about abolition, policing, and transformative justice within their own congregations and communities (including around theology); and
2. Tools and support for directly participating in local movements aimed at confronting policing and state violence.

Mobilization and Direct Action

MARCH understands that mobilizing pro-LGBTQ religious people for action is critical. In the last several years, MARCH has built a mobilization network (using a listserv, Facebook, Twitter and Signal) of congregations and religious leaders who have been present at marches, protests and events ranging from the Two-Spirit camp at Standing Rock to Rev. Dr. William Barber's Revival in the Twin Cities to the Capitol to protest the killing of Philando Castille.

With the spree of police killings, most importantly that of George Floyd which happened one block from Calvary Lutheran Church, one of our Sacred Solidarity Network congregations, most of MARCH's mobilization and direct action has been directed toward following the leadership of Black Visions Collective and Reclaim the Block. Early in the summer this was toward socially distanced protests, vigils and rallies. Later in the summer it was toward getting a Charter Amendment removing the Minneapolis Police Department from the Minneapolis Charter on the ballot (which failed because of the Charter Commission's blockage but which can be placed by citizen action in coming years). And in the Fall, the action has been largely focused on moving monies away from armed policing toward mental health interventions and affordable housing programs. Many MARCH-affiliated congregations, including Lyndale, submitted testimony in support of reducing the police department's budget.

In 2021, CSJ and MARCH will be partnering with Reclaim the Block to provide educational opportunities for religious communities on defunding and abolition efforts.

CommunityWell

MARCH members have begun the work of framing what repair/reparations work might look like and how we might more concretely help support LGBTQ and pro-LGBTQ people of color and indigenous (POCI)-led organizations and transfer resources and money from predominantly-white congregations to them. They began mapping the resources of MARCH member communities and the needs of several POCI-led organizations with which MARCH members have relationships. In 2020, MARCH leadership (including Rev. Rebecca) has been working closely with several community partners to launch a state-wide reparations effort. At the end of 2020, the board of the Minnesota Council of Churches voted to create a 10-year reparations project. This project will be a primary partner for both MARCH and CSJ.

CSJ's and Lyndale's Religiously-rooted Direct Action

Although Covid reduced our ability to participate in many direct actions, the summer provided a few opportunities for masked and socially distant actions. As direct action is one of CSJ's strategies, we helped organize both folk within Lyndale and those in the broader community to participate. In addition to almost a dozen protests and actions in response to George Floyd's murder, we participated in these:



Our Immigrant Welcoming/Sanctuary Supporting Task Force continues to work very closely with ICOM (Interfaith Coalition on Immigration) and MIRAc (Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee). We are deeply grateful for Pastor Daniel Romero's role in leadership with ICOM and Mary Vanderford's active volunteering with MIRAc which both enable us to be led by ICOM and MIRAc. On Father's Day, MIRAc sponsored a march and witness in which they described their purpose:

"The epidemic of killer cops must end now before one more family loses a loved one. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) continues separating families at an outrageous rate and this must stop now. These are two branches from the same tree of a white supremacist 'criminal justice' system. Communities impacted by ICE and police must unite to win justice. Join us for a protest to call for justice. The white supremacist criminal justice system must be stopped. Please practice safe social distancing -- we ask all who are able to wear a mask, use hand sanitizer, and keep distance from those outside your household."



We were proud to have Michael and Mary Vanderford, Melia Derrick and Rev. Rebecca participating in this powerful action.

Those gathered heard speeches at the Capitol before the march that linked the violence perpetrated by ICE and the violence perpetrated by police. Many families who had lost loved ones to police violence spoke their painful truths. Michael Vanderford carried a sign that read "Jesus, Mary and Joseph were refugees, too." While a young woman held a poster which showed the image of a tree. On the trunk was written "white supremacy" and on one branch was written "ICE" and on the other "Police."

Our Staff

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel



Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, is the Director of the Center for Sustainable Justice. She is the author of *Carnal Knowledge of God: Embodied Love and the Movement for Justice* (Fortress Press, 2017) and of *To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations*, *A Time to Build Up: Analysis of the No on Proposition 8 Campaign* and *Its Implications for Future Pro-LGBTQQIA Religious Organizing*, *Preventing Sexual Abuse: A Course of Study for Teenagers* (Pilgrim Press, 1996) as well as numerous articles and sermons.

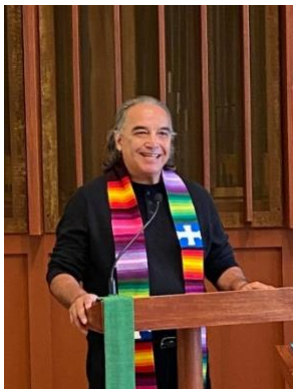
Voelkel is a theologian, pastor, trainer, and movement-builder who specializes in coalition and collaborative partnerships across movements for justice. She is a graduate of Earlham College, Yale Divinity School and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She can be found at www.RevDr.RebeccaMMVoelkel.com.

Rev. Ashley Harness



Rev. Ashley Harness is a United Church of Christ minister and a communications strategist with over a decade of experience in non-profit media work. Currently Harness is pastor at Lyndale United of Church of Christ. She provides confidential training and counsel to religious leaders seeking to use social and traditional media as a pulpit through Auburn Theological Seminary's digital organizing and media teams. She is a graduate of Brown University and Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Pastor Daniel Romero



Pastor Daniel Romero serves as Community Minister for Immigration with both Lyndale UCC's Center for Sustainable Justice and the Interfaith Coalition on Immigration, focusing on ministry with undocumented communities. This Ministry includes immigrant jails and courts, immigrant family accompaniment, and leading social justice policy campaigns. Daniel previously served in ministry positions in Chicago and Minneapolis and he has served in leadership positions at all levels of the United Church of Christ. Daniel holds dual membership at Lyndale UCC and at First Christian Disciples of Christ, and in 2016 Daniel served as an Ecumenical Accompanier through UCC-DoC Global Ministries in the West Bank of Palestine. Prior to becoming a Pastor, Daniel was a social worker and community organizer, leading and organizing dozens of social justice issue campaigns in several states

Budget for The Center for Sustainable Justice

	2020	Notes
SOURCES OF SUPPORT		
Grant sources	33,000	Carpenter Foundation, UCC New and ReNewing Grant
Lyndale UCC	7,000	
Individual contributions	4,000	
TOTAL SOURCES	\$44,000	
EXPENSES		
Good Friday Walk for Justice film, Advent film	\$3450	
MARCH (Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change and Healing) staff support and SSN 101 filming	\$7625	
Community Actions	\$1,125	
Operating Expenses / Overhead		
Director's Salary	31,800	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$44,000	