

# Justice Council Summer Report

Justice Council members continued to focus their energies on living out our commitment to building a Beloved Community through projects aimed at responding to the needs of our surrounding community as well as our own deep spiritual yearning to bring about social change in our city and society, creating greater wholeness and equity for all.

This report covers the Justice Council (JC) activities from March through May, 2024. We encourage you to learn more about JC projects by accessing the special JC document page of the UUs of MA website where more complete reports on our JC projects are available. See:

[https://www.uumtairy.org/jc\\_docs.php](https://www.uumtairy.org/jc_docs.php)

## **Reparations:**

We are led by a vision of overcoming white privilege and norms in ourselves, congregational life and society and bringing about reparations, healing, and repair for the harms of colonization and slavery and continuing systemic racism as it impacts Black, Indigenous and Other People of Color.

Our Congregation History research has continued seeking to account for harms the congregation has committed as well as actions the congregation has taken to advance racial justice within and outside our congregation. Several members participate in the “Rise Up for Reparations” interfaith group that arose out of the “Building a Culture of Reparations” they participated in in January 2023.

Also, several members have continued supporting the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA-PHL) in their work forming a Philadelphia Reparations Task Force which was approved by City Council last year and launched Tuesday, May 21st. The new task force members and mission were introduced by City Council member, Jaimie Gauthier, and young and elder community members spoke about their support for this initiative, including Bruce Pollack-Johnson, Moderator, representing UUs of Mt Airy. N’COBRA-PHL is our designated Change for Change organization for May.

The Task Force web site is: [phlcouncil.com/reparations](http://phlcouncil.com/reparations) and the PHL NCOBRA Task Force site is: [rep215.com](http://rep215.com).

The Reparations Working Group is developing plans to engage the congregation in a conversation via listening sessions to ascertain members’ views of ‘what is reparations’ and what they would like the congregation to do to advance the goals of a congregation-wide reparations plan of action. This plan of action would build on multiple projects already underway that represent reparations work such as the monthly Change for Change Program focused on Mt. Airy/Germantown organizations, Mt Airy Community Fridge and Pantry, the emerging Garden Project, and our Film and Speaker series.

The film/speaker series kicked off last Fall with the Coalition of Natives and Allies in Pennsylvania film “Native Women Speak: What We Weren’t Taught in School” and a panel discussion.

In April, the film, “Neighbor Ladies” was shown to the community followed by a panel discussion on the theme, “Mt Airy - Past, Present and Future: a Welcoming and Inclusive Community for All?”. Panel members included Linda Bell, President of East Mt Airy Neighbors (EMAN), Pat DeBrady, a UUsMA member who was featured in the film, and Craig Stevens, a housing justice advocate from UUsMA. Former pastor Rudy Gelsey and members such as Tim and Darlene Styler of our formerly named UU Church of the Restoration (now

UUsMA) helped found EMAN! Our continued support for EMAN includes having designated them a Change for Change recipient in March.

In mid-May, UUsMA hosted the showing of a powerful film on reparations, Pay Up/Get Out of the Way, produced by a grass roots group in Baltimore allied with the national group, Aging People in Prison-Human Rights Campaign (APP), which held a moving Summit on Reparative Justice involving APP members from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and North Carolina on Saturday. A recording of the Summit is available in our Boxcast archive on our website at: <https://boxcast.tv/view/time-for-repair-mwuhll8qhnrrOutflyao>

**Our April Change for Change recipient was Tomorrow's Girls & Woman:**

Tomorrow's Girls & Women is a youth-based mentoring/enrichment program created to provide a positive and supporting environment for young girls by helping them develop self-esteem and life skills using cultural and visual arts. The program serves girls from Germantown, Mt. Airy, West Oak Land and Olney. The program is entirely free of charge to the young ladies.

Going by the motto "One Girl Can Change the World" Tomorrow's Girls mission statement states, "We believe in teaching every young lady in the program that she can indeed be "that girl"".

TOMORROW'S GIRLS is a learn-by-doing program created for young ladies, to help them better understand who they are and why they think, feel and behave the way they do. Once youth know these things about themselves, they will be more empowered to take responsibility for their actions. The program is designed to involve the youth in enjoyable learning experiences. Over the years, the program grew beyond just mentoring girls and developed into a community organization serving women and girls of all ages.

Tomorrow's Girls was founded by Pat McLean-Smith and was referred to us by UUsMA member, Karen Smith (no relation), who participates in their programs.

For more info: <http://www.tomorrowgirls.org>

**POWER Interfaith:**

UUsMA hosted a well-attended POWER Interfaith Northwest Cluster meeting on April 16th where representatives from member congregations heard presentations from NW Power's new Community Organizer, Antonio Hunter, Lilah Safer, POWER Director of Organizing, and NW cluster core team leaders on plans for Spring and Summer.

POWER is organizing "listening campaigns" with congregation and community members to learn what their major concerns are about quality of life in their neighborhoods and city-wide to provide a base of information for POWER framing its NW and citywide agenda for 2025. In the meantime, POWER PHL and PA will be carrying out voter engagement and legislative advocacy for equitable State funding of public education, increasing the minimum wage from the current 1990s minimum of \$7.50 hour, among the lowest State minimum wage levels in the U.S and funding for deeply affordable housing and community control of development projects.

Deb Gausmann will be serving as our liaison to POWER and alerting the congregation to ways they can participate in POWER's economic and social justice campaigns. Deb(c) 412-600-9400

### **Education, Listening and Organizing on the Israel-Palestine Conflict:**

The rising death toll of Palestinians in Gaza, the denial of humanitarian aid for the over 2 million people trapped in the enclave and the Biden Administrations funding and support of Israel's military campaign led congregation members to raise and share concerns about the conflict and how UUsMA can add our voices and support to nationwide efforts by faith, peace and civic groups to bring about a permanent ceasefire, provision of unlimited humanitarian aid, freeing of Israeli hostages held by Hamas and of Palestinian prisoners detained in the thousands by Israeli defense forces.

During a March 31st Town Hall sharing of feelings, opinions, and proposals for congregational action, the one consensus point participants reached was to put CEASEFIRE NOW on the UUsMA lawn sign and to continue sharing information and support for peace and justice efforts around the conflict. One initiative being pursued is exploring organizing an area-wide Philadelphia Chapter of UUs for Justice in the Middle East, the UUA's main resource for peace, justice and humanitarian around the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Palestinian diaspora in the Middle East and beyond.

Contact Craig Stevens if you are interested in this project: 412-760-6478

### **Highlights of UU Justice PA Annual Meeting - April 20th, 2024:**

This year's annual meeting was conducted entirely virtually. UUsMA member and board member of UUJusticePA represented at this meeting. The morning session began with Reverend Joan Sabatino, our director, introducing our two new staff members.

Clara Jenkins will be our new Administrator. She will succeed Ruth Thomas, who will be retiring in mid-June. Clara has previously served as the Administrator for New Jersey Faith Action and is swiftly familiarizing herself with our database and Eblast system, EVERY ACTION. Clara will work remotely from her home in Summit, New Jersey.

Arly Henninger-Voss will join us as our Legislative Associate. She holds a degree in government and politics from Franklin and Marshall and will be assisting me in the Harrisburg Capitol, with a focus on future Advocacy Days.

During the remaining time in the morning, Joan outlined our UU The Vote PA strategy, which includes several existing partners. These partners are:

- Super Majority, organizing women across the state
- Red Wine & Blue
- Power Interfaith

Our work to support UTheVote is headed by UUsMA member Beth Orrell and she will be sharing these plans in our next quarterly newsletter.

**To get involved in or learn more about all these Justice Council projects**, please contact Co-Chairs, Laurie Durkin (215) 514-7955, or Craig Stevens (412) 760-6478

Garden blurb submitted by cathy/mary; blurbs re book discussion submitted by bruce