

July 2020



THE SPIRE

THE FEDERATED CHURCH NEWSLETTER

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

The following Statement of Solidarity has been thoughtfully prepared by the leadership of the Social Justice Advocacy Ministry at the invitation of the Church Council. The statement was voted on and approved by Church Council.

Statement of Solidarity

The Federated Church stands in solidarity with our Black and Brown sisters and brothers who over generations have been and continue to be subject to a high level of violence through overzealous policing, racial profiling, and white vigilantism as well as the failure of justice in our courts.

While the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police is the immediate cause of today's unrest, we acknowledge that his murder is but one example of the many ways systemic racism is rooted in our society.

We believe we are in the midst of two pandemics. COVID-19 has stolen the breath from thousands of our fellow Americans. The other -- some call it "COVID-1619" -- has been stealing the breath from our Black and Brown sisters and brothers for over 400 years. When one of us cries, "I can't breathe," we are all robbed of that Pentecost moment when the Spirit of the Lord moved like a mighty wind into bodies in that first-century crowd, giving them breath. While we may speak with many tongues, with this breath the Spirit allows us to hear and understand as though there is but one voice (Acts 2:4, 6).

We believe we are in a Pentecost moment now. The wind of the Holy Spirit has pulled the curtain back from our confusion and we now can see clearly that racism is America's Original Sin.

We seek a way forward in which every person's life is valued and communities are kept safe because those charged with protecting them realize that they themselves are part of a greater family as Children of God. We stand in solidarity with those protesting peacefully for justice and reform of law enforcement. We applaud those in law enforcement who have marched with or taken a knee with protesters in recent days.

Finally, we believe that statements like this can be empty words without follow up. "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:14). In the coming weeks the Social Justice Advocacy Ministry will create an action plan for moving forward within both our church and the community.

Statement of Solidarity Q&A

There will be a Question and Answer session regarding the Solidarity Statement right after worship on Sunday, June 28 at 11:15 on Zoom.

To join, go to <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/89888298075>

From Hamilton's Desk

Dear Friends,

"Peace be with you." It's one of the Bible's most potent words of grace. Never did it mean more than it did coming from the lips of the crucified Christ in the early moments of Christ's newly resurrected life. "Peace be with you," says the risen Christ to the petrified disciples locked together in an upper room soon after their leader and hoped-for messiah has died (John 20:19).

And "Peace be with you" is what Christ says to us now. In homes, in towns, in nations, upheaval is the order of the day. Still we isolate to keep us safe from a lethal virus. Still we seek to discern how best to navigate an unsettling new world. And still we wonder how to make a decent and good world when scorching cruelty and inhumanity gores our best instincts.

So to embody that peace, we are invited to turn inward. Stop. Be still. Know that God is God (Psalm 46:10). Followers of Christ who hope to know that peace are beckoned simply to rest in it. If you haven't done so recently, or if you have, take a moment to stop and sit still. Close your eyes. Take some breaths, know that you are being held in arms of blessing. Remember that your very life is lived in love. As the psychiatrist Gerald May once said, your whole life is "in" love in the way you might be "in" a pool or "in" a room. You and I are immersed in a love that never ceases to embrace us and shower us with acceptance and grace. Turn inward. Receive that peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

That's not all, though. To be at peace asks of us, as well, a turning outward. There's no real way for me to be at peace unless you are, as well. I can do all the praying and meditating in the world—and it's best if I do—but if I don't reflect the grace I receive to the world around me, then I am "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (I Corinthians 13:1). Without love, I am nothing but a shell of a person. So generosity is a chief virtue of followers of Christ. We give to the church. We give to people and organizations that care for others. And we find ways to act with merciful justice.

In the wake of the killing of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Rayshard Brooks and so many more, it would be the height of arrogance and disengagement and hopelessness if we were to try to isolate ourselves and pretend that justice wasn't at the heart of God's desires for this precious earth. Black Lives Matter. And a good part of our calling as church is to live that and express that in every setting of life.

The only peace that matters is an internal peace: know that you are loved beyond your wildest imagination; and an external peace: so is every other living being. So may we dedicate ourselves to building a world that holds each person tenderly and offers them abundant opportunity, a world that redresses the wounds and scars of centuries of entrenched racism.

May your summer be filled with peace. It is God's gift to us. And it is our gift to the world.

Yours in Christ,



Hamilton

UPCOMING WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday, July 5

Rev. Judy Bagley-Bonner preaches
10 am Online Worship*

Sunday, July 12

Rev. Mark Simone preaches
10 am Online Worship*

Sunday, July 19

Rev. Judy Bagley-Bonner preaches
10 am Online Worship*

Sunday, July 26

Rev. Mark Simone preaches
10 am Online Worship*

** The church building is closed and worship has been moved online through September 6. You can access the worship service streams by following the links at www.fedchurch.org.*



News & Info

Convergence to Lead Federated Toward Visionary Action Plan!



Why do we need an action plan?

Millions of Americans hunger for the kind of grace, purpose, community, and hope God can realize through Federated. So why is our church membership, participation, and financial sustainability declining year after year? It doesn't have to continue that way. Instead, we need to develop a comprehensive action plan.

At February's Annual Meeting of the Congregation our moderator, Beth Rutkowski, named a three-pronged approach to dealing with declining trends: 1) Partner with the Community Life Collaborative (CLC); 2) Develop a clear vision and actionable steps that identify community needs and align resources; and 3) Better understand and review our stewardship trends and behaviors. Your Church Council is dedicated to this three-pronged approach in order to mitigate decline and develop the capacity and structures for Federated's bright future. **An action plan will focus our energies and align our resources** so we can pivot as a responsive and compassionate community of faith.

Why now?

The world as we know it has been turned upside-down. People all around are in crisis, the world is crying out for deep listening and substantive action, and the church stands at a crossroads between the past and the future. **Extraordinary times call for extraordinary action.** Fortunately for Federated, even before the pandemic-related shut down, our Church Council was already in the process of researching and interviewing organizations skilled in guiding church transformation. We selected Convergence to guide our pathway forward.

Why collaborate with Convergence?

By collaborating with an organization like [Convergence](#), we believe the congregation will be able to conceive our future within a larger context and with fresh, innovative ideas. We selected Convergence to help us navigate this process because their **leadership represent front lines of church reform and forward thinking**. We spoke with congregations they had worked with who consistently heralded substantive change and supported action. Additionally, Convergence offers continued coaching to leadership teams and staff so we move strategically from plan to action that is sustainable for many years to come. Beginning August 2020, leaders from Convergence will engage our congregation and staff in critical conversation, self-assessment, envisioning, and then mobilizing action teams.

In preparation for a Zoom Forum with Convergence CEO, Rev. Cameron Trimble, we invite all members to read [Ten Ways the Church Will Be Changed By COVID-19](#), written by Cameron in April 2020. We look forward to engaging your questions and thoughts to launch a collaborative journey to a promising future!

Mission & Service

Doug Horner Retirement

In celebration of Doug Horner's 17 years as pastor at our sister church, St. Paul's, we would like to recognize Doug's service to so many of the people on the near west side, including many of the homeless. His outreach program has also touched countless lives.

If you would like to be included in this celebration of Doug, please send your monetary contribution to the church by July 31, noting in the memo line "Doug's celebration", and include any photos or personal messages with your gift.



Thank You from HOLA

Dear friends,

On behalf of HOLA Ohio, I want to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone at the Federated Church for your very kind and generous donation. We cherish our relationship with The Federated Church, and are deeply grateful for your caring and compassionate support for HOLA's work serving Latino families, many of whom are unable to access relief for the hardships they confront. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these hardships, but with your generous grant, we are able to meet many urgent needs during this time.

Recently, a Spanish-speaking couple, both of whom have worked long hours in Cleveland restaurants for more than 10 years, were laid off, falling behind on their rent. When they received an eviction notice, they became frightened, and started packing their bags not knowing where they would go with no money. Thanks to your donation, we not only helped pay their rent so they were caught up, but we spoke with the property manager, who then reassured the family that they could stay. The couple is back to work, and back on their feet.

Your donation is also enabling us to support dozens of individuals in the Hispanic community who have contracted the coronavirus, or are in quarantine due to an exposure. We are not only removing barriers to testing and treatment, but also HOLA staff are delivering free COVID-19 Care Kits including thermometers, masks, grocery gift cards, hand sanitizer and other essentials to affected and high-risk families so they can monitor their symptoms and care for themselves at home.

The hardships caused by this pandemic will be felt for a long time in the Hispanic community. With your donation, we will be able to provide vital services to the families we serve for many months to come. We are grateful for our ongoing partnership as a mission partner with Federated Church. We couldn't do the work we do without you. Thank you so very much.

Mil gracias,
Veronica Isabel Dahlberg
Executive Director, HOLA Ohio



Mission & Service

Update on JustHope and Nicaraguan Partners

2020 has been difficult for JustHope. With the Nicaraguan government ignoring health issues related to COVID-19, the pandemic has put a deep strain on the community partners in Chacraseca and La Flor. This has also presented many challenges for JustHope, as the organization seeks to secure the sustainability of important community development work. JustHope is working to retain as much of its Nicaraguan staff as possible to conduct specific programs.



Programs and Projects with priority focus are related to:

Health

- Keep the Chacraseca clinic open and functioning
- Continue to support repair and maintenance of the Clean Water system

Education

- Primary school scholarships
- College/university/technical school scholarships
- Cultural Center operations

Social Enterprise

- Provide staff support for coordination and management of microcredit banks
- Provide staff support for coordination and management to Stitching Hope
- Promote pottery sales to support local artists

Agriculture

- Continue to support the Farm Commission's efforts to bring the model farm up to "self-sustaining program" status

The Mission and Service Commission has agreed to provide support to JustHope. What will funds be used for? Here are some needs:

- \$300 per month for medications and supplies for the clinic
- \$400 for model farm cistern repair
- \$600 for model farm land prep for fall planting
- \$1000 for water in Chacraseca

If you wish to add to the Mission and Service funds, you can donate through Realm and designate JustHope as the fund. Go to fedchurch.org/giving for quick access to Realm Giving.

It is hoped that JustHope's future as a sustainable, impactful difference-maker in our world inspires you as well. And it is also hoped that it inspires you enough that you'll partner with them in making that future possible.

Christmas in July Offering

Sunday, July 26

The Christmas in July offering (sometimes called Veterans of the Cross offering) is an expression of appreciation and caring to those who served as clergy (and certain lay employees) who are now retired or disabled and financially strained. The offering is a profound gift. It helps provide pension supplements, health premium subsidies and emergency assistance to active or retired clergy families and Christmas gift checks to hundreds of retirees and those who are disabled.

Federated Happenings

Social and Environmental Justice (SJAM) News

SJAM is a group of Federated folks learning about and taking action on a wide variety of societal justice issues such as gun violence, criminal justice, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental issues, racial justice, voter registration and immigration as well as other areas of concern. Sound interesting? We welcome you to join us at our next meeting on Zoom. SJAM is open to all in the community who are looking for ways to work for social justice. If you would like to learn more, please contact Kathy Franz (440.543.4086 or kfranz17114@gmail.com).

Next SJAM Meeting — Sunday, July 12, 11:15 am on Zoom (Meeting ID: 261-964-671 Passcode: 44022).

Racial Justice

White Privilege Study starting soon—two options

The time is right to offer the White Privilege Curriculum using Zoom again this summer. If you haven't taken the class yet, please consider doing so. Past participants have consistently given this course high ratings. It is very eye-opening. Zoom has worked as the platform for the most recent round of classes. Please spread the word, as community members who are not affiliated with Federated Church are more than welcome.

Timeframe: Week of July 7 though the week of August 17 (six-week study with an extra week built in for any scheduling problems that may come up).

Dates/Times: Saturdays 1:00-2:30 pm; Thursday 1:00-2:30. Choose which date works best for you. Other days of the week and times are possible based on demand/availability.

If you would like to take a look at the curriculum you can view/download: <https://www.uccresources.com/products/white-privilege-lets-talk-a-resource-for-transformational-dialogue-pdf-download>

If you are interested, please email steesbassoon@gmail.com

Environmental Justice

Electronics Recycling

Rescheduled to October 24, 2020. It is important to keep our old recycled items out of landfills! Save them for the electronic recycling opportunity and save the earth.

Voting Rights

Voter Registration

In the United States of America, a fundamental tenet of our democracy is fair and accessible voting for all citizens. Unfortunately, that has not been the experience for many of our black and brown brothers and sisters due to gerrymandering and voter suppression. This year, COVID-19 has presented even more concerns and problems. The SJAM group is actively engaging on this issue with several non-partisan national and local organizations. The League of Women Voters is monitoring changes in legislation for the State of Ohio in the upcoming 2020 election. Their mission is to empower voters and defend democracy. There are many opportunities to stay informed and contact state representatives with feedback on rule changes. If you wish to learn more, their website is lww.org. Another organization dedicated to fair elections is nova-Ohio.org. They are looking for volunteers to make phone calls to ensure that voter information is accurate and to encourage vote by mail to some of our most vulnerable citizens during this time of the pandemic. If you need more information, contact Tricia Baumgartner (tricia.a.baumgartner@gmail.com) or Judy Majcen (jomajcen@gmail.com). Let's have safe, fair elections this fall!

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Federated Happenings

Social and Environmental Justice (SJAM) News (continued)

- NOVA-Ohio, <https://nova-ohio.org/>
- Rock the Vote www.rockthevote.org
- Mobilize the Vote www.mobilize.us
- Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America endorsing Gun Sense Candidates
clevelandmomschapter@gmail.com
- League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland <https://www.lwv.org/local-leagues/lwv-greater-cleveland>
- League of Women Voters Geauga County <https://www.lwv.org/local-leagues/lwv-geauga-county>
- Sign up or register on any of these websites! Remember every voice counts.

Movie Night—Monday, July 20 at 7:00 pm

Watch "Suppressed: The Right to Vote" at your leisure. This 38-minute film deals with voter suppression in Georgia in 2018 and is all the more relevant following June's primary election. Follow this link to view the film: <https://vimeo.com/user49077866/fighttovote>

Log into Movie night Zoom call on **July 20 at 7:00** for one hour of discussion and action steps planning! Hope you can join us by going to <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/83595558354?pwd=U1VxZU5SZoNjcEVkbEcxeXpsbVlWdzog>

Contact Kathy Franz (440.543.4086 or kfranz17114@gmail.com) with questions.

Choral Workshop

Members of the Federated Choir will have a unique virtual workshop opportunity in July! Led by past director Amanda Powell, the three-part series "Still We Sing" will be a wonderful way for our choir community to connect and have fun together through singing.



STILL WE SING

Led by renowned songleader, Amanda Powell, Still We Sing is a unique series of devotionals and workshops inviting communities to sing, connect, and have fun.

Diving into Zoom technology, Amanda devised a series of devotionals meant to invite singing, reflection, and fellowship. Assisted by Director of Music Ministries Joshua Konow and organist Marcia Snavely, the workshop will take place on Thursday, July 9, 16, and 23 from 7-8 pm. The three-part series will flow as follows:

Week 1: July 9, "Finding Peace" – In the opening devotional, Amanda leads people on a journey to their individual and collective center. Together participants connect with their breath and learn songs of centering and peace.

Week 2: July 16, "Choosing Love" – At this challenging time, we must choose love for ourselves and for one another. This devotional introduces songs that are about deep, unconditional love. We open ourselves to the ways we are being called to bring love into the world.

Week 3: July 23, "Cultivating Joy" – Even as we navigate difficult times, we can look for moments of joy! Experience joyful moments in community with exuberant singing and fun! We learn to keep our eyes wide open for glimmers of joy in the midst of challenge.

The workshop will happen virtually via Zoom. A limited number of 30 spots are available. First preference will be given to choir members, but spots may be available to others who are interested to participate. Please email Joshua Konow at jkonow@fedchurch.org to register for the workshop!

TOS Spotlight

Loaves & Fishes Ministry

During these stressful times, there are two young members of our Federated faith family who are making a difference to those served through our Loaves & Fishes ministry.

Ever since Federated began following a social-distance policy, Jim Scheuermann, our fearless Loaves & Fishes leader, reformatted the making of month-end meals by providing 100 much-needed bagged lunches. The ministry volunteers help to purchase food, prepare, bag, and deliver the meals. The Atkinson family members have been stalwart volunteers of this ministry for the past two years and **Phoebe Atkinson** asked Jim how they could continue to contribute during this pandemic. He asked them if they could provide desserts – which was a perfect fit for them, as making homemade treats for school events/teachers has been a tradition for their family.

And this is when it becomes obvious that during these unprecedented times, our ministries are still providing a personal touch. In a recent conversation with Phoebe, she explained that her eldest daughter, Bella, wanted their family to take this opportunity to brighten people's day. So, at the end of every month, when they bake two huge batches of cookies, brownies, and/or Rice Krispie treats, her daughters, **Bella and Sydney**, also include hand-written notes of encouragement. Each month the girls take turns either writing the 100 notes or helping mom bake the treats. The notes include sayings like **"You are not alone"** or **"God loves you"** or **"We can get through this."** And the bakers get creative by baking chocolate chip cookies, brownies, or Rice Krispie treats – mixing the latter ones with Fruity Pebble cereal, or any cereal that provides some color. What a fun way to put a smile on someone's face!

Making a difference in the lives of others comes naturally to Bella and Sydney. And this thoughtfulness was recently recognized as Bella was chosen by her school, Notre Dame Cathedral Latin, to receive their *Living the Truth in Love* award. Students are selected by the school's faculty and staff as "leaders who transform the world, as Jesus did, by living the truth in love."

Federated is blessed to have ministries – such as our Loaves & Fishes program – that give members the opportunity to touch the lives of those who live on the margins. Through these ministries we gather in spirit and serve in love. At the same time, we are blessed to have members like the Atkinsons who regularly live into that message. Thanks be to God!

