

MINUTES
BOARD OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ACTION (SJA)
SUNDAY, JULY 10, 2016

In Attendance: Melissa Herman, Rebecca Unruh, Caryn McTighe Musil, Dick Staufenberger, Nancy Lohman

Unable to attend: Jerry Hartman, Ann Norman, Cindy Sanders

Opening Prayer or Meditation: Caryn read passages from Brian Lanker's 1989 book, *I Dream a World Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*. Names of the women were read out loud by committee members present.

Minutes: June minutes had already been approved via email.

Treasurer's Report: No new updates.

Response to GC decision not to fund a social justice campaign as proposed by SJA in January as part of the 20/20 Campaign.

The SJA Board discussed the invitation by the Governance Council to attend a GC meeting to discuss the possibility of the church considering some form of the proposed Westmoreland College and Career Fellowships in the future but not as part of the Capital Campaign. The possibility of taking the project to a regional level (Potomac Assoc.) was briefly discussed as well. Caryn will send the revised draft of the SJA response to the Governance Council and Capital Campaign Committee (see attachment #1 below)

Black Lives Matter Banner: In light of the most recent shooting of more black men in Baton Rouge and Minneapolis by police officers which marks an unbroken series of killings that seem to have no end, SJA will send a letter to the GC recommending that a Black Lives Matter banner be purchased and hung on the church building in a prominent place that can be easily seen by passersby. Caryn will write the letter. (see attachment #2 below).

Update on Grantee Progress Reports: Requests for Progress Reports have been sent to all grantees. Approximately eight have responded and reports from the remaining group are anticipated. Caryn will send copies of the reports to all SJA board members as they come in. Each member will be asked to be the contact/point person for three to four organizations.

Meeting in August: In light of all the current SJA activity pertaining to EAO, the request for a Black Lives Matter banner and follow up needed regarding all agencies receiving SJA funds, it was decided that a meeting in August would be advisable. Caryn will send an email to all SJA members with suggested dates.

Agenda Items Not Discussed Due to Lack of Time: Supporting Syrian families at another UCC church and SJA sponsoring a film on incarceration for Westmorelanders. These items can be addressed at the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING: AUGUST 14 or 21.

SEE TWO ATTACHMENTS BELOW:

Attachment #1

**Letter Sent to Governance Council in response to its Invitation to meet to discuss
SJA Proposal for College and Career Fellowships**

July 10, 2016

To: The Members of the Governance Council, the Members of the Capital Campaign Committee, and the Ministerial Staff
From: The Members of the Social Justice and Action Board
Subject: Decision by the GC and CCC on SJA's Recommendation to the Congregation in January for a Parallel and Complementary Social Justice Fundraising Campaign and Response to the Invitation from the GC to Meet with the SJA Board about WCUCC College and Career Fellowship Proposal

While we continue to support the 2020 Capital Campaign, we are disappointed and concerned regarding the social justice component. SJA was always clear that the call for a social justice part of the campaign needs to be more than bricks and mortar connected to Westmoreland's stewardship of its properties, and it was with that in mind that we made our proposal. Indeed, our views were expressed at both the informational meeting in January and subsequently at the Congregational meeting later that month. We understood that the January Congregational meeting endorsed that concept of conceiving of a project that addressed a large unmet social need beyond Westmoreland's buildings. So we were surprised that all of the initiatives chosen as the so-called social justice components of the Capital Campaign--- as worthy as they may be--- were bricks and mortar. And to imply in the report to the Congregation that the consultations with SJA resulted in selecting these initiatives is baffling since both our underlying premise--- non-bricks and mortar--- and our specific proposed initiative were rejected.

We understand that the Capital Campaign and the Governance Council have made their final decision on the matter. However, motivated by the invitation of the chair of the Governance Council, Peggy Alfonso, to speak with the whole Council about its interest in the proposal for a Westmoreland Congregational UCC College and Career Fellowship, we would like to meet as soon as possible with the Governance Council to explore together how it might be possible to move forward on the idea. We are happy to learn from Peggy's note that many among the two decision making groups were quite interested in the proposal we offered to the church. Our board members also found that there was widespread support from whomever we discussed our project with in the Church, including many on the

Capital Campaign Committee. There were only two significant concerns from the supporters — first was why not work with one of our existing partners in launching and managing the project. The second was financing. On the first, we are open to actively exploring partnerships with either an existing WUCC grantee, other UCC churches, and/or other. We are also eager to hear the ideas the Governance Council has about what it might take to launch such an initiative. On the second, we believe with leadership from the Governing Council, the congregants will financially support the project.

Let us know when we might begin what we hope proves to be a fruitful conversation.

p.s. We are dependent on Jo Jo to pass this email on to the full Capital Campaign Committee members since we do not have access in the directory to who is serving on it.

Attachment #2

Letter Sent by SJA Board Chair to Governance Council about a Black Lives Matter Banner

July 10, 2016

Dear Governance Council,

Knowing that the Governance Council at one point discussed putting a “Black Lives Matter” banner of some sort to show support for racial justice and equity, the Social Justice and Action Board voted this morning to propose to the Governance Council acting on that earlier impulse. Three hundred years into the country’s history, we still have a racial divide and a racial hierarchy that leads to shameful and dangerous inequalities across every conceivable factor in human life.

The centuries of policies, histories, and racism that have led to intense neighborhoods of poverty organized largely by race have bred despair, violence, isolation, and inaccessibility to the opportunities we know help individuals, communities, and the nation thrive. We believe it is important for Westmoreland, as a predominantly white church in a predominantly white section of DC, to offer public witness to standing for social justice in the face of such uncontestable discrimination. As one on our SJA Board said this morning, “Only when black lives matter can we say that all lives matter.”

The timing is especially important in light of the horrific killing of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile last week, adding yet more deaths to two years of violent encounters with police graphically captured on video since August 9, 2014 when Michael Brown was left lying in the middle of street for hours after being killed in Ferguson. With the murders of the five white Dallas police officers, the likelihood of inflamed racial hostilities against African Americans, especially African American men risks being ignited.

Taking lessons from our marriage equality banner, we should hang a banner high on the second floor of the building that faces Massachusetts Avenue. Our first marriage equality banner first displayed on our columns was cut down within the first week. We know there is a history of defiling Black Lives Matter signs and banners in other metropolitan churches.

Beyond hanging a banner, we also think it is important to continue to probe the facets of racism and what can be done to recognize its many forms, resist its lure, and deepen our understanding of what it means for people to live in a country for 300 years and still be seen as unwelcome outsiders. SJA would be happy to work with the Governance Council and others to help organize or co-sponsor such activities. We discussed reading all or parts of Jim Wallace's *Original Sin*, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, seeing *Free State of Jones* or other films together, organizing cross racial dialogues, and working in alliance with other churches on racial justice actions.

SJA is happy to be one of the leadership groups in such church wide efforts.

Submitted by

The Social Justice and Action Board