

First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh

Environmental Justice Initiative

2022 - 2023

“All life is interconnected. From the forest to the sea to humanity itself, each thread of being is woven into a single fabric of existence. We embrace nature’s beauty and are in awe of its power. We care for our environment so that it may sustain life for generations to come. We do this in partnership with those most impacted by environmental destruction, who are often marginalized in the larger culture. Often these “frontline” communities are impacted hardest and have fewest resources to recover. We collaborate because it is only with the knowledge and experience of these communities that equitable and sustainable change can happen.”

~ UUA, Climate & Environmental Justice



On May 22, 2022, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Pittsburgh unanimously voted to pass an Environmental Justice Initiative that reads: “The congregation of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh voted to commit to a year-long, church-wide focus on Environmental Justice, in order to take appropriate actions to address the issue.”

We come to this work with our hearts, heads, and hands ready and willing to work. We know this burden is one that we must all share. Many of us may already be doing this work in other ways, many of us may be unsure how to begin or what to do. Together we will funnel our current work, action, and commitment through the lens of our faith and our community.

Recalling our seventh principle of respect for the interdependent web of all existence, our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to honor Earth and all Earth's creatures. We **are** Earth, and the healing of the planet is linked to our own healing and flourishing. Our environmental justice (EJ) work is intersectional and a kind of "soul work" that has the potential to transform us both spiritually and emotionally.

We will give every member of the congregation an avenue to participate in achieving spiritually-grounded Environmental Justice ministry in three ways: direct **action** working with local traditionally marginalized communities; public **advocacy** at the local, state and national levels; and **changing our own** social and environmental behaviors.

Based on the information gathered at VIM meetings held in early 2022, we have identified four potential areas of focus for this initiative:

- **Air** – for example, poor air quality leads to increased asthma and other health impacts, especially in children.
- **Land** – for example, some neighborhoods are suffering from both neglect and gentrification.
- **Water** – for example, lead and other forms of water pollution disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities.
- **Greenspace** – for example, some neighborhoods have become both vegetation and food deserts.

Within each focus area that we pursue, we will:

Partner with at least one organization that is already doing this vital work. We will build this partnership over time and demonstrate our commitment to them through:

- **Advocacy** that supports their mission and actions. We will find these issues on our own and through our other existing partnerships as well as ask them what they need and how we can help.
- **Action** that supports their mission and actions based on what our partners need and we will lend our energies and talents to do the work they need done.
- **Support** our partner(s) financially.

Within our own beloved community, we will:

- Encourage and support internal groups of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh to **create their own opportunities for education, conversation, advocacy and action**. The Environmental Justice Initiative Action Team will support and promote these activities.
- Create opportunities for **advocacy** and encourage congregational participation and action around each focus area.
- Create and support **action** around each focus area.
- Commit to **changing our own social and environmental behaviors** within each focus. This would include (but not be limited to) our physical building and the events that happen within, our public marketing presence (social media, website, mailings, external representation at events, actions, finances, etc.), how we use our finances, and more.
- Organize a combination of **events** that may include: a church-wide, intergenerational activity; an action in partnership with churches and justice organizations in our region; or an educational film, speaker or workshop as well as provide educational programming to help members choose activities best suited to their interests.
- Nurture spiritual growth through eco-spiritual practices, such as nature immersion, contemplative practices, and eco grief work, which can foster hope and resilience during this uncertain time of climate emergency. We also plan to support the ministry team in creating at least one worship service around each focus area we pursue.

This work is being led by the Environmental Justice Action Team with strong support and leadership from church leadership and staff as well as congregational commitment. All members are welcome to join the Environmental Justice Action Team, and there will be plenty of opportunities to help with events and actions as they come up during the year.

Our work is transparent and open for all to review. We invite members (and friends) to attend our meetings and give feedback. The Environmental Justice Action Team will submit periodic reports to the congregation outlining and celebrating all the activities, action, knowledge, connections and more encompassed by our commitment to this vital work.

For more information, please email ejl@first-unitarian-pgh.org.