



“Faithfully Bringing Forth Justice”

(Isaiah 42:3)

The VOICE-Buffalo Newsletter - May 2018



Deacon Jerome R. Wright accepts the Nehemiah Award at VOICE-Buffalo's 2018 Awards Banquet

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the Task Forces of VOICE-Buffalo, THANK YOU to everyone who came out to celebrate with us at our Annual Awards Banquet on Friday, April 20, 2018. Thanks to YOU, we had the best turnout we have ever recorded at a banquet, with nearly 450 people in attendance. Thank you for joining us in support of our remarkable, powerful community leaders honored at the event.

Upcoming Dates

- 5/15, 5:30PM: BILT Board Meeting @ Holy Cross Church, 345 7th St.
- 5/16, 5:30PM: Criminal Justice Task Force Meeting @ VOICE office, 2495 Main St. #547
- 5/24, 5:30PM: Clergy and Faith Leaders Caucus @ Back to Basics, 1370 William St.

Task Force Updates

- Access Task Force - p. 2
- BILT - p. 2-3
- Clergy Caucus - p. 3
- Criminal Justice Task Force - p. 4
- Black Entrepreneurs Initiative - p. 5
- Fund Development - p. 6
- Leadership Development - p. 6



“Faithfully Bringing Forth Justice”

(Isaiah 42:3)



Access Task Force

The Accessibility Task Force is bringing renewed energy to the campaign to move the Developmental Disability Service Office from West Seneca into Buffalo. Though there have been successes that include a proposed satellite office in Buffalo and a shuttle, essential Self-Advocacy and Benefits Counselor services remain in West Seneca. The facilities in West Seneca are a former inpatient institution for people with mental and physical disabilities – a space that brings trauma to many that

visit there. The Task Force has developed relationships with Western New York assembly members and senators who are speaking in favor of the relocation campaign.

Next on the Task Force’s agenda – media coverage on a recently released state report that offers a cost comparison of moving the services versus keeping them in West Seneca. Task Force co-chair, Marie Malinowski will also give a brief presentation at Developmental Disability Awareness Day on May 24, calling people together to support the move campaign. Task Force leaders joined forces with members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo on May 6, and will be back again on May 13, to fill out postcards to Governor Cuomo to get him to move DDSO services into Buffalo.

The Task Force is also planning events in June and July that will bring greater attention to the human rights issues at play in accessing the DDSO. We will keep you updated as we develop these plans.

BILT

BILT leaders are gearing up for a strategic planning process May 23 and 24. These sessions will help leaders get grounded in BILT’s mission, vision and values and chart a course for growth. BILT leaders will examine structures, leadership development and campaign goals for the next five years.

There was great media coverage after BILT leaders spoke about the extremely low ELL graduation rate and high ELL drop-out at the March 21 Board of Education meeting. Following that action, BILT decided to engage students, parents, teachers and administrators in a survey process to learn from them about barriers to educational attainment. One of the goals of the survey is to recruit new BILT





“Faithfully Bringing Forth Justice”

(Isaiah 42:3)

members among the different people who will participate, either as survey administrators or interviewees.

The BILT survey as well as meetings with Mayor Brown and a representative of Governor Cuomo’s office will inform the BILT public meeting, planned for mid-late September, 2018. At that meeting, BILT leaders will present preliminary findings and ask for commitments from Buffalo Public Schools board members and administrators to “Raise the (graduation) Rate” through several critical measures. BILT will keep VOICE-Buffalo members informed as the plans for the public meeting come together.

Clergy Caucus

Galatians 2:19-20: *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

Galatians 3:10-11: *“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous through faith will live.”*

All of our congregations are plagued with piety. And that piety is reinforced when we proclaim that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Do we preach that you need more faith? Do we insist that we need more faith? Surely we understand that our people struggle to build up faith in a person who lived and died 2000 years ago in a remote foreign land.

Rather, we must preach that the faithfulness of Jesus Christ saves us so that we may then turn to the work of building the kingdom of God on earth. You see, Jesus the human person models for us the supreme confidence that God will vindicate our struggle against the systems of domination even unto death and beyond. And Jesus the divine son of God provides the guarantee of God’s faithfulness by the fact of his bodily resurrection. This is the basis of our hope and the energy and confidence for our action.

Jesus did not die so that each of us may have a ticket to heaven. Jesus died and rose to guarantee that the kingdom of God will prevail. As I heard in a sermon recently, by Rev. Dr. Amaury Tanon-Santos and preaching from I John, our relationship with God begins with God loving us first; the relationship with God moves us, not our belief system.

Let us preach the faithfulness of Jesus Christ-- and see how the Spirit moves our people.

*Gladys Gifford, lay preacher
University Presbyterian Church*

Please join us Thursday, May 24th, 5:30pm at Back to Basics, 1370 William St., Buffalo, NY





“Faithfully Bringing Forth Justice”

(Isaiah 42:3)

Criminal Justice Task Force

In this year, 50 years after the tumultuous times of 1968, the work of VOICE-Buffalo’s Criminal Justice Taskforce can be understood as a continuation of the civil rights movement. We are focused on legal reform and community organizing which will attack mass incarceration on both sides. In the domain of legal reform, we are focused on the adoption of an internationally successful diversion program called LEAD, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion. This will build on last year’s successful Raise the Age campaign. We aspire to engage the Police Force, the District Attorney’s office, specific judges on the bench, along with other concerned agencies, to develop greater sensitivity toward youth, the poor, the drug addicted, individuals with Mental Health Issues, and our Veterans. LEAD will provide resources for our police officers to engage in harm reduction, diverting repeat offenders from unproductive cycles through the criminal justice and health care systems to social programs that will address their actual problems and save the public money. Join us as we launch our postcard campaign, a campaign to let those in power know that the public wants to reduce mass incarceration through a successful diversion program. Anyone from Erie County is welcome to join in this campaign. Postcards can be picked up from or delivered to Heron Simmonds, Heron@VoiceBuffalo.org



In the domain of community organizing, we are engaged in the work of peaceful revolution. We are building the beloved community by spreading the transformative capacity of peace circles and restorative justice. As we train and engage our Voice membership in the skills necessary to provide restorative practices, we are also reaching out to the community building relationships to put this growing capacity into redemptive practice. Therefore, we are reaching out to the community to invite small business owners to use our growing network of Peace Hubs to resolve conflicts and address racial and intergenerational tensions.

We want to arrive at peace not by arresting our way to it, but by harvesting it from within. We want to empower each other and we will by extending the hand of brotherhood and being co-creators of a truly beloved community. To join in this work to end mass incarceration and build Peace Hubs, please join our Criminal Justice Taskforce. To do so simply contact Heron@voicebuffalo.org.



“Faithfully Bringing Forth Justice”

(Isaiah 42:3)

Black Entrepreneurs Initiative

Last summer we did a listening tour of nearly 60 one on ones with unemployed and underemployed individuals on the east side of Buffalo. We heard your response and call to take action and organize existing and aspiring entrepreneurs to create powerful change. Since that time we have gathered over a dozen entrepreneurs from Buffalo’s east side to form the **Black Entrepreneurship Initiative**, a task force committed to establishing and sustaining a cooperative of black businesses to create financial freedom and build economic power in the black community.



Our leaders are working to create and sustain black businesses that specialize in efficiency and accountability to empower our community. During a time of economic downturn and high unemployment, particularly among young people, society needs innovative strategies to generate growth without falling into the trap of gentrification. In the current system, impoverished communities lack resources like grocery stores and other businesses that other communities have access to. The standard approach to address the problem is to bring businesses from outside the community in to “revitalize” it, but the wealth they generate doesn’t stay within the community. As the neighborhood gentrifies, its citizens eventually find themselves pushed out. Rather, we believe that marginalized communities need to own our own businesses so that the community is able to grow and flourish as the business succeeds.

Co-operatives are one strategy based on fairness, democracy, and equality. The co-operative business model has a global track record of helping communities become sustainable and achieving more equitable distributions of wealth. Through building and establishing the Black Entrepreneurship Initiative in Buffalo, we are working to create a sustainable economic ecosystem of firms, factors markets, households, and goods markets. By creating a self-sustaining ecosystem in the Black communities of Buffalo, we are bringing social and economic power back into those areas.

Earlier this month we had a very powerful meeting with M&T Bank. We appreciate their long standing relationship with the Buffalo community and look to continue this relationship in some of our future endeavors. If you would like information or know how to get involved, please contact whitney@voicebuffalo.org



“Faithfully Bringing Forth Justice”

(Isaiah 42:3)

Fund Development

We are thrilled to report that the fundraising side of this year's banquet was a success! Please see below for a report on the final numbers:

Revenue	Amount	Expense	Amount
Sponsors	\$23,525.00	Venue/food	\$11,600.00
Tickets	\$19,050.00	Emcee	\$200.00
Ticket Scholarship Donations	\$3,040.00	Printing	\$579.51
Friends&Patrons	\$860.00	Awards	\$245.00
The Ask	\$3,486.50	Design	\$200.00
New Sustainers (rest of 2018)	\$1,260.00		
		Total Expenses	\$12,824.51
Gross Revenue	\$51,221.50		
Net Revenue	\$38,396.99		
Cost to Raise \$1	0.25037357		

Huge thanks to all of our member representatives who worked hard selling tickets and soliciting community sponsorships! Despite a decrease in our corporate sponsors this year, we were able to make up the difference in tickets and community sponsors, and our Cost to Raise \$1 profitability metric is within the Fundraising Industry Standard range for a gala special event.

Stay tuned in the next month for information on our Sustainers' Breakfast this coming fall! We're always looking for leaders to join us in the fundraising work that makes VOICE Buffalo's mission possible. To get involved, email our Internal Organizer Leslie Nickerson at leslie@voicebuffalo.org.

Leadership Development

We are now beginning to recruit new and continuing leaders to attend Mid-Atlantic Regional Leadership Training with our new national organizing network, Faith In Action (formerly PICO). This training will be within driving distance (location TBD), July 18th-21st. Some funding will be available to help defray the cost of attendance. If you are interested in going, let us know at info@voicebuffalo.org, and someone from our Leadership Development Committee will get in touch to discuss the details!