

# Peace and Justice Task Force 2023-24

Welcome to the 2023-2024 church year! The Peace and Justice Task Force is an open group, sponsored by the Outreach board, of about a dozen members who help to plan and coordinate activities related to peace and justice throughout the year. We welcome new members (church membership not required) for our monthly planning meetings (typically virtual on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 12:30pm).

Rev. Howell often speaks about God being a sense of connectedness: to the divine, to the world and its nature and, especially, to each other.

In some ways, our church's organization reflects the outgoing ripples of connectedness:

1. Worship and Education boards: Within the individual and family
2. Deacons: Within our congregation
3. Outreach and Community Grants Committee: Within our community
4. UCC, OGHS, NIN Support and Peace and Justice Task Force: Within our state, country, and world

As we look at connectedness at the national and global level, we see that modern American society has several trends that are pulling in the opposite direction:

- some political leaders and donors view setting people against each other as the most expedient way to win or keep power; and our political system, especially the way primaries favor tend to choose more extreme candidates
- increased specialization of personalized media and specialized online groups that reinforce partisan beliefs rather than building a common set of accepted facts and forums for dialog and compromise,
- an effort by those people and corporations with higher wealth and profits to use political power to shrink the proportion of public and safety net services they are funding and reduce regulation that protects workers and the environment

The result is that the demands on the middle class are greater, and the needs of the lower class are more likely to be ignored. We feel greater pressure as costs rise and wages do not keep pace. Families need to spend more to replace services that are no longer provided by the government, or simply to keep up with the Jones' Instagram facade. Uncertainty reigns about where the climate is heading, our democracy, and multiple hot conflicts around the world.

Those stressors erupt into episodes of violence or intolerance of people who are "Not Like Us." Coupled with the plethora of guns and loss of skill in relating to others with years of social isolation from the pandemic, even ordinary social interactions can become fraught with fear and have led to dreadful, fatal mistakes.

(This sounds bleak, but it gets better if you flip the page over!)

To help counteract these forces, the Peace and Justice Task Force is looking at ways of

- Empathizing with and standing up for others
- Rebuilding connection in the world

Our main activities are educational forums on Sundays after church, and while it may seem like a scattershot smorgasbord, this is a throughline and we thought that by sharing our thinking it would help provide context for the series of events that we have planned for the fall.

To be more specific, we'll be looking at:

- The stresses facing workers and families (labor organizing, the role of AI, affordable housing, reparations to African Americans)
- Reproductive justice and bodily autonomy as courts and states shift with the overturning of Roe vs. Wade
- Supporting those whose lives have been upended by war and health issues (Afghani girls seeking education, Veterans who need support or help readjusting, people suffering from drug abuse or mental health crises)

To help prepare for those, the Peace and Justice Task Force will be meeting on:

- September 19
- October 17
- November 14

The Peace and Justice Task Force is not the only group attending to these issues. We're excited about:

- Outreach board's "FCCPA Serves Day" on September 10th
- Special Forum on Ethics & AI: September 15th at 7:30 in the Social Hall
- Rev. Emily Linderman's book discussion of Awe (9/24, 10/22, 11/12, and 12/10)
- CWS CROP Walk against Hunger (10/29 at 1pm)
- Deacons Board's "Friendly Voices for Isolated Seniors" (10/29)
- Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice (9/11, 10/11, 11/11, 12/11)
- Mental Health Allies (10/15, 11/19, 12/17)
- Bay Area Native Allies Project (10/3, 11/7, 12/5 at 7:15 PM each evening)

As each event comes up, our introductory information will include the connection of these themes to the presentation and ideas for deeper engagement.

If any of these topics or themes represent something you'd like to learn more about, we welcome your participation at our events or as part of our planning task force. Contact co-chairs [steve.ketchpel@gmail.com](mailto:steve.ketchpel@gmail.com) and [nancymoss@gmail.com](mailto:nancymoss@gmail.com) to learn more.

We look forward to seeing you at our events, and would love to have your involvement in the Task Force to help plan and do more!