



Ian Shay

Building Sustainable Social Justice: First Unitarian Society of Madison, WI

Project Goal:

The JBI project at First Unitarian Society (FUS) involves working with a team that will conduct an equity assessment of how we partner with external organizations. This information will be used to make sure our outreach work is aligned with our original intent. The success of this alignment will be measured by the extent to which our community partners are actively engaged in our justice-building programs. By the end of this project, at least half of our social justice events should be driven by our community partners.

Personal Reflection

Leadership is this strange new thing to me. I'm a bookish, quiet, conflict-averse person. I worked for a couple of years as a translator, a job where it's a sin to insert your own ideas into the text. Therefore, while the analytical assessment aspect of the project appealed to me, the prospect of *leading* seemed daunting. I've had to learn to be more of a go-getter than I've ever been. Sometimes I feel like I'm starting a business, pitching my idea and asking fellow congregants to invest their time. Sometimes I feel like an imposter, not really knowing what I'm doing and terrified that someone is going to notice. It has helped to approach the project with a sense of curiosity: I don't know what we're going to find; I'm just a guy asking questions. I'm certainly qualified to ask questions, and my fellow congregants are too.

Project Update:

My congregation's original JBI has moved away from Madison, so I am picking up the project where she left off, and I have some catching up to do. My biggest challenge so far has been deciding in what direction to take our assessment work. Initially I thought of the project as an audit: an impartial survey asking our partners how we are performing, and bringing that feedback to church ministry groups. But the project needs a concrete goal, some measurable outcome to achieve by the end. Since we want to show up and support our partners with a sense of cultural humility, we have tentatively agreed that our goal should be for a majority of FUS social justice events to be driven by our community partners. However, depending on the findings from the assessment, we might find different problems to fix altogether.

Our first meeting is scheduled for September. My focus right now is recruitment. I wrote an ad to be included in the order of service, and presented the plan at a parish meeting. I plan on tabling in the next few weeks. I'm having coffee with everyone who has expressed interest in the topic. In these conversations I hope to tell them more fully what the project is about; gauge

the interests, skills, and passions of potential volunteers; and start building the relationships that will sustain this project. As we build a team, the next step is to work together to develop our methodology for the assessment.