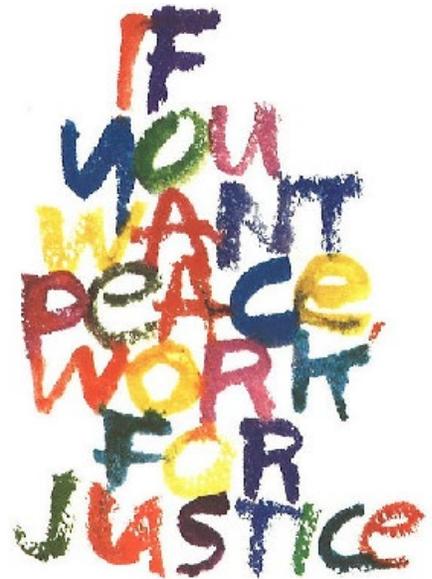


First and Center
Pastor's Blog
October 29, 2019

GHIAA (pronounced with a hard “g”-- gee-ah) is the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance! Founded last night with a thousand members of faith communities, as well as local officials and state legislators. GHIAA is a faith-based, community organizing alliance that has been in the formation process for three years, led by what was called The Christian Activities Council (now The Center for Leadership and Justice). Our church is a founding member of GHIAA with a core team of five, and more ready to be trained in community organizing.



A story is told about a group of people standing by a river, watching babies come floating down the river and then jumping in to rescue them. One member of the group begins to walk away, and the others call out to them to stop, as they need help getting the babies out. The one walking away says, “I think someone needs to go upstream and see why babies are in the river and do something to stop it!” GHIAA is the one walking upriver, seeking systemic change that will help alleviate the conditions in Greater Hartford that cause poverty, violence, racism, and injustice. It is not involved in charity and social service, although working alongside those who are, rather seeking to change systems that perpetuate the need for charity.

The group has chosen five issues for its first focus, as well as continuing to work with the North End Power Team on the No More Slumlords project. The issues are chosen as things that are actionable and winnable. The five are (and I have summarized in short form):

- **Education:** Asking Superintendents in Greater Hartford schools to take specific action to deal with anti-racism training with teachers/staff.
- **Housing:** Introduce a bill to repeal CT laws that require anyone who has ever received any kind of public assistance to pay it back, often by placing liens on houses or seizing money granted in lawsuits or inheritances. CT is one of only two states with these laws.
- **Criminal Justice Reform:** Seeking to pass Clean Slate legislation that will make expungement of criminal records automatic after remaining crime-free for a specified time.
- **Healthcare:** Work on laws that would allow use of reclaimed medications (from nursing homes after patient death, for example) to be dispensed in “charity” pharmacies. Seeking to open such a pharmacy.
- **Gun Violence:** Work with other organizations on a campaign to ask police departments and local governments to use their purchasing power to pressure gun manufacturers to develop “smart gun” technology.

Thirty-five faith communities committed people and money as founders, with another fifteen observers who, we hope, will join. I believe this is one of the most exciting developments among people of faith in Greater Hartford. If you want to get involved in any of these actions, let me know!

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister