

Congregations join forces for a better world (5.10.04)

Contributed by Administrator

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Congregations join forces for a better world Local congregations are getting together to take church to City Hall and the State Capital. By Jean Peerenboom, Press-Gazette Posted May 10, 2004

Reprinted with permission from the Green Bay Press-Gazette Area religious organizations will come together and officially launch JOSHUA (Justice Organization Sharing Hope and United for Action) at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Union Congregational Church, 716 S. Madison St. The group has been forming for about a year and has tackled such issues as drug or alcohol-abuse treatment instead of prison, school funding and tuition for illegal immigrants at the state level. In the coming year, the group will concentrate on affordable housing at the local level. "We decided to focus on something local to get more people involved," said organizer Barb Schiffer. Each year, the group selects a topic of interest to the interfaith, interracial organization. It also works on issues selected by the state group called Wisdom. "It's always been the responsibility of the church to be a voice for those who have no one else to speak for them," said the Rev. Dave Pleier, pastor of St. Bernard Catholic Church in Green Bay, one of the congregations that will become part of JOSHUA on Saturday. "If we, as a group of churches, can reach out to those people in need or be a voice for them, that is what church is all about." The Saturday celebration includes a combined choir from different congregations and the Nia African/American dance and drumming group. The celebration will end with a candlelight ceremony symbolizing the shared hopes and dreams of the organization. "Personally, I think this is an extremely important opportunity to come together and offer a voice, identify common ground and speak with enthusiasm and passion about what's important in our community," said the Rev. Kay Krejci, a pastor at the hosting Union Congregational Church in Green Bay. "From a Christian perspective, it's a way we can participate in a vision of wholeness and shalom." Parishioners at Nativity Parish in Ashwaubenon found the one-on-one interviews that are part of JOSHUA helped build community and develop stewardship, said Deacon Mike Schmidt. "Social justice touches all of our lives, whether you think about it or not. It is important for us, as religious communities and pastors, to get together and talk about these issues." He's pleased that affordable housing is the focus area because "we really don't have a lot of affordable housing here for young families." First Baptist Church in Green Bay is one of the congregations signing on at the celebration. "I think there's a growing sense that our congregation is called not just inside our fellowship (at worship), but also to reach out beyond into the community through ministry," said the Rev. Steve Hartman, pastor. "In the past, churches saw themselves as having an influence in the community just by being a church. Now, we see we must be engaged to realize that difference." "This is a way to experience a Christian voice in the community." Sister Maria Drzewiecki, peace and justice coordinator for the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross on Green Bay's far-east side, said the sisters and associates of her community are joining "because it demonstrates our belief that to build God's kingdom is not just being concerned with giving aid and meeting people's immediate needs. We also want to change the unjust conditions that keep people individually or by their ethnicity or social status from receiving just treatment and opportunities. "To have an impact on these issues, we really need to be organized or our effect is minimal," she said. In addition to congregations that join JOSHUA, other community groups, such as the Multicultural Center of Greater Green Bay, Hmong Community Center and the Mediation Center of Green Bay, may sign on as friends and allies.