

August 22, 2017

Justice Matters Board of Directors,

Plymouth Congregational Church, an open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ, is committed to justice and appreciative of the work of Justice Matters. The dedication of Justice Matters, and the countless hours of effort by its volunteers, to the goals of improving availability of affordable housing, interrupting the cycle of childhood trauma, improving mental health crisis resources, reforming criminal justice and reducing racial bullying in the schools are laudable.

Many Plymouth members are passionate about the work of Justice Matters, and several have played important roles in development and execution of Justice Matters' strategies. We are grateful for the many ways our members support justice.

It is in our desire to seek justice in Lawrence that we want to communicate concern that Justice Matters may at times be creating roadblocks to success. While Plymouth supports the mission of Justice Matters and has many active and passionate network members, significant concerns have been expressed by many in our congregation about some of the approaches taken to achieve goals. Many were troubled by the level of confrontation in the 2017 Nehemiah Assembly, specifically the flood of text messages to officials and the theatrical shaming of officials reflected in the "empty chair."

We recognize that there is a fine line between the tension required to produce meaningful change and alienating tactics which complicate the potential to achieve justice. We believe that the local elected officials are people of good will with genuine interest in doing justice in their community. Many of our members fear that some of the tactics employed alienate these public officials. Does this create entrenched opposition where previously there was none? Does this generate new barriers that hinder efforts to change the status quo? While confrontation with officials can be necessary to effect change, we would promote collaboration and reserve confrontation for strategic times in which significant and defined resistance is met against which other methods have proven ineffective.

As a congregational church, decisions about all aspects of Plymouth ultimately rest with our congregation. As we consider our ongoing relationship with Justice Matters, we believe the congregation would be aided by a clearer understanding of the expectations Justice Matters has of Plymouth, and that Justice Matters would benefit from elucidation of the expectations Plymouth has of Justice Matters.

Specifically, Plymouth Church has three requests of the Justice Matters Board of Directors: (1) a more collaborative, and less shaming, approach in its dealing with public officials and potential partners, in both the Nehemiah Assembly and the execution of strategies; (2) clarification of what Justice Matters seeks from Plymouth in terms of volunteers, church leadership, and funding; and (3) clear expectations for those serving as Plymouth representatives on boards and within research committees of Justice Matters.



Established in 1854

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In order for all of our members to have access to your response, free of misunderstandings that arise from verbal discussions, we ask that you respond in writing to this request. We understand that your organization needs time to consider this letter and your response. If possible, we respectfully ask that you respond by Friday, October 20th, 2017 so that the Church Council may review your response at our October meeting.

We share a devotion to justice, and this communication is intended to help Justice Matters' efforts by encouraging collaboration and reducing confrontation. We hope to strengthen our partnership with you in order to maintain an ongoing dialogue and bring about justice in the Lawrence community. We sincerely believe that the changes we are advocating will enhance the justice ministry of our members and the greater faith community, as well as enhance the efforts to overcome injustices in Lawrence.

We applaud Justice Matters' mission, passion and successes to date. Although young and still paving its way, Justice Matters has made a significant contribution to the Lawrence community by identifying, researching and proposing solutions to systemic issues. Solutions to these issues will make Lawrence a more just place for all among us.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mark Simpson
Moderator, on behalf of the Plymouth Church Council



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