

RLBC Social Justice Team Vision Statement

October 2018

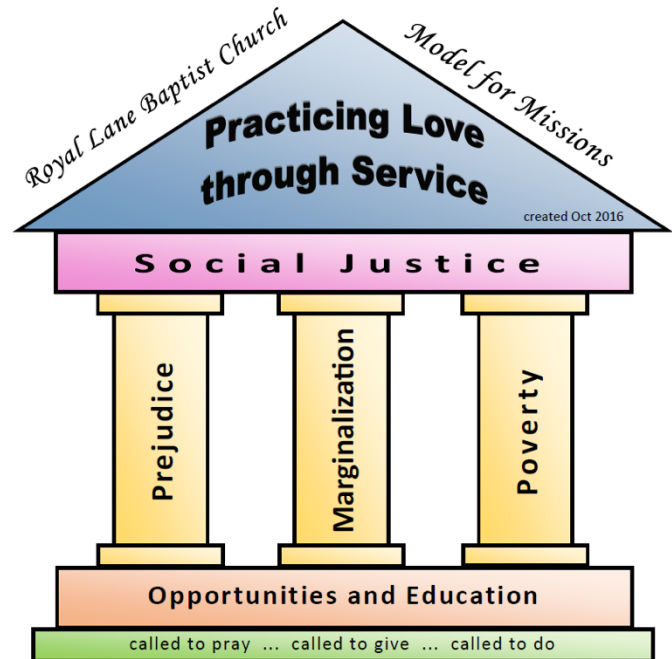


Purpose

At a 2016 leadership meeting, the Missions Division adopted a model for missions that includes social justice. The Social Justice Team (SJT) was subsequently formed in October 2017 to explore ways that RLBC can engage in the social justice component of this model.

In the spring of 2018, the SJT was tasked by the Missions Division to begin a broader dialogue with the congregation about what social justice means at RLBC, what issues we should address based on that common understanding, and what organizations we should partner with in order to educate ourselves and access the resources we need to be effective in the social justice work that God is calling us to.

This vision statement describes the initiatives that the SJT will focus on initially. These initiatives were selected based on the results of listening sessions conducted during August and September 2018, a confirmation survey that was made available to the entire congregation, and numerous one-on-one conversations that SJT members had with individual members of the congregation



Listening to the Congregation

The SJT conducted listening sessions (Justice Jams) in August and September in an effort to answer the following question:

What does social justice mean at RLBC?

Specifically, what is our “sweet spot”? What is the intersection of the social justice needs in our community, our gifts/talents/resources, and our passions?



Timeline

Nine listening sessions were conducted as follows:

1. Aug 20 – home of Margaret Darden
2. Aug 25 – home of Rosa & Joey Belgard
3. Aug 26 – home of Christine & Scott Gonzalez
4. Sep 8 – home of David Doom
5. Sep 13 – home of Barbara Gunnin
6. Sep 22 – home of Sandy & Doug Washington
- 7 - 9. Sep 23 – RLBC – two adult sessions and one youth session

Facilitation Team

For each listening session, there were three roles:

- **Host** – Provided the meeting space and food/beverages. Welcomed the participants and set the tone of the conversation.
- **Facilitator** – Kept the conversation focused on purpose by leading activities and asking prompting questions.
- **Secretary** – Kept a written record of the conversation for later debrief by the SJT.

Listening Session Takeaways

83 Royal Laners participated in the listening sessions.

Each listening session was comprised of three major components:

1. A spiritual formation exercise to identify each participant's primal value.
2. Small group exercises designed to help each participant:
 - a. Uncover the source of his/her primal value
 - b. Make a connection between primal values and social justice points-of-view
 - c. Describe an individual vision of social justice at RLBC rooted in each participant's primal value.
3. Large group debriefs of each exercise described above.

After each listening session, the secretary summarized the broad justice themes revealed during the dialogue.

Confirmation of Listening Session Takeaways

Once the last listening sessions were complete, the SJT compiled a list of themes that were common across sessions. They were:

- Criminal Justice Reform
- Education Reform
- Healthcare
- Homelessness
- Immigration Reform
- LGBTQ+ Equality
- Moral Economy
- Racial Justice
- Voter Engagement

These themes were used to build a confirmation survey that was made available to the entire congregation from Sep 24 – Oct 5.

Confirmation Survey Results

For the purpose of this survey, justice work was defined as "Identifying systemic problems that affect our community; engaging with those affected, public officials, and decision makers to impact policy changes."










Given that definition, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement:


I believe that RLBC should undertake justice work as defined above.

Responses to this question were as follows:

<i>Level of Agreement</i>	<i>Survey Responses</i>	<i>Percent of Survey Respondents</i>
Strongly agree	40	69.1%
Agree somewhat	12	20.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	2	3.4%
Disagree somewhat	2	3.4%
Strongly disagree	2	3.4%

In accordance with respondents' passion for the themes previously listed, they were prompted to rank each theme as a potential RLBC social justice initiative. Those rankings are shown in the following table.

Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score
RACIAL JUSTICE - Advocating for equal rights and fair treatment of people who have historically been discriminated against based on their race.	1		314
IMMIGRATION REFORM - Working to end discriminatory immigration laws and practices. Accompanying immigrant families as they navigate the justice system.	2		276
HEALTHCARE - Advocating for affordable, quality healthcare for everyone.	3		262
EDUCATION REFORM - Working to provide opportunities for learners at all levels of education.	4		257
VOTER ENGAGEMENT - Working with other organizations to register, educate, and motivate voters and to encourage voter turnout.	5		249
MORAL ECONOMY - Ending predatory lending practices, ensuring access to basic needs, and advocating for living wages, fair working conditions, fair housing, etc.	6		241
LGBTQ+ EQUALITY - Advocating for full and equal treatment of members of the LGBTQ+ community.	7		227
HOMELESSNESS - Engaging with public policy makers to address homelessness in our community and to educate the general public about the causes and consequences of homelessness.	8		222
CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM - Ensuring the equal treatment of all people who intersect the criminal justice system.	9		216



Low est Rank High est Rank

Survey responses were assigned a weighted score based on overall rankings. In other words, each respondent's highest priority was assigned a weight of 9, second priority a weight of 8, etc. Each person's lowest priority was assigned a weight of 1. The score for each initiative is the sum of these weighted scores.

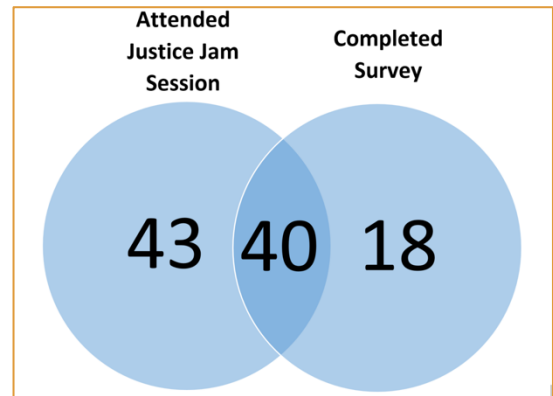
Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to provide free-form feedback in response to the following questions:

- Please indicate any justice issues that should be added to the list above and indicate your priority for each.
- What else would you like to share with the Justice Team?

These responses can be found in the appendix to this document.

Between the Justice Jams and the confirmation survey, 101 Royal Laners have engaged in this process:

- 43 people attended a Justice Jam but did not complete the survey.
- 18 people completed the survey but did not attend a Justice Jam.
- 40 people did both.



Initial RLBC Social Justice Team Focus

Based on the findings from our listening sessions, the subsequent confirmation survey results, and the numerous one-on-one conversations that SJT members had with Royal Laners, the SJT proposes to engage in the following initiatives grounded in human dignity.

Our three initial, co-equal focus areas will be:

- Racial Justice, for people of color in our community.
- Immigration Reform, particularly for Muslim and Central & South American immigrants.
- Healthcare Access, for people who lack adequate and affordable healthcare.

Note: While the initiatives described in this document comprise our initial focus, it is assumed that they will change over time as needs in the community change and passions in the

congregation evolve. The SJT will undertake periodic listening sessions to ascertain the will and passion of the congregation as time progresses.

There will also be occasions when events unfolding in the world demand a rapid response that may fall outside the initiatives listed herein. As and when that occurs, the SJT will make a response recommendation to the missions division and the deacon board, ask for a timely decision that is tied to the urgency of the situation, and respond in accordance with their counsel.

Where Are We Now?

The following image depicts the cycle that the SJT is following as we continue to discern God’s calling for RLBC in the public arena.



The table below describes the progress we have made thus far and the next steps we have planned.

<p>Create a Shared Vision</p>	<p>Complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice team formed and confirmed by the congregation as a standing sub-committee of the Missions Division. • Initial purpose document approved by the deacon board. • Leadership training completed by SJT. • Listening sessions conducted. • Confirmation survey completed. • Vision statement (this document) completed and presented to deacon board, program council, and congregation.
<p>Build Teams</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize partnerships. • Build relationships with other congregations, community experts, and justice-oriented community organizations.
<p>Research and Strategize</p>	<p>Next Step</p> <p>Leverage community and congregational partnerships to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate our congregation on problems in our community around our focus initiatives of racial justice, immigration reform, and healthcare access. • Hear the stories of community members impacted by these problems. • Envision potential solutions that can be brought to bear and plan specific actions with clearly-defined goals in order to implement those solutions. • Identify public office holders and decision makers with whom we and our partners can be in dialogue as we strive to realize these solutions.
<p>Public Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amplifying the stories we hear and walking alongside our struggling neighbors, engage with public office holders and decision makers identified in the previous step to advocate for specific policies around our focus initiatives.
<p>Celebrate and Evaluate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate progress. • Celebrate successes. • Engage in ongoing dialogue to stay in touch with the social justice passions and priorities of the congregation.

Strategic Partnership

Throughout the initial phase of our Justice Team work, we partnered with Faith in Texas (FiTX), a multi-racial, multi-faith organization that develops civic leadership in faith communities for economic and racial justice. FiTX has been an invaluable resource to us as we educated ourselves about the justice issues facing our community. FiTX also provided impactful and well-designed training opportunities as we prepared to lead the social justice conversation at RLBC and to organize ourselves around the initiatives that Royal Laners indicated they care about the most.

Given the relationship we have established with FiTX and the social justice passions of the congregation, we will be recommending to the Congregational Affiliations Committee that this partnership be officially sanctioned by the church.

Formally aligning with FiTX requires an annual investment of .5% (1/2 of 1%) of our budget. For FY2019, that would amount to approximately \$3,500. This would appear as a line item in the Missions budget.

Faith in Texas website - www.faithintx.org

Conclusion

The SJT is honored to present this vision statement to the congregation. We look forward to an ongoing conversation in the months and years ahead about what social justice should look like at RLBC and how this vision statement should continue to evolve. Please feel free to reach out to any of us at any time if you would like to engage in further dialogue.

- Adam Simmons
- Anna Lou Brown
- Barbara Gunnin
- Cathy Walling
- Connie Bechtol
- Doug Washington
- Garland Hamic
- Joey Belgard
- Karen Simmons
- Sandy Washington
- Scott Gonzalez
- Wayne Meachum

God has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Appendix – Survey Comments

Question: Please indicate below any justice issues that should be added to the list above and indicate your priority for each.

Responses:

- Families/children that have been affected by abusive parents or partners
- I am not sure if "immigration reform" includes refugees, but I would like to include them in that category.
- I think continuing to work interdenominationally/with the LGBTQ community should be on of the top priorities. Then when we work with officials we are a larger more inclusive community. Also, I believe, so many have turned away from church in general I think there needs to definitely be a differentiation between the work that God has called us to do and our own separate political beliefs. We have to make it clear that what we are doing involves human rights and justice for all regardless of our political preferences and climate.
- Might such initiatives as Meals on Wheels, NDSM, YBC, i.e., those which support the under-privileged in a tangible way, and in which our members are already involved, be included as a 10th justice issue? Maybe these don't exactly qualify as "social justice" initiatives (more social ministries?) but I could argue that efforts to combat/reduce the many negative influences of poverty/ deprivation in our community, while not as much of an attention getter as, say, Immigration Reform, deserve to be included as part of this undertaking.
- None
- Perhaps group poverty with homelessness as the two are correlated and the root causes of poverty tend to metastasize and reach multiple of the other items listed above.
- sex traffickng
- Some day I would like us to add 'Reproductive Justice' to our discussion board - this would include conversations and work around reproductive health care and access for women of all socio-economic backgrounds, creating families by choice of choice, addressing high mortality rates for minority women, access to prenatal care, parent leave, educational access, food security issues for families, disruption of families and communities due to high minority incarceration, violence in families, etc. etc.!!
- Stable childcare for low-income working families
- The world is bigger than just the metroplex or the United States, or this continent. There are other peoples and needs that we may need to consider too.
- There are none.
- Under moral economy, include problem of consumer protection, income inequality, and campaign finance reform.
- We should investigate all learning materials edited by Texas committees for text books and learning materials for all levels from pre-K to 12th grade.
- Women's rights

Question: What else would you like to share with the Justice Team?

Responses:

- Change your name to Mission in Action and affirm that RLBC has always been involve with equity concerns.
- Fantastic Team! Awesome work!
- Good series of info sessions to help RLBC mine our path & to determine a real impact on our community, neighbors, and City to attract other families and individuals to become a part of RLBC by commuting to membership and stewardship commitments and join in our work toward all the highest rated Justice aspects ASAP.
- I appreciate RLBC's efforts for Social Justice. This should become a much larger part of what we do.
- I know the committee worked and I appreciate it, as well as the way the meeting happened when I attended the one I did. However, justice work is important, but I want to come to church and worship God, enjoy fellowship of my church family, be encouraged and yes, be involved in social justice, but we are a church, not a club or "social" network. We must be involved in social ministries but we are monotheistic, and God needs to be first, not a social action, which is an outgrowth of a healthy relationship with God.
- I thought the Jam sessions were well organized and executed. Your intentional standardization of the discussion framework across sessions enhanced the validity and reliability of your results - i.e., you can have a higher level of confidence that you have tapped the true values and beliefs of the broader congregation regarding social justice. The thought exercise using the "boxes in the boat" metaphor was brilliant! I still find myself thinking about it and what it means for me, my own values, and what my role should be at RLBC related to social justice. I would encourage you now to be at peace about this process and to let go of any anxiety that you might be feeling at this time or after the congregational vote in October. The vote will (likely) not be unanimous, and that is to be expected. We are Baptists, after all. There will be a few dissenters who say we are being "too political" or that we are moving "to far ahead of where our congregation is and we will lose members." So be it. These are familiar lines that I have heard at Royal Lane over the past 25 years whenever we decided (thoughtfully and intentionally) as a congregation to do something bold and important. When Mahatma Gandhi was asked "what is the most important quality in spirituality"? He said "the most important thing is to be brave. Don't be a coward. A coward is incapable of exhibiting love; it is the prerogative of the brave." ~ Mahatma Gandhi (1869-10-02 1948-01-30 age:78) Royal Lane must be a courageous church that always acts out of love. "There are times when you have to obey a call which is the highest of all, i.e. the voice of conscience even though such obedience may cost many a bitter tear and even more, separation from friends, from family, from the state, to which you may belong, from all that you have held as dear as life itself. For this obedience is the law of our being." ~ Mahatma Gandhi (1869-10-02 1948-01-30 age:78)
- I wish I could have participated but my children are far too needy. Thank you for your work in this area. It's very important to me.
- I'm concerned that trying to address too many community issues will dilute our ability to be effective. We are a relatively small church and I recommend we pick only 2 issues to begin our effort.

- Individuals kneel at church and to say prayers. Why does "taking a knee" have to be interpreted as anything other than a respectful statement for why God put us here? What about the treatment of the elderly and the right to die? So many people are emotional about the right to life, what about the right to die the way a person wants to do?
- many items on the survey I would have liked to mark one but the survey would not let me do that it would erase the one?
- NO POLITICS
- Nothing
- Thank you for taking initiative to help us be engaged in social justice issues as a church
- Thank you for this very difficult and challenging work! The more you continue to emphasize the non-partisan side of these issues, the better for the harmony of our church congregation.
- Thanks for the good work!
- The 9 statements at beginning are fairly vague and therefore I do not really understand what actions I would be rating. I realize I would have a better perspective/understanding if I had been able to attend one of the meetings.
- these systemic issues are world wide and I would like to see us begin here in our community and then widen our involvement outside of the community.
- This has really made me think a lot about my own life, journey and choices. Everyone I've spoken with who has attended has had similar experiences. Very well organized and I'm excited as we go through the rest of the process. Thank you for putting so much time, planning and commitment into this.
- Very difficult to decide on/defend my numerical choices. If I did the survey again next week I would probably rate/rank the choices differently. The "level of agreement" question above strikes me as too vague. My degree of "agreement" that RLBC (who/what) should undertake (meaning support verbally, financially, be actively involved??) justice work (which of the 9 or more ?) varies by the particular initiative.
- We need to have a balance between missions and social justice.
- You are awesome! I really appreciate the energy, thought, time and attention you all committed to forming the Justice Team and implementing the Justice Jams. I had so much fun at the one I attended. For me - following Jesus is Social Justice and Social Justice is following Jesus. I'm so energized by the Justice Team's push forward into Kingdom work!