



B.R.E.A.D. Quarterly Newsletter

Building Responsibility, Equality, and Dignity

Columbus, Ohio Affiliate of The DART Center:
A National Network of Congregation-Based Justice Organizations

Q3 ISSUE

AUGUST 24, 2024

Editor: Helen Anne Sweeney

NEHEMIAH ACTION 2024

By ANTOINETTE BEYNEN

On May 21, 2024, 1,738 people attended the 27th Nehemiah Action, held at the Celeste Center on the Ohio State Fairgrounds. Co-Presidents Brother W. D. Smith and Reverend Joanna Samuelson, opened the large gathering. Reverend Joanna reminded people that B.R.E.A.D. focuses on local problems that we can fight, rather than global ones. Rabbi Skolnik, who gave the invocation, reminded everyone of the true state of the city, which is quite different from the version the Mayor was celebrating that same May evening.



Reverend Joanna Samuelson & Brother W. D. Smith presenting Alice Rathburn offered messages of hope by listing our successes won this year:

- Columbus City Council passed an ordinance to protect mature trees on public property;
- Columbus City Schools implemented restorative practices training, bringing the city closer to being a Restorative City.
- Columbus Violence Reduction call-ins proved to be an important tool in reducing gun violence;
- Police Chief Bryant is taking B.R.E.A.D.'s people power seriously, since she implemented our recommendations to incorporate training methods that prepare officers to intervene to prevent harm and create a law enforcement culture supporting peer intervention.

The Nehemiah Action's main focus concerned predatory landlord practices. Bishop Scales compared the story of Nehemiah to the current housing situation in Columbus, with

over 26,000 evictions and substandard conditions in existing low-income housing. Furthermore, he highlighted the predatory environment that encourages out-of-state investors to buy up land and farmland. He urged city officials to ban predatory landlords by limiting the impact of large corporate investors. (See page 2 for additional testimony and other related details).

Although Councilmember Favor attended the Nehemiah Action, Council President Hardin chose to ignore the invitation. Neither responded earlier to B.R.E.A.D.'s requests to meet with the "Stop Predatory Landlords! Protect Renters Now!" research group; consequently, the committee lacked information about their positions. B.R.E.A.D. delivered the questions at a mini-Action on May 13, but were unable to discuss their ideas with either councilmember.

Cathy Levine presented the committee's recommendation of a rental registry that would provide renters with information about building ownership which changes frequently. Ms. Levine asked Councilmember Favor to make two commitments.

First, as chair of the Columbus City Council committee, Ms. Favor was asked to sponsor an ordinance to create a rental registry and introduce the proposed ordinance, but preferably much earlier, by December 1, 2024.

Second, Councilmember Favor was asked to meet with B.R.E.A.D. within four weeks after the Nehemiah Action and regularly after that to discuss the ordinance's details, including possible inclusion of a Certificate of Occupancy requirement, and to ensure sufficient collaboration with B.R.E.A.D. members.

Councilmember Favor agreed to meet with B.R.E.A.D., but felt that she was not the right person to respond to each request.

Recapping B.R.E.A.D.'s successes, Reverend Ahrens vowed that B.R.E.A.D.'s work will continue, even though several officials chose not to attend the meeting. He directed a special recognition to the Justice Seekers, ages 25 years and younger, and predicted that the people power from Nehemiah will ensure that the Mayor will hear our version of the State of the City. In a bittersweet conclusion, he touched on his impending retirement as Senior Minister to the congregation of First Congregational Church, fighting for Social Justice as a co-founder of B.R.E.A.D., for more than 27 years.

The First Unitarian Universalist Church choir provided rousing and celebratory music.

STOP PREDATORY LANDLORDS! PROTECT LANDLORDS NOW!

By HELEN ANNE SWEENEY

The availability of affordable housing relies on the community's effort to increase the number of units as well as being able to preserve the existing stock. During last year's house meetings, network members voiced concerns about rental property conditions. When a repair is needed, tenants often do not know who owns the property since ownership changes rapidly and out-of-state landlords are purchasing more property.

The "Stop Predatory Landlords! Protect Landlords Now!" committee conducted an extensive research process. Members talked with city and county officials, interviewed experts, and reviewed ways that other cities deal with these problems. Based on this research, the committee recommends the following three solutions for the City of Columbus to adopt: (1) Rental Registry, (2) Certificate of Occupancy, and (3) an Office of Renter Advocate.

Rental Registry: The City of Cleveland has had a rental registry for years and recently passed an ordinance to strengthen its effect. Our proposed registry is similar to Cleveland's. At a minimum, the registry would require a listing of the property owner, a local, legal agent, and a management company based in Franklin County. It would also serve as a public database, helping tenants to find and link to responsible landlords' websites.

Certificate of Occupancy: As part of its registry, Cleveland has a certificate of occupancy component. Our proposed registry would also have this component to ensure that landlords conduct business responsibly, requiring rental units to be inspected prior to a new renter moving in. Routine inspections would help curb the number of properties with ongoing deterioration and avoid having the City take legal action to close buildings and dislocate residents.

Office of Rental Advocate: City Councilmember Favor would like to see the creation of an Office of Fair Housing to protect renters from discrimination by landlords. This office would not address renters' needs for assistance and protection; instead, an Office of Renter Advocate would provide resources for renters. Examples of these resources include an early warning system to identify problem properties; outreach to renters in those properties; and promotion of best practices in the eviction process.

At the Nehemiah Action, two community members provided testimony about predatory landlords. Their testimonies illustrate how the proposed solutions protect renters. Danial experienced an unjust situation as a renter and as a worker. He testified that his landlord promoted shoddy workmanship and cheap materials and retaliated following confrontations. Hadassah, a single mother with a 13 year old daughter, was twice evicted. Each time her building was sold and then renovated. She could not afford the new rent.

In Danial's situation, the Certificate of Occupancy's required inspections would uncover inadequate repairs and cheap materials. The rental registry's database could help Hadassah link to responsible landlords' websites. The Office of Rental Advocate could offer both individuals outreach services to help them solve problems.

The "Stop Predatory Landlords! Protect Renters Now!" committee met with Councilmember Favor after the Nehemiah Action. The newsletter will continue to provide you with updates about this issue.

MAKE AN INVESTMENT IN B.R.E.A.D.

At the Celebration on June 24, 2024, network members pledged to invest nearly \$100,000 in support of B.R.E.A.D.!

Your investment in B.R.E.A.D. helps provide needed resources, such as training, staff, and supplies, to build the power for justice. With the investments made in 2023, we were able to build a strong community and celebrate many victories, including:

- An allocation of \$7.9 million for Affordable Housing from Franklin County's American Rescue Fund;
- The implementation of nine Restorative Justice Circles which prevent children from entering the juvenile justice system and will potentially save Franklin County \$2.2 million.

If you have not yet made your 2024 investment in B.R.E.A.D, you can choose your preferred payment option by accessing: <https://www.breadcolumbus.com/invest>.

SPECIAL THANKS TO RHEMA CHRISTIAN CENTER BOY SCOUT TROOP #376



B.R.E.A.D. would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the Rhema Christian Center Boy Scout Troop #376 for volunteering at the

Nehemiah Action! As part of their volunteer duties, these scouts escorted public officials and speakers to the Celeste Center stage.

CELEBRATION 2024

By ANTOINETTE BEYNEN

It was a celebration, worthy of B.R.E.A.D.! One-hundred seventy-nine network members, representing 28 congregations, gathered in the “All Saints” school, part of the “Christ the King” complex on June 24, 2024. However, that was not the whole story! There was food and drink (and plenty of it!), fun and games, and new friends to connect with.

Best of all, there were interesting and spirited presentations, led by Brother W. D. Smith, co-President, and Jessi Sadaka as emcees. We recognized Judge Elizabeth Gill, who had been involved with B.R.E.A.D. through the Justice Circles since 2012, along with newer coordinators Julie Troth and Courtney Kellum. Julie Hart gave a rousing presentation of what it is worth to invest in justice, but the most anticipated part of the celebration was the detailed account that Cathy Levine and Bishop Scales provided of concerning the events leading up to the “Stop Predatory Landlords! Protect Renters Now!” action at Nehemiah on May 27. “Action needs a reaction to be effective,” Bishop Scales stated. The “reaction” was the commitment by Councilmember Shayla Favor to meet with the “Stop Predatory Landlords! Protect Renters Now!” research committee. Cathy related in detail the path the committee had followed in trying to schedule a meeting with Ms. Favor, leading up to the Action.

Special recognition was given to congregations that turned out 50%, 75%, and 100% of their Average Worship Attendance to the Nehemiah Action in 2024. These congregations are:

- 50% – Congregation Tifereth Israel;
- 75% – Christ United Methodist, Church of Christ on Genessee Avenue, First Unitarian Universalist, and University Baptist Church;
- 100% – New Beginning Christian Center and for the first time Rhema Christian Center.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

LISTENING PROCESS KICK-OFF: SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

North Broadway UMC at 6:30 PM
48 E. North Broadway Street, 43214

TEAM ASSEMBLY: OCTOBER 28, 2024

North Broadway UMC at 7:00 PM
48 E. North Broadway Street, 43214

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY: NOVEMBER 12, 2024

Christ the King Catholic Church at 7:00 PM
2777 E. Livingston Avenue, 43209

We look forward to seeing you at these upcoming events!

DIRECT ACTION & RESEARCH TRAINING CENTER (DART) JUSTICE MINISTRY CONFERENCE

By HELEN ANNE SWEENEY

Nine B.R.E.A.D. team members as well as 3 staff participated in the 2024 Justice Ministry Conference, held in Orlando Florida from July 16-19, 2024. Besides the B.R.E.A.D. delegates, social justice seekers from other DART affiliates from Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia attended.

In a rousing presentation about the Prophetic Call, Bishop La Fayette Scales of Rhema Christian Center reminded attendees of our core values to engage in social justice are tied to the Biblical story of justice and the need for the power of organized people to win justice, firmly rooted in the Book of Nehemiah. He urged attendees to stand over and against the cult of money and embrace high standards and rigorous accountability, because our task is so important.



B.R.E.A.D. leaders travel for training!

The breakout and practice sessions focused on techniques for conducting one-to-one sessions and uncovering the connections between network members’ self-interests and community problems. These sessions also provided participants with guidelines on inviting network members to house meetings and on leading house meetings.

On November 21-23, 2024, DART will be holding a negotiation and power building training in Charleston, West Virginia. A clergy conference is scheduled for February 4-6, 2025 in Orlando, Florida. For information and registration, please contact the B.R.E.A.D. Office at breadcolumbus@gmail.com.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOUSE MEETINGS

Justice Ministry/Rodef Tzedek networks will begin holding their annual house meetings after September 16, with team leaders scheduling and inviting network members to these meetings. In this article, we would like to provide network members with a brief overview of what a house meeting entails and how house meetings build personal relationships and power.

What is a House Meeting?

A house meeting is a focused conversation among potential network members within a congregation and lasts 90 minutes. It is meant to uncover problems that may align with important community issues, and usually involves about 11 people who may or may not be members of the congregation. The house meeting is not a problem-solving or a counseling session. The meeting can be held in someone's home or in a congregational meeting space or via online conferencing. During the discussion, members reflect on their values and experiences with injustice and receive an invitation to be part of their congregation's Justice Ministry/Rodef Tzedek network.

How Does a House Meeting Build Power?

House meetings help network members build and strengthen new and ongoing relationships. By uncovering community problems in small groups, members may identify common concerns about their community and motivate members to join their Justice Ministry/Rodef Tzedek network. Having large groups of organized people working on common problems with their community leaders, may contribute to a solution to those problems.

FOLLOW THROUGH: ISSUE UPDATES

STOP VIOLENCE! BUILD TRUST!

Columbus Violence Reduction (CVR) Program: CVR has met with 117 known violent offenders, through individual contact and three organized group events, resulting in 87 people making a commitment to change their lives.

B.R.E.A.D. network members and congregations can assist folks participating in CVR by donating items, such as food, as well as money that will be used for training programs and gift cards. Learn more about how to make a donation by visiting Cityview Church – Violence Reduction (<https://cityviewcolumbus.org>).

Active Bystander for Law Enforcement (ABLE): City of Columbus Police Chief Bryant agreed to submit an application to Georgetown University School of Law to conduct ABLE training. This training guides police departments in (1) preparing police officers to intervene successfully in crisis situations to prevent harm, and (2) to create a culture that supports peer intervention.

CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

The City of Columbus Recreation and Parks Department is keeping its commitment to create and implement the new city ordinance that protects mature trees on public property. As a next step in this project's implementation, the Department has hired a consultant. This fall, the Environmental Justice Committee will continue working to support the development of an ordinance to protect trees on private property.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Pilot Program: A student-led restorative practices program was rolled out at four high schools. This program teaches young people ways to own their emotions, build relationships, and serve as leaders to resolve conflicts among peers.

Community Training: In May, 25 community members – including B.R.E.A.D. network members – participated in an intensive two-day Restorative Practices training. Columbus City Schools staff hosted this training to thank B.R.E.A.D. network members for their persistence and support.

CONTACT US

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OUR MISSION

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good and what the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your GOD?” – Micah 6:6 (NRSV)