

HOPE

This fall, the Hillsborough Organization for Progress & Equality (HOPE) began its work to deepen relationships and share how community problems are impacting our community. HOPE also reflected on its spiritual foundation for doing justice work and the vital role each person can play to fulfill God's call to "do justice."

In 2019, HOPE got County Commissioners to pass the HOPE Affordable Housing Act that commits at least \$10 million annually in the county budget to create and rehab affordable housing for working families and seniors with low and very low incomes. So far, \$25 million was put in the county's HOPE Fund. This past February, 112 new units opened, a groundbreaking for 61 units is taking place, and there are plans for hundreds more of other quality housing units.

Changes HOPE previously won for Youth Civil Citations have prevented almost 1,000 children in Hillsborough County from getting life-long criminal records for minor offenses. This year HOPE got local stakeholders to greatly expand the Youth Civil Citation policy. Now Civil Citations are mandatory for all first-time misdemeanor offenses by children.

HOPE along with 16 other DART (Direct Access Research and Training) affiliates have decided to begin to work together by listening to stories on how heat, mold, toxic water, and storms impact our health and daily lives.

Micah 6:8 tells us that God asks for three things of us: 1) do justice; 2) love mercy, and 3) walk humbly with God. Our congregation does a good job of walking humbly with God, by being faithful. We worship on Sundays and Holy Days, study scripture, and sing praises. Our congregation does a great job of showing mercy. St. John's School educates and mentors young people. We contribute our time and resources to Love, Inc., Faith Cafe, Cornerstone Kids, and Kairos Ministries. Biblically, the work of justice is to hold those in power accountable for fair treatment of all people, especially the poor, the widow, and the orphan. As individuals and individual congregations, we do not have enough power to hold officials accountable for fairness and justice. We need the power of people to make a significant impact.

If you are interested in learning more about the work that HOPE is doing in Hillsborough County, you are invited to attend the Virtual HOPE 33rd Annual Convention on Monday, October 25, to hear the results of this year's Listening Process and see how HOPE makes decisions and commits to work together for justice. Stay tuned. The time and login information will be forthcoming. *Shirley Susich; sjsusich@gmail.com*