

# SACRED RESISTANCE MINISTRY TEAM: FOUNDRY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, WASHINGTON, DC

## Team Mission Statement

---

Why Sacred Resistance?

We exist because we are commanded to love one another, and love is an active verb. Our resistance is rooted in the concept of strength and endurance, in the United Methodist baptismal vow “to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever form they present themselves,” and in the biblical admonition to people of faith to seek justice and speak on behalf of the powerless.

Today, Foundry believes this vow mandates:

- opposing governmental actions that tear families apart and bar entry to this country to immigrants and refugees solely because of their religious affiliation;
- resisting policies that exploit and destroy natural resources on the planet we are charged with protecting and

that put short-term economic gain for a few above the long-term health and survival of the human race; and

- standing up with our voices, our bodies, our money, and our time to the policies and people who would deny human rights on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or income level.

There are many areas of government policy in which people of faith may disagree. Sacred Resistance at Foundry UMC targets issues that affect our bedrock principles: human rights, care for the planet, and the basic right of every human being to live without fear of oppression, speak without fear of censorship, and worship peacefully without fear of hostility.

## **Getting Started**

---

The membership at Foundry UMC leans toward being politically progressive and social justice-oriented, so the November 2016 election stunned most of us and filled us with grief and disbelief. In response, a group of parishioners agreed to be catalysts for channeling our collective negative energy into actions of positive resistance under the guidance of our clergy team. This was the genesis of the Sacred Resistance team.

Moving into 2017, the initial focus of this team was to scout out and coordinate concrete actions that congregation members could take to resist what, at the time, seemed to be a daily onslaught of proposed actions from the incoming administration that conflicted with our core beliefs as a community of faith. We started out by simply posting a link on the church website where our fellow members could post their suggestions on specific actions to take for the coming week. The idea was to open this up for maximum participation, and

we expected to be inundated with ideas. That turned out not to be the case: we quickly discovered that our fellow church members were waiting for us to tell them what to do, not the other way around. Our actions turned out to be overwhelmingly generated within our group, and they came as an outgrowth of the jobs some members currently had or professional connections they had made in past jobs.

Two members, for instance, were currently engaged in immigrant rights work; several others worked for local nonprofits in positions that involved keeping track of legislation on Capitol Hill.

Not all members of the Sacred Resistance team had those connections, however. Their value to the group was in more general skills. One member, for instance, was a veteran of a political campaign. She became our schedule organizer and detail person—that indispensable person who follows up on who’s doing what, when the next meeting is, and exactly who is going to be doing x, y, or z. Another member was a writer who helped craft our mission statement. The team was also a mix of ages, which turned out to be important: younger members were tech-savvy and facile with social media while the older members came with experience, institutional memory, and frequently, more flexible schedules.

Energy was high, and in the first weeks and months it seemed that there was a march or a protest planned practically once a week—one of the perks of being in the nation’s capital. But we realized we had to do more than just march in protests and encourage our fellow members to call their members of Congress. Our fellow members who were eager to do something also needed specific pointers on how to do it. In response, we set up several education and training sessions. One, for instance, was focused on specific tactics to use in helping immigrants threatened with deportation, as well as how to speak up for immigrants who were being subjected to public harassment. Another training session dealt with the basic how-tos of lobbying. We heavily

publicized both. And though one was on a Saturday and the other was an after-worship Sunday meeting, both were well attended.

## **Logistics**

---

The team initially met on a weekly basis. At first, a core group of three to four members took on the responsibility for one month at a time, signing up to coordinate communicating one or more actions each week. This was done through two primary channels: an opt-in email group for those who wanted a personal reminder in their inbox, and a page on our church website anyone could check. The weekly cadence of meetings moved to monthly as the team and process evolved. This mode of operation carried the team through mid-summer.

## **Challenges**

---

And then, not surprisingly, fatigue and burnout set in. By summer, it was very clear that part of the strategy of the new administration was to keep the opposition in react mode. This was a significant challenge. There were times where we communicated an action just hours before it was to take place. It was also clear that this was our new normal, and that we needed to stop and take stock of where we were and what we were doing. Acknowledging our feelings of discouragement and caring for ourselves and each other was vital.

## **Moving Forward**

---

For the month of August, the team (along with most of Washington) chose to take a break. When we regrouped in early September,

we took time to discern what worked, what didn't work, and what we needed to do next. At that point, we decided that it made more logistical and planning sense to focus on one action and one training per month, instead of trying to do things on a weekly basis. We also decided to move forward with an idea proposed by our associate pastor to get started on developing an interchurch advocacy exchange, working with like-minded congregations across the country. This involved a brainstorming session. What kinds of contacts did we have with congregations elsewhere? Who did we know in the congregation who had such contacts? We made a list, and individual members were assigned to reach out to those congregations to see if there was any interest in working with us. Meanwhile, we set about coming up with a letter introducing ourselves and our mission, and explaining the parameters of that mission. We also decided on a fundamental principle: that whatever collaboration happened, the initial idea had to start with a partner church, not with us. Our job was to use our physical proximity to power (Capitol Hill) to help others convey their message; the message itself had to originate with our partners.

That is a work still in process.

Some things we've learned that similar groups might keep in mind:

1. While the team is open to all, there needs to be a core group of people with vital skills and connections. Figure them out and take full advantage of them. In particular, having one person who specializes in scheduling and organization was very helpful.
2. A mix of ages is important. Younger people benefit from the experience of older people; older people benefit from the energy and tech-savviness of youth.
3. Prepare for burnout and exhaustion. It will come. Knowing that ahead of time makes it much more likely your group will survive it.

4. Don't be afraid to change tactics. Everything is an experiment, and some experiments are bound to fail. When something doesn't work, figure out why and move on.

## Sacred Resistance Email Actions for 2017

---

- o January 9: Moral Monday march
- o January 21: Women's March
- o February 4: Nonviolent Active Bystander Intervention training
- o February 6: Call Senators to oppose appointment of Steve Bannon
- o February 13: Call Senators to oppose appointment of Scott Pruitt
- o February 20: Call ICE field office in Fairfax, VA to express concern about targeting Rising Hope UMC in Alexandria, VA
- o March 4: Sanctuary DMV/immigrants' rights orientation at Foundry
- o March 9–10: Standing as Stone prayer event and rally in support of Standing Rock Sioux/against DAPL
- o March 18: More for Housing Now Rally at Foundry
- o March 21: Sanctuary DMV launch at Foundry
- o April 6–7: calls to DC city council on Moral Budget and family leave
- o April 10: Help Sacred Resistance group network with congregations
- o April 23: Advocacy Training
- o April 29: People's Climate March

- o May 2–3: May Day walk-backs with immigrant workers
- o May 4: Rapid response to the AHCA vote: invitation to call representatives and attend Protect Our Care rally
- o May 8, 15, 23: Maternal health series (information and social media campaign, plus calls to senators on health care legislation)
- o June 10–11: Equality March and Capital Pride
- o June 12: Local action on climate change, elections
- o June 20: World Refugee Day rally
- o June 27: Rally Against Scott Pruitt’s Dirty Budget
- o June 28: Interfaith Health Care Vigil
- o July 13: Emails to Senators on health care
- o July 14: Women’s March from NRA2DOJ
- o July 24: Walk with Pastor James Brigman for health care
- o July 26: Washington Interfaith Network Summer Action event
- o August 12: Invitation to attend vigil in the wake of Charlottesville violence
- o September 5: Sanctuary DMV rally on DACA
- o October 4: Sanctuary DMV rally at ICE headquarters to protest Operation Safe City
- o October 29–November 4: Praying with Dreamers week, including Standing with the Saints Prophetic Action on November 1 (All Saints’ Day)
- o November 29: Comment in support of American Correctional Association proposal to reduce the use of solitary confinement for youth
- o December 1: Senate Tax Bill/link to the Sojourners 2000 Verses campaign
- o December 9: Attempted Rapid Response Training
- o December 12: Second Tax Bill email