



CREATING A MORE Just AND Loving COMMUNITY

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August 2026 Newsletter



CAJM hosted United for Peace: A breakfast conversation with pastors and police on July 20th. The breakfast was designed to reinvigorate gun violence interruption efforts in our community. More than 50 pastors, law enforcement and community leaders, elected officials and other stakeholders participated. Each participant was challenged to collaborate in creating practical, measurable action plans. Every conversation was centered on the question. *“What can we do together over the next 90 days to make a difference?”*

The discussion tables identified several common priorities including:

- Building trust through neighborhood outreach and stronger relationships between pastors and law enforcement
- Increasing youth engagement through mentoring, positive activities, father figures and prayer
- Parenting classes and family support
- Stopping the violence occurring at late-night parties through a greater collaboration between schools, churches, law enforcement, and the community
- Expanding mentoring and early intervention opportunities
- Recruiting, equipping and supporting more community mentors
- Creating job fairs and employment opportunities for young people

- Strengthening neighborhood-to-neighborhood partnerships and community outreach
- Engaging local businesses to create meaningful summer jobs and career pathways for students

These priority areas were organized into Community and Assessment (CAR) Teams. Each CAR Team now is responsible for turning these ideas into measurable projects. Each CAR team identified a Driver who will help coordinate the team's work over the next 90 days.

Before leaving, every person in attendance signed a United for Peace Covenant committing themselves to be accountable for supporting their team's 90-day action plan. Each Driver will meet with members of CAJM staff in 30 days to share its plans, celebrate progress, and identify obstacles and resource needs to help each team accomplish its goals before the 90-day review.

You can help by:

- Joining one of the CAR teams to volunteer your time and expertise
- Helping implement the action plans when they are developed
- Connecting organizations to this effort

CAJM Executive Director noted that "lasting peace is built through consistent collaboration, shared accountability and a commitment to act together."

Please contact Elder Connell Leonard at connleon@aol.com to get more information and get involved in this effort.





Please Consider Joining One of Our Other Research Teams

Our research teams gather information, identify needed actions and discern gaps where CAJM can advocate for meaningful change.

We welcome thoughtful, dedicated people who are willing to work on these issues over the next six to nine months. As strategies are selected, members may wish to continue to dedicate efforts to planning projects. Please contact the leaders of each team, they can provide more information on getting involved.



Food Insecurity

Susan Robinson
surobins@me.com



Community Mental Health

Saskiya Fagan
sfagan@floridainnocence.org



Immigration Justice

Jerrie Lindsey
leleli939@gmail.com

Team Leaders, Get Ready for Listening Circles!

Many of us are familiar with the organizing tradition of House Meetings. Whether in homes, churches or coffee shops, we long used these meetings to surface community concerns and strengthen our network.

CAJM is building on that strong foundation by more clearly describing this essential step of the CAJM Way. Listening Circles more accurately reflects our approach and our identity as an interfaith justice ministry.

When we create welcoming spaces and listen to each other's lived

experiences, we discover shared values, strengthen relationships, and identify emerging leaders.

We believe that lasting justice begins by listening. Before we research problems, develop solutions, or ask public officials to act, we first listen to the people who are living with the challenges in our community.

Listening Circles will be the front door to CAJM's organizing process and an important way we strengthen congregations, develop leaders, and build people power for local community justice.

We invite every Team Leader to join us for the Listening Circle Kick-Off, where you will experience the process firsthand, learn the vision behind it, and receive the training and resources needed to confidently lead Listening Circles within your congregation. Together, we have an opportunity to deepen relationships, discover new leaders, and ensure that the voices of our communities continue to shape the work of justice. **When we get the listening right, everything else gets stronger.**





Update on the Rental Housing for Very and Extremely Low-income Residents Campaign

The Housing Strategy Team met with county housing staff on July 24 to discuss the status of the Affordable Housing Gap Financing Incentive Program developed as a result of CAJM's advocacy. The program offers "gap funding" to developers of mid-income affordable rental housing who agree to set aside units "in perpetuity" that can be afforded by families earning extremely-low and very-low incomes. The program is funded with monies from county general revenue, the Blueprint Office of Economic Vitality, and a portion of the county's annual allocation under the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program. Allocations are held in trust funds that roll over each year. Staff reported that as of October 1, 2026, the available funds will total \$1.5 million.

One application has already been received and accepted from Volunteers of America-Florida for the Via Nova Project on South Monroe Street. Gap financing will be provided when the applicant secures its primary funding from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation.

The Strategy Team are pleased with county staffs' efforts to promote the program with affordable rental housing developers and with their continued collaborative relationship.

Research Team Professional Development

On July 25 Betsy Stadt Willet led our Research and Strategy Teams through a second interactive training. From the spiritual foundations of our work through best practices to effectively initiate and implement change, new and seasoned team members learned from and shared with each other. The training opened with Carolyn DeBard reading her powerful poem reminding us of the importance of flexibility and persistence and the formidable impact of faithfulness.

The Persistence of Water

Carolyn Debard

Water does not argue with the mountain.
Instead, It begins falling toward the waiting valley,
carrying nothing but an unwavering desire to continue.
Water does not linger until the path is easy.

Instead, it begins
without knowing the way,
only its destination.

Water listens to the fallen tree,
the tangled roots,
the wall of stone
learning what stands before it.
Never mourning the path it cannot take,
water finds another way.

It bends,
It circles,
It slips beneath,
or leaps above.

Day after day,
drop after drop,
water caresses the hardest granite with quiet resolve.
What seems impossible in an instant
becomes inevitable through time.

Strength lives—not only in resistance,
but in yielding, without giving up,
in changing shape, without changing direction.

And so the water flows—
through shadow and sunlight,
through forests, fields, and stone—
ever faithful to its calling,

For in the language of water,
there is no word for defeat.
There is only FORWARD.

Please

Help us Put Fuel in Our Tank



Just like your car requires fuel to move forward, CAJM needs fuel to achieve progress. Please prayerfully consider investing in CAJM. Your support helps us organize and train community leaders, build partnerships and advocate for a better future in the Capital Area.

[Is your congregation part of CAJM?](#)

Join our growing faithful network. We also welcome businesses that wish to partner with us. You will be recognized for helping to make Tallahassee a better place.

Contact Bryan Stringer, CAJM Executive Director at bryan@capitalareajustice.org

You can also provide and advertise your support with a [CAJM polo or Tshirt](#).

Every dollar CAJM receives is an investment in justice and equity. Together, we can continue to strengthen our community and create lasting change.

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Tuesday, August 25 at 6 PM
Listening Circles Kickoff (Team Leader Training)
Trinity United Methodist Church

Interfaith Immigration Justice Vigil
Every Sunday at 5PM at the Old Capitol Steps



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