

Sedgwick County Multifaith Justice Organization

OUR ANNUAL PROCESS

4 MAIN EVENTS

Sept-
Oct

Listening
Process

Nov. 9

Covenant
Assembly

Nov-
Apr

Research
to Action
Process

Apr. 11

Solutions
Rally

May 9

NEHEMIAH
ACTION

June
20

Celebration

*"What does the Lord require of you but to
do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly
with your God?"*

- Micah 6:8

Our justice organization will build a
collective voice so large it can't be
ignored.

We will organize and use that voice
to advocate for changes that
address the root cause of our
community's most pressing
problems.

How it works:

LISTENING

Every year, leaders meet with others from their congregation to discuss community problems. Through these conversations, common areas of concern emerge. Leaders then vote to determine a few major priorities to focus on.

RESEARCH

Leaders form research committees to determine viable solutions that will resolve the problems long-term, as well as the public officials in their community who have the authority to implement those solutions.

ACTION

Organizations then hold a large public meeting called a Nehemiah Action. Members from all of the congregations involved (usually thousands of supporters) gather to negotiate solutions with public officials in attendance.

HOW a TEAM of LEADERS WILL DO JUSTICE in SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS

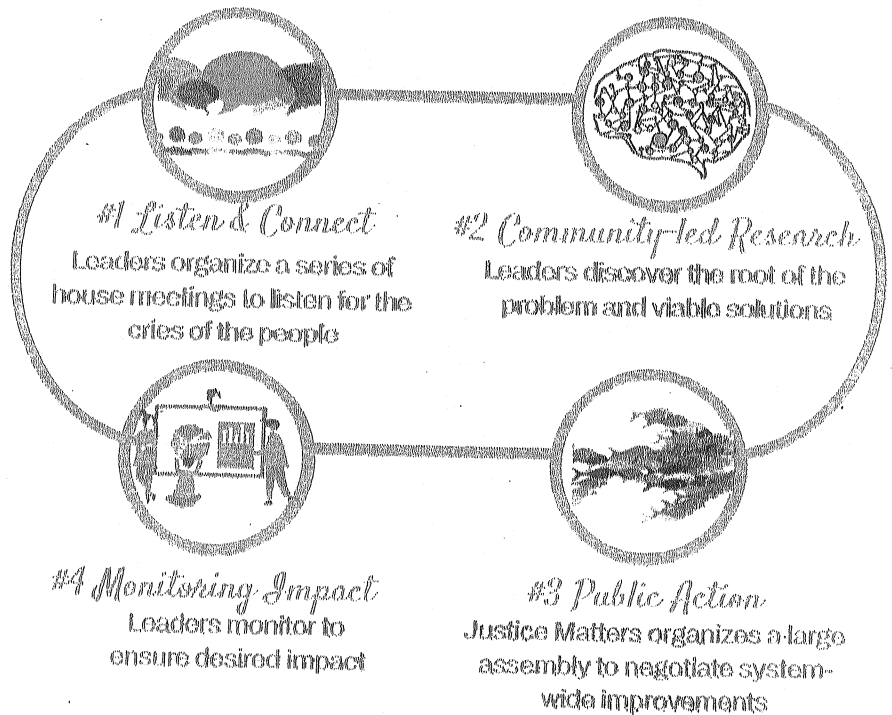
OUR ANNUAL *four step* CYCLE for *doing justice*

A group of 50+ clergy have met monthly over the last year to launch a new faith-based organization committed to doing justice in Sedgwick County. We hope you will join the Team of Leaders that will carry out this mission in our congregation. The process we will use to surface and act together on one accord to do justice includes:

Step 1. Listen & Connect

In September and October, about 200 leaders from a wide, diverse range of congregations will conduct a small group discussion to break down isolation, to share stories and values, and surface common problems facing people everyday in Sedgwick County. Themes will emerge and congregational members gather on November 9, 2023 to vote on the top two priorities to be addressed first.

A sister organization to the one we are building in Sedgwick County, Justice Matters in Lawrence, Kansas, organized 112 small group discussions with over 1,400 people of faith and good will. The conversation centered around the question: "What anxieties keep you up at night worrying?" The organization was shocked to hear the same story again regardless of income, race, gender, ethnicity: people suffering from mental illness could not find adequate treatment in Lawrence.



Step 2. Community-led Analysis

Starting in December 2023 and into the Spring of 2024, this new organization in Sedgwick County will form leader-led research committees to understand of the priorities selected. These committee will:

- Analyze data, conduct interviews with subject matter experts, and following up on the stories told during the listening sessions to understand the complexity of the problems
- Determine potential solutions by looking at best practices in other cities, consider cutting edge proposals from experts, and use common sense
- Define SMART improvements to systems like public policies, institutional practice or procedures, budgets: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
- Present and gain approval by a local Board of Directors representing all the congregations who have formed this new organization.

Returning to the example of Justice Matters in Lawrence: During their research phase, faith leaders uncovered a shocking reality: the mental health crisis was far more severe than anyone had imagined. Police officers reported an alarming average of eight mental health calls each shift. Mental Health Consumers faced an agonizing 6-8 weeks for psychiatric consults. Even nurses in the ER organized a walk-out in protest over to the sheer number of people waiting for days for a treatment bed to open up. And Osawatomie, the state mental health hospital, was under federal investigation for its mismanagement and overcrowding.

Then the group met with Rick Cagan, the Kansas State Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. He pointed the group to the inspiring Restoration Center in San Antonio, Texas — a place where people be taken by law enforcement as an alternative to jail or walk in 24/7 to receive a range of behavioral health treatment.

Determined to bring change, Justice Matters gathered nearly twenty stakeholders, including the Mayor, Chief of Police, and local hospital CEO, in April 2015. Together, they went to see the Restorative Center for themselves. They learned treatment radically reduced the jail population saving taxpayers tens of millions of dollars, people suffering from mental illness will put off treatment until they crisis and a one-point destination is a crucial beginning to recovery.

Justice Matters decided that spring that Lawrence desperately needed a high-functioning, financially sustained Crisis Center if there was any hope of resolving the problem.

Step 3. Nehemiah Assembly

In the spring, our new organization in Sedgwick County will bring together large numbers of people to an event known as the Nehemiah Assembly. This is not a meeting. This is an action to call for change. Testimonies will be given as to how the problem is impacting people's lives, researched solutions will be presented, and respectful negotiations will take place with authorities who possess the ability to make improvements.

The event is based on the example found in our sacred text, Nehemiah 5. Its purpose is to demonstrate broad public support for proven solutions and get local officials to make commitments that will lead to improvements on the problems impacting people's lives.

Justice Matters organized four Nehemiah Assemblies, with a total of over 5,000 people united in the call for a Crisis Center like the one in San Antonio. Three years, six months, and 29 days later, their relentless efforts bore fruit. In an overwhelming display of support, 71% of the county's voters decided to dedicate a quarter of a penny in sales tax solely to mental health treatment. It was a moment of triumph, a breakthrough achieved through unwavering community unity. The Lawrence Treatment and Recovery Center opened in 2022 complete with detox and stabilization services, as well as transitional and permanent housing for continued treatment support. Its a completely new arm to the system of behavioral healthcare in Lawrence.

Step 4. Monitoring for Impact

In the early summer and then as needed, the organization will monitor progress on the issue to ensure desired impact. Often deep, long-term system-wide changes will require a series of cycles before the organization can responsibly shift the organization's focus to make room for new priorities.

To this day, Justice Matters monitors the Treatment and Recovery Center using objective measurements like tax payer savings, hospital and jail diversion savings, treatment outcomes, recidivism, impact on public safety, etc.

JOIN the JUSTICE TEAM HERE

Together, we can make a real impact in Sedgwick County. A team of leaders is essential to engage our members and neighbors. The team will meet/lead activities about once a month to carry out this mission using the process described above, and you will receive great training and coaching from our staff of organizers. In Lawrence, they decided to first address mental health. In Sedgwick County, we will decide our own priorities. It's up to to us.

Mercy and Justice: a simple comparison

Below is a basic chart to help clarify the distinction between works of justice and works of charity borrowed from the Sisters of Marianist. This is not an in-depth analysis of contrasts, but a simple comparison. Justice Ministry can respond to immediate as well as long-term need. Also, justice work may require repeated actions to change institutions.

Charity ... Social Service	Justice ... Social Change
<p>Scriptural Reference: Good Samaritan Story</p> <p>The Gospel story does not attempt to survey the causes of highway banditry. The Samaritan provides temporary and immediate relief.</p>	<p>Scriptural Reference: Exodus Story</p> <p>Moses does not ask for food and medicine for the Jewish slave-labor force. He challenges the institutional system.</p> <p>Message: "Let My People Go."</p>
Private, individual acts	Public, collective actions
Responds to immediate need	Responds to long-term need
<p>Provides direct service: Food, clothing, shelter</p>	Promotes social change in institutions
Requires repeated actions	Resolves structural injustice
Directed at the effects of injustice: symptoms	Directed at the root causes of social injustice
Examples:	
Homeless shelters, food shelves, clothing drives, emergency services	Legislative advocacy, changing corporate policies or practices, congregation-based community organizing

THE NEHEMIAH ACTION ASSEMBLY:
A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR USING GODLY POWER
Example from BUILD Organization in Lexington, Kentucky

Scripture		What Is This?	BUILD example
<i>Neh. 5:1-5</i>	The people are being exploited by their own Jewish kin, and they feel powerless	Nehemiah hears the problem	Hundreds of addicts each year are released from Lexington's jails without getting drug treatment. Upon their release, some have been injured or killed as a result of drug-related violence. Men's drug treatment is reducing recidivism for participating inmates by more than 50% -- but there is no such treatment for women.
<i>Neh. 5:6</i>	"And I was very angry when I heard ..."	The anger	BUILD pastors & congregations got angry when they learned of the negative impact of untreated addiction for addicts, their families, and the whole community.
<i>Neh. 5:7</i>	"After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the rulers ... and called a great assembly against them."	The decision-maker is identified Public meeting is called	BUILD leaders did research to identify the Mayor of Lexington as the person responsible for solving the problem Meeting of 1,000+ people with Mayor of Lexington held at a local church
<i>(Agenda for the Nehemiah Action)</i>			
<i>Neh. 5:8-10</i>	"You are all taking interest from your own people."	Statement of the problem	The statistics on the need for drug treatment for women, and on the potential impact of BUILD's proposed solutions are presented; testimonies are given by people affected by the problem
<i>Neh. 5:11</i>	"Let us stop this taking of interest. Restore to them, this very day their fields, their vineyards ..."	Demanding a specific solution	BUILD demands that the mayor include \$175,000 in her proposed budget for a Women's Drug Treatment program in the Fayette County Jail.
<i>Neh. 5:12a</i>	"Then they said, 'We will restore everything'"	Decision-maker's response	Mayor agrees
<i>Neh. 5:12b</i>	"Then I called the Priests and made them take an oath to do according to their promise."	They "get it in writing"	BUILD leaders marked the mayor's commitments on a chart for all to see and sent a letter summarizing her commitments the next day
<i>Neh. 5:13a</i>	"I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, 'So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise'" "And all the assembly said, 'Amen,' and praised the Lord."	Holding them accountable Meeting adjourned with celebration	BUILD leaders set a follow-up meeting with the mayor in two weeks and inform her that we will be monitoring her follow-through on her commitment BUILD assembly sang a song & closed with a prayer of celebration
<i>Neh. 5:13b</i>	"And the people did as they had promised."	Monitoring	BUILD followed-up with the Mayor and Urban County Council to monitor and ensure that sustained funding was provided for the Women's Drug Treatment Program. (The program has graduated over 300 women to date)