



A Faith<sup>THAT DOES</sup> JUSTICE

*Inspiring faith in action*

# **A Report to Friends and Sponsors of A Faith That Does Justice**



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Dear Friends,

In the past year, our world has changed dramatically and with it, our call to walk in solidarity with those in need has increased.

I founded A Faith That Does Justice because I was profoundly influenced by my experience in El Salvador during that country's civil war of the 1980's and early 1990's. The faith of the Salvadoran people led them beyond their churches to realize their God-given human dignity and rights. Their example made me realize we are all called to live beyond an intellectual ascent to faith to one that is lived in action on behalf of all God's people.

From the COVID-19 pandemic which has disproportionately impacted people of color to a divided nation healing from a contentious election to an awakening of the masses to the impact of white privilege and systemic racism, we are in a profound time in our country's history. The challenges of the past year have given us the opportunity to chart a new path forward. This report to friends and sponsors of AFTDJ outlines the steps we have taken to inspire faith in action and walk toward a better, brighter future together.

May God Bless You,

Peter Gyves, SJ, MD  
Founder, A Faith That Does Justice

## Our Mission: Living Faith in Action

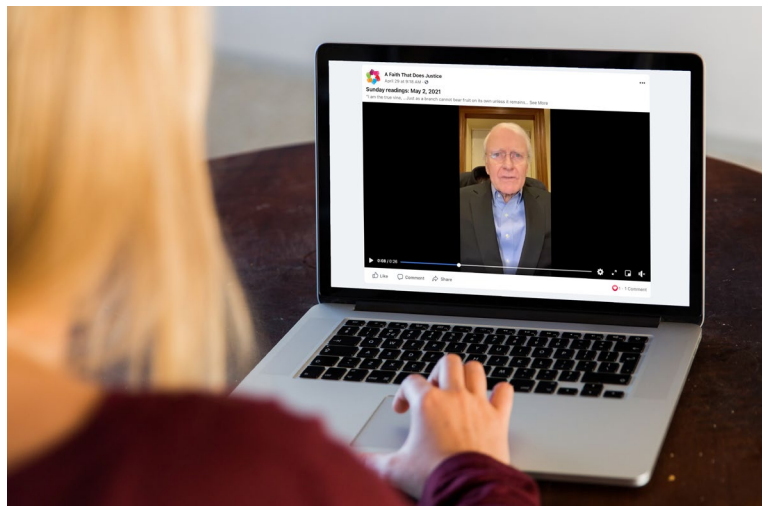
A Faith That Does Justice is an interfaith organization that challenges people to experience God by living their faith intentionally in service to others. We do this by showing how unjust societal structures marginalize people and by acting to help those in need. Our vision is people intentionally living their faith in action.

AFTDJ serves among the most marginalized in our community: resident immigrants in the Boston area who do not speak English. Our key program serving this population today is our free English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program which enrolls adult immigrants and refugees who have a desire to learn English. For some of our students, the ESOL program represents their first school experience, either in the United States or in their countries of birth.

English learners face myriad, daily challenges that are nearly overwhelming to them until they can gain basic language skills to navigate interactions that many of us take for granted. These include registering their children for school, talking to teachers, doctors, and other health care workers, applying for employment, starting a business, and interacting with people in their communities like neighbors, retail workers, law enforcement and other public servants, to name a few. AFTDJ's free ESOL program provides a lifeline to new English speakers by reaching out to them, gaining their trust, and helping them to acquire the basic English language skills needed to navigate experiences and activities essential to security and wellness in their lives.

Today, our job is more challenging than ever. Our immigrant neighbors face exclusion, isolation, and oppression due to the intersectionality of their language, race, ethnicity, and poverty (and sometimes gender, disability, and other factors.) The past several years of anti-immigrant policy and rhetoric in our society have deepened fear and isolation among all immigrants (citizens, refugees, and other immigrants alike).

To restore trust, build community relationships, and engage others in the mission of faith in action, AFTDJ continues to expand our community outreach and education activities. These include our **Community Meetings**, public learning events intended to inspire action by focusing on social justice issues that impact immigrants and other historically marginalized people as well as **Workshops**, smaller public sessions led by invited speakers offering faith-based presentations that challenge participants to live their faith through action in service of those living in under-resourced and "otherized" communities in and around Boston.



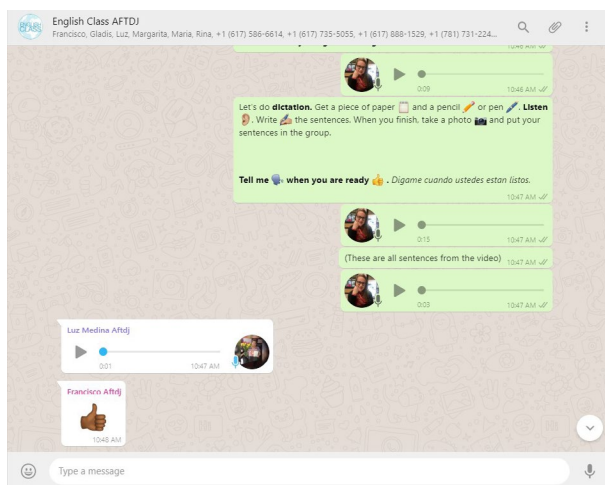
*Father Peter launched a series of weekly videos to inspire faith in action through the weekly Sunday readings.*

## Our Impact

### ESOL Program

AFTDJ's core program is our free English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program for Boston's immigrant communities. Participants in the ESOL program are representative of Boston's larger adult immigrant community and reside in diverse neighborhoods including Roxbury, East Boston, and Dorchester. The native language of AFTDJ's ESOL student population is primarily Spanish, but the program serves Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Russian, Turkish, and Arabic native speakers.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly halted in-person learning. AFTDJ's volunteers and students quickly adapted to this challenge by modifying and moving to a virtual program on the What'sApp platform, the most accessible (via smartphone) and familiar platform to the program's students. As AFTDJ moved to a virtual learning environment, we identified a new challenge that confronts the English learners



ESOL Class held over What'sApp

we seek to serve: the notable lack of access to technology. To respond to these challenges, AFTDJ piloted a Tablet Learning Project supported by our sponsor, **TCC Gives**, through which we are loaning tablet devices and providing wireless service to some students participating in our Winter ESOL Class Session.

Another new feature of our ESOL program is our team of 7 volunteer Student Relationship Managers (SRMs). The ESOL SRMs support students in their learning process to help them overcome obstacles to learning and class attendance, and to increase student retention, a significant challenge in all ESOL programs. Our SRMs are volunteer, bi-lingual individuals who live and work in the communities we serve.

“...Thank you so much for believing in me. Thank God for meeting you. I look forward to continuing my studies.”

- Olena, an ESOL student

“My experience as an SRM has allowed me to have a closer relationship with the students, letting them know that they have our support and that there is someone they can relate to advocating for their success throughout their class cycle. It is like having a friend next to them. They feel less lost. It is easier for them to know where to go for help. They feel more at ease and more empowered to engage in the program. This position allows us to get to know students' needs and concerns and to work with this in mind.”

- Samuel Josué Zamora Yoder, AFTDJ Student Relationship Manager

We are proud to have served over 100 students in our ESOL program during 2020 and early 2021. The need for the ESOL program is more urgent than ever. English learners have been isolated from formal and informal opportunities to learn English during the ongoing pandemic. As our society returns to “normal” operations, including in-person ESOL classes, continuation and expansion of our in-person and virtual teaching capacity is essential.

### Community Outreach and Education

Also central to our mission are **Community Meetings**, public events held 3 times per year that educate participants on relevant social justice issues and inspire them to act to mitigate those issues. Topics are complex, frequently in the news, and important to our mission. Three to four panelists with an expertise and unique perspective are invited to speak and answer questions in a virtual roundtable format.

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In October 2020, A Faith That Does Justice moved successfully to Zoom Webinar for a Community Meeting titled **Faith & The National Elections: A Discussion of How Faith Informs our Voting**. This meeting, with more than 100 attendees, attracted a national audience that we hadn’t previously reached.

Our most recent meeting was “**Healthcare Disparities: What Can We Do About It?**” during which panelists explored how the impacts of systemic racism in health care disproportionately impacts communities of color and offered suggestions on what the audience can do about it.



AFTDJ welcomed health care experts for a virtual Community Meeting about health care disparities and what we can do.

**AFTDJ Workshops** are smaller public sessions led by invited speakers offering faith-based presentations that challenge participants to take action with and on behalf of historically marginalized people. Our last Workshop followed our Community Meeting about how disparities are impacting the health of communities of color. The Workshop was a conversation about how an individual can be an agent for change by putting their faith in action working toward justice, equity, and inclusion in health care.

### Strategy for 2021

In the fall of 2020, the volunteer leaders and Board of AFTDJ collaborated to develop a strategic plan for 2021, and coalesced around three overarching goals for our organization:

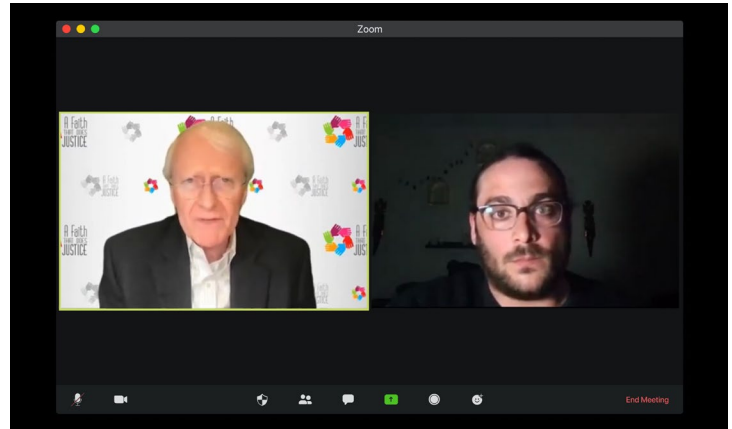
- Focus on priorities that advance the **action** aspect of the AFTDJ mission and on improving engagement of the community and our target audiences in AFTDJ programs and events.
- Improve racial, ethnic, and lived experience **diversity** of AFTDJ Board, volunteers and staff.
- Expanding and deepening our **community partnerships**.

## Prioritizing Action

In 2021, A Faith that Does Justice is piloting an Education + Action model in response to feedback from our Community Meeting participants. Following the Community Meeting, suggestions for inspiring faith in action will be provided in two ways:

- Focusing panelist remarks on actions the audience can take to achieve social justice as well as educating them on the issue and encouraging action focused audience participation.
- After the meeting, providing a road map to all attendees of social justice actions relating to the meeting topic that they can take.

Our recent workshop illustrating ways to put faith in action, titled **Be an Agent of Change: Achieve Health Justice**, was held on March 23, 2021 with the Health Justice Campaign Organizer from our partner **Health Care For All Massachusetts** leading attendees in advocacy training and ways to work for health justice in their communities.



*AFTDJ held a Workshop with Health Care for All about actions we can take as individuals to create a more just health care system.*

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The events of the past year, including the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery; the city, state and national outcry for racial justice; and the tragic fact that COVID is causing disproportionate acute illness and death among Black and Latinx Americans, have intensified AFTDJ's resolve and passionate commitment to understand and more actively participate in ending systemic racism and the social injustices it causes. We recognize that our Board and volunteers do not reflect the demographics and lived experiences of the community members we stand with and serve. In 2021 we are committed to several initiatives to make AFTDJ a more diverse, equitable and inclusive organization, including:

- **Creation of an Outreach and Engagement Fellowship Program.** To support community outreach and engagement and to build further trust in and expand our ESOL program, AFTDJ is actively seeking a paid Outreach and Engagement Fellow. The Outreach and Engagement Fellow will be responsible for building relationships with individuals, grassroots leaders, and community-based organizations in Boston (specifically Roxbury, East Boston, Roslindale, and Dorchester) to expand and enhance our relationships with immigrant and other populations we seek to serve. This position will be filled by an individual who reflects the diversity of the communities we serve, speaks Spanish as their first language, resides in Roxbury, East Boston, Roslindale or Dorchester, and has lived experience as an immigrant to this country. AFTDJ has already received a generous grant from our sponsor the **Eastern Bank Foundation** to support the Fellowship, and we are seeking funding from several other foundations to further support this effort.
- **Engagement of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Consultant.** To improve the racial, ethnic, and lived experience diversity of the AFTDJ Board and staff, we plan to engage a DEI consultant to work with our current Board and leadership and support us in transformation to a more diverse and inclusive organization. We specifically seek help with recruiting at least one new Board member who reflects the racial and ethnic diversity and experience of the people we serve.

## Strengthening our Community Partnerships

We rely on collaboration with and are grateful to community partners without whom we would not be able to achieve impact for our communities. We are continuing to deepen and expand these relationships:

- **Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)** is core to our ESOL program. JVS provides student assessments, curriculum, lesson plans, and teaches one section every session. In addition, we refer students who complete our program to them for advanced language training and for assistance with job placements.
- **St. Anthony Shrine** (Downtown Crossing) provides free classroom space for our ESOL program.
- **St. Mark Community Education** has a robust ESOL program. To reduce their backlog of students, AFTDJ has welcomed their beginner students into our program.
- **St. Stephen's Episcopal Church** in the South End runs a youth program, and AFTDJ is providing ESOL instruction to parents of youth program participants.
- **Tiziana Dearing**, the host of WBUR's Radio Boston and former professor of Social Work at Boston College, has been a key advisor to AFTDJ in shaping and implementing our Community Meetings, as have Jesuits within the academic communities of **Boston College, Harvard University, Fordham University**, and **Loyola University** (New Orleans).
- Community-based advocacy agencies, including the **MIRA Coalition, Health Care for All Massachusetts, Union Capital Boston**, and **The Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement**, are essential to our ongoing learning about Boston's community of immigrants, and how best to take action, and inspire others to take action, to support them.

## Financial Report

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AFTDJ is an organization that financially relies on individual philanthropic support to fulfill our mission and programming objectives. Last year, we were fortunate that individual donations were stable. Like many organizations, we heard a common message from granting organizations and foundations to which we applied – that they had received a record number of applications from community-based, non-profit organizations like ours, simultaneously reeling from and attempting to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, and also like many organizations, AFTDJ had a 37% reduction in expenses related to limitations on the number of community meetings we were able to hold during the pandemic and transitioning to a less-costly virtual meeting environment. As a result, we finished the year in a solid position financially, with a surplus of \$46,000.

As we look ahead to 2021, and the promise of returning to a new normal, we recognize the need for our ESOL program and community outreach and engagement are more critical than ever, and our plan for expansion of these efforts could well be challenged if we experience a downturn in individual donations and increased competition for grant funding. For this reason, we are asking for your financial support to enable AFTDJ to continue and expand our work with Boston's immigrant communities.