



Mission: Interfaith prayer, education, and action for Earth

2019 REPORT & 2020 OUTLOOK



Earth justice is a mission as big as the planet. So, how does something as tiny as VEJ make a difference?

We try to be a “pebble in the pond,” making ripples for Earth justice through southeast Michigan’s people of faith.

GIVING THANKS FOR 2019

In 2019, VEJ reached and served people for whom Earth justice is part of their faith practice. Our programs were:

- **Community Dinners.** Dinner guests from the neighborhood and suburbs enjoyed Earth justice presentations from local speakers and vegan meals made by local chefs.
- **Interfaith Prayer Breakfast on National Day of Prayer.** Interfaith clergy led prayers and Rev. Faith Fowler of Cass Community Services shared her experiences working for Earth justice in Detroit.
- **Wonder Walks** at nature preserves and parks throughout southeast Michigan. At each event, a nature guide and a spiritual director led walkers on a one-part nature hike, one-part spiritual retreat.

The **neighborhood garden at Hope House** drew hundreds of volunteers, most of them youth. While the garden only grows enough food for a few households (and groundhogs!), it is an important part of our Earth justice mission. The garden is where people from different cultures, tax brackets, and ZIP codes meet and work side-by-side.

Here are some numbers that help tell the story of 2019:

- VEJ programs reached and served about **650 people** this year. That is a **30 percent increase** over the number of people we reached and served in 2018. **More than half volunteered at Hope House and most of those were youth.**
- About **half the people we served came from Detroit** with one in four coming from the Hope Park neighborhood.
- **More than half the people we reached and served in 2019 were first-time VEJ participants.**
- VEJ media followers (email subscribers, social media followers, and website visitors) grew to **5,500 people.**
- The **board of directors doubled in size**, reaching ten members. In January, we will welcome new officers.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2020

*We're all in this together...
...as the created sharing in one Creation,
...as co-habitants of one habitat,
...as fellow human beings despite different cultures, faiths, politics, tax brackets, or ZIP codes.
We're all in this together.*

In the fighting and noise of an election year, VEJ will say and show: ***We're All In This Together***. We want our story in 2020 to be one of people finding what they have in common and working together for Earth justice.

HOW WILL WE DO THAT?

Prayer

Prayer is giving thanks, humbling ourselves, and seeking understanding and wisdom from beyond us. At VEJ, we weave interfaith prayer into all of our programs. We aim to make each VEJ gathering a place and space for wonder.

- **Earth Day Interfaith Prayer Breakfast featuring Amanda Saab (Wednesday, April 22, 2020).** Our interfaith prayer breakfast will return next year on Earth Day. Amanda Saab, founder of “Dinner With Your Muslim Neighbors” and owner of a “Triple Bottom Line” business will be the keynote speaker.
- **Wonder Walks (monthly starting in Spring 2020).** Nature has the power to unite people in awe. This one-part nature hike/one-part interfaith spiritual retreat will take you deep into southeast Michigan’s natural wonders.

Education

In 2020, our education focus will be on helping people find ways to work together for Earth justice. We will blend “how-to” training with inspiring examples and true stories from people who are making things happen.

- **Community Dinners (monthly starting March 2020).** Speakers will share stories about how they formed unlikely partnerships that brought about Earth justice in their communities. Guided table discussion will follow.
- **Non-Violent Communication workshop (TBD).** Non-Violent Communication is a method for conflict resolution. People learn to work through their differences to find common ground to make change happen.

Action

Earth justice is *only* Earth justice when it is *lived and practiced* in our personal and public lives.

- **Neighborhood Garden at Hope House (Spring through Fall 2020).** The neighborhood garden is where people get their hands dirty and rub shoulders with people they don’t often meet in their own walks of life. It is one part personal (learning to care for Earth) and one part interpersonal (learning to care for people).
- **Partnerships.** VEJ is part of an informal alliance of Earth justice organizations like Bees in the D, EcoWorks Detroit, Hazon Detroit, Michigan Interfaith Power & Light, NEW LEAF, and more. We encourage our VEJ community to explore ways to take action with these partners.

Our budget for the current fiscal year (the one in which the first half of 2020 falls), is just under \$72,000. If you want to help make our mission and programs the best that they can be in 2020, please make a donation today! Thank you!