

Cleveland Kick-Off Event

75 people came together at the *Puncture the Silence – Stop Mass Incarceration* kickoff and organizing event on August 28. Hosted by the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Cleveland, welcomed by Rev. Daniel Budd, the evening featured poetry, a speech by Rev. Jerome McCorry, and break-out sessions to get down to the business of planning the October Month of Resistance.

There was a broad mix of people. The atmosphere was made that much more serious by the murder of Michael Brown and the inspiring resistance of the people of Ferguson, joined by protestors from around the country, who defied the unbelievable show of force from law enforcement trying to intimidate people into going home. The event was dedicated to Michael Brown and the courageous resisters in Ferguson.

People who attended the event came from around the city: youth from the St. Clair/Superior film showing of “Fruitvale Station” and the vigil for Michael Brown, folks from the multi-cultural committee of two churches, one in an inner-ring suburb and the other from the inner city, helping to greet and serve refreshments, veterans of the civil rights movement, revolutionaries, younger people refusing to be silent, teachers, social workers, and some formerly incarcerated. The crowd about evenly involved Black and white. Lots of new people who had been met at street fairs, concerts, protests, and friends and family of Puncture the Silence members were there. Many people commented on how organized and spirited the event was.

After a rousing speech by Rev. Jerome McCorry, director of The Adam Project and head of the Stop Mass Incarceration Network faith-based initiative, everyone chose break-out meetings to focus on brainstorming and planning the October Month of Resistance.

The large Fellowship Hall was buzzing with conversation. People who yesterday had been strangers started to work together to build the movement. There were 7 breakout planning groups: Vision for October 22, Faith-based organizing, Youth Outreach, General Outreach, Arts, Social Media, Formerly-Incarcerated Outreach. These elements will be coordinated to make for a powerful outpouring throughout October. Everyone agreed, between now and October, and beyond, our movement needs to get even stronger, more active, with a focus on resistance.

The night ended with a determination and spirit to use the kick-off as a springboard to be a bigger part of the national movement to Stop Mass Incarceration. People took stacks of the 5,000 palm cards ready to go. It's going to take a lot of hard work and outreach to the people. Please contact us at: puncturethesilencecle@gmail.com.