Dear FCSJ community and friends.

What a fantastic year we’ve had. It’s been filled with amazing firsts and organizational milestones. Some are discussed in more detail below; however, I would like to lift up the role that relationships have played in us making the accomplishments we have.

Since all of our work and programming is done intersectionality, it would be impossible to name every volunteer, funder, partner, ally and accomplice we have worked with, but I would like to take this moment to name just a few.

I would like to thank our newly appointed Board Chair, Juan Battle, who helped me understand more than five years ago, the impact that well-funded Movement work can have. I, like many grassroots leaders, struggled (and still have this as a growing edge), with fundraising and donor development. He helped me see how effective and strategic fundraising is a part of any good organizing effort.

I thank Wesley Mancini who gave us our first grant for $5,000.00. Those resources helped us lay the foundation for all of our future work. He believed in us before most even knew who we were.

Tonyia M. Rawls
In February, FCSJ staff travelled to Raleigh for The Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ) People’s Assembly and March. We joined more than 125 North Carolina NAACP branches, youth councils, and college chapters from across the state and members of over 200 other businesses and organizations.

Bishop Tonyia Rawls (FCSJ’s Founder/Executive Director) and Jamila Reddy (Communications Coordinator) delivered speeches based on personal experience to members of the LGBTQ community and champions for justice and equality. Their speeches were viewed by thousands at HKonJ and worldwide through livestream and multiple TV and network sources.
BUS TO DC FOR THE GLOBAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY

On June 23, 2018, the Freedom Center for Social Justice took a charter bus to Washington, D.C. to support The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival’s #GlobalDayofSolidarity Call to Action Mass Rally. FCSJ staff and 45 guests from N.C. marched together as #TeamBayard in honor of Bayard Rustin, an American leader in social movements for civil rights, socialism, nonviolence, and gay rights.

We joined Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis and America’s poor and impacted for a massive call to stand against systemic racism, systemic poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy/militarism, and the distorted moral agenda of religious nationalism.
MAJOR! FILM SCREENING IN HONOR OF TRANS DAY OF VISIBILITY

In March, LGBTQ elders, youth, and local activists gathered at Aldersgate Retirement Community for a screening of Major!, a documentary film about the life and campaigns of Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, a Black transgender elder and activist who has been fighting for the rights of trans women of color for over 40 years. Miss Major is a veteran of the Stonewall Rebellion and a survivor of Attica State Prison, a former sex worker, an elder, and a community leader and human rights activist.

Hosted by The Freedom Center for Social Justice and the Charlotte LGBT Elders group, the event brought together over 100 people to celebrate International Transgender Day of Visibility, an annual event occurring on March 31 dedicated to celebrating transgender people and raising awareness of discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide.

Reverend Debra J Hopkins hosted a talkback, and trans-affirming local businesses generously donated offerings for custom care packages that we offered to trans folks doing impactful work in Charlotte.

We were able to celebrate FIVE trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people who were nominated by members of their communities for their work, lives, and/or activism!

FREE FILM SCREENING: MAJOR!

Presented by The Freedom Center for Social Justice and Charlotte LGBT Elders Group
We also had the pleasure of hosting Miss Major Griffin-Gracy live in Charlotte. Miss Major’s personal story and activism for transgender civil rights intersects LGBTQ struggles for justice and equality from the 1960s to today, and our goal of having her join us was to encourage and inspire trans-inclusive activism in Charlotte. At the center of Miss Major’s activism is her fierce advocacy for “her girls,” trans women of color who have survived police brutality and incarceration in men’s jails and prisons.
This year we hosted our third annual Transgender Faith and Action Network (TFAAN) Retreat in Montreat, North Carolina, which brought out 50 participants. The goal of TFAAN is to connect trans people and allies under the shared goals of learning, networking, healing, and empowerment. TFAAN is also co-convener of the Trans Seminarian Leaders Cohort, a yearlong leadership development program for transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming seminarians in the United States.

TFAAN exists not only to change policies and raise awareness about issues that affect the trans community, but also to provide spaces for trans folks to network and heal. The annual retreat is an opportunity for trans folk to decompress, be heard, engage and collaborate with like-minded community.

TFAAN is presented in partnership with The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at Pacific School of Religion and The National LGBTQ Task Force.
SOUL LIBERATION YOGA LED BY ETERNITY PHILOPS
In this casual and shame-free workshop, participants discussed the many dimensions of Yoga that can help in healing and growth journey, and practiced some of the most common poses while honoring the uniqueness of our bodies.

PERFORMING OUR POWER LED BY JACKSON REDDY
Inspired by Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, this workshop explored storytelling, performance theatre, and preserving history. Through movement, writing exercises, dialogue and performance, participants learned ways to tap into their inner power in their everyday life.

FROM CUDDLING TO KINK: TRANS DESIRE AND SACRED SEXUALITY LED BY HOLIDAY SIMMONS
This interactive workshop engaged people in desire mapping, somatic responses to pleasure and trauma, and discussed some of the nuances of dating, loving, sexing, and kinking while trans.

LOVING YOURSELF & LIVING LIFE FULLY LED BY JOJO V. GABUYA
This workshop featured group activities on (a) finding one’s rhythm of compassion; (b) discovering the path that’s right for you; (c) uncovering your social shadow; and (d) caring for the world.

TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE: DEVELOPMENTS IN FEDERAL POLICY IN THE LAST YEAR, LED BY RAFFI FREEDMAN-GURSPAN, AMES SIMMONS, & LIAM HOOPER
Facilitators led a discussion about the proposed Conscience & Religious Freedom Division of the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, as well as the Trump Administration’s proposal to use this division to restrict reproductive justice and transgender health services.
LIBERATING THEOLOGIES SPEAKER SERIES

Liberating Theologies Speaker Series, a one-day experience exploring varying theologies with an emphasis on liberation and inclusion for the oppressed and marginalized. The Liberating Theologies Speaker Series is an extension of The Freedom Center for Social Justice’s Do No Harm initiative, which works with people of faith and the broader community in North Carolina to shift culture and narratives that cause harm through interpretation of Holy Text and other religious writing.

North Carolina continues to be a political, social justice and religious battleground in the United States for decades. Regressive views on religion, the LGBTQ community and other marginalized groups have harmed many of civil rights advances in the South. There is a consistent need to make a bold statement about intersectional justice; and the importance of restorative justice for those in the LGBTQ community that have been religiously ostracized.

The Freedom Center for Social Justice hosted nearly 100 attendees for our inaugural Liberating Theologies Speaker Series. 13 sponsors joined us for the series, including our core partner, Union Theological Seminary of New York’s UNION of Affirming Christians. Attendees joined us from North Carolina, South Carolina, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, New York and more. Guest speakers included MacArthur Genius Fellow, Bishop William J. Barber II, Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, and Bishop Yvette Flunder.
NC Faith Forward Coalition
We worked with the NC Faith Forward Coalition to host the Uniting for Our Future Summit. The Uniting For Our Future summit was a non-partisan, public education gathering that provided opportunities for North Carolinians to learn from others and make connections that help increase our power across the state. Our four core issue areas were public education, Ban the Box, immigration and sanctuary solidarity, and maintaining a fair judiciary. Through dialogue and peer-to-peer education, this gathering sought to uplift the voices of the most vulnerable and unite our visions for a just and inclusive future for all North Carolinians.

NC Council of Churches
FCSJ partnered with NC Council of Churches for a workshop entitled, “NC Churches in ally-ship with Trans Woman” to guide participants through how to transform their places of worship into embracing communities for ALL women. This workshop, presented in partnership with Reverend Debra J. Hopkins, provided trans-101 information to equip participants with the fundamental knowledge and tools they need to understand, take action for, and initiate conversations on gender justice.

NAACP
On January 27, FCSJ Founder and Executive Director, Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls, was sworn in as the inaugural chair of the recently established LGBTQ committee of NC Conference of the NAACP Executive Board. This appointment came as a result of several years of work that the NAACP has been doing towards LGBTQ inclusion, protections, and advancement. In her new role Bishop Rawls and FCSJ staff will be working with the local NCAAP chapters to provide training on LGBTQ and social justice issues.

Aldersgate
This year we partnered with Aldersgate Senior Living Community, one of the Charlotte area’s largest retirement communities. This relationship reflects our deepening commitment to intergenerational and intersectional work. FCSJ will be a part of the Elder’s Council that’s helping to bring the very first SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) chapter to Mecklenburg County, NC. We’ll also be working with Aldersgate as a resource on ways they can work with their seniors to provide varied viewpoints on LGBTQI life. Our collaboration will provide a shared learning environment, in addition to an opportunity to build a more inclusive East Charlotte.
“The Freedom Center is everything to me. The Freedom Center is the pulse to my advocacy work — most of it is connected to The Freedom Center in some way. It is the central piece that allows me to do what I do. The most valuable aspect of my participation in The Freedom Center’s activities is the sense of feeling liberated in the confines of my trans journey. It gives me a chance to commune and participate. Without The Freedom Center, I would have to find my own avenues to do activist work. The Freedom Center makes it easier to be a part of a community. The Liberating Theologies Speaker Series was so very vital to faith spaces for our community. What it did for me was allow me to do some queering of my own theology, and I had never done that before. My new theology made room for me. It took away the boundaries that tradition has set. Once I attended Liberating Theologies, it released the shackles.”

"Attending Creating Change was absolutely fabulous. I could have spent another week there! One workshop in particular, “The Science of Trans” was eye opening for me, because a lot of time I can’t have conversations with people about trans identities. Going to something which was science-related, and put on by trans people, in an audience of professionals on the field who were trans were very refreshing. This information is not regularly available to the average Joe...certainly not to me, in Charlotte. The most valuable aspect of my participation in FCSJ activities is that now, I can have conversations with my cis friends across all kinds of communities, but specifically in the Black community. I got information that I can pass on. We want to know stuff, but we’re always scared to ask. This gave me a safe space to ask questions and to learn."
TESTIMONIALS FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Going to the events that The Freedom Center held has really helped me learn where my place was in the social justice movement, so much so that it helped me learn that I am indeed a Faith Leader. At Liberating Theologies, when people asked me if I was a faith leader, I had never thought of myself in that way before. Learning about that role helped me reach into my calling. Right after Liberating Theologies, I applied for my Doctorate in Ministry and I got accepted. I wouldn’t be where I am if it wasn’t for the Freedom Center. It’s been so fulfilling and eye-opening and soul-flourishing. All of your staff is so amazing; right away I felt like family. What you all are doing is priceless.”

Involvement in FCSJ events and activities, particularly, the TFAAN Retreats and Liberating Theologies conference, has been profoundly impactful for me. In my own work for trans liberation, and especially in my work with faith groups, I am often the person, or one of the persons, responsible for the event or activity. This means, I seldom have time to be fed spiritually, intellectually, or otherwise decompress and simply be with my people -- these being, trans, queer, and otherwise folks engaged in the movement for change. The events offered to us by FCSJ allow me to participate in community in ways that are enriching, soul-sustaining, and even intellectually challenging and formational, in ways I am not able to do in other spaces in my work; this is true even when I am “working” in some way at these events. The time with peers in deep community-building, respite, and movement-building are renewing, formative, and soul-feeding and I am deeply grateful for those opportunities to just be, be fully myself, and focus on my own rest, renewal and growth.
It is hard to believe it has been 10 years since we became a partner in the fight for freedom justice and equality in the South and beyond. We are proud to announce that we will be expanding our reach through the engagement of consulting partners Sherri Teng, Media Sutra and Diana Marie Lee. As we enter year four of our 5-year strategic plan, we look forward to the varied ways we can support our partners, impact policies and shift culture in ways that enhance life and increase safety and opportunities for the marginalized, disenfranchised and the poor. We will keep you updated as our plans unfold.