As we come to the close of 2019, I do so present to the fact that all things really are possible for those who believe. This annual report is not a reflection of our actions this year alone, but instead the fruit of more than ten years of a socio-political experiment we were fortunate to engage in. The experiment was anchored in a simple assumption: if you work on the issues most important to the marginalized, the outcomes will benefit the whole. 2019 has yielded much fruit that supports this premise.

The early going was tough because, several years ago, not many people - funders included - had a clear grasp of what it meant to shift from the transactional ways we formally worked to the deeper dive culture-shifting work we were engaging in.

As we celebrate this year of accomplishments, I must extend gratitude to former Co-Director of SONG, Caitlin Breedlove, who served as a mentor and generously shared her contacts and funding partners when we were still very young. She and her Co-Director, Paulina Hernandez, shared organizational information, provided training and vouched for us with people in rooms that were important to us. One of the many gifts they shared was former Arcus Foundation Director of Social Justice Programming, Roz Lee. She showed me what was possible when clear, narrow, adequately-funded work is done. They did not just invest funds in the organization, but invested in us as people as well. Those two early models of organizing and partnership has helped us with all funding and organizational relationships since. It is impossible to do this work without the resources needed to fund programming and our people. It is also impossible to do this work well without deep relationships.

We ask that you consider a winter gift to help us with the launch of 2020s transformational work.

With gratitude,

Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls
Founder/Executive Director

The Freedom Center for Social Justice
This year we celebrated a decade. The last ten years have been seed-planting — laying the groundwork for the organization we are becoming. We have been able to lay a foundation that now enables us to have a significant impact on culture shifts within the State of North Carolina and beyond. As an organization, we are committed to leaning into our growing edges, and getting clearer about what is uniquely ours to do. We want to grow in the direction of our community’s needs. We are okay with evolving — we know that as the world changes, our vision and strategies will inevitably change alongside it.

As we continue to grow, we stand upon the following organizational pillars:

**EDUCATE**

We believe each person is capable of making significant, lasting change in the lives of people around them. As such, we empower people to be effective leaders in culture-shift, the process of changing culture (the outlook, attitudes, values, morals, goals, and customs shared by a society) away from oppression and towards liberation.

**ADVOCATE**

We collaborate with other social-justice organizations to advance the cause of justice, equality and protections for LGBTQ people and the marginalized, centering those who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, or People of Color), elder, and/or youth.

**CELEBRATE**

We envision a world in which all people are able to reach their full potential as human beings, regardless of their varied identities. We celebrate the fullness of our humanity by working intentionally at the intersections of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, faith, age and class.
WE LAUNCHED our new website, FCSJ.org, to ensure that the people we serve and the people who support us understands clearly who we are, how we enact our mission and how we live our values. It is important to us that our community not only understand what we do, but also why our work matters.

WE CREATED a digital resource library — a collection of resources to help people support the LGBTQ folks and allies in their lives. It also serves as an informational portal to keep our networks up-to-date on matters of politics and justice.

WE EXPANDED our Board of Directors to 10 members, which serves as a model for intergenerational and intersectional leadership. Of that number, we have two people who identify as Latinx, seven people who identify as Black and one person who identifies as white. Seven out of ten board members identify as LGBTQ and the group has representatives from three generational groups.

WE GREW our staff to six with two new roles: Intersectional Program Manager (Ezra Fairley-Collins) and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (“SOGI”) Program Coordinator (Sarah James-Saunders). They will expand our growing body of partnerships and continue to create and refine programming that advances our mission, including our Liberating Theologies speaker series and annual TFAAN retreat.

WE HOSTED our first major Fundraising Campaign, 10 Days of Giving, to evolve the ways we mobilize resources to fund our work. We are working towards organizational sustainability by diversifying income streams.

Pictured — LEFT TO RIGHT: Ezra Fairley Collins (Intersectionality Program Manager, FCSJ) at the 2019 TFAAN Retreat | Rodney McKenzie (Board, FCSJ), Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls (Executive Director, FCSJ), Jamila Reddy (Communications Director, FCSJ), and Elizabeth White (Board, FCSJ) at a fundraising event hosted in Washington, D.C. | Sarah James-Saunders (Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity (“SOGI”) Program Coordinator, FCSJ)
For more than a century, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has worked to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

MAKING HISTORY WITH THE NORTH CAROLINA NAACP

This year, FCSJ deepened our partnership with the NC NAACP, providing resources and experience-based strategies to ensure that those on the margins of the margins (Black people and people of color who are lesbian, gay, queer, transgender, non-binary and/or gender non-conforming) are included in the fight for racial justice, equality, and an inclusive society.

THE NC NAACP TOOK A HISTORIC, BOLD STANCE IN FAVOR OF EQUALITY AND PROTECTIONS FOR THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY BY INCLUDING LBGTQ CONCERNS AND PROTECTIONS IN EACH OF THEIR 14 CORE ISSUES ON THE ‘PEOPLE’S AGENDA’.

THEY ESTABLISHED THE FIRST LGBTQ COMMITTEE, OF WHICH FSCJ FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BISHOP TONYIA M. RAWLS, IS THE INAUGURAL CHAIR.

THE STATE CONFERENCE WAS PRESENT AT FOUR NORTH CAROLINA PRIDE CELEBRATIONS, AND CURRENT PRESIDENT, REV. DR. T. ANTHONY SPEARMAN, PERSONALLY ATTENDED CHARLOTTE’S TWO-DAY EVENTS, CONNECTING WITH HUNDREDS AND INVITING THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 2020 HKONJ MARCH AND RALLY.
We continued our education at Creating Change — the National LGBTQ Task Force's annual organizing and skill-building event for the LGBTQ community and our allies. We had the chance to reconnect with our core co-conspirators for justice and made new connections with people whose missions, visions, and values align with ours.

We joined the HKonJ Coalition at the 21st Annual Moral March on Raleigh & HKonJ People's Assembly. This year, Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls (Founder/Executive Director) and Ash Love (former Director of Faith Organizing) spoke on the main stage during the rally to increase awareness of the distinct challenges that face the LGBTQ community.

Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls was the keynote speaker at a free community gathering about inclusion and intersectionality at First United Methodist Church of Boulder. This event was held the week after the Methodist Church decided to not support LGBTQ clergy or allow same sex marriages in their churches. Participants learned ways to honor diversity, empower the marginalized, and liberate the opressed.

We partnered with Reel Out Charlotte, the Queen City's LGBTQ Film Festival, April 28-May 5 at Camp North End for a full week of free events to uplift and highlight different identities within our LGBTQ+ community. We partnered to promote two films: “From Selma to Stonewall” and “TransMilitary,” highlighting the important intersections of our LGBTQ community.

On May 25th, FCSJ hosted our second Liberating Theologies Speaker Series. We heard theologies from Rev. Dr. John Boopalan, Rev. Dr. Keri L. Day, Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey, and Emerging Theologians, Rev. Lacette Cross and Rev. Brandon Wrencher. It was an honor for us to gather with our community in a shared commitment to disrupting harmful narratives that keep people oppressed.

We celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and Uprising, at a rally hosted by Charlotte Pride. The rally gave particular focus and attention to the history and achievements of our shared Liberation Movement and the contributions to the Movement over the past five decades by members of our beautifully diverse LGBTQ community.
We continued our education at Philly Trans Wellness, The largest Free Trans-Specific Conference in the World. Not only did we attend workshops that deepened our understanding of the communities we serve, we made new connections with allies working for protections and justice for trans, gender non-conforming and non-binary folks.

From August 15-18th, transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks and allies joined together for a three-day weekend of learning, fellowship, and relaxation. This year’s presenters were Cecilia Chung, Diego Sanchez, Jeynice Poindexter, Jess Majid, Michale Holliday, and the 2019 Trans* Seminarian Cohort.

This year, the NAACP came under scrutiny for a NC-based sexual harassment case. Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls, FCSJ’s Founder & Executive Director, joined the Elder Women of the NC NAACP to urge current leadership to enact a Nationwide sexual harassment policy and supported the victim in this case. The NAACP made a historic commitment to formally addressing complaints of sexual harassment.

At the Fall 2019 Liberating Theologies Speaker Series, participants heard from Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, Dr. Kwok Pui Lan, and Rev. Dr. Marsha Foster Boyd in addition to emerging theologians J Vu Mai and Rev. Corey Brown. Each walked us through how theology can be used to promote justice, acceptance, healing, and community care. Our perspectives were collectively expanded and we left feeling even more committed to shifting culture away from oppressive views towards life-affirming ones.

We hosted our first fundraising campaign, 10 Days of Giving, a digital event that was held November 24th to December 3rd to inspire our community to support FCSJ via financial donations or volunteer hours before #GivingTuesday. We shared powerful stories of impact from members of the FCSJ community.

At our annual end-of-year celebration, we opened the doors to our new NC Center for Diversity and Inclusion. The NC Center for Diversity and Inclusion is based within our recently-expanded office area. It is a physical manifestation of our mission — a space where people can exist as their authentic selves, ever-engaged in a process of evolving and expanding into their fullest potential in nurturing, safe, and supportive community.
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

ALDERSGATE, SAGE & CHARLOTTE LGBTQ ELDER'S GROUP
Providing support for LGBTQ Elders

BELIEVE OUT LOUD & INTERSECTIONS INTERNATIONAL
Sponsoring the Fall 2019 Liberating Theologies Speaker Series

EQUALITY NORTH CAROLINA
Advocating for Policy Changes that secure equal rights and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) North Carolinians

CHARLOTTE CLERGY COALITION FOR JUSTICE, NC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, MECKLENBURG MINISTRIES
Moving communities of faith in North Carolina toward pro-LGBQ and trans acceptance

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP)
Advocating for democratic protections, justice and equality for the LGBTQ and marginalized communities

PFLAG
Increasing diversity in the support they provide to communities of color

TIME OUT YOUTH, UNC CHARLOTTE, CAMPUS PRIDE
Providing support for and engagement with youth

THE NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE AND PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION
Co-Sponsoring the Transgender Seminarians Leadership Cohort, a program for transgender and genderqueer seminarians in the United States

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Co-Presenting the Fall 2019 Liberating Theologies Speaker Series

Pictured—LEFT TO RIGHT: Community Leaders at Equality Act Town Hall hosted by EqualityNC | Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls (Executive Director, FCSJ) with Kendra Johnson (Executive Director, EqualityNC) | Believe Out Loud staff Ben Ohene, Victoria Anderson & Anna Dreves at Fall '19 Liberating Theologies Speaker Series
As someone who has an MDiv Degree, it’s always great to be open, seeking and learning. I appreciate Liberating Theologies because it provided me a unique space to engage in scholarship — something that’s not often offered. As theologians and scholars, it’s important to keep sharpening your tools because the world is always evolving. Once you get the formal education, you have to continue learning to be in tune with what’s happening in the world. Hearing Dr. Kwok Pui Lan — a theologian I wasn’t familiar with until this event — and hearing her share about colonialism was helpful to me because as I preach and talk about what’s happening in the world when it comes to the problems in our government and political leadership, I can dig deeper and go back into how these issues are something that occur worldwide.

REV. MELISSA N. MCQUEEN-SIMMONS
NORTH CAROLINA FAITH ORGANIZER WITH MANY VOICES

I really appreciated being able to meet with amazing people like Dr. Kwok Pui Lan and Rev. Dr. Marsha Foster Boyd. It broke down those barriers that people often talk about when it comes to this field [of theology], particularly within academia. People are like, “You gotta work your way up and make sure you’re worthy,” and being at Liberating Theologies was like, “No you’re worthy now. You’re valuable now. I appreciated the ability to engage with these really thoughtful scholars who are well-respected without feeling like I had to shrink down; I could show up fully and feel accepted by the community.”

J. VU MAI
EMERGING THEOLOGIAN AT THE FALL 2019 LIBERATING THEOLOGIES SPEAKER SERIES

I gained friends I needed to meet and a sense of clarity and confidence in myself and my identity because of the 2019 Trans Faith and Action Network Retreat. I was able to meet other trans graduate students navigating the pressures of academia while exploring who they are. I was able to spend time in nature and ponder the big questions of life with people doing similar self-work. I cannot thank you enough for providing this opportunity to me at this important time. I am better for having this experience! This experience profoundly impacted my life.

NOELLE A JANAK
ALUMNI OF THE 2019 TRANS FAITH AND ACTION NETWORK RETREAT

I am so grateful for the work that the Freedom Center for Social Justice does. As a native North Carolinian, I think that doing this work in the South is so critical and so important, especially when you’re engaging work at the intersection of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. I really truly believe so much goodness comes from campaigns like the Do No Harm campaign, which really engages faith and sexuality and gender at its core and has conversations about how folks are living whole beautiful lives and embracing all parts of who we are.

ANGEL COLLIE
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY AT DUKE UNIVERSITY
LOOKING FORWARD TO 2020

As we continue our culture shift work, we will also:

LAY A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR THE NC CENTER FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
We will build capacity for individuals and groups with an opportunity to work in a technologically friendly and inviting space. The Center, opening to the public in January of 2020, will be a space for gatherings, workshops, events, and co-working. We want it to be a hub that fosters connection, learning, creative thought, and collective healing. The Center will offer free and sliding-scale workshops and trainings based on the named needs of our constituents. This space is also designed to generate revenue through rentals, in support of our operational and programming expenses.

BECOME A MODEL FOR OTHER ADVOCACY ORGS
We will replicate our best practices and share them through webinars and trainings in our programming as well as organizational work.

SUPPORT VOTER PROTECTION AND TURNOUT EFFORTS IN NC
This will be done with partners like Equality NC, LGBTQ Democrats of NC, Democracy NC and NC NAACP

FURTHER DEVELOP OUR BOARD AND STAFF
As a queer and people-of-color led organization, our presence is, in and of itself, shifting culture. We intend to expand the Board of Directors by 5 members and deepen trainings and support for personal development.