

BREAD & ROSES

Start with a faith community inclined to do justice; add some creativity and generosity; discover the right mission; and find a good leader. It's very likely the result will be generative and life-giving. And so it is with the Charlottesville, Virginia ministry, *Bread & Roses*, a project of Trinity Episcopal Church run by JustFaith grad and advocate, Kristan Pitts.

In 2012, Trinity, which describes itself as “an intentional multiracial community of reconciliation, transformation, and love,” began discussions of developing a signature ministry that would take the place of the James Hicks Childcare Center which had recently been closed. For over thirty years the childcare center had served hundreds of children and families in the Charlottesville area, welcoming children who were not accepted at other centers. With a new Vicar and a continued desire to impact the Charlottesville area with a new ministry that was particular to the skills and resources of the parish and the needs of the community, a new ministry was birthed – Bread & Roses.



Bread & Roses, the name borrowed from a political slogan first used in the women's suffrage movement in the early 1900s, was envisioned as a ministry that would address systemic issues of food injustice using the physical, financial, and human resources of Trinity Church and future partner organizations and churches. The mission of Bread and Roses was agreed to be “a ministry of Trinity Church that would help transform the way we acquire, cook, and relate to the food that we eat.”

Food is important. Growing food is important. Knowing how to cook food is important. The community recognized the complexity of food insecurity and food injustice and wanted to be a source of inspiration and new opportunity. Unfortunately, many people in America struggle to meet their basic needs; lay-offs at work, unexpected car maintenance, or an accident on the job can suddenly force a low-wealth family to choose between buying food and paying utility bills.

The root causes of food insecurity are complex. Some of the causes of food insecurity include: poverty, unemployment, or inadequate income; lack of affordable housing; chronic health conditions or lack of access to healthcare; systemic racism and racial

discrimination. These circumstances impact people all over the country, including Charlottesville. As a faith community, Trinity leaned into the Gospel call for love and justice and decided to leverage its resources to advance food access.

The first step was the development of infrastructure. Bread & Roses began in 2014 with a capital campaign and the complete renovation of the parish kitchen into a commercially licensed commissary kitchen. Kristan Pitts, the Bread & Roses program coordinator, notes that the commissary kitchen was created to be “an affordable option for new food entrepreneurs in the area, to allow them to have access to participation in the local food economy.”

The kitchen was designed, in effect, to be an incubator used by local food entrepreneurs; it has been more than successful! The headline of a July 2022 article in “Charlottesville Tomorrow” reads, “20 Local Food Vendors Got Their Start at this Low-Cost Kitchen,” referring to the Bread & Roses facility. Notably, the article mentions that “Bread & Roses has been a place where chefs of color and immigrant chefs have gotten a start.”

Caribbean cafe and catering outfit Pearl Island and Middle Eastern halal food stand (and city market staple) Khadijah’s Kitchen, both run by immigrant chefs and beloved by the community, are just two of those spots. “Oftentimes, it is the obscure ethnic foods that can enrich a community with culinary diversity,” said Mochiko chef Riki Tanabe, a native of Hawaii and former Bread & Roses tenant. He goes on, “And making a commercial kitchen accessible to an immigrant chef with limited resources *is very empowering.*” The work of justice can erupt into something both delightful and delicious!

The commercial kitchen, including walk-in coolers, also creates a revenue stream to support the other Bread & Roses projects. By charging a reduced and affordable fee for use of the kitchen and coolers, Bread & Roses provides both opportunity for low wealth entrepreneurs and funds for other projects.

The second step of Bread & Roses was the building of several wooden raised beds in the lower garden area of the church’s property. These beds serve as a “Demonstration Garden” to assist with educating people how to grow their own food at their homes and in other spaces. The extensive vegetable, herb, and flower gardens demonstrate how to raise fresh produce and cultivate beauty, even in limited urban spaces. Produce from the gardens has gone to members of Trinity as well as several organizations and ministries throughout the city. From 2018 to 2021, over 1200 lbs. of

fresh produce was grown and distributed to low-wealth and/or food insecure individuals in Charlottesville, Va.

The third and final focus of Bread & Roses builds on the work of the kitchen and gardens by bringing people together to learn and engage. Taking good advantage of the physical spaces they had created, Bread & Roses turned the kitchen and gardens into gathering spaces, points of reference, signs of hope and places of learning. Educating and empowering people are an important complement to the physical plant. Consider these accomplishments:

- From 2017 to 2019, nutritional cooking workshops were hosted at local farmers' markets, community events, and within faith communities, with 50-100 attendees at each session
- From 2016 to 2021, Bread & Roses worked with the Piedmont Master Gardeners to host monthly community education workshops on various gardening practices and techniques that could be implemented in their own yards. Each workshop had an average of 50 attendees.
- Since 2021, 14 intergenerational community garden workdays were hosted in the demonstration gardens that fostered relationships between individuals from 10 to 72 years old. (Growing food and growing relationship so often go hand in hand.)

And here's where the paths of Bread & Roses and JustFaith Ministries intersect. As program director Kristan Pitts puts it, "A thoughtful, prayerful examination of the ethical and theological grounding of food choices is an important component of Bread & Roses." In 2021, Bread & Roses hosted three separate JustFaith "Sacred Land: Food & Farming" small groups to begin a network of graduates inspired to advance food and ecological justice in the Charlottesville area. The three groups engaged 21 participants/graduates. Consequently, several of the program graduates immediately got engaged in the work of Bread & Roses.

One grad commented, "Participating in the Sacred Land program energized me to get involved with Bread & Roses and other creation care ministries across our community and the [Virginia] Diocese. Through this program I was able to make a deeper theological connection between food justice and my faith commitments."

Another graduate shared, "Participating in the [Sacred Land Food and Farming program](#) allowed me to connect with Bread & Roses and other Christians who are

passionate about food and land justice. Other participants from my parish left inspired to take what we learned back to our parish. A couple of direct actions we have committed to after this program is thinking about how we can incorporate more plant-based options for our hospitality meals and support our local food system by sourcing our produce from the local Black Farmers directory.”

A third graduate made this observation: “What occurred to me throughout the program is how entrenched our misuse of land is in our culture. I look forward to many more conversations after this program and doing more JustFaith Eco-Justice programs. I want us to continue to discern how we may bring these into the [Virginia] Diocese to be a permanent part of our theological curriculum.”

With positive feedback from all three groups, Bread & Roses did indeed invite the VA Episcopal Diocese to consider using programs within the JustFaith Eco-Justice Series to advance the mission of the Diocesan's Creation Care Taskforce. Late last fall, they purchased the [Hunger program](#) and [Sacred Air](#) program and plan to host these offerings for groups in the near future.

As Susie Tierney, JustFaith Ministries Executive Director, observes, “The work of Bread and Roses is a nearly perfect scenario for the fruition of our (JFM) programming - a committed church with a wonderful project, engaging people in a transformative learning process that links them to real work, real issues, real opportunities. It’s just ideal.”

As is typically the case with any growing and successful organization, you will sooner or later discover a talented leader and that’s certainly the case with Bread & Roses. JFM program graduate Kristan Pitts serves as the organization’s leader. Kristan first participated in a JFM program in 2016 and has done multiple programs since then. She introduced JFM programming to Bread & Roses.

Latricia Giles observes, “As a person of faith working at the intersection of climate and social justice, having the opportunity to participate in a JustFaith program helped inform my faith and my work. The Bread & Roses coordinator, Kristan Pitts, was able to generate a lot of enthusiasm within the non-profit community and within local Episcopal churches in Charlottesville around the importance of ecological justice through co-facilitating several JustFaith programs through the ministry of Bread & Roses.”

Rev. Tamika Jackson, Executive Pastor of Judah Temple AME Zion Church in Bowie, Maryland, says this about Kristan, “She is an amazing human who I have gotten to

know over the past few years. She has taught me as much, if not more, about justice than I have learned through classes I have taken, books that I have read, and other sources of information that I have absorbed. I have often heard, ‘I can show you better than I can tell you.’ Kristan embodies that mantra in the way that she shows up in the world. She doesn’t just talk about justice; she lives it.” As Kristin shared with a colleague last year, “Ministry means being in service to all people and working toward the collective liberation of all.”

As for the future, Kristan notes that the success of Bread & Roses has largely been a product of making connections. The work and success of Bread & Roses, to its credit, is a product of building relationships with volunteers, churches, foundations, businesses and other justice-oriented organizations. Kristan observes, “Our work to advance food and ecological justice collaboration has been at the core of our work. Programmatically and financially, our work has been possible through partnerships. As founding members of the Charlottesville Food Justice Network, we have learned, shared best practices, and collectively worked alongside 20+ local organizations to advance food justice in the City of Charlottesville.”

As Bread & Roses continues to grow, new opportunities will continue to emerge and, with them, new strategic challenges. The creativity, collaboration, and vision of Bread & Roses inspires a lot of hope and anticipation that this is an organization with a robust and life-giving future.

JustFaith Ministries salutes the great work of Bread & Roses and hopes that JFM programs continue to build constituency and inspire leadership for the important work of creating a more just world in which there is plenty of healthy food available to all.



<https://trinityepiscopalville.org/bread-roses/about-us/>