

**The Report of the Minister of Faith in Action
To the Council of Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast,
Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ**

Saturday, November 21, 2020

The Faith in Action Steering Team had its first meeting on October 28, 2020. This team's major responsibility will be to support the development of a strategic vision for the Faith in Action ministry of our Association. In direct alignment with our Association's purpose, our Faith in Action vision will be *"To support, resource, and empower our congregations to turn faith into action by building strong, resilient, beloved communities."* The Team Members include:

- Maren Koepf, Chair (Member, Federated Church of Chagrin Falls)
- Mike Bone (Pastor, Church of Christ UCC, Orrville)
- Janet Ross (Chaplain, Amistad Chapel, Cleveland)
- Rich General (Member, Avon Lake UCC, Avon Lake)
- Michele Humphrey (Senior Pastor, Imani UCC, Euclid)
- Jeremy Wanton (Pastor, East View UCC, Cleveland)
- Brent Gundlah (St. Paul's UCC, Navarre)

A Community Empowerment Toolbox is currently in the early stages of development. A team is still being assembled and planning what this toolbox will look like. I have been shared and reworking toolkit ideas with pastors and community leaders across our region and denomination. Interested parties include the Heartland Conference, the UCC Church Building & Loan Fund, and the Walker Leadership Institute at Eden Seminary. Already in the works are plans for curriculum items (toolkits), demonstration projects, learning experiences, and pilot congregations. Our goal is to have the first draft the framework, goals, outline and descriptions of the toolbox to begin rolling out the first of the year.

Community Engagement and Mission Grants continue to be offered to support the outreach ministries of our member congregations. With the Faith in Action Steering Team, we plan to revitalize these grant programs by introducing a reporting structure, project management training, and a toolkit for congregations.

Anti-Racism work with our Association continues. I am still working with congregations, advising leaders, and leading youth-group events related to Anti-Racism. For now, I am privileged to be working with our Transitional Conference Minister, David Long-Higgins, in the development of the Anti-Racism Network for the Heartland Conference. There are currently twelve clergy and congregational leaders from our Association who have joined.

An opportunity has arisen to develop a new vision for Prophetic Witness. As the Heartland Conference Anti-Racism Network continues to develop, we are in the early stages of discussing the possibility of other forms of support for ministries of Prophetic Witness operating through collaborative work with the Conference.

Regional engagement in the Greater Akron area has continued. This year began with efforts to design and implement an initial regional community engagement project within the Akron area. This included:

- building strong organizational partnerships in the Akron area;
- supporting the restoration of Cascade Valley neighborhood's Elizabeth Park;
- establishing a neighborhood park organization: Friends of Elizabeth Park;
- hosting a volunteer day of service with First Congregational Church of Hudson; and
- designing and developing a publicly owned permaculture food-forest,
 - with 1226 flowers, trees, vines, and bushes,
 - nearly 400 volunteer hours,
 - deepening our relationship with networks in the area related to food & housing insecurity, environmental racism, addiction recovery, and civic engagement.

Akron Area conversations work around the eviction crisis continues. In partnership with the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, Fair Housing Contact Service, The Community Builders, and other local organizations, work around the eviction crisis in Akron continues. Building on the work that began with the community-wide conversations on evictions last year, several local initiatives continue, including

- forming a Social Action ministry out of First Congregational Church of Akron,
- developing a region-wide rental assistance fund hosted by Fair Housing Contact Service,
- supporting other organizations in the area fighting housing insecurity, including a partnership between Trinity UCC of Akron and Nazareth Housing Development Corporation.

I continue to connect with congregations through preaching, providing workshops, supporting community engagement initiatives, and exploring visions of new outreach ministry and missions.