



# FAITH IN ACTION

2021 Annual Report

**PREPARED BY**

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Minister of Faith in Action  
Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast  
Heartland Conference  
United Church of Christ

**OCTOBER 30, 2021**



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# Summary



Volunteers from First Congregational Church of Hudson's First Serve Program at Elizabeth Park in Akron

Dear Living Water Association,

For congregations across our Association—from the Firelands of Lorain County to the west and the historic Ashtabula County to the east, to the south in the Appalachian Mountains of Powhatan Point—2021 has been a momentous year, to say the least. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our congregations have not only transitioned to offering their services online, our community engagement initiatives have had to pivot as well. During this time, the Faith in Action ministry of the Living Water Association has continued to move forward, supporting, resourcing, and partnering with congregations, non-profits, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and community groups across our region.



Lakewood Congregation & Greater Cleveland Congregations

With the help of the Faith in Action Steering Team, this year we launched our newly re-tooled Faith in Action Grants Program, created and curated a number of tools for anti-racism initiatives, prepared to respond to the Afghan Refugee Crisis, hosted numerous community-wide discussions, developed our new Community Engagement Toolbox, inspired and resourced the birth of a city-wide food forest initiative, and continued to support neighborhood-level outreach.



Elizabeth Park Community Empowerment Garden  
Cascade Valley Neighborhood, Akron, Ohio

In all of these efforts, our vision continues to take shape—to support and resource our congregations in building strong, resilient, beloved communities—one neighborhood at a time! When it comes to Faith in Action, our congregations are rocking it!

For your passion, your courage, your sweat equity, your relentless commitment to justice, your covenant partnerships, and your inspiring faith—thank you!!

*Faithfully Yours,*  
—Rev. Michael Howard  
*Minister of Faith in Action*



First Congregational Church of Akron,  
Feeding Hope Food Pantry

# The Faith in Action Grants Program: A New Name for a Renewed Vision

## One Team, Two Grants

Starting in the fall of 2020, the Faith in Action Steering Team went to work retooling two of our Association's grant programs to fit within a wider vision of community engagement. We decided to merge our Mission Ministry Grant Team and our Community Engagement Grant Team into a single team with two related grants. Thus, the Faith in Action Grants Program was born.

## Their Legacies Lives On

Our two Faith in Action Grants are funded by a number of generous donations. As congregations have closed over the years, many have wanted to leave a legacy of care and healing through community service and action. We are grateful for their decision to allow the Living Water Association to carry their legacies forward.

In 1984, Trinity Congregational Church on Pepper Pike in Cleveland closed, sold their building, and donated funds from the sale to the Association for the expressed purpose of "mission ministry." Similar donations came in 1996 from North Olmsted Congregational Church and in 2014 from Trinity UCC on West 25th St. in Cleveland. Though these congregations have closed, the legacies of their ministries lives on.

## New Names, Renewed Ministry

Our Faith in Action Ministry aims to encourage congregations to move away from the problematic and confusing language of "mission." Instead, we chose to use the language that helps us better differentiate between the two approaches to community outreach that our grants represent. The result is one grant that supports Direct Community Service, and another that supports Prophetic Community Engagement.

## Faith in Action Grants Program

- **Direct Community Service Grants**

*(Formerly, Mission Ministry Grant)*

Our Direct Community Service Grants support congregational ministries that provide vitally needed direct services to their surrounding communities.

- **Prophetic Community Engagement Grants**

*(Formerly, Community Engagement Grant)*

Our Prophetic Community Engagement Grants support ministry programs that go beyond direct service and build social capital, form community partnerships, increase capacity, and implement strategies that bring about social change.

- **Two Grant Cycles**

Our program offers both **Spring and Fall Grant Cycles**. (Fall grants are contingent on the funds that remain after the completion of the Spring Cycle.)

The Fall Grant Cycle this year will close on Monday, November 1.

For more information, visit [livingwaterone.org/faithinaction/grants/](https://livingwaterone.org/faithinaction/grants/)

## Spring 2021 Faith in Action Grant Awards: 6 Congregations and 3 Partner Organizations



United Campus Ministries at Kent State University

### Spring 2021 Cycle

The newly established Faith in Action Grant Team offered our first grant cycle this past spring. We were honored to award \$27,500 of grant funds to 6 congregations and 3 partner organizations.

### Empowering Youth Exploring Justice

EYEJ is a Cleveland organization that was created in the wake of the death of Trayvon Martin. With our support, they began their Youth Online Discussing Justice (YODJ) program as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### United Campus Ministries at Kent State

United Campus Ministries at Kent State is the only open and affirming, ecumenical and interfaith ministry on campus. This year, they continued as a partner organization with our Faith in Action Grants Program.

### Family Promise of Greater Cleveland

We are proud to continue to support Family Promise of Greater Cleveland. Family Promise works with families facing homelessness and empowers them to take control of the course of their lives.

### Archwood UCC and Denison Avenue UCC

Our grants program this year is proud to support Archwood UCC and Denison Avenue UCC in their partnership youth program that serves hot meals to children after the closing of a shelter program due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Feeding Hope Food Pantry (FCC Akron)

The Feeding Hope Food Pantry at First Congregational Church of Akron provided food for 170 unique households this past September, about 520 individuals, 150 of them being children. With support from the Faith in Action Grants Program, they were able to update their refrigeration system.

### Lorain County Project: The Haven Center

Three congregations joined forces to help the Haven Center in Lorain County: Brownhelm UCC, First Church (Oberlin), and Avon Lake UCC. With our support, the Haven Center updated their homeless facility in response to the pandemic and finally moved their clients out of hotel rooms and back into their facility.

## Sharing the Load: The Heartland Conference Anti-Racism Network

This year, the Living Water Association continued living into our shared partnership with the Heartland Conference by helping staff the Anti-Racism Network. Since this summer, the Network has shifted to hosting four larger online gatherings a year. These gatherings are in addition to numerous other initiatives the Network and the Living Water Association have offered.

These initiatives included:

- [White Savior Discussion Guide](#)
- 2021 Summer Read: *White Too Long*
- [Online Anti-Racism Resource Library](#)

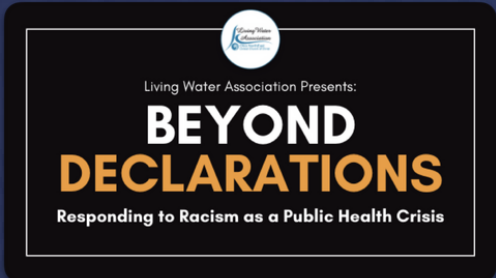
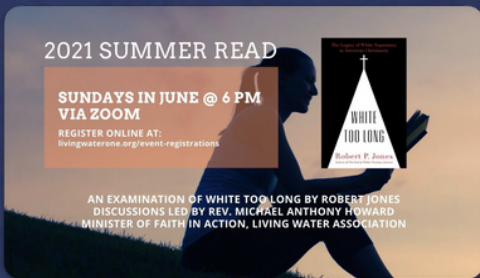
The Anti-Racism Network will host its next large Zoom gathering on Thursday, November 4 from 7 to 8:30 PM. The conversation will be led by Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, the Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches.



**Moving Beyond Declarations:**  
Responding to Anti-Racism as a Public Health Crisis

A recording of the **Beyond Declarations** conversation can be found on our website at [livingwaterone.org/resources-for-anti-racism/](http://livingwaterone.org/resources-for-anti-racism/)

For more information about the **Heartland Conference Anti-Racism Network**, please contact [michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org](mailto:michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org).



## Beyond Declarations: Responding to Racism as a Public Health Crisis

The 33rd General Synod of the UCC voted this summer to pass a resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis. This vote came a year after the lynching of George Floyd at the height of the global Coronavirus Pandemic. This highly publicized event brought about numerous resolutions in cities, counties, and organizations across the country declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

To bring the conversation closer to home, the Living Water Association hosted a public conversation in the Akron area on October 9. The event included a presentation by Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry, CHHSM's Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development, and a panel discussion by Summit County Councilwoman Veronica Sims; Rev. Ray Greene, Director of the Black-Led Organizing Collaborative; and Sunny Matthews, Co-Founder of Dimensions of Isms and a member at The Church in Silver Lake.

# Afghan Refugee Response

COORDINATING AN EFFORT: WELCOME BETSY WOOSTER



## **Welcome: Betsy Wooster**

On Monday, November 1, Betsy Wooster will begin serving as our Refugee Response Coordinator. She will be working with congregations who are interested in being part of a collective effort. She will receive training with Global H.O.P.E. and Partners in Ministry.

If your congregation is interested in partnering with other UCC congregations in your area, we would welcome your partnership. Feel free to email our Minister of Faith in Action directly at [michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org](mailto:michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org).

## **Informational Event on Nov 10**

On November 10 at 7 PM, the Federated Church of Chagrin Falls along with the Community Life Collaborative will be hosting an informational event. All are welcome.

The informational event will feature April Carson, an attorney who has spent time in Afghanistan and has worked with the U.S. Senate and the Biden Administration.

For more information or to RSVP, email [admin@communitylifecollaborative.org](mailto:admin@communitylifecollaborative.org).

## **For More Information**

For anyone wishing to better understand the situation and all that is involved, please make use of the two webinar videos we recorded in partnership with the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. You will find the videos and presentation slides for both conversations along with other updates and resources on our website at [livingwaterone.org/help-afghan-refugees](http://livingwaterone.org/help-afghan-refugees).

# Summer Peace & Justice Pilgrimage

## In the Footsteps of the Civil Rights Movement: An Intergenerational Pilgrimage

**When:** June 14-21, 2022

**Cost:** \$1,363

*Pilgrimage cost includes hotel, daily breakfast and dinner, entry tickets, and round-trip airfare.*

We will journey back in time and walk the footsteps of those who dreamed for equality, a day when all God's children would live in peace and harmony. Among the sites visited will be Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Southern Law poverty Center, Rosa Parks Museum, National Voting Rights Museum, Edmund Pettus Bridge, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and 16th Street Baptist Church.

### **Payment Structure:**

- Deposit: \$300 by Jan 1, 2022
- First Installment: \$500 by March 1
- Remaining Balance: \$563 by May 1

Register online at [livingwaterone.org/events](https://livingwaterone.org/events)

# Elizabeth Park **Community Empowerment Garden**



Spring Neighborhood Volunteer Day

## **The Akron Parks Challenge**

In 2019, under the direction of our Minister of Faith in Action, Rev. Michael Howard, the Living Water Association agreed to support the Akron Parks Collaborative's efforts to restore Elizabeth Park and re-activate Akron's Cascade Valley neighborhood.

With funding and support from the Akron Parks Challenge, the Akron Parks Collaborative and the Living Water Association joined a team of neighborhood residents and community leaders. The Akron Community Foundation, the Cascade Locks Park Association, the Community Builders, the Big Love Network, the Akron Parks Collaborative, and the Friends of Elizabeth Park collectively invested more than \$150,000 in the first year.

## **Elizabeth Park as a Demonstration Project**

Last year, the murder of George Floyd in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

raised much-needed awareness of the intersection between racism and public health. These events helped underscore the key elements of the Elizabeth Park Project.

We worked with Wild Woman Designs, which specializes in community engagement, restorative landscape design, and health equity, to develop a participatory design for an edible permaculture garden. That garden design gave birth to the Elizabeth Park Community Empowerment Garden.

With the support of the Living Water Association and hundreds of hours of volunteer work from First Congregational Church of Hudson, Dominion Energy, Keep Akron Beautiful, the Big Love Network, and Friends of Elizabeth Park, the Elizabeth Park Community Empowerment Garden came to life. Soon after, Boss Park in the University Park neighborhood joined in, forming the Akron Food Forest Initiative.



## The Community Empowerment Garden

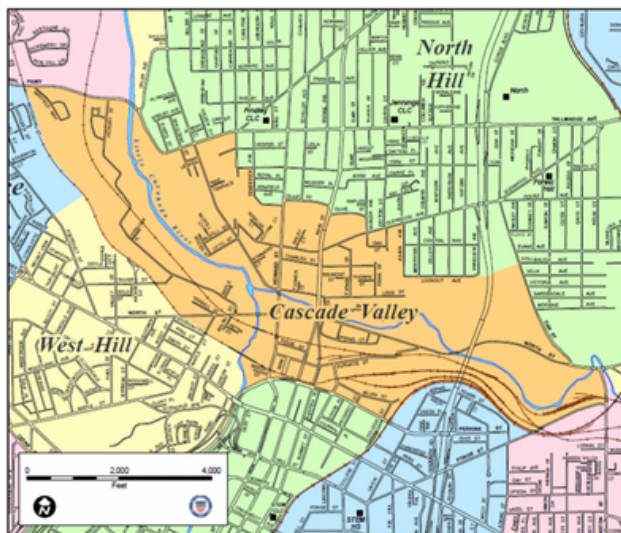
The Cascade Valley neighborhood has numerous challenges. One of the most pressing is the lack of affordable food. It is referred to as a food desert, but it is more accurately called food apartheid. There are restaurants in the neighborhood, but none of them are affordable to the majority of the neighborhood residents. That is one important thing that makes this project so cool.

More than a community garden, the Elizabeth Park Community Empowerment Garden addresses numerous challenges simultaneously. Designed as a participatory, permaculture food forest, the garden builds healthier and deeper soil that soaks up groundwater. This helps respond to the challenges of erosion and the polluted stormwater system. The garden includes plants intentionally chosen to increase the biodiversity of the neighborhood. With the fruit trees we have added, we will be reducing the island heat effect, which happens in urban places that have an abundance of blacktop and concrete surfaces but lack sufficient shade. It has become a spot where children and families spend time outdoors, building community cohesion and addressing the all-important need for "vitamin N" during early development.

### Most of All, Food!

Most of all, the Community Empowerment Garden is a food forest, filled with a wide variety of edible plants. On any given sunny day you will find volunteers spreading mulch, pulling weeds, or planting seeds. Families regularly stop to get kale, butternut squash, or containers of raspberries.

The altogether most important thing this project demonstrates is the power of inter-organizational collaboration and community participation. These are the key ingredients for bringing about sustainable social change.



### Save the Date:

#### Grand Opening, May 14, 2022

On Saturday, May 14, 2022, Elizabeth Park will be celebrating its Grand Opening. The Living Water Association and other community partners will give a presentation of the work that has been done and an overview of the plans for the future of the garden.

For more information, contact our Minister of Faith in Action, Rev. Michael Howard at [michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org](mailto:michael.mfia@livingwaterone.org).

# The Community Engagement Toolbox

## Launching October 30, 2021



With the help of Canva, our resource decks allow you to see and access recommendations in real time.

On Saturday, October 30 during the Living Water Association Annual Meeting, the Minister of Faith in Action will launch the first few elements of the Community Engagement Toolbox.

With numerous rollout-dates planned, the Community Engagement Toolbox will be packed with congregational exercises, neighborhood projects, resource libraries, educational videos, and more.

With the first launch, we will roll-out several community engagement tools, an Anti-Racism Resource Library, a Health Equity Resource Library, and more.



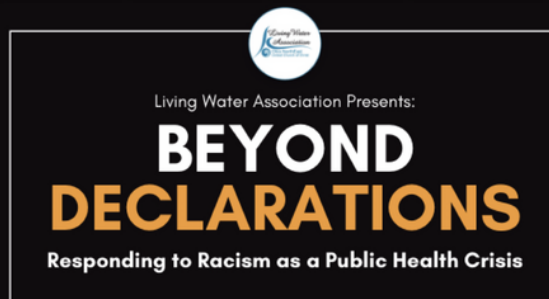
Our resources are created with the user in mind, featuring documentary discussion guides with time-stamps and facilitator questions so you can be focused and prepared for the conversations that matter.

Come explore! Find the resources you need for your next community engagement project.

[livingwaterone.org/toolbox](http://livingwaterone.org/toolbox)



Our resource libraries curate the topics so you can find what you are looking for and start inspired and prepared for your next community engagement project.



Our resources bring issues home, connecting you with community leaders in your own area so you discover what God is already up to in your neighborhood!