



FAITH IN ACTION

2022 Annual Report

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Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast
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Hope is a Spiritual Practice

A Letter from our Minister of Faith in Action

Dear Living Water Association,

This has been an amazing year of ministry in the Living Water Association. We have learned more about our communities and ourselves. We have loved our neighbors and discovered God in our midst.

The ministry we do is built on relationships maintained by countless hours of conversation and collaboration. These relationships hold the joys and pains of our shared life together. At times it may feel as if the world is covered in wounds and trapped in despair, and that is a terrible burden to carry. Your ministries offer hope and healing, which startles the soul and creates sacred transformation.

Rebecca Solnit writes that hope is not like a lottery ticket you clutch in your fist on the couch feeling lucky. "It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency." Hope is not just something you have, it is something you do. Hope is a spiritual practice. This year, I saw the hope of Christ in you. Hope like this is contagious!

This report highlights several of the Living Water Association's Faith in Action Ministry endeavors of this past year. It doesn't begin to capture the full scope of our ministry. This past year, I have visited ministries where the sanctuary meets the streets, where the heaviness of the world is comforted by a watery eye or an extra grip of the hand. These are the ministry moments that really matter. It is your work that makes possible the moments in our communities when hope comes alive again. It is an honor to support ministries like yours.

Thank you!

*Rev. Michael Anthony Howard
Minister of Faith in Action
Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast
Heartland Conference • United Church of Christ*



Neighborhood volunteers at Akron Parks Week Festival in Akron's Elizabeth Park



Community gathers for postcard protest against HB 616 at Brecksville United Church of Christ



Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr., Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches, leads a conversation in Selma, AL.



Children learning about neighborhood ecology in the Little Cuyahoga River Explorers Summer Camp

The Fruit of Collaboration

Discovering God in Collaborative Partnerships



Members of Brecksville United Church of Christ join with other local congregations to host a postcard protest.

The best ministries often happen through collaboration. This year has been a year filled with collaboration. Sometimes this looks like sponsoring a table and showing up to community events, like the [the Eviction Prevention Summit in Akron](#) in April. Other times, collaboration looks like ministry leaders joining already ongoing conversations about community challenges, like sponsoring a table to attend City Club of Cleveland's forum on [Caring for the Unhoused](#).

While it is not possible to detail every collaborative engagement in this report, the evidence of it is on every page. Here are two examples of how our Association has supported collaboration at the congregational level.

Congregational Outreach Workshops

Last fall, the Living Water Association built on our growing partnership with the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church (EOA UMC) to host a series of workshops titled *Discovering God in Your*

Neighborhood. These place-based ministry workshops served as a chance to pilot several elements of our expanding Community Engagement Toolbox. They were led by Rev. Michael Howard, Living Water Association's Minister of Faith in Action, and Will Jones, the Director of Multicultural Ministries for EAO UMC. We continue to offer these workshops on demand as they are requested.

Postcard Protest at Brecksville UCC

On June 1, the Association cosponsored a postcard campaign to oppose Ohio House Bill 616. The event was organized by Heidi Spangler at Brecksville UCC, and was open to anyone from the Living Water Association or the East Ohio Conference of the UMC. Clergy and laity from across the Association attended the event. It included three presenters who spoke about HB 616, while those in attendance filled out more than 255 signed postcards. The Association is always interested in helping support events like this where partnership can be leveraged to make our voices heard.

Cleveland International Film Festival

A Panel Discussion About "Mama Bears"



Panel participants from the 2022 Cleveland International Film Festival

On April 16, in collaboration with the National Setting and the Open & Affirming Coalition, the Living Water Association was invited to host a panel discussion following the viewing of the documentary "Mama Bears" at the Cleveland International Film Festival. More than 30 people attended the panel discussion that was moderated by Rev. Michael Anthony Howard, our Minister of Faith in Action, and Rev. Joanna D'Agostino, Senior Minister at Lakewood Congregational Church. The panelists were Rev. Jason Thompson from West Park UCC, Jacob Nash, Danielle Shultz, and Bobbi Urlinger.

"Mama Bears" was an honest film that documents the difficulties faced by mothers faith with queer children. Each mother's experience with their children brought on a crisis of faith.

The film told stories of ridicule and joy. It portrayed how damaging bad theology can be; it also highlighted the important role supportive communities play.

The name of the film comes from a supportive network that began as a facebook page, [Mama Bears movement](#) and now has thousands of followers.

The discussion included personal stories that highlighted the challenges LGBTQ people of faith experience. Danielle Schultz expressed her concern with congregations that claim to be welcoming but "act like it's a gift" or something to be rewarded for.

Rev. Jason Thompson reminded the audience that Open and Affirming churches "still have a lot of work to do" to achieve "genuine, sensitive, thorough inclusion."

The planning team for the event included Rev. Doug Horner and Rev. Halldor Gudmundsson. An article about the event is available on the UCC's website: <https://www.ucc.org/film-and-conversation-shed-light-on-lgbtq-journeys-and-churchs-role/>.

Our Nature Series

A Collaborative Series on Creation Care



The Community Life Collaborative hosted the final and main event of the Our Nature series at the Family Life Center featuring a presentation by the national best-selling author Douglas Tallamy

This past spring, in partnership with the Community Life Collaborative, a new nonprofit created to help further the mission of the Federated Church of Chagrin Falls, the Living Water Association co-hosted a creation justice educational series, *Our Nature: Rethinking, Restoring, and Rebuilding Our Relationship to Nature*. The goal of the program was to build collaborative partnerships and educate ourselves about how to better care for creation.

The first event on February 26 was held at the Summit Lake Nature Center and featured the Summit Metro Parks Chief Conservationist, Mike Johnson in his talk on Urban Ecology. That event included collaborative partners from the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, Summit Metro Parks, South Street Ministries, and the Big Love Network.

The second event on March 12 was hosted at the First Church in Oberlin and featured

our guest presenter, David Orr. In Orr's presentation, we were invited to focus our attention on how the challenges to responding to climate change were linked to challenges for democracy in America.

The third event on April 9 was hosted at the North Chagrin Nature Center and our guest speaker was a naturalist on staff there, Jeff Riebe. He gave a tour of the work with native plants they have done at the nature center and the impact that has made on the ecology of the area.

The culminating event featured the New York Times best-selling author, Douglas W. Tallamy and his book *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Own Backyard*. The dinner and presentation drew 40 participants and was hosted at the Federated Church of Chagrin Falls' Family Life Center.

Each of the videos in the series was posted on the [Association YouTube channel](#).

2022 Peace & Justice Pilgrimage

Following in the Footsteps of the Civil Rights Movement



16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, AL

Under the planning and leadership from Living Water Association council member and Pastor of West Park UCC in Cleveland, Rev. Jason Thompson, the Peace and Justice Pilgrimage to Alabama this summer consisted of 25 pilgrims.

Some of the major stops of the pilgrimage included a memorial of the Mothers of Gynecology; the Rosa Parks Museum; Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and the Peace & Justice Memorial, both which were in Montgomery; the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma; and Kelly Ingram Park and 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

The pilgrimage included clergy and laity from across the Association and the Heartland Conference. We encountered a number of challenges, the most difficult being managing shifting protocols around

exposure to COVID. We learned a lot, as individuals, as a community, as a leadership team, and as organizational partners.

We are providing numerous opportunities for pilgrims to share their thoughts and reflections about the trip, including at the Heartland Conference annual meeting, the Living Water Association annual meeting, and the Anti-Racism Network's gathering on November 2 at 7 PM.

You can learn more about the Peace and Justice Pilgrimage, including our pilgrimage journal, photos of the trip, information about several of our stops, and reflections from participants, on our website at livingwaterone.org/pilgrimage2022.



Little Cuyahoga Explorers Camp

The Neighborhood Experience of a Lifetime



Little Cuyahoga Explorers learning about biodiversity along the Towpath Trail with CVNP Ranger Arrye Rosser by the Mustill Store in Akron

This past July, the Living Water Association partnered with the Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park to host a five-day summer camp for 15 children ages 6 to 12 in the Cascade Valley Neighborhood of Akron. During the camp, campers had the opportunity to explore the Little Cuyahoga River, the Ohio & Erie Canal, and the Cuyahoga River watershed. This included spending time in outdoor settings both in the Cascade Valley neighborhood and our hometown Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

The curriculum featured hands-on activities that gave the little learners a chance to investigate and experience the natural world, make new friends, and grow. It featured water-testing, bug collecting, nature hikes, and learning activities facilitated by naturalists, conservationists, educational specialists, and neighborhood historians from the Conservancy, Summit Metro Parks, and the Cascade Locks Park Association.

Six high school interns also assisted with the camp, including students from North High, in partnership with the First Congregational Church of Hudson's First Serve outreach program.

We are grateful to our community partners who helped make this year's exploration camp possible: the Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Summit Metro Parks, the Cascade Locks Park Association, Friends of Elizabeth Park, and the Akron Parks Collaborative.

Lastly, we want to give a special word of thanks to Bobby Burt, Associate Minister for Young Adults & Families with Children at First Congregational Church of Akron, for his leadership and service as a camp counselor.

The feedback showed this year's camp was a great success. Continuing to lean into the partnerships we have built, we plan to host another set of camps in 2023.



Akron Parks Week Festival

Support for Citywide Event at Elizabeth Park



The Living Water Association partnered with the City of Akron, the Akron Parks Collaborative, and numerous other community organization to host the Akron Parks Week Festival at Elizabeth Park on May 14, 2022.

This past spring, May 9-14, the Living Water Association and the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church partnered with the City of Akron, the Akron Parks Collaborative, the Friends of Elizabeth Park, and numerous other community organizations to support this year's Akron Parks Week.

The week ended on Saturday, May 14 with a large community festival at Elizabeth Park. The festival featured live music, tree planting, art and craft projects, volunteer opportunities and more. One station allowed families to decorate their own planters with logo stickers from supporting organizations—including the Living Water Association! With our support, the festival was able to host a community meal for 175 of the residents of the Cascade Valley neighborhood while supporting young, Black entrepreneurs from the area.

Throughout the year, our Association has supported the Friends of Elizabeth Park in

hosting volunteer days. These volunteer days are an essential part of the ongoing work to maintain the Community Empowerment Garden. The garden was the first of several projects that are part of the Akron Food Forest Initiative, a vision that got its start with support from the Living Water Association. Volunteer groups this year have come from the neighborhood and around the region. We are especially grateful for the ongoing support of First Congregational Church of Hudson and their outreach ministry, First Serve, along with the support that has come through First Serve's partnership with Hudson High School and Akron's North High School.

Plans are already underway to host community events this coming spring. Elizabeth Park will host a special gathering on Saturday, March 18 as part of the Community Life Collaborative's 2023 Our Nature Series. That event will be in partnership with the Cascade Locks Park Association and the Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Heartland Conference Anti-Racism Network

Decentering Whiteness, Reflecting the Holy

CENTERING GOD, DECENTERING WHITENESS

Building Faith-Based Anti-Racism Competence for
Congregations Predominantly of European Descent

With Special Guest:
Barrick Stees
Award-Winning Teacher,
Trained Anti-Racism Facilitator



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE
ANTI-RACISM NETWORK

Presents

REFLECTING OR REFRACTING THE HOLY

Discovering Racism Embedded in
Christian Worship, Theology and Practice

Wed, Sept 7

7:00 - 8:30 PM

Via ZOOM

Meeting ID: 848 0325 5059
Pass Code: 044539



With special guest
Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay
Minister for Worship and Theology
United Church of Christ



SPRING GATHERING

THURSDAY, MAY 5 @ 7 PM

RISE UP, LEAN IN: JOINING THE
MOVEMENT TOWARD RACIAL JUSTICE

WITH OUR SPECIAL GUEST

DR. SHARON FENNEMA

CURATOR AND STORYTELLER · JOIN THE
MOVEMENT



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE
ANTI-RACISM NETWORK

Joining the Journey

Reflections From the Peace & Justice
Pilgrimage

Wed, Nov 2

7:00 - 8:30 PM

Via ZOOM

Meeting ID: 826 5232 8850
Pass Code: 477 305

The Heartland Conference and the Living Water Association partner together to host four gatherings of the Anti-Racism Network each year. Our work this year has challenged us to decenter whiteness, reflect the holy, lean in to our covenant relationships, and join on the journey to peace and justice.

Our first gathering of the year was on February 2. The evening featured a presentation by Barry Stees, a member of the Federated Church of Chagrin Falls. A trained facilitator of the UCC's Sacred Conversations to End Racism, Barry showcased an antiracism educational program he created, "Centering God, Decentering Whiteness."

For our second gathering, on May 5, the guest presenter was Dr. Sharon Fennema, the curator for the UCC's new antiracism initiative, *Join the Movement*. The focus for the evening was on the role of storytelling in the work of racial justice.

For our third gathering, we spent the evening with Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay, the UCC's Minister for Worship and Theology, and she also serves as the Pastor of First Congregational Church of Wellington, Ohio. Her presentation on the intersection of worship and antiracism challenged us to be aware of how white supremacy shows up in our traditions and practices.

The final gathering of the year on November 2 was a time of reflection on this year's Peace and Justice Pilgrimage to Alabama. The gathering included presentations by members of the Anti-Racism Core Team, Rev. Emily Howard and Rev. Kay Albright, along with Rev. Brooke Baker, who served as the Pilgrimage Documentarian.

Videos of these presentations, other details of our gatherings, and more resources for the Heartland Conference Anti-Racism Network can be found on our website's Anti-Racism Resource Library at: livingwaterone.org/antiracism.

The Faith in Action Grants Program

Resourcing Ministries that Change the World



Kent UCC hosted a Racial Justice Sunday, featuring preaching by Rev. Dr. Velda Love, UCC Minister of Racial Justice and a dedication of the Portage County NAACP's new office located in their building.

Our congregations continue to develop exciting and innovative community engagement ministries in need of support and resources. The hardest part of the work of our Faith in Action Grants Team is deciding which ministry ventures to award among the many requests we receive. Since our 2021 annual report, the Faith in Action ministry of our Association has received \$94,000 in grant requests. With our limited funds, we were able to award \$29,000 in grants that support ministries of direct service and prophetic community engagement. The Grants Team continues to explore ways to increase our funds so that we can honor and support more of the great work of our congregations.

At the end of our fall cycle last year, we awarded six Faith in Action Grants. With these funds, West Park UCC in Cleveland was able to expand their food pantry to include a section designated specifically to support refugee families from Afghanistan. St. Peter UCC in Seven Hills received funding to provide bedding for newly arriving Afghan families and tools for new Habitat for Humanity homeowners. First Congregational Church of Andover received funding to continue their partnership with the local school district to provide supplies for children and teachers.

Saint Paul's UCC in Cleveland received funding to support their health and wellness outreach to those who are housing insecure in Ohio City. With the support of a Prophetic Community Engagement Grant, Kent UCC remodeled a section of their building to host the office of the Portage County NAACP. The space was dedicated during their Racial Justice Sunday this spring, which included a sermon preached by our denomination's Minister of Racial Justice Rev. Dr. Velda Love.

For our spring cycle, First Congregational UCC in Jefferson used used to purchase a long-arm quilt machine to train youth to make quilts that will be used for various community ministries, including a foster home and battered women's shelter. Archwood UCC in Cleveland was granted funds to revive a produce sale for their neighborhood that struggles with food insecurity. Our grant funding this year also provided ongoing funding for ministry partners, including Family Promise of Greater Cleveland, EYEJ: Empowering Youth, Exploring Justice, Greater Cleveland Congregations, and United Campus Ministries at Kent State University. If your congregation or community ministry is interested in requesting grant funding, please visit our website for more information at livingwaterone.org/faithinaction/grants.

Thank You Faith in Action Steering Team!!



Maren Koepf

Rev. Janet Ross

Rich General

Rev. Jeremy Wanton

Rev. Mike Bone

All year, our Faith in Action Steering Team has given their time and talents to help our Faith in Action Ministries moving in the right direction. Their leadership helps make this work possible.

The Faith in Action Steering Team

- Maren Koepf, Chair – *Member of Federated Church of Chagrin Falls*
- Rev. Mike Bone, Secretary – *Intentional Interim Minister, Grace UCC, Uniontown*
- Rich General, Grants Team Liaison – *Member of Avon Lake UCC*
- Rev. Janet Ross – *Former Pastor at Amistad Chapel, Cleveland*
- Rev. Jeremy Wanton – *Senior Pastor, East View UCC, Shaker Heights*

This year we will be welcoming to our Steering Team, Rev. Rachel McDonald, Pastor of South Haven UCC in Bedford.

A special thanks also goes out to our Faith in Action Grants Team. Their work has helped fund ministries that care for communities across our Association.

The Faith in Action Grants Team

- Larry Becker, Chair – *Member of First Congregational Church of Akron*
- Rich General, Steering Team Liaison – *Member of Avon Lake UCC*
- Patsy Harris – *Member of Mt. Zion UCC, Cleveland*

This year, the Faith in Action Grants team is saying goodbye to longtime grants team member, Vicki Werneke, a member at Plymouth UCC, in Shaker Heights.

We are welcoming three new members to the team:

- Rev. Roberto Ochoa – *Program Associate for Congregations of Color/Ethnic Identified Congregations, UCC National, Member, Mt. Zion UCC, Cleveland*
- Rev. Kevan Franklin – *Senior Pastor of Trinity UCC, Wooster*
- Julie Gilliland – *Member of Medina UCC, Congregational*