**The Report of the Minister of Faith in Action  
To the Council of Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast**

**Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ**

**March 16, 2024**

*The Living Water Association supports and resources congregations as they endeavor to embody Christ in the 21st century world by transforming crisis into creativity, nostalgia into adaptability, anxiety into trust, and weariness into compassion.*

1. **Community Development:** In the effort to shift our focus to community development, I have continued working with congregations and community leaders across our region.
   1. **Summit County:** I have been working with a group of community leaders across Summit County to create a new Community Development Corporation, provisionally named Cascade Commons CDC. Our first target initiative is to apply for workforce development funds to support the formation of an entrepreneurial business development center for artists, entrepreneurs, and non-profits. While these resources will be aimed at certain target populations, I am hoping it can become an exciting way to also offer resources for our congregations. My hope is that this new CDC will take ownership of two initiatives I began with LWA resources: (1) Elizabeth Park Garden, (2) Little Cuyahoga Summer Camp, while tying them to a larger walkability plan with the City of Akron.
   2. **Other Initiatives:** Having regularly partnered with ecumenical leaders to provide workshops and trainings across the region, including Living Water Association SPIRE Center sessions, we are increasingly receiving requests for support from congregations doing innovative community ministries. This includes grant applications for programming, connecting with community organizations, feasibility studies, and even planning for large-scale property development. As this work continues to grow, I see it becoming a central part of the way that Living Water Association provides support and resources to congregations.
2. **Faith in Action Steering Team:** The Steering Team recently toured Eastview United Church of Christ and discussed their vision for community ministry and the development of a community development corporation. We talked extensively about growing our capacity to provide resources to support congregations in creative ministries and alternative forms of ministry in partnership with community partners.
3. **Faith in Action Grants Program:** This year we are offering only one grant window, which opened on March 1st, with a deadline of May 1st. We have increased funding this year and aim to raise more funds to offer additional grants annually.
4. **Initiative Updates & Events:**
5. **Our Nature:** *In partnership with the Community Life Collaborative and the Heartland Environmental Care and Justice Network.*
   1. **March 16th** – **Climate Fresk:** The series kicks off on with the Climate Fresk, which happens to fall on the same day as the Association's Council meeting. The Climate Fresk is a gamification of the cause and effect chain of climate change, aimed to educate people about the urgency and details of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report. For more information visit: https://communitylifecollaborative.org/events/
   2. **April 20th** — **Tree of Life Ceremony:** This year we will be co-sponsoring the "Tree of Life" event with Hand to Hand and the Community Life Collaborative in Elizabeth Park. This event aims to bring together families impacted by gun violence, overdose, or suicide for planting activities and support services. Families and community members will plant 15 trees to honor their loved ones.
6. **Just Action (April 10 & May 10):** April is Fair Housing month. This year, LWA we will host a public discussion in partnership with the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, Fair Housing Contact Service, Community Legal Aid, the Akron-Summit County Library, and the City of Akron. We are still inviting sponsors and community partners, including local congregations
   1. **April 10 - A Community Discussion** is scheduled for April 10th at the Highland Square branch of the Akron-Summit County Public Library. Additional reading gatherings are being organized. More information is available on the library website at [this link](https://services.akronlibrary.org/event/10187047?fbclid=IwAR1iCSLCfClJeVBUnPdPCs6hHOek3yObS8Uhko8jBzcwNWPnLx-Ii_xMO3c).
   2. **May 10 - The Main Event** will take place on March 8th, 9th, and 10th, featuring a legal clinic, documentary screening, and public discussion about the book *Just Action* by Richard and Leah Rothstein.
7. **Little Cuyahoga Explorers Camp (June 24-28):** The summer camp will be held again this year during the last week of June, Monday through Friday, in partnership with the Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The camp aims to provide watershed educational experiences for 30 children. The day camp will run from Monday, June 24 to 28, 9 AM to 3 PM. The camp is a great way to connect urban settings with the national park for environmental education while emphasizing compassionate responsible stewardship of our natural resources..
8. **Greater Cleveland Congregations – Core Team Building:** We continue to engage pastors of UCC congregations in the Greater Cleveland area to form a core team by the end of May. Our goal is to prioritize issues and engage congregations across Cleveland. Living Water has been a long-time supporter of Greater Cleveland Congregations. In preparation for the 2024 election cycle, we will be partnering with GCC to operate as a member organization. We have had relational meetings with the majority of LWA pastors in Cuyahoga County as our first phase. The GCC’s new Associate Organizer, Nathan Self, has taken the lead on this partnership and has done an amazing job already of connecting with our congregations.
9. **National UCC Gender and Sexuality Justice Initiative:** Last spring, the UCC National Setting hired Rachael Ward to be the new the team lead and minister for gender and sexuality justice ministries, as well as the Executive Director for UCC HIV and AIDS network. Rachael, who uses they/them pronouns, shared their vision to kick off a national campaign within the UCC to bring LGBTQ-centered worship services throughout the country. After meeting her, I convened with a group of individuals from UCC congregations in the region who are actively involved in trans activist work, including mostly representatives from the Church of Silver Lake and other Akron area congregations. Together, we are enthusiastic about collaborating to organize a worship service, tentatively planned for the last week of May. Our collective aim is to participate in the Cleveland Pride march on the first weekend of June 2024, aligning with Rachael's overarching goal of fostering inclusivity and support within our communities. With the National Office being in Cleveland, the plan is for this initiative to kick off a national initiative that will be followed by similar initiatives across the country.