**Faith in Action Ministry Report**

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**Prepared for:**  
Living Water Association Council

# Introduction

# The Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ, is a community of 135 congregations united in the Holy Spirit to embody Christ in the 21st-century world. Our purpose is to support and resource our congregations, fostering their health and well-being so they may grow into communities of healing and grace, embodying Christ in the world. *Our Faith in Action vision is to support congregations as they turn faith into action by building strong, resilient, beloved communities—one neighborhood at a time.*

# 1. SPIRE Center

The SPIRE Center remains a hub for education, congregational resources, and community-focused ministry development. Rev. Mike Bone continues to do an excellent job coordinating with the new Resource Team, which functions in an advisory capacity in relation to our staff.

1. **Learning Opportunities**: This fall learnings are below:
   * Sept 4, 2025 – Church Property: A Burden or a Blessing
   * Sept 18, 2025 - Relational Stewardship: Prepping for Pledge Season in Your Church
   * Oct 14, 2025 – Speak Truth to Power: Influencing Sacred Change
   * Oct 23, 2025 – Spiritual Strength: When the Nightmares Come
2. **Special Winter Learning Opportunity:**
   * **Six Session:** *January 12 & 26, February 2, 9, 23, and March 2, 2026*
   * **Place-Based Ministry Certification:** This six-session SPIRE Winter Workshop will equip leaders and congregations to create community engagement plans for strong, resilient, and beloved communities. The course time is equivalent to 1 CEU credit for individuals and a special certification for participants and congregational teams of three.
3. **Resource Platform (Damascus Project):** We are currently engaging with the Damascus Project (initiative of the Wisconsin Conference) to learn about their initiative and how their model might inspire or direct our SPIRE Center’s use of resource and community building.

# 2. Faith in Action Grants Ministry

The 2026 Grants cycle concluded is planned to launch in March with a deadline of May 1. Each year we have had more applications than we are able to award. This year, we awarded $32,748 in funds to congregations.

In addition, we have added two new grants team lay members. The team includes (with the new members mentioned first):

* Marty Culbertson, member from Federated Church of Chagrin Falls
* Elen Kaliber, member from Bainbridge Community Church
* Larry Becker, Chair, member from First Congregational Church of Akron
* Patsy Harris, member from Mt. Zion UCC in Cleveland
* Rich General, member from Avon Lake UCC
* Rev. Kevan Franklin, Clergy from Trinity UCC in Wooster

# 3. Wider Church Engagement

1. **Organizing Call with Global HOPE on October 6:** A special organizing call has been scheduled for Monday, October 6 from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM. This will introduce our congregations to the new UCC leaders and allow them to answer questions.
   1. Megan Berger, Minister for Refugee and Migrant Services
   2. Danielle Hickman, UCC’s Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Minister and Manager
   3. Update: Ayman Soliman has been released and DHS dropped all charges! [Ayman Soliman Released From Immigration Jail — Ohio Immigrant Alliance](https://www.ohioimmigrant.org/blog/2025/9/19/ayman-soliman-released) This is truly a remarkable turn of events!
2. **Our Whole Lives (OWL) Program:** *Registration Deadline on September 26*
   1. We have scheduled for an OWL training on October 9–13 at Camp Christian, co-hosted with Living Water Association and the Heartland Conference.
   2. Facilitated by Rev. Kelly Burd and Rev. Michael Schunemeyer.
   3. We currently have 5 registered.
   4. With financial support from National and Heartland Conference, we have been able to make keep the cost for folks within our region (UCC and DOC) fur $250.
3. **Ohio Council of Churches (OCC):**
   1. The director, Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan will be retiring at the end of the year. A retirement reception and service has been scheduled for Wednesday, November 12 (reception at 5 PM, worship service at 7 PM) held at the Ohio Statehouse Museum Gallery. Learn more on their [website](https://www.ohcouncilchs.org/).

**4. Building Special Support Network for UPCaM:**

Living Water Association is working on building a stronger supporting relationship with United Protestant Campus Ministries in Cleveland, located on Case Western Reserve’s Campus at Church of the Covenant (Presbyterian). Their director, Amanda Powell, has reached out to several of our pastors to engage interest in participating in their programming. Living Water Association automatically supports them financially each year. In addition to inviting Amanda to present at our upcoming Annual Meeting, we are looking for congregational leaders (clergy preferred) who would be willing to help with their small group activities—namely, their social action group that offers community ministry throughout the Cleveland Area.