Our Faith, Our Voice, Our Vote

“Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.” - Romans 12:12 MSG

In 2018, the Neighbors in Need special mission offering and grant pool committee examined the ways in which it could spotlight, the UCC identity and mission: 3 Great Loves campaign, LOVE OF NEIGHBOR. Emmaus United Church of Christ, in Vienna, Virginia, applied and received a $3,500 NIN grant to aid them to work for justice within their community. They partnered with VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement) in hopes of securing the outcome they desired.

Emmaus UCC senior pastor, Rev. Kristen McBrayer shares, “In 2018 we set out to listen to our neighbors. We learned that the greatest concerns in our schools this year are student support for mental health counselors as well as the retention of ‘good teachers’. From these listening sessions and meetings with key leaders, we set forth an agenda to increase the funding for mental health counselors so that students have a 250:1 ratio. This ratio is the minimum needed to provide basic support for our students. Retaining our best teachers is key to the success of our school system. Increasing teacher pay is essential to this goal.”

Additionally, Rev. McBrayer reports, “In October, 1,300 people from our VOICE institutions met with Virginia’s Governor and Attorney General to ask for their support on our agenda. Among those present were more than 600 students, parents, and teachers concerned about our schools. The Governor continues to work with VOICE on funding for mental health and good teacher pay and we believe the ground work we did in 2018 has set the stage for some big wins for our students in the 2019 budget cycle and general assembly.”

As people of faith, we are encouraged to advocate for all those who are marginalized by institutional systems as well as individuals. Being able to use one’s voice, even at the ballot box, is a key to fulfilling that biblical misional mandate. We are proud to have been a partner with Emmaus UCC as they embarked to make a difference in their community to aid their neighbors in need.

Please join us in supporting the
2019 Neighbors In Need Special Mission Offering. THANK YOU!
Two-thirds of your donations to NIN support advocacy programming and grants.
One-third of your generous gifts directly support CAIM. www.ucc.org/nin.

For more information about this event contact:
Emmaus UCC: https://emmaausucc.org/ or VOICE: http://www.voice-iaf.org/

To learn about the UCC’s positions on Disabilities and Mental Health contact:
Rev. Sarah Lund, Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice,
(216) 736-3230, lunds@ucc.org

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Loving Neighbor Through Acts of Compassion

"When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you? Then the King will say, "I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me." - Matthew 25:37-40 MSG

The 2018 Neighbors In Need offering, in conjunction with UCC's missional initiative - 3 Great Loves campaign, featured LOVE OF NEIGHBOR. St. Peter's UCC in Louisville, Kentucky was a recipient of a $5,000 NIN advocacy grant to work for justice in their community. Their project focused on helping women and men who had been incarcerated to reintegrate into society once released.

According to St. Peter's pastor, Rev. Dr. Jamesetta Ferguson, MOLO’ Village, a nonprofit ministry of the church, provides a foundation of support for persons as they reestablish and stabilize their lives when entering the Russell Neighborhood following a period of incarceration and/or recovery from drugs and/or alcohol. The reentry and recovery programs will help lead participants to a life of sobriety as well as a reduction in incarceration through education, job preparation, case management and advocacy.

Dr. Ferguson further states, “Since implementation in January 2018, MOLO has served 138 participants various 12 week/12 month reentry programs, which was comprised of workshops, resource fairs and volunteerism, and over 1,000 participants in 3 weekly recovery programs which included many persons completing court ordered programs and substance abuse programs. Additionally, the programs include conversations with community stakeholders, law enforcement, attorneys and other reentry nonprofits.”

Dr. Ferguson concludes, “Some lessons learned are that the educational and emotional/mental needs of the participants were greater than anticipated. Therefore, the curriculum has been revised multiple times to include more basic educational courses such as reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as mindfulness and art therapy during periods of socialization and group interaction is necessary to build trust and alleviate stress and isolation. With this evidence, we hope to double those served in 2019!”

As the scripture above informs us, people of faith ought to offer compassion to those who have been harmed and/or marginalized by people and institutions. We are proud to have been a partner with St. Peter’s UCC as they journey to make a difference in their community aiding their neighbors in need. Because of the generosity of UCC members giving to NIN, programs such as this can be supported and communities are strengthened. Please consider giving today. Thank you!

Is your church 5 for 5? The success and sustainability of the United Church of Christ’s national ministries is relying on your church’s contribution to basic operating support and mission. Being 5 for 5 means that your church is a leader, providing support to Our Church’s Wider Mission and the Special Mission Offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors In Need, & The Christmas Fund.

For more information about this ministry visit St. Peter’s UCC webpage or call 502-583-5544.