



A Hunger Justice Journal

PHP POST

Spring 2022 | Presbyterian Hunger Program | www.pcusa.org/hunger

Congregational Vitality



Source: www.pcusa.org/vitalcongregations

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Revitalizing congregations through hunger, poverty and environmental ministries

by Rebecca Barnes, coordinator for PHP

When a congregation lives out its faith in the community and broader world, it brings a renewed sense of connection, energy and purpose to the congregation and to individual church members themselves. Revitalizing the community simultaneously brings vitality to the church!

Of course, churches for their health and well-being do care for one another within the walls of the church, engage in authentic

worship, provide Christian education and formation, and strengthen the church itself and the faith journey of church members through many channels. Yet God calls us to take our care, engagement and strengthening also into the streets and around the world. The PC(USA) Vital Congregations program (pcusa.org/vitalcongregations) includes 7 marks of a vital congregation, and these “marks” of vitality run this spectrum of internal and

outward-focused engagement. Churches have found that they have the most vibrant and healthy life as they demonstrate care both within and beyond church walls.

Whether they are certified as Vital Congregations or are recognized as Earth Care Congregations, Hunger Action Congregations, or Congregation-Based Community Organizing — or congregations are simply incorporating some individual elements of working to end hunger, poverty, homelessness and environmental devastation into their witness, Presbyterian congregations are strong when their presence and relationships within the community are strong.

In this issue of the PHP Post, you'll read examples of people and churches strengthened by their engagement in the world around them, as they walk the talk of their faith. If your congregation would like to pursue becoming an Earth Care Congregation, a Hunger Action Congregation or to connect with other ways to live an outward incarnational/embodied focus, please contact us! Also, if you would like to explore some individual steps to help address hunger and its root causes, see pcusa.org/endhunger. We are here to connect and resource you.



PLEASE GIVE GENEROUSLY —
FOR WHEN WE ALL DO A LITTLE,
IT ADDS UP TO A LOT.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING
SPECIAL OFFERINGS
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03.02.22-
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Celebrate EARTH DAY APRIL 22 all year long

Sustainable solutions for your home, neighborhood and congregation

Climate change is a big problem that affects everyone, but there are many ways to make a big difference in your home, neighborhood and congregation. The most important thing to do is to get started. Pick one or two actions from the list below and do them now. The rest will follow more easily.

1. Save money by saving energy. Adjust your thermostat, turn off those unused lights, insulate doors and windows, and wash clothes and dishes in cool water. So many options!

2. Travel wisely. Group your trips and travel with family and neighbors. Use public transportation, walk or bike when you can. If you have a car, think higher MPG, maybe hybrid or electric.

3. Eliminate waste wherever you can. Use less and recycle. Go for glass and reusable containers instead of plastic bags and wraps. Take reusable bags to shop. Make sure everyone in your family has a reusable water bottle and takes their own mug to the coffee shop or worship service.

4. Involve others. Invite neighbors or your congregation into a discussion about what you should do and why. Schedule a lunch or virtual meeting and find out how they can help. List their ideas, build commitment and publish an action plan.

5. Green your neighborhood. Restore nature and increase property values by planting trees and other native plants to help reduce heat, improve mental health and community well-being, and provide better air quality and cleaner water.

6. Start with the easy, obvious successes in your congregation. Change to LED lights, motion sensors and timers for lighting, shades near bright windows, recycling bins and plants for fresh air.

7. Make 100% clean renewable energy your goal, with a target date. Half measures won't inspire your congregation

and won't solve the problem. You might be able to switch to clean energy at low cost almost immediately. Set interim goals with target dates, too.¹

To learn more about how to move your congregation in the right direction, check out Blessed Tomorrow's Moving Forward Guide at blessedtomorrow.org.

For more ideas, browse the Treading Lightly Lenten calendar at www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/treadinglightly-for-lenten or the Climate Care Challenge at www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/climate-care-challenge.

1. Source: www.blessedtomorrow.org



Texas church fights homelessness with permanent supportive housing

It's a justice issue for First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth

by Darla Carter, communications associate for the Presbyterian News Service

A \$4.8 million housing complex is the latest effort by First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth, Texas, to tackle homelessness in the community.

The newly developed Quail Trail apartments, just north of downtown Fort Worth, is permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless people and was built with the help of a \$1 million gift from First Presbyterian Church that spurred generosity from others in the area.

“We received generous grants from four major foundations in town,” said Steve Christian, chairman of New Leaf Community Services, a nonprofit that was formed to execute the project.

Philanthropist and New Leaf board member Flora Brewer “also gave us a large donation,” he continued. “The city granted us a forgivable loan, \$1.7 million,” toward the project. So “we started something brand new, and within two years, we had raised the funds to begin construction and hope to have all tenants in by February 2022.”

The church is interested in homelessness because “it’s an issue of justice, and it’s definitely an issue of human dignity,” said the Rev. Dr. Robyn Byrd Michalove, associate pastor of mission and family ministry at First Presbyterian Church. When you have all the things that stability and housing provide, “it can lead to greater success in other areas of life.”

The new development, which will have a total of 12 fourplexes when completed, already has begun welcoming tenants and will include case management to help them



overcome obstacles. “Most of the Quail Trail residents have been homeless for years,” Christian said.

They’re showing their gratitude in various ways. For example, “some of the tenants have volunteered to help with things like janitorial services in the community building and lawn care and that kind of thing,” Christian said. This helps give people “a sense of purpose and giving back.”

Quail Trail is just one of the ways that First Presbyterian Church is living out its mission as a Matthew 25 church and as a Hunger Action Congregation of the Presbyterian Hunger Program.

For years, there’s been an “institutional proclivity to say, ‘Look, we are a part of this community, and we want to be a part of the solutions (to Fort Worth’s struggles),’” Michalove said.

First Presbyterian’s mission work has included founding a night (homeless)

First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth is a Hunger Action Congregation that offers several programs and community services, including the Choice Pantry. Photo by Richard Massey, First Presbyterian Church

shelter in the 1980s that was recently renovated and has blossomed into a place that provides comprehensive services. The church also has a food pantry and has provided unique experiences for children to learn what it’s like to live on a budget.

Other endeavors include hosting a new worshipping community (Worship on Wednesdays), participating in Habitat for Humanity, operating a community outreach center and holding an annual event called Homeless Connect to provide one-stop services, such as haircuts and health checks.

Quail Trail “was sort of the next piece of the puzzle to say, ‘OK, what can we do to actually end homelessness,’” Michalove said. “We can provide services for those that are homeless, but what’s another tangible step? And this sort of collaborative dream came together.”



Christian, who has participated in other major outreach efforts by the church, explained the need for such endeavors this way: “We have to care for one another. Whether we like it or not, we are our brother’s keeper.”

Andrew Kang Bartlett, national associate for the Presbyterian Hunger Program, is impressed by their work.

“It’s so inspiring to see a church dig in on challenges facing their community,” Kang Bartlett said. “FPC knows they are imbedded in the city and the world, and just as Jesus did, they are getting their hands dirty grappling with systemic problems. I am eager to see what comes next for this community of believers!”

Several tenants already have moved into the development, which is intended to give them a place to feel proud, safe and welcome.

“A lot of our residents are older, with multiple health issues,” Christian said. “As a result, permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless people can become assisted living for the homeless because a lot of them are not able to become employed again, but they still need to be safe and healthy for as long as they can live. ... We recognize that, and that’s something that we want to support.”

Vouchers from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will make the project self-sustaining, he said.

“We shouldn’t need additional funds once we get all of our rental vouchers in place,” he said. “The income stream from those rental vouchers will cover all case management, all maintenance and operation of the facility” as well as some other services, such as a part-time mental health professional and volunteer coordinator.

Quail Trail is a \$4.8 million housing complex built with the assistance of First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth, Texas, to tackle homelessness in their community. Photo courtesy of New Leaf Community Services

In order to reside at Quail Trail, tenants with income will “pay a third of whatever income they have,” Christian said. “If they don’t have any income, then they don’t pay anything.”

Looking to the future, New Leaf has another project on the horizon. “We’re already looking at sites for the next one,” Christian said. “The church has committed another \$250,000 per year to help us with the next site,” and various groups have expressed interest in supporting the effort.

Collaboration is important, Michalove explained, using an African proverb. “If you want to go far, go together.”¹

1. This article originally appeared in the Presbyterian News Service at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/texas-church-fights-homelessness-with-permanent-supportive-housing/>

The Presbyterian Hunger Program and Congregational Vitality

Serving one another with gifts we have received

Connecting with the programs of PHP can energize and enliven congregations and presbyteries as they serve local communities. Here are a few snapshots of the variety of ministries that help revitalize congregations as they engage the communities around them:

In Savannah, Georgia, First Presbyterian Church, Butler Memorial Presbyterian Church and Skidaway Community Church participate in a **Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO)** group called Justice Unites Savannah Together (JUST). Forty percent of Savannah residents earn less than \$50,000 each year and are struggling to afford quality housing. JUST researched housing trust funds, which allow developers to keep rents affordable. Savannah had a housing trust fund, but the city had only been investing \$500,000 annually — not enough to make a substantial difference in the housing crisis. JUST organized and helped motivate people in their congregations. Together they advocated for the city to invest \$10 million of American Rescue Plan money into the fund. Thanks to their efforts, the mayor and city council allocated \$7 million of their 2022 budget for the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund. Mayor Van Johnson publicly credited JUST with pushing for this historic investment. This kind of organizing demonstrates the kind of vital and energizing work that people of faith can do when they work together with others for positive change in their community.

Hunger Action Advocates (HAAs), serve in presbyteries to educate, motivate and facilitate hunger action. They encourage congregations and presbyteries to engage in hunger relief, development assistance, public policy advocacy, education, and interpretation about sustainable living and earth care concerns. Jessica Fitzgerald, HAA for the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia, shared that Suffolk Presbyterian Church has a long history of faithful hunger ministry. They help support seasonal agricultural workers through the Eastern Shore Migrant Farm Workers Ministry, provide dry beans to the Society of St. Andrew for food bags, and support the Suffolk Christian Fellowship ministry with food, clothing, hygiene products, diapers and more. In 2021, church educator Beth Lyon-Suhring offered “Come to the Table,” a six-week discipleship study to raise awareness, provide education, and inspire advocacy. The study focuses on scripture and people’s relationship to food. HAAs and Suffolk Presbyterian Church are inspiring servant leadership, demonstrating outward incarnational focus, and helping create lifelong disciples.

How can your congregation get involved?

- Go to pcusa.org/hunger to learn more about root causes of hunger and find a number of ways to advocate in solidarity with people.
- Take steps to become a Hunger Action Congregation (pcusa.org/hac) or an Earth Care Congregation (pcusa.org/earthcarecongregations).
- Start or participate in a Congregation-Based Community Organization (pcusa.org/cbco) or engage with a Joining Hands Network (email Valery Nodem at valery.nodem@pcusa.org).
- Like and follow PHP at **Presbyhunger** on Facebook and Twitter.
- Support the work of PHP through One Great Hour of Sharing (pcusa.org/donate/OG300000).

Prince of Peace, a Presbyterian church in Crofton, Maryland, is a new **Earth Care Congregation** that sees the value of caring for the earth in a holistic way. They incorporate caring for God’s creation in their worship, education programs, church facilities and grounds, and take their environmental ministry into the community. They are well-known for hosting an annual Used Book and Media Sale, which raises money for mission activities, and this year they added a kickoff event where community members donated used bicycles. The bikes went to Wheels of Hope, a program that provides refurbished bicycles to meet transportation needs for at-risk youth, the local sober living community and more. This event allows the church to live out its faith in the broader community, meeting needs for transportation and health, while also saving bicycles from the landfill.

Congregations, presbyteries and individuals are revitalized when they work to address hunger, poverty and their root causes through global relationships. For over 20 years, clergy and church members in the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy have acted in solidarity with Red Uniendo Manos Peru — PHP’s **Joining Hands** network in Peru. Together they have advocated for health care for people affected by lead contamination, helped shine light on the connections between corporate operations in Peru and those in Missouri, and supported the restoration of land damaged by mining activities. Participants have been part of a movement of people working to address local and global systems of economic, environmental, and racial injustice, and they share that it has been a life-changing experience. Study, prayer, planning, worship, leading workshops, travel and advocacy have brought people together in solidarity and mission and have helped bring vitality to congregations and the presbytery.

Ladson Presbyterian Church, a **Hunger Action Congregation (HAC)**, is the oldest African American congregation in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. Once a month, church members offer a hot breakfast for their unhoused neighbors in need, serving up grits, eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, juice and fruit. Twice yearly the church invites the guests to a community birthday party where food, clothing and toiletries are provided. During September’s Celebration of Life Birthday event, information about record expungement, job training and community resources is made available. Some guests who were served by the program now participate as members of the congregation and help serve others. While changes have been made during the pandemic, Ladson has continued to be a light, partnering with others to reach hundreds of neighbors each week. Ladson has been an HAC since 2019 and exemplifies outward incarnational focus, a mark of vital congregations.



A little garden fosters big community

by Charron Andrews with Nancy Corson Carter, members of Church of Reconciliation

There had been a few dreamers who tossed around ideas for a community garden for the PC(USA) Church of Reconciliation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, but in 2018 Charron Andrews dreamed one into reality. The fact that she'd had little previous gardening experience didn't matter. She received a grant from the Orange County Extension Service to community gardens, and CREW, or Church of Reconciliation Elliott Woods Community Garden, was born.

Simple goals were established: to provide an opportunity to grow food, to show people how amazing that process could be and to provide fresh produce for folks in the community. A basic rule was to show kindness to the living world around it and hospitality to anyone who came to visit.

The garden's first real shaping came when 10 to 12 people came out for a work day to build four raised boxes, made from trees taken down to build the church's fellowship hall. Soil and compost were added. In the fall and winter of 2019 and 2020, more helpers constructed a fence. Bit by bit, plants, compost, a wheelbarrow and other garden supplies came from varied sources.

Then in March 2020, the Coronavirus hit and most everything closed. Charron remembers that the garden began to really come together during that summer when most people were staying home. They made a storage cabinet for the nearby porch on the side of the parish house. Best of all for community purposes, they set out garden furniture donated by friends. With indoor restrictions due to COVID-19, the porch was well-used in 2020–21. If you walked by on any given day, you might see a small committee meeting in progress, or the church's pastor meeting with a member of the congregation.



The garden began to really come together during the summer of 2020 when most people were staying home. Donated garden furniture allowed for outdoor gatherings when indoor restrictions due to COVID made traditional gatherings impossible. Photo courtesy of Church of Reconciliation

While the garden has grown to fill much of the once all-grass quadrangle, there is still enough green space for various events in that area. The Earth Care Committee met there, and a Carolina Garden Coaching leader came to talk about gardening with young people. One small group came in the summer to listen to live music.

At the same time, workers grew food. There were huge okra plants and a bounty of green peppers, Malabar spinach, tomatoes, eggplant, ground cherries, squash and herbs. Basil was a favorite that congregation members were encouraged to gather for themselves. There was even a little free produce stand placed where vegetables were offered to passersby.

Charron says that the garden “certainly has been a source of God's love and care for me,” and others seem to have that same sense. Noting a woman who frequently came to sit on the porch and read with one of the children from the apartments, Charron asked if they'd like to plant something.

They chose a baby watermelon that grew plump with sweetness, and a moonflower vine that later decorated the fence with its exotic evening blooms.

When another woman learned of the small community garden at the church, she came over to see it and fell in love. It reminded her of her own growing-up story that included living on a small farm. She wanted to get her hands in the soil but had trouble reaching down to the raised beds. Charron constructed a small waist-high box from supplies at hand and labeled it “Joyce's Garden.” She was delighted to be able to plant her own lettuce and greens. Now, in wintertime, Joyce reports that she often dreams about the garden.

In 2022, a variety of plants are readying for spring. The coming of a new pastor, the Rev. Allen Brimer, who is also a farmer, is an encouraging sign for new and continuing uses of the garden and its surroundings at the Church of Reconciliation.

Just Reads

by Valery Nodem, associate for international hunger concerns



S. Balajiedlang Khylllep and Hunter Farrell

Valery Nodem, associate for international hunger concerns, recently had a conversation with Hunter Farrell about “Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility and Co-Development,” the book he authored with Bala Khylllep (InterVarsity Press Academic, 2022). Hunter shared about his inspiration for the book and more.

What inspired you to write this book?

Over the years of working with the Presbyterian Church in DR Congo, Peru and the U.S., I began to see that there was a massive “disconnect” between what U.S. congregations intend and their actual impacts. I began to ask questions like:

- Why do we focus so much attention on the hungry child but invisibilize the child's parents, extended family and community, conveniently ignoring the systemic causes of the child's hunger?
- Why do Euro-American cultural

traditions, which generally value efficiency, turn such a blind eye to the wastefulness of mission trips, child sponsorship programs, orphanages and meal packaging programs that purport to “stop hunger now” or “save the starving children”?

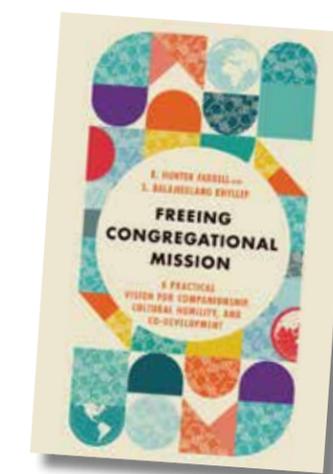
- Why do we work so hard to reduce mission to “benevolent gestures to ease the symptoms of poverty” rather than allow it to be the risky, embodied solidarity with marginalized people that Jesus lived out?

These are the questions that moved co-author Balajiedlang Khylllep and me to write “Freeing Congregational Mission.” Our purpose was to provide the lay and ordained mission leaders in mainline Protestant, Catholic and evangelical congregations across the country — the mission committee members, youth leaders, PW leaders, pastors and others who shape

their people's understanding of mission, allocate funds and deploy volunteers — with the understandings and tools they need to lead more effectively.

Can you tell me about the book? Sure!

The book critically examines current congregational mission practices, which we found are often shaped by colonial-era assumptions and the consumer marketplace. This twin set of assumptions — colonial mission (“mission = the charity of the rich on behalf of the poor”) and selfie mission (“mission as self-transformation”) functions like a riptide, pulling our understanding and practice of mission way off course. We propose as an alternative a theology of companionship focused on intercultural relationships that upend societal expectations; the kind of *cultural humility* evidenced by Jesus, the boundary-crosser; and the insights of what we call “co-development.”



1. Cole, Teju. “The White Savior Industrial Complex,” The Atlantic, March 2021: www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843

Organizing interfaith-fully! Christians and Jews unite for housing justice

by Andrew Kang Bartlett, associate for national hunger concerns



Nehemiah Action organizing. Photo credit First Presbyterian Church of Richmond Virginia

Amy Starr Redwine, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, Virginia, is very motivated to help solve the city's affordable housing crisis. Why? Because she has looked into the eyes of people who are struggling to secure decent housing.

The Rev. Amy Starr Redwine discussed with the author how their congregation's engagement with community organizing provides church identity, motivation and connections to their community

First Presbyterian Church is one of five Presbyterian churches that are part of a city-wide coalition called Richmonders Involved to Strengthen Our Communities (RISC), a Congregation-Based Community Organizing group, or CBCO.

Redwine says their participation in Richmond's CBCO, which is composed

Rev. Amy Starr Redwine discussed with the author how their congregation's engagement with community organizing provides church identity, motivation, and connections to their community.

of 22 houses of worship, "has been an important part of this church's identity in terms of the kind of outreach that both enables us to feel like we can make a difference in the community, but also do a deeper dive in terms of better understanding the issues.

"Through our work in RISC, we leverage the power that people have when we come together. One of the great values that I see in our involvement with RISC is it gets us working with people outside of ourselves. We work with many other churches, as well as synagogues and other faith communities."



Redwine adds, "We realize — wow, we come together, and we have more power to affect change!" And change, in Richmond, is definitely needed.

RISC's research discovered that Richmond is 25,000 short of affordable housing apartments and houses. The biggest need is among households making under 30% average median income (approximately \$27,000 for a family of four).

RISC has succeeded in getting \$23 million allocated by the city into the Richmond Affordable Housing Trust Fund since 2015. Now they are pushing for half of the housing units to be affordable for these lower-income resident individuals and families.

Redwine says that their organizing focuses on a large assembly of people, called the Nehemiah Action, where civil servants are asked directly for needed funding and policy changes. Some in the congregation are fully supportive of the approach, while others wonder whether this approach is too contentious.

Redwine agrees but says, "The strategy is to, not create, but to reveal tension that already exists, so it can get contentious." Adding, "This is not a personal ask of the mayor or a

city council member; we're asking them to do these things in their public role, because we believe these are the right things to do for our community, and they are servants of the community."

Beyond the organizing for affordable housing, RISC and First Presbyterian also work on gun violence and on healthy homes. Healthy homes emerged as an issue for the RISC coalition out of care for Creation concerns. Many RISC members shared stories of their experiences living in unhealthy homes. The RISC website explains that "Households living in mobile home parks in Richmond and Chesterfield,

which are primarily Latino, are experiencing unsafe, unhealthy and environmentally unjust living conditions. People spoke about extreme heat and extreme cold due to poor conditions of mobile homes, mold and other unsafe elements."

RISC is in the "research" phase of this new campaign for Healthy Homes, and they will determine ways to push for tangible improvements at the Nehemiah Action on April 5. The longer-term vision to build up the justice ministries (Rodef Tzedek, in Hebrew, meaning pursuers of justice) within each congregation such that justice becomes an integral part of their culture.

"The RISC strategy is all theologically grounded," said Redwine.

CBCO is a grassroots organizing approach for rebuilding communities, revitalizing congregations, and developing individuals into effective leaders and change agents. There are over 180 CBCOs across the country, and gifts to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering allows PHP to fund these groups during their start-up phase or in their on-going efforts to address affordable housing and homelessness.

FIERCE URGENCY: Advancing Civil and Human Rights

EAD 2022 calls us into solidarity to restore, protect, and expand voting rights in the United States and to realize human rights around the world. As people of faith, we know each person to be created in God's image, imbued with dignity and having a voice that demands to be heard, heeded, and treated justly. We arise in unity, holding up a mirror to leaders of nations, putting injustice on display and tearing down the veil of oppression that obscures the beautiful, God-born light shining from within us all.

Register @ www.accelevents.com/e/eadvirtual2022



Just Reads, continued from p. 9

What did you learn while writing the book? The discipline of gathering the wisdom we had learned from communities on four continents taught us much. For example, we were pushed to think more deeply about the process of development — a term rooted in colonial notions of "civilization" (sic) and what American novelist Teju Cole calls "the white savior industrial complex."¹ Co-development is, we believe, a more honest and mutual process where two groups offer both capacities and needs to provide the other with tools they need to reflect God's good intentions in the world. Contrary to the prophetic, money-table-overturning mission of Jesus, so much of what we do as "mission" today lacks any regard for the underlying causes of poverty and injustice.

One of the three foci of the PC(USA) is Vital Congregations. What does your book propose as ways that congregations can be revitalized? An authentic relationship with mission companions requires us to address our own racist assumptions, our privilege and our painful shared history in ways that can only transform our congregations. Our book tries to point to ways to do this.



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