

A FOCUS COVENANT FOR MISSION

WE CELEBRATE, the FOCUS Churches of Albany, our common calling to be God's servant people in the broken and hurting world.

WE HONOR the uniqueness of our member congregations with their diversity of gifts, separate histories, and God-given resources.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE that we need to learn from one another, to be enriched by one another's vision of Christian faithfulness, and to join in those areas of Christian mission where we can work more effectively together than by ourselves.

WE RECOGNIZE that our urban location, close to the raw edges of human need, as well as the centers of political power, defines the primary thrust of our common mission.

WE BELIEVE that we are called by God to discern amid the many shapes of need and pain around us, the design of Christ's mandate for our shared ministry.

WE COVENANT, therefore, with God and with one another

- To engage in a search for faithful and effective forms of ministry
- To provide a ministry of presence, support, and advocacy for victims of society's injustices and neglect
- To speak the truth in places of power on behalf of the powerless
- To offer new possibilities of wholeness to the lonely and alienated
- To equip ourselves for the service of Christ through joint educational and community building ventures
- And to celebrate in worship the meaning of our shared mission.

WE COMMIT to these purposes our prayers, our time, our talent, and our material resources with the hope that our life and work together in this time and place will demonstrate the liberating and reconciling power of the gospel.

FOCUS Office
275 State Street
Albany, NY 12210

(518) 465-5161
(518) 465-8781 FAX
FOCUSchurches@juno.com

FOCUS

Annual Report 2000

Emmanuel Baptist
First Presbyterian
Metropolitan Community Church of the Hudson Valley
Israel African Methodist Episcopal
Trinity United Methodist
Westminster Presbyterian

FOCUS Annual Report 2001

In reflecting over the last year – my first year as Director of Community Ministry – I can say with great enthusiasm - God is doing a great thing among, in and through us.

This report is an overview of the programs, projects and daily acts of ministry that make up our work together. It is interspersed with reflections and visions for a FOCUS future.

FOCUS Leadership

Discernment has been a priority for the FOCUS Executive Council (FEC). Questions of identity, mission and accountability have been creatively wrestled with for the purpose of clarity and faith-filled actions. FEC faithfully met for prayer and business each month – rotating among the 6 congregations. Members from the FEC met with each congregational governing board to listen to concerns, hopes and dreams for our future ministry. An intentional goal this past year has been communication. We have gained ground on conveying and dispersing FOCUS news through regular articles and information through congregational newsletters and weekly bulletins. Congregational FOCUS representatives have been sharing “moments for mission”. The FEC continues to gain strength as each congregation intentionally fills representative positions. A FOCUS brochure is due out shortly.

Our heartfelt thanks to Kathy Moore (Emmanuel Baptist Church) and the Coordinating Council at Emmanuel for the faithful attention and work of maintaining the FOCUS payroll services. Starting January of 2001 payroll will be transferred to Westminster Presbyterian Church and maintained by member Allan Tedrow. Our ongoing appreciation to Stacy Wilburn (Trinity United Methodist) and Irving Smith (First Presbyterian) for their careful handling of all other FOCUS finances.

Clergy Commitment

This has been a year where the FOCUS clergy are getting to know each other better. Two of our congregations have experienced leadership changes (we said goodbye to Donna Elia of First Presbyterian

Direct Advocacy

Along with the administering of FOCUS programs and new projects my time as Community Minister is spent interacting with the poor in our midst – on our doorsteps, at our feeding programs, walking along the streets and those who come knocking at our church doors. The needs are many – and multi-layered. Many live in or on the verge of crisis due to health problems and no health insurance; loss of jobs and lack of money to pay for food, rent, heat, clothing; jobs that don't pay enough to put a family above the poverty level; despair that seduces people into destructive addictions; shame and fear of going to the homeless shelters; confusion and frustration encountering a social service system that is not user friendly. By building relationships FOCUS continues to respond with listening and compassionate ears, referrals to appropriate agencies and resources, a voucher system and spiritual direction and counseling.

I represented FOCUS on the Board of Directors for CREO (Capital Region Ecumenical Organization and FPCD (Food Pantries of the Capital District). I continue to enjoy getting to know the congregations as I worship with you on a quarterly basis. My prayer and hope is that we renew our commitment to each other—building bridges between our congregations and neighborhoods, worshipping together, sharing in educational ventures, feeding the hungry, seeking justice and being the very presence of Christ in this world.

God is doing a great thing among, in and through us.

Your partner on the journey of faith,

Rev. Debra Jameson

transported fresh produce to the FOCUS pantry. Over 2,000 lbs. of produce were harvested this year.

Worship

Communal worship continues to be a foundational value for our churches. We are looking for innovative ways to bring our faith communities together that will be challenging and meaningful to all the FOCUS congregations. We continued our tradition of joint services this summer with a 6-week worship series that visited in each of the FOCUS churches. Easter Dawn was a wonderful experience for 60 plus people who gathered at the Capital for worship. By the time this report is published FOCUS will have gathered for joint Sunday morning worship where our covenantal mission will be renewed.

Educational

Project Love

FOCUS joined together with the Albany Boys and Girls Club to sponsor an eight-week summer program call Project Love. This past year we changed our form of involvement by letting go of administrative duties and became a financial supporter. The Boys and Girls Club ably oversaw Project Love. Project Love provided structured educational and recreational programming for 125 underprivileged children from our local neighborhoods. FOCUS funded scholarships for twenty-five children and finances for one full time teacher. FOCUS congregations were given the opportunity to volunteer during the summer.

FOCUS Youth

FOCUS provided the backdrop for Youth Leaders from our congregations to gather this fall to look at possible youth initiatives involving the FOCUS churches. This will be a continuing dialogue – with the hope of joint activities taking place this New Year.

Book study roundtables

In December we were able to lay the plans for and sponsor (what we hope will be ongoing) a series of book studies. FOCUS provided each congregation with copies of our first study “Inclusion – Making Room For Grace” by Eric Law.

and welcomed interim Matt Samson and as of this Fall new senior pastor Dale Webb; we said hello to Sandra Hannah who began an interim ministry with Westminster).

FOCUS clergy cleared their calendars and spent two days away on retreat in the beautiful Adirondacks where community building and FOCUS were the focus.

The clergy began meeting on a monthly basis (at the breakfast program) where ongoing communication and bonding are being built. FOCUS clergy have made a commitment to organize and lead peace & healing vigils in our neighborhoods anytime an act of violence is committed.

FOCUS Feeding Programs

Breakfast Club

The FOCUS Breakfast program completed its sixteenth season. Breakfast is served three mornings a week for the 6 coldest months of the year. On the average 80 people per morning were served a hot breakfast. The 2-hour breakfast time continues to be a sanctuary space for our guests who not only need food but find also a safe hospitable environment where they can come out of the cold, sleep, build community, read the want ads and seek spiritual direction/resources. We continue to work collaboratively with many outside human service agencies who come to breakfast and talk directly to guests. During the winter we hosted PBS who shot a documentary about hunger in NYS. This fall we introduced a bag lunch program where guests are able to take a lunch with them – averaging 50 lunches per day.

This program continues to function primarily due to our volunteers (over 30 are needed on a weekly basis) who arrive before dawn and take on the myriad of tasks that are needed to feed so many within a 2 hour window. Staff (Dave Balga and Peg Hanlon) continues to oversee the food inventory, pickups, deliveries and ordering. In May a volunteer recognition luncheon was hosted by the FOCUS Executive Council and held at First Presbyterian Church. We continue to be grateful to Westminster Presbyterian Church for their graciousness in sharing physical space for this vital and ongoing ministry.

FOCUS Interfaith Food Pantry

The FOCUS Interfaith Food Pantry continues to play an important

and vital role in our neighborhoods. Partnering with the FOCUS Churches are Congregation Beth Emmeth, First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, St. Andrews Episcopal Church and New Covenant Presbyterian Church. Open on the average of 8-10 days each month of the year, the pantry served 250 families per month. According to the size of the household each family was given a four-day supply of food (equivalent to 12 meals). Our resources allowed us to increase by 30% the amount of food given out. We continued to work collaboratively with many outside human service agencies who came to pantry and talked directly to guests. Over 125 extra Holiday Baskets were distributed in December.

This program continues to function primarily due to our volunteers (7-10 needed each day). Pantry operation continued under the guidance of the food pantry committee and the administrative leadership of Jim Cameron and staff Peg Hanlon (Food Manager) and Dave Balga (Food Mover). We anticipate the pantry undergoing a time of transition this coming year as Jim Cameron announced his resignation for mid-year 2001. Food Pantry Committee chair Janet Franklin has also stepped down from her position. Both will leave voids in our operation. We have been blessed by their tremendous contributions. We continue to be grateful to Trinity United Methodist Church for their graciousness in sharing physical space for this vital and ongoing ministry.

Balancing Our Feeding Programs

Our breakfast program and food pantry continue to occupy a tremendous amount of time, energy, sweat, laughter, tears, coordination and people power. Thanks be to God for those of you involved in these ministries. Is there an end in sight?

Soup kitchens and food pantries and shelters started as emergency responses to terrible problems – to help ensure that people do not starve, or die from the elements. No one, certainly not those of you who founded the FOCUS feeding programs, ever considered these services as appropriate permanent solutions to the problems – or that emergency feeding programs FOCUS began almost 20 years ago would still be in existence and so big. Today soup kitchens and food pantries are now the “accepted” response to hunger. We must begin addressing, in light of biblical wisdom and teaching, the question

“why is their hunger?” And grapple together with the fact that charity has replaced entitlement to food and other basic necessities that rightfully belong to all humankind. How do we speak to and act upon the injustices of hunger? I’m not suggesting that we abandon charity and close our feeding programs. Charity is both necessary in our current situation and a requirement of our faith. But we must acknowledge the broader implications of our charity and recognize that it alone is not enough – it must be balanced with acts seeking justice. Our challenge is to continue thinking about ways for our churches to support ministries of justice. What will that look like? My hope and invitation is to explore that together. A few small steps were taken this past March as I represented FOCUS at the hearing of the Food, Farm and Nutrition Policy Assembly Task Force to present testimony about hunger in our region, as well as 3 FOCUS church members participating in the Hunger Action Network Lobby Day. Five attended a Faith & Hunger/Bread for the World Conference last January.

Summer meals for Kids

A new FOCUS initiative this past year was summer meals for kids. In collaboration with the Albany Housing Authority and the USDA we were able to provide nutritious breakfasts for children aged 1-18 throughout the month of August. On average 30 children per morning participated.

Extra Helpings

FOCUS continues to run Extra Helpings, a communal Food Buying Club that gains monthly access to nutritious foods at a discount price. Our volunteers assemble the grocery bags and items for distribution at the Albany Boys and Girls Club. We saw our food buying club participation increase by 25 percent, averaging over 50 participants per month. This program has tremendous potential for growth.

Harvest For the Hungry Garden

Located at the State Office Campus, this one-acre garden was planted, nurtured and harvested by volunteers and guests from pantries participating in the greater coalition Food Pantries for the Capital District, Hunger Action Network of NYS and the Office of General Services. FOCUS church volunteers regularly were in the garden and