

## **Community Engagement Grants through the Enduring Witness Fund – 2022-2023**

### ***Recipient Narrative***

#### **First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland**

The First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland is looking to support a new *community café* (pay-as-you-can) in the Cumberland downtown area. Cumberland has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the state of Maryland, and although there are various organizations actively working to alleviate this challenge, the problem is significant. There is also a lack of vibrancy in the downtown area of Cumberland, and therefore, many people feel disengaged. The expectation is that the café will help to bring about a fuller sense of community. This *community café* idea has been in the works with a small group of inspired community members since 2019 after several visited a similar café in Kentucky. Their discussions were slowed down by the pandemic and until recently these visionaries were unable to make significant progress on the café. This café is meant to provide high quality food to the community regardless of ability to pay. It will also create a community gathering space to foster a sense of engagement and inclusion. The location of the café will be only a few blocks from First Presbyterian of Cumberland in the downtown business area. The church ultimately wants to reach the food insecure individuals and families in Cumberland with the intention to provide one lunch a day for five days of the week. We also wish to appeal and engage with the employed population in the city. Our hours of operation will provide an alternative place for lunch meetings. The pay-as-you-can model allows us to offer high quality meals in a high-quality setting. We will need those who can pay as well as those who will volunteer their time to help at the cafe. There is also a plan to be open on Sundays to offer a place to grab lunch after worship since many of the downtown restaurants are closed on Sundays. The hope is that we will engage more deeply with our neighbors through a welcoming place to share a meal together.

#### **Brown Memorial Park Avenue Memorial Presbyterian Church**

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Memorial Presbyterian Church is seeking funding for the Brown Memorial Tutoring Program. Brown Memorial Park Avenue Memorial Presbyterian Church's mission is to provide elementary school- age children who attend Baltimore City Public Schools and come from under-resourced families/communities with the opportunity to build their literacy skills, regain their confidence, and succeed in school. BMPAPC dedicated to helping students become confident readers and discover the joy of books!

The Tutoring Program is made possible by a committed cadre of volunteers, and for the current year, 39 volunteer tutors are giving of their time each week. Some tutors work with more than one child in different 75-minute sessions, which are offered Monday through Thursday, morning, and afternoon. This number is down from a pre- pandemic average of 70. Since BMPAPC's population skews older, many chose not to tutor this year due to health concerns. The number of students BMPAPC can enroll is directly correlated to the number of tutors BMPAPC has. For the current 2021-22 school year, BMPAPC is serving 55 students down from the pre-Pandemic average of 90.

BMPAPC recently learned that many of the tutors who took a break during the pandemic, will in fact not be returning. In the past, there had not been much tutor turnover year to year and the Program was able to rely on word of mouth to engage new tutors. Unfortunately, BMPAPC is ending this year with quite a deficit in the number of tutors and need to conduct a recruitment campaign from now through the summer. The Tutoring Program Commission {Advisory Board)

has formed an ad hoc Tutor Recruitment subcommittee to help in this effort. BMPAPC is currently planning two open houses and have invited Park Ave. congregation members to attend by advertising through the bulletin and email newsletter. BMPAPC is also inviting residents from the neighborhood through the Bolton Hill Community Association {BHCA} Facebook page and Listserve.

To build the Tutoring Program back up to pre-pandemic levels, BMPAPC must train and match at least another 25 volunteers. If successful, this would mean a very large pool of new tutors will start the 2022-23 school year, thereby necessitating additional training sessions. As the budget was approved in January, expenses associated with additional volunteer trainings were not included.

All tutors are trained in the Orton Gillingham Approach, a phonetically structured and multisensory way to teach literacy when reading, writing, and spelling does not come easily. This method is especially effective when working with children who have dyslexia or other learning differences.

The Program had its beginnings in 1963 when a group of Brown Memorial Church members began a Saturday children's program at Mount Royal Elementary School. Since that time, the Tutoring Program has grown in both scope and mission, becoming a valued partner of Baltimore City Public Schools. Up until the pandemic, the Tutoring Program had on average 70-75 volunteer tutors and enrolled 80-90 children.

Our Program is unique among most volunteer tutoring programs in that we hold our sessions during the school day, which helps assure continuity of attendance. In fact, according to J-PAL North America, a global research center based at MIT, "Tutoring programs conducted during school tend to have larger impacts than those conducted after school."

The Program will need to increase the number of training sessions at the beginning of the school year, as well as offer workshops throughout the year. BMPAPC would also like to produce a tutoring handbook and/or manual.

The Brown Memorial Tutoring Program serves Baltimore City elementary school children who attend Dorothy I. Height Elementary, Mount Royal Elementary/Middle or Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School. The 21217- zip code, where two of these schools reside, has a 35.4% poverty rate with 54% of children living below the poverty line. Students range from 1st to 5th grade, the majority of whom are African American and from low-income families.

BMPAPC partner schools draw their students primarily from the West Baltimore neighborhoods that surround the church - Druid Heights, Penn North, Reservoir Hill, Madison Park, Bolton Hill/Midtown, and Upton. The only exception is the Baltimore Montessori which has a citywide application process and 10% of its slots reserved for neighborhood children in the Greenmount WesUMidtown neighborhood. One partner school, Mount Royal Elementary/Middle, is close enough to the church that students can walk to and from tutoring.

## Faith Presbyterian Church

Faith Presbyterian Church is hoping to broaden and deepen its engagement with Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School as well as establish a relationship with Nexus Woodbourne, a residential facility for youngsters from 12-18 years of age who struggle with emotions, behavior, and/or mental health. With the monies awarded from the grant, *Faith* is hoping to purchase picnic tables which will be decorated, painted, and weatherproofed by the Nexus Woodbourne students in their woodshop and provided to Walter P. Carter to use for after-school

outdoor education programs provided by our congregants as well as outdoor classes and other activities of the school. We also hope to continue our support of the monthly Family Engagement Nights at Water P. Carter.

For the last three years, *Faith* has received Community Engagement grants to establish a relationship between our congregation and the Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School that has allowed us to support the staff and families in their work. In the past, the money has supported the *Family Engagement Nights* which the school has monthly during the school year. The development of our relationship was disrupted by the pandemic during which time the *Family Engagement Nights* were held virtually. Attendance was low and our involvement was severely curtailed. We are eager to pick up where we left off before the pandemic and grow our engagement with the school community.

*Faith* hopes to continue and strengthen its relationship with the Walter P. Carter community by shifting the focus of their support and broadening their community engagement. The staff of the school has expressed a need for outdoor tables where students can eat, classes can be held, and afterschool activities might take place. Several of *Faith*'s members with teaching backgrounds and a special interest in the environment hope to create an outdoor education curriculum to offer as an after-school activity for WPC students. *Faith* sees the picnic tables as a staging area for such a program.

*Faith* has also begun a partnership with Nexus Woodbourne, which is located 2 blocks from the church. Their vocational program includes a well-equipped woodshop where students are planning and building an outdoor bulletin board for our grounds. The staff of Nexus Woodbourne has expressed a desire to see their students more involved in the community. *Faith* would like to provide them with such opportunities by enlisting their help in preparing the picnic tables for Walter P Carter.

### **First and Franklin Presbyterian Church**

First and Franklin Presbyterian Church is looking to initiate a Gun-Buy-Back Project which takes unwanted guns, melts, and shapes them into garden tools. The goals for the project are to

- Remove firearms from the community
- Reduce the number of gun deaths and injuries. Some gun discharges are accidental, often by children finding a loaded gun; others get fired in domestic disputes or by someone in an unstable state. Most suicides involve guns. Accidental or impulsive actions may have been prevented if a gun had not been available.
- Heighten awareness of gun violence, gun ownership and gun safety
- Turn swords into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4-5)

In order to decrease the number of guns in homes, research points to a buy back project. Info sessions to community schools and groups on handling conflict, challenging the belief that guns make us safer, and gun safety education, will help us reach our goals. It takes time for neighbors to understand the project and see the benefits of gun free homes, but our weekly prayers and 4 year purple ribbon display have laid groundwork. In the future, we hope to increase the number

of near-by schools and groups we visit, the number of guns collected, the number of community partners and so improve our neighborhood outreach.

This year First and Franklin Presbyterian Church's goal is to reach all communities within a two-mile radius. Future years will include a further outreach. First and Franklin Presbyterian Church is starting with its immediate neighbors, reaching out to members of its congregation, participants in their weekly food ministry, AA members who hold meetings in the church and neighborhood schools within blocks of the church. First and Franklin Presbyterian Church has also decided to order large signs announcing its *Gun Buy Back Program* for all who pass our church. First and Franklin Presbyterian Church's advertising plans include neighborhood newsletters, newspapers, radio stations and social media platforms.

### **Hope Presbyterian Church**

Hope Presbyterian Church is looking forward to offering five Family Fun Nights (FFN) to deepen relationships between *Hope*, Zumi, and community families. The *FFN* will include activities and conversations around community needs. An assessment tool will outline community needs and help guide future services and programs, ESL classes, child care, after school. There are hopes for two sessions for future services and programs, ESL classes, child care, after school as well as for two sessions for youth and young adults (college students from UMBC who live adjacent to the church) will also be offered.

This is an expansion of *Hope*'s on-going outreach. Beginning in June of 2021 the church offered large community events: Music on the Lawn Halloween/Holyween; Christmas Eve Service, Easter Egg Hunt with an average of 200 attendees at each event. This project centers on deepening the relationships with a small group of families thru the *FFN*. A goal is to complete a Participatory Analysis for Community Action to guide future programs and services for families and youth.

Arbutus, Halethorpe, and Relay are the communities that surround the Hope Presbyterian Church (73% white, 9% African American, 5.1% Asian and 3.9% Hispanic. *Hope* plans to target the families in the community, youth who hang out in the playground after dark and foreign exchanged students who attend UMBC.

The Family Fun Nights will engage 25 families who want to get to know each other and establish relationships. During the *FFN*, thru food, fellowship, and sharing using a needs assessment tool, parents will identify programs to offer in the community to meet the needs of every family member using a Participatory Analysis for Community Action tool.