



Continuing
**OUR WAY
FORWARD**

*A Strategic Report
for Outreach
at Asbury First*



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**A strategic report for Outreach
at Asbury First United Methodist Church,
and an update to “A Way Forward” report.**

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“You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul, and with all of your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus said, answering a lawyer’s question about the way to find the kingdom of God. The lawyer asked a clarifying question: “And who is my neighbor?”

As usual, the great teacher responded with a parable: Three men separately came upon a man beaten and left on the side of the road. The first two, who were the same or a related religion as the unknown victim, passed him by. The third, a traveling Samaritan, rendered aid, went out of his way to walk with the victim on his journey of recovery and paid for his housing and treatment.

Who was the beaten man’s neighbor, Jesus asked? “The one who showed him mercy,” the newly enlightened lawyer responded. From Luke 10:29-37.

Since “A Way Forward,” a strategy document for outreach at Asbury First United Methodist Church, was published in 2016, the Outreach Taskforce has come to better understand its members’ relationships to those in need of help. We feel we should no longer think of ourselves as hosts offering hospitality to less fortunate guests, or as professionals offering specialized services to clients. Terms like guests and clients also underscore – however unintentional – a power differential that we don’t want to perpetuate.

We are all neighbors.

Neighbor is the role God calls us to take on, so that is the term we will use in this report, replacing “guests” from our original report. In some instances, such as our medical clinic, other terms may be more appropriate, but we encourage everyone to use “neighbor” when they can, reflecting the relationships God calls us to have. In the scripture above, Jesus shows us the best way to show mercy is to walk with our neighbors and not simply offer them charity. We must also seek justice for them.

We agree with and affirm the values and mission statement of the original document. Our mission: “As disciples of Jesus Christ, we cultivate hope and fullness of life.” Our values are Love, Community, Safety, Sharing, Faith in Christ, Justice, Stewardship, and Joy. (For more detail visit [the original report here.](#)) Now, though, we would add a new goal: To seek transformation, for our community, for the neighbor seeking assistance or spiritual uplifting, and for the neighbor volunteering.

This document strives to:

- Reflect progress on the goals first stated in “A Way Forward.”
- Identify areas in which we still need to improve or embark upon.
- Take into account changing conditions in Rochester and the world.
- Take into account changes at Asbury First.
- Offer recommendations for a continued way forward in the coming years.

WHERE WE STAND

PROGRESS

Happily, there is much progress in our outreach ministries since *A Way Forward* was published. Some very major recommendations in that report have been realized:

1. In a miraculously short time, money was raised and construction completed on 1010 East Ave. to turn it into the Asbury Community Outreach Center, which houses our on-campus ministries, namely Dining and Caring Center, Grocery Bag Ministry, Storehouse, UR Well health clinic and Community Garden. Silo walls are already coming down that have kept some of these ministries apart. The mere relocation into a single site will continue to help build synergies among these ministries and some off-campus ministries as well. It also helps reduce duplication of efforts.
2. We have hired an Outreach Director to manage all of this. Due to his unique qualifications, the Rev. Pat Dupont has also been elevated to Minister of Outreach. He has been a tremendous help in navigating the temporary relocation of the dining center and the various ministries, as well as the continuing operation of all our Outreach ministries.
3. We have hired a social worker to better assist particularly vulnerable neighbors with navigating social services off and on campus. To paraphrase a parable: You can give a neighbor a fish, or you can help more by teaching them to fish. However, if they don't even know how to get a fishing license, the social worker can help with that.
4. When a grant opportunity arose, we built a community garden at Asbury First, currently consisting of 10 raised beds located behind 1010. Since the garden started in spring 2021, it has supplied produce for the dining center, the grocery bag ministry, refugees in the Keeping Our Promise program, the Meal and More program at Zion AME, and what is now called the People's Pantry.
5. The original report also recommended volunteer training with an eye toward understanding the difference between mercy and justice. We held two training sessions in March 2023, the first, we hope, of many to come.
6. As a result of our initial deliberations that recommended focusing our off-campus but local ministries on one needy part of the city, tutoring efforts in city schools were consolidated at School 17. The pandemic made tutoring even harder and it exposed the impact on children's learning. However, the relationship between Asbury First and School 17 remains strong.

MORE PROGRESS NEEDED

Some recommendations unfortunately, saw little or no progress. A few were probably best left on the cutting room floor, as it were, but several remain important even six years later. The

worldwide COVID 19 pandemic made it difficult to reach some of our goals, even if they were valued by all involved. Social distancing has made it difficult to be in relationship with our neighbors, be they help seekers or volunteers.

- A. We're struggling to embrace the goal of seeking justice for our impoverished neighbors. We have mostly sought more pinpointed and long-lasting help for individuals rather than seeking change in the policies and systems that hold them in poverty. Independent of our Outreach Ministries, though, the church has an ongoing effort to examine systemic racism and that is providing a valuable backdrop for our Outreach work.
- B. With some exceptions, we are not doing the recommended annual reviews of each Outreach ministry or seeking regular feedback from those who receive help from them. Seeking feedback doesn't need to be an onerous task. It might take the form of a brief survey on a self-addressed postcard. Notable exceptions have included the dining center, which participated in county-wide surveys of people receiving meals from soup kitchens, and the GBM, which convened a workshop with participating churches that distribute the groceries, and which frequently talks with those churches and the Keeping Our Promise program.

NEW OBSTACLES OUT THERE AND AT HOME

Our foreign ministries, namely Project Chacocente and Miracle Garden, have faced governmental intervention that has hindered our support of work in Nicaragua and India. These ministries need to reflect and are reflecting on ways to continue supporting education of orphans and other children (boys *and* girls) in India and the uplifting of people in rural Nicaragua without violating new and unjust laws in those countries. This is hard work and should be discussed broadly among our Outreach leaders.

During the course of our committee's deliberations, we interviewed every Outreach ministry led by or supported by Asbury First – on campus, elsewhere in Rochester and abroad. Nearly every ministry said it needed more help from volunteers. And so we are reiterating the call for a volunteer coordinator. Perhaps even more than financial assistance, these programs run on volunteer power and they are all in need of more. The pandemic, which caused many older volunteers to step back from working in groups, compels us to seek new and younger volunteers to replace those who have withdrawn. We suggest tapping into community service programs at all local high schools and colleges as well as identifying younger families and individuals within Asbury First.

The pandemic also made it difficult to meet the education goals of our original document. Thankfully, the dangers are subsiding and Outreach training sessions have begun. Our church has also become extremely adept at the use of zoom and hybrid meetings, so we may continue to reach even those still reluctant to venture out. One ministry – the Storehouse – articulated what we believe many are feeling: They aren't trained in identifying how institutional racism impacts our actions and beliefs, particularly in dealing with neighbors of races or circumstances different from our own. Nor do they have training on how to understand or lovingly assist

neighbors who have experienced trauma. Some people seem to innately understand how to do this or have learned from other experiences; others admit they are uncomfortable with this. We feel our outreach director and social worker can help us reach our educational goals, perhaps with the help of outside agencies.

During the pandemic, the Rochester Area Interfaith Hospitality Network (RAIHN) changed its model, which had included having program participants relocate to a different church for a week or two at a time. When the program used to visit Asbury four times a year, a cast of dozens of Asbury First volunteers were marshaled to feed and house these neighbors and even stay overnight with them. Now called Family Promise of Greater Rochester, this program that helps unhomed families find stability, has switched to serving neighbors in a stationary location. It eschews drop-in, one-time volunteering to avoid intruding on the participants' privacy. Asbury First continues to support this program financially. Meanwhile, homelessness has reached a new crisis owing to many people losing their jobs during the pandemic or in the economic crisis that followed. There was a huge spike in home loss when the federal government ended its pandemic protections on evictions. What will we do about this? Homelessness in Rochester seems like the perfect topic on which to focus some of our new justice-seeking efforts.

Our ministries have shown remarkable resilience and creativity during the pandemic and lockdown. Though the dining center streamlined its services, it switched to a grab-and-go model that continued to serve hot meals to a core number of our neighbors seeking hot meals. We look forward to the return of a full-service Dining and Caring Center, which was founded on the notion of waiting on and caring for our neighbors rather than requiring them to march through an impersonal line to gain food. We're excited to see how our new dining and caring services will work in tandem with other food programs on campus. The Storehouse used its creativity to fill orders for goods and clothing after neighbors provided their needs, sizes and ages through a caseworker. These packages were either picked up or delivered by volunteers or agency caseworkers. The storehouse's complex operation has moved into 1010 and has already started having neighbors shop for themselves again. We endorse a plan that has been discussed by multiple parties that would have ministries overlap their hours so neighbors who come for meals or health care can also stop by the Storehouse on certain days when they visit Asbury First.

We should also note some changes that occurred organically or as a result of changes outside our church. Asbury First's participation in building homes with Flower City Habitat for Humanity has diminished for several reasons, including the age of devotees, and ending One Great Week of Service (which often prompted a group build.) We don't want to give up on this. Meanwhile, the pre-pandemic consolidation of the West Avenue UMC into another congregation essentially ended the Oral G. Roberts Teen Cafe, which Asbury First had supported. This program provided meals and a social program on Fridays nights for youths who would be at risk of suffering violence in the way that the program's namesake did. Support has now been switched to Cameron Ministries' Teen Center, which is broader in the services it offers. However, Asbury First's participation now amounts to just a couple of Asburians who volunteer time and money,

and an occasional Outreach grant. We should be doing more for this program, which has proven its worth and effectiveness in one of the neediest Rochester neighborhoods.

The No One Left Behind program, which Asbury First supported, changed its focus and a new organization emerged: Rochester-based Keeping Our Promise. This supports relocation of Afghani, Iraqi, and Kurdish interpreters and their families who helped American armed forces during the war in Afghanistan. Individual Asbury First members volunteer with KOP and a variety of ministries support the families with home goods, groceries and fresh produce.

NEED FOR CONSOLIDATION

When a new governance model for Asbury First was adopted a couple of years ago, Outreach oversight went from one committee to three, though two are actually “teams.” Additional teams continue to support the individual ministries, which they always did. One reason for adopting this new governance, as far as Outreach was concerned, was to provide extra focus on getting the Community Outreach Center up and running. But with little to discuss other than cutting checks, the Outreach Funding team reports that it meets only occasionally to provide funding from the undesignated Outreach fund. And the Missions and Service team, comprising off-campus ministries, has been split off from both. Liaisons report from one committee to another, but not to all three. There is no single Outreach entity reporting to the Asbury First Governance Board about general Outreach concerns. This structure also makes more work for the Minister of Outreach and for the two liaisons doing thankless and tedious work of reporting back and forth between two of these groups each.

With two years under our belts of this governance structure, we feel it’s time for the Governance Board to make some tweaks in the governance structure for Outreach. We recommend the Outreach Center Committee, the Outreach Finance team and the Missions and Service teams be combined into one again without seeking to provide one-to-one representation. We also recommend that undesignated funding be simplified by providing annual line-items for “frequent flyers,” such as Cameron Community Ministries, the Tyshawn Caldwell scholarship and Grocery Bag Ministry, while continuing to set aside half of the unreserved outreach dollars for truly one-time, emerging or emergency needs. Agencies that have come to rely on us for annual donations will be able to plan their budgets better this way. The committee should check in annually to make sure the money is spent appropriately and is still needed.

This new Outreach Committee would work in tandem with the Minister of Outreach and report to the Governance Board. Its charge would include:

- 1) Carrying out the recommendations and strategies of this report. Identifying emerging or outdated needs and adjusting strategy accordingly.
- 2) Overseeing budgets and spending for all Outreach programs, including undesignated funds. Track spending with partner agencies by collecting annual reports. Assist the church administration in preparing budgets for Outreach.

- 3) Coordinating general Outreach fundraising, supporting fundraising efforts of individual ministries, and working with the church administration to seek and manage grants from outside sources.
- 4) Connecting with other Rochester-area partners – faith and secular organizations – and seeking new partners when needed.
- 5) Providing educational opportunities for volunteers and the Asbury First community.
- 6) Holding ministries accountable for annual self-reviews and surveys of neighbors receiving services, providing technical assistance to make that happen.
- 7) Assisting, as necessary, the staff in recruiting and training volunteers and ministry leaders, providing educational programs and carrying out outreach missions of the church.
- 8) Work with a (yet to be formed) justice and advocacy team and the pastoral staff to select social justice issues for Asbury First to focus on through education and advocacy.
- 9) Assist with formation of an Outreach Newsletter, and contribute to its content.

We recognize this is a lot, but we also recognize the passion and talent of the Asbury First community and have faith that all of this can be accomplished.

NEW AND RENEWED EFFORTS

With the opening of the COC, we will see changes as on-campus ministries start to operate as part of a whole instead of wholly independent. We must be wary, though, that off-campus ministries are not ignored because of focus on the center. Currently, the support for some of the organizations Asbury First partners with rests exclusively on the shoulders of one or two church members who volunteer there, rather than truly being supported by the congregation. So we further recommend that the new, single, Outreach Committee add to its agenda ways to keep these ministries better supported.

We ask that the church administration dedicate resources to a regularly published newsletter devoted to Asbury First Outreach programs. The audience for this newsletter, unlike our existing church publications, would include non-Asbury volunteers, outside organizations that provide volunteers or services, funders and grantmakers, and neighbors in the physical proximity sense of the word. This newsletter will be both a way to amplify and connect our ministries within the Asbury First community, and be a tool to appeal to and inform the wider community for partnership and funding. Asbury First does phenomenal work in outreach and we have a local reputation as a church that gets things done in this arena. We just need more documentation and communication to help us do an even better job.

We also need to start working on justice with our Outreach ministries, as we promised to in 2016. An Asbury First advocacy and justice work group should identify anti-poverty initiatives on which we can bring positive pressure to bear. One lasting effect of the pandemic is the widening

of the wage gap between poor and rich. While service workers who live hand-to-mouth risked catching a deadly disease to keep food on their tables, Amazon owner Jeff Bezos gained billions of dollars of personal worth. This outreach justice work group, however, need not limit its focus to poverty. As gun violence has become the No. 1 killer of our children; and our community and country are still grappling with a racial reckoning, the justice group may address issues like these. It could coordinate with a new racial justice group at Asbury or be joined with it to avoid redundancy. Our advocacy group could pinpoint legislation that addresses root causes of poverty, violence or racism and then invite our membership to participate in protests, a letter-writing campaign to our political representatives or lobbying. With our rich experience in anti-poverty programs, we can file amicus curiae briefs in legal cases aimed at poverty injustices. There is much to be done in this area.

Finally, let's talk about personal transformation, which is more than an Outreach goal. It's part of our faith. Dedicated volunteers have experienced this sort of personal transformation while working in our ministries. Less frequent volunteers don't often have the opportunity for such change. We can encourage transformation in several ways. One is through the awareness raising of education programs, which we have just begun. We need to bring in speakers on poverty and diversity issues more than annually to keep that education going. Another is by expanding our food programs to include demonstrations on cooking and nutrition. Or we can cook and prepare meals with our neighbors; during our ministry interviews, at least two partner agencies asked whether they could use our facilities to hold large fundraisers. We have named our new center the *Asbury Community Outreach Center*. To truly understand the meaning of community in that title, we need to find new ways of using the building. Let's invite our neighbors – those who come for help, those who come to help and those who are members – to join us for special events. Imagine gathering to watch a Bills game in the dining center after the Sunday meal. Imagine classes in cooking and language instruction. Imagine a workshop on foot care led by UR Well, aimed at both neighbors eating in the dining center and diabetic church members. Imagine a thriving community that improves the lot of all neighbors.

We can do more good.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Renew our commitment to seek justice for our neighbors. Create an advocacy work group that can, for instance, promote letter-writing campaigns or suggestion demonstrations to attend. Start by end of 2023.

Annually conduct annual reviews of outreach ministries and, also annually, seek feedback from neighbors who receive services from those ministries. Start in 2024.

Hire a volunteer coordinator. They would focus on recruiting volunteers, establishing connections with pipelines for volunteers and lead training of volunteers. As an alternative, assign these tasks to existing staff or volunteers. Initial steps by end of 2023.

Conduct annual reviews of each ministry and at least annual surveys of neighbors receiving help from Asbury First. Organize plan by January 2024.

Lead volunteer training at least twice a year to include instruction in serving neighbors, trauma-informed care and implicit bias. Continue in fall or early winter of 2023.

Seek new ways to deliver services for legacy programs such as Miracle Garden and Project Chacocenter that have been affected by law changes in other countries. By the end of 2024. Add homeless as a focus of outreach efforts by mid 2024.

Seek synergy among our ministries so they can avoid replication and work together. Overlap hours of ministries so neighbors can gain more than one service during a single visit. Start immediately.

Consolidate outreach committees into a single committee; simplify allocations of undesignated outreach funds by designating annual stipends for about half of the fund, retaining the other half for emergency, new or one-time funding. Streamline the committees but be mindful of ways to highlight smaller ministries, especially those off-campus or off shore. Encourage informal meetings of all ministries leadership to further connect them and break down silos. By January 2024.

Providing funding and staff support to create an Outreach newsletter. Use it to better inform the Asbury First congregation and partner agencies, recruit volunteers and seek grants and other funding. By the end of 2024.

Keep the health and safety of the community of Rochester top of mind in all we do. Starting immediately.

Promote personal transformation by coming together as a community of neighbors. Begin events by March 2024.

GRATITUDE

Thank you to all our task force members who met for several months and conducted numerous interviews of our ministries. Special thanks for the original taskforce members who agree to help again on this update. They are: Bob Castle, Diana Carter, Robyn Gage, Carolyn Hamil, Rick Kuempel, and John Smalt. Thank you to the intrepid new members for their invaluable contributions. They are Lucia Cardona, Pat Dupont, Tim Mahan and Brennon Thompson.

We also thank all of the outreach ministries at Asbury First and programs supported by Asbury First, for the work they do and for participating in interviews. They are:

Asbury First Dining and Caring Center

Asbury First Community Garden

Grocery Bag Ministry

UR Well clinic at Asbury First

Asbury First Storehouse

Project Chacocente

Miracle Garden of India

School 17 tutoring

Cameron Community Ministries Teen Program

Keeping Our Promise

Family Promise of Greater Rochester

Flower City Habitat for Humanity