

Project URGE, Inc. Report for 2006!



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Zechariah 7:8-12 (NIV): And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.’

“But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.”

Clearly in this verse there is a call for compassion and justice; however, you’ll note it states “their hearts as hard as flint”. Unfortunately, this, to a large extent, remains true today. We who are active in Project URGE constantly are evaluating and praying for a change to this scenario. Do we somehow think that God is less angry about these circumstances and lack of action now!?

I am pleased to report that there are many people, organizations and churches associated with Project URGE who truly see the vision and engage in carrying out God’s mission on a regular basis. (*Connecting and uniting churches, organizations and individuals in working together to break down barriers of poverty, race and despair in the name of Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:18 “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”*) This collaborative spirit that joins our hearts and hands, which has been opened through prayer, protected by prayer and acted upon through the folks whose hearts are both open and obedient to fulfilling what God has set forth for us to do. Please take a few moments to learn some of the ways this vision is being carried out:

Bread Run Team: There are seven families who faithfully deliver bread, baked goods, and desserts from Tops in Canandaigua to 8-10 shelters, soup kitchens and organizations feeding the hungry, every Saturday morning and every other Sunday. This is approximately a 60 mile round trip, which takes about 2 ½ hours to complete. The effort not only feeds people, but also saves these organizations who do the serving, both time and money. This team has been operational for over three years, delivering to: Recovery House of Rochester, Women’s Place, Outreach Temple, Sanctuary House, Mercy Residential, Grace Community Village, Eastern Service Workers Association, Francis Center, House of Mercy and others, if there is an overabundance. Clothing and hygiene products are sometimes delivered to these same destinations, as they become available.

Jacob’s Ladder Team: This group, led by Fred Stresing, has been active for over three years, painting, patching walls, sorting and delivering coats, installing, building shelves, residing buildings and much more. The team centers around helping to restore and renovate facilities of organizations who serve the under-resourced and who rely heavily on donations (often hanging on by a shoe-string). We also were involved in the City Clean Sweep effort. A priority is usually given to those affiliated with Project URGE, because these organizations have shown a willingness to collaborate with others. Three or four people working here and there on 2 Saturdays a month may not first appear significant; however, these efforts in 2006 alone account for a collective savings to these organizations of over \$10,000 in labor! The disappointing aspect of this team has to do with a lack of participation from a diverse church population, and that it’s been the same 3 or 4 individuals showing up to do the work the past couple years, despite bulletins in the newsletter and pleas for others to join at our monthly meetings. There are churches on nearly every corner in the City of Rochester, and yet there is little effort outside their walls. This must change!

Additionally, we’re in discussion with BOCES 2 – Workforce Development about partnering with them by using their apprentices in conjunction with our upcoming projects. Furthermore, we are seeking ways

to transition this team from a weekend volunteer group to a viable, job producing, business, that will also provide training and keep the dollars in the neighborhood. This initiative could also be a springboard for rehabbing homes that would in turn provide permanent, affordable housing for low-income families and transitional housing for the homeless.

The city and county governments always seem to find the dollars for the huge monumental projects, but are far less likely to invest in partnerships with grassroots organizations that represent the pulse of the under-resourced in the community, because it does not translate into big headlines and contribute to sustaining their campaign funds.

We'll delve into this subject farther down the road.

Service Projects: Williamson High School sent 50 to 60 students and faculty to Project URGE affiliated organizations twice in 2006, performing multiple tasks at Foodlink, Rochester Family Mission, Women's Place (CFC), Friends Helping Friends, Sanctuary House (CFC), Mercy Residential, Grace Community Village, Eastern Service Workers, Francis Center and Community Lutheran Ministry. Typically, I will meet the bus at the first stop, deliver a brief overview about Project URGE and describe the importance of the work they're about to do. I then escort the bus to each of the facilities, where they are briefed on the purpose of the organization and how the students are about to compliment their mission. The organizations provide the snacks and beverages, while the volunteers bring their own lunches. After the task is finished they return to the school and have discussions and reflections around what they've experienced. This has been a win/win situation for all involved (see article in this issue and past newsletters).

We set up service opportunities for the Perinton Presbyterian Church's 30 Hour Famine event and additionally, for a larger 30 Hour event involving youth from about a dozen churches in Fairport and Penfield, that use our booklet and contact information for lining up the work to round out their weekend event.

Beyond these one day projects there are a number of groups from churches involved in helping out with cooking, conversing, praying and sorting clothes at homeless shelters, food pantries, soup kitchens and working with youth. Some of these groups spawn from churches such as: Fairport United Methodist Church, Crosswinds Wesleyan Church, Assumption of Our Lady, Walnut Hill Community Church and Browncroft Community Church. You do not typically see these stories in the news about these ongoing efforts, some of which have been in progress since the first presentation and bus tour that Project URGE sponsored 4 years ago. Several of these churches also team up to help those in need in their own "backyard" on a regular basis.

Churches located in the city that have encouraged relationships and infused volunteers from suburban and rural churches include: Grace United Methodist Church, with their Grace Community Village organization, which offers a multi-faceted ministry approach to the community, Outreach Temple (COGICU), Salvation Army, Catholic Family Centers, West Avenue Methodist Church and in the past, Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church. We applaud and encourage more churches to be open to partnering.

Plain and simple – it builds strength, which in turn has a greater impact on the community and unifies us in our faith and deeds. It helps create a "we" in Christ, rather than a "me" and draws us back to Ephesians 4.

Summer Camps: Once again in 2006, a number of churches hosted the Community Lutheran Ministry's Summer Camp, for youth in the 14621 area code. Some churches have been hosting a couple days of camp for three or four years. We look to extend this great mission in 2007! The camp visits churches in Canandaigua, Fairport, Farmington, Penfield and other villages. The activities range from Bible study, to basketball, kick-ball, capture the flag, hiking in Grimes Glen with the help of a member of the Fingers

Lakes Land Trust, to canoeing on the canal, drumming, writing local officials, discussing racism and more. Some churches support the camp financially and others have collected snacks and beverages to help defer the cost. Foodlink also helps supply the foods and drinks, which are nutritional in value.

This past year at Crosswinds Wesleyan Church the camp had volunteers from the Mosaic group (a local non-profit) facilitate a program encouraging meaningful dialogue with teens that were paired up with differing ethnicities and backgrounds. The adult volunteers seemed to appreciate the exercise as much, if not more than the youth! At Crosswinds they encourage their teens to take part in the camp.

Some of the churches who have helped in the past include: Church of the Transfiguration, St. Marks Lutheran, Christ Clarion, Crosswinds Wesleyan Church, St. Mary's Church (Canandaigua), Walnut Hill Community Church, Fairport United Methodist Church, Pittsford Baptist, Assumption of Our Lady, New Covenant Fellowship and others.

Nevaeh and Rochester Family Mission also host summer camps, which afford the opportunity for volunteers to be part of these camps in a variety of ways, such as, serving food, reading, transportation, along with donations of finances and supplies. Doors of opportunity must continually be opened for these children to succeed.

Newsletters: Project URGE produces a quarterly newsletter each season, which helps churches stay informed as to 1) what types of ministry activities are taking place, 2) to describe opportunities for involvement, 3) to encourage greater urban/suburban participation and 4) a testimony of how "the church" can exemplify the teachings of Jesus Christ through involvement in the community.

Social Events: In 2006 our annual dinner was held at the Fairport United Methodist Church, where about 50 people gathered to reflect, socialize, and become better acquainted, apart from the work they are involved in. There was great food, music, artwork, talk of ministry efforts, a DVD clip of Dr. Perkins and a couple icebreakers for fun. We'll continue this tradition in March of 2007.

The second weekend in July found us once again at the Island Pavilion in Ellison Park. Approximately 70 adults and children attended the picnic. BoBo the Clown was there doing face painting and presiding over some of the games. JoAnne Rosato brought a canoe, and some of her children and others helped load some of the kids into the boat for a short ride on Irondequoit Creek. The food and conversation were great, as was the weather!

These social events have always been a key component to our ministry. I'd also encourage people to meet in small groups from time to time throughout 2007. Often, smaller groups are more conducive to meaningful dialogue. This can even take place after team meetings.

Presentation and Tour: The first Saturday in November became the fourth year for Project URGE and its' affiliated organizations and ministries to introduce individuals and churches to their mission work and provide a tour of their facilities, with the hope that we'd be providing participants of the tour an avenue to involvement. This year we cut down transportation expenses by using vans. We also shortened the time of the presentation and tour, as well as the number of places a person would visit. It's probably easier to digest the activities of 4 or 5 organizations first hand, rather than 20. There were approximately 40 participants in this year's tour, with nearly all the feedback being positive. Browncroft Community Church hosted the initial presentation before we transported folks to the different sites. Foodlink, Project URGE and Glenn Miller helped with breakfast food and beverages. The conversations were more thoughtful and meaningful this year, in part, due to smaller groups chatting in the vans and being able to have more personal dialogue.

This continues to be a great rallying event for all our affiliated organizations. Some ministries continue to reap the benefits of this presentation back from its inception.

The weather was cooperative as well. I seem to always walk away from this event with a sense that this is how it's supposed to be – churches and organizations getting together to impact the community, while at the same time, providing community. Folks from about 12 different churches helped, while there were approximately 20 organizations represented, all pitching in to make this a success. Presenters were: Project URGE, Foodlink, Rochester Family Mission, Community Lutheran Ministry, Teen Challenge, Catholic Family Center's three Shelters, Touching and Agreeing Faith Ministry, Grace Community Village, Friends Helping Friends, Nevaeh, Adopt-a-Class (School #17), Recovery House of Rochester, Grace Urban Ministries, Salvation Army and the Outreach Temple Home Mission.

The "Vantastic Voyage", as we called it – differed in format from previous years, so we'll go revisit the drawing board to improve upon a couple things that need to be tweaked. The team consisted of Melanie Marciano (Calvary Assembly of God), Rev. Michael Jackson (Touching & Agreeing Faith Ministries), Bob Enck and Pam Renfro (Fairport United Methodist Church), Glenn Miller (Browncroft Community Church), Ron Tocci (Assumption of Our Lady) and Garry Manuel (Crosswinds Wesleyan Church).

Additionally, we have updated our Project URGE Booklet at least three times, which is a very time consuming effort. The booklets provide a huge informational tool and get distributed to churches, organizations and individuals throughout the year. I estimate that we handed out approximately 800-1000 booklets.

We also updated the DVD, which describes what Project URGE is about and the reasons for its existence. It also features a majority of our affiliates and gives viewers a glimpse of what takes place inside these organizations. This is an important tool in assisting people in choosing where they might best fit in serving.

Our E-Briefs (approximately twice a month) also help communicate immediate needs and messages that need to be distributed that impact our ministries and the community.

The Project URGE website went through a major facelift this summer! It is much more user-friendly and is much more pleasing graphically. Our affiliates are listed with links to their own websites. It contains our activities, contact information and descriptions of our ministry teams and proposals.

Prayer Team: This team provides prayer for the organizations and individuals associated with Project URGE. At times the distance and schedules prevent this team from meeting frequently; however, several people meet and pray in their areas. The team generally meets together quarterly. I **strongly** encourage all to be faithful prayers.

Grant Team: FACT (Faith And Communities Together), with the lead agency being Foodlink, has been meeting for three years, applying for the Federal Compassion Capital Grant, as well as looking toward other opportunities for collaboration in obtaining funding. This has impacted greatly on the time of Len Erb (Roberts Wesleyan College, Center for Christian Social Ministries) and myself, who, along with Ruth Fischer (CFC) were on the Project URGE grant team. Because of this commitment, it railroaded other efforts that we might have pursued. This funding **has** been granted; however, the way it's being administered has changed dramatically. This change came from Federal Government, **after** the grant was awarded. It has a whole new complexion. My only hope is that this training, assistance and money truly affect a positive impact on a struggling city. Foodlink has put a substantial amount of time and effort into this grant, as have some others.

Coatlink: Annually, in November, we attempt to rally our affiliated churches to gather coats, scarves, mittens and items that can be used in homeless shelters and organizations that serve those in need. Despite our e-mails, newsletter feature and announcements at meetings, we fell far short of former years in our collection. The youth at Crosswinds and folks at West Ave. United Methodist took part this year. We feel this is a fairly easy step for churches to get involved in making a difference. Frankly, we were disappointed at the outcome of this 2006 collection. I'm asking our associates in churches right now, to

start thinking about ways they can make this collection a reality in 2007. Even our affiliated organizations responded to wanting the coats at the last minute. Everyone has so much on their plate, so I do understand how this can be set aside; however, we can and should do better in the coming year.

CCDA (Christian Community Development Association): We are members of this association. There were about a dozen people who traveled to Philly at the end of September to attend the conference. It was a terrific event, and once again, we brought a load of information back to Rochester that we collected on that trip. Some of this information was folded into the 4 Point Plan from the previous years conference. People gravitated to the classes that were pertinent to their own ministry efforts. Dr. Perkins Bible studies in the morning were excellent, as usual. Project URGE, Roberts Wesleyan (CCSM) and Walnut Hill all collaborated to get people there. Project URGE funding made it possible for several to attend who otherwise would not be able to.

Many of those who attended met at the end of October to have a discussion regarding the follow-up and to share the information we gathered with one another. While it was beneficial to get together, we did not have ample time to complete this follow-up.

We will be bringing the CCDA Institute classes to Rochester April 27th & 28th. Please mark your calendars NOW! I emphasize the importance of our affiliates and people in our various churches taking advantage of this opportunity (see article in this issue and Fall 06).

Roberts Wesleyan's Center for Christian Social Ministries: Our collaboration with Professor Leonard Erb and CCSM has produced a win/win situation. Many ties and connections would not have occurred had it not been for Professor Erb. Our collaborations through ministry efforts, organizing and making appropriate connections have proven fruitful and valuable, as we continue to build on that relationship presently. Through the CCSM department for several months we were privileged to have Jane Ames working in a variety of social ministry efforts on behalf of Project URGE and our affiliates, as she worked toward completing her degree.. She was steadfast in her efforts, working with diligence and excellence, contributing greatly to the mission.

Additionally, I've had the privilege to serve on the CCSM Advisory Board, which has provided me the opportunity to acquaint myself and interact with people who I highly respect.

Wells Christmas Project: This was our first rural project and it was indeed a success! The Salvation Army, the Outreach Temple and several individuals came forward to give Christmas gifts to 22 children in poverty in Wells, NY, which is a small Adirondack Mountain community that has 180 children (K-12) in the school. We are hoping this will inspire neighboring churches in that area to start a Project URGE for their area.

F.O.R.T.H. Proposal: Faith Organizations Restoring and Transitioning Homeless is a proposal that grew out of reading an article in Christianity Today Magazine early last year. Ruth Fischer and Lisa Lewis at CFC began molding the proposal, as I began collecting data from various sources and speaking with people in various organizations, like Salvation Army, Providence, RHR and others to compile this information to be included.

I recently had a discussion with the executive director of this ministry in Illinois and she was extremely helpful in describing what they do and they have a guide that we may obtain which articulates the process of the program. I am very hopeful that we can have our churches become part of this effort and that it can be launched in the near future.

4 Point Plan: We began the process of working through this plan of community organizing and collaboration, that divided into 4 specific geographic areas of the city, which intentionally, happened to be where the majority of our affiliates are located. While most agree this is an important initiative, the

progress in working through the building blocks has been slow. Many of us would like to see at least one of these areas ignite this plan, with tangible outcomes that will lead to transforming our neighborhoods.

Anti-Poverty Walk: In mid-September many from Project URGE gathered to walk to raise awareness of the groups who are committed to making an impact on poverty, while at the same time raising funds for our ministry. This walk was similar to others, where you request that people sponsor you for the walk. Action for a Better Community sponsors this walk and keeps a portion of the proceeds to offset the costs. Project URGE may have had the greatest number of walkers. This walk assisted in raising funds that went toward accomplishing the many initiatives we are putting forth.

Farm Stands: In collaboration with Foodlink, a couple of our affiliated organizations (Grace Community Village & Francis Center), established Farm Stands, with the purpose of bringing fresh, fruits and vegetables into the “hood”, as well as providing a training tool for youth or people in homeless transition. The plan is to continue and expand this effort in 2007. We now have the experience that will help inform us as to what may need to be changed. One must keep in mind, weather can impact the progress of this program.

Project URGE, Inc. thanks the churches, organizations and individuals that have helped fund our efforts. We are also grateful to the many volunteers who give so graciously of their time and energy to show their “love for their neighbor”, “love of God” and their concern for the poor. This report demonstrates what a collaborative effort can produce and why a ministry like Project URGE, Inc. is necessary.