

Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative
Whitworth Office of Church Engagement

1. HUB ACTIVITIES 2021

Calling Community Activities

- **Race & Reconciliation** – This community, centered largely on book groups, continued to foster important conversations around reconciliation & the church. Groups have continued to form in churches throughout 2021, with many finding creative ways to meet. One re-granting project was formed from this community, the Immanuel Bridge Project (details below). The Biblical Justice Forum, a collaboration between this community & First Presbyterian Church Spokane, hosted two events, with a third coming at the end of November. In Feb. 2021, members gathered for a discussion titled “Doing the Work: Building the Beloved Community in Context” and facilitated by leaders in Spokane. In March 2021, Esau McCaulley spoke about his recent book “Reading While Black.” At the end of Nov. 2021, Randy Woodley will join the community to discuss “Decolonizing Our Faith this Thanksgiving.” Other informal activities include groups of pastors meeting to pray in various locations around the city about reconciliation issues, and key leaders in this community are meeting to plan a “Spokane Mosaic.” The event will be a walking tour of Spokane with visits to racially significant sites in the city.
- **Refugees & Immigrants** - This community is centered around a partnership with World Relief and the Friendship Center. Throughout 2021, participation by church volunteers was difficult due to COVID, and the Friendship Center remained closed until November. In spite of this, many churches found ways to serve refugees & immigrants in the Spokane area through activities like Good Neighbor Teams and coat/car seat drives for incoming Afghan refugees. The OCE also continued its church match program to match contributions from churches to World Relief. Comunidad Christiana de Spokane also received regranting funds to begin the Family Orientation Center at their church (details below).
- **Youth Ministry** – This community gathered one a month with an organization called United, a gathering of Spokane-area youth workers for training, encouragement, and community building, including a lunch. They hosted Zoom meetings from Jan.-June and transitioned back to face-to-face gatherings outside for the remaining gatherings in 2021. The group included 15 local youth pastors and youth leaders from 10 different denominations and organizations. The topic of discussion throughout the first part of the year centered on how to keep Zoom meetings for youth exciting and engaging. The community then addressed the challenges of churches and organizations dealing with the state mandates around masking and vaccines, including how churches have dealt with losing members over the politics of the mandates. The community studied the book “Disruption,” a book published by the Youth Cartel describing how youth ministries are

dealing with the changes of the past two years. In

November they gathered again and discussed the topic “What is Good News” to this generation. In December, Dr. Maddox will join the community to talk about Gen Z and how they might better reach this generation and meet their unique needs.

- **Formational Worship** – This community formed a cohort of 18 worship leaders from churches both in Spokane and around the country, representing seven Christian denominations and eight states. The group met bi-monthly (Jan.-June) to discuss the interaction between anti-racism work and Christian worship. The group was guided by the books “Rediscipling the White Church” by David Swanson and “How to Fight Racism” by Jemar Tisby. In February 2021, David Swanson joined the group’s meeting to facilitate further conversation. Two grants were awarded to members of this cohort (details below) as projects developed out of the shared learning and deepening sense of call to anti-racism. In June 2021, the group also attended the Whitworth Ministry Summit (some virtually, others in person), and the programming was centered largely on race & the church.
- **The City & the Church** – This community met throughout the fall of 2021 with conversation centered on the book “The New Parish” as the involved churches continue to consider how they can better establish neighborhood roots and work within the geographic context in which they exist. One regrating project was started by this community in 2021, The Bible Art Gallery (details below).

Regrating Projects

- **Comunidad Cristiana de Spokane**, a member of the Called to Refugees and Immigrants Calling Community, received \$25,000 to help fund their new ministry, the **Family Orientation Center**. This center provides resources and information to immigrant families arriving in Spokane. The project offers information about schools, food banks, rent assistance and other community resources.
- **First Pres Salida**, a member of the Anti-Racism & Worship cohort, received \$2,074 to contribute to their **Injustice Advocacy program** which is designed to expand the church’s sense of calling to community outreach and advocacy. It will fund community conversations, small group materials and visiting speakers.
- **The Immanuel Bridge Project is an initiative of Immanuel Church**, a member of the Race & Reconciliation community. The church was granted \$25,000 (\$17,500 given so far), and the project is meant to create opportunities for pastors and leaders in Spokane to learn about racial justice and develop approaches to combat racism, both personal and systemic.

- **The Bible Art Gallery is an initiative of the Pilgrim Slavic MB Church**, a member of the City & the Church community. This art gallery, titled "Jesus in the Masterpieces of World Paintings," aims to share the gospel in our city through Biblically inspired art from around the world. The paintings are displayed in settings around Spokane as a mobile gallery. We contributed \$10,000 to the project.
- **St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**, a member of the Anti-Racism & Worship cohort, began a project with the centerpiece being the "**Love One Another Mural.**" The mural is meant to both reshape the physical presence of the church in this community, as well as invite congregation members into deeper conversations about racial justice. The project was granted \$2,668.
- **The World Relief Friendship Center** is a continuation of a partnership between World Relief (a refugee resettlement nonprofit) and eight local churches, all of which have committed financially and with volunteers as part of their sense of calling to refugees & immigrants. In 2021, \$5,000 was contributed to World Relief to match the funds contributed by partner churches. With the Friendship Center closed due to COVID, many of the church volunteers found creative ways to connect with refugees in ways that matched their comfort and risk-level. In November, the center relaunched, and church volunteers are resuming their involvement.

Anticipated Activities in 2022

- **The Hope for Creation Conference** is an event spearheaded by **St. John's Episcopal Cathedral** and designed to gather individuals of various faith traditions together to consider the relationship between faith and environmental stewardship. Other collaborators include the City of Spokane and Gonzaga University. The conference was meant to take place in the spring of 2020 but has been rescheduled for April 2022.

2022 Point of Discernment

As we approach 2022, many of our Calling Communities are dwindling and it seems a natural time to end the worship, race & reconciliation communities. We in the OCE are discerning the best way to move forward, with one idea being that we gather a cohort of churches from the various communities and provide resources to allow them to dig deeper into the sense of calling that has developed over the last several years.

2. CONGREGATION ACTIVITIES

The Story of Colbert Presbyterian Church

Jeanette had felt a sense of call to serve refugees in the Spokane area around 2018. Her approach was matter of fact, "Refugees are coming to our city and we in the church have a responsibility to welcome them." She became connected to refugee families through World Relief as a good neighbor team member and recalls how surprised she was each time she

learned that she and her family were the only American friends that the refugee individuals had.

Fast forward to 2019, and the OCE and World Relief were dreaming about ways to draw churches into partnership with World Relief to benefit refugees who were being resettled in Spokane. The idea for the Friendship Center was born from the collaboration of eight partner churches and the funding support of the OCE via the Refugees & Immigrants Calling Community. Colbert Presbyterian, Jeanette's home church, was one of the eight churches. It was the combination of lay leadership and the commitment of the church leaders that set the stage for the calling at Colbert Pres. to take shape.

Dwight, another member at Colbert, was drawn into the Friendship Center by Jeanette and feels as though it has given him life and purpose in his retired years. He had always had a heartbeat for building relationships with those outside of his normal circle and found the perfect place for that in the Friendship Center. Beyond his own sense of call, he is in relationship with many veterans in the church. He says that their connection to the Friendship Center and refugees has offered a profound sense of healing. They have recognized that God kept them here for a reason, to take care of others in a way that was never encouraged when they returned from the Vietnam war. Now they are welcoming Afghan refugees, and all can sense the uniqueness of that connection.

Both of these church volunteers have a sense that the connection to the Friendship Center and the deepening call to relationship with refugee families is the best thing to ever happen to the church. Dwight has the sense that the older members of the church especially are recognizing that their goal isn't to build up their own church, but instead are committed to stepping outside of the church and meeting others where they are. The Friendship Center has provided that meeting space – a piece of common ground where the barriers of culture and language do not feel so insurmountable. Volunteers can show up to a certain place, at a certain time, sit at a certain table, and attend to a specific activity. The context takes much of the pressure off, and from there, relationships blossom beyond the center. In fact, Jeanette has many stories of volunteers from Colbert attending kids' birthday parties, driving family members to the dentist, attending pro-refugee rallies together, and picking fruit at Greenbluff (a popular u-pick agricultural area).

Within the church itself, members have been drawn together in unlikely relationships over a shared calling to serve refugee families. Groups gather for coffee after worship on Sunday and stand chatting outside the church doors before heading home. There is a deeper sense of connection with one another and the spirit of God that has transformed the congregation more than a theological meditation on the issue ever could have. The purpose has seeped into most of the activities of the church. The pastor mentions refugees & immigrants often from the pulpit or written addresses to the congregation, families are invited to

worship, special dinners are held to connect with World Relief staff and hear the stories of refugees, and the church has, more than once, come together to provide resources for incoming families. A group of church members have even invested in an apartment building to provide housing to resettled families.

Of course, in all this activity we are keen to recognize that there has been something much more profound happening than the effects of well written emails or invitations to volunteer. The Holy Spirit has moved powerfully in the congregation at Colbert Presbyterian Church. The lay leaders continue to invite people into these relationships and opportunities, but all recognize that it is God who is actually calling them. Those who have responded to this prompting are living into what they feel is Jesus' model of service to others.

If we were to provide advice to another pastor or leader on ways to cultivate a sense of calling, we would say:

- **Find a champion** – The sense of calling at Colbert spread because of the leadership of a few key members of the congregation. We wonder if it would have been as successful had it only been the lead pastor offering invitations. We have seen time and again the power of lay leadership in these areas. At Colbert it worked well to have a leader with administrative giftings and another who is a true relational insider in the congregation.
- **Find a space of common ground** – The Friendship Center provided a space for refugees and church volunteers to meet together without feeling the awkwardness of being in “someone else’s space.” If your congregation is trying to reach out to a different population, can you find a space that feels neutral?
- **Pay attention to where passion & conviction meet** – For Jeanette, she felt convicted that the church needed to be a place of welcome for refugees coming to Spokane and she was passionate about the relationships that she was building with families. This became the catalyst to draw more in the church into the sense of calling and recruit other lay leaders to her cause. Are there ways that you can draw out both the convictions and passions of members of your church?
- **Weave your commitment into the life of the church** – At Colbert, talk of refugees & hospitality became part of the daily language of the church. The simple fact of exposure drew more and more people to take action to volunteer or give to the cause in other ways. If you see someone in your church championing a specific cause, how can you support that passion with the other programs and resources of your church?