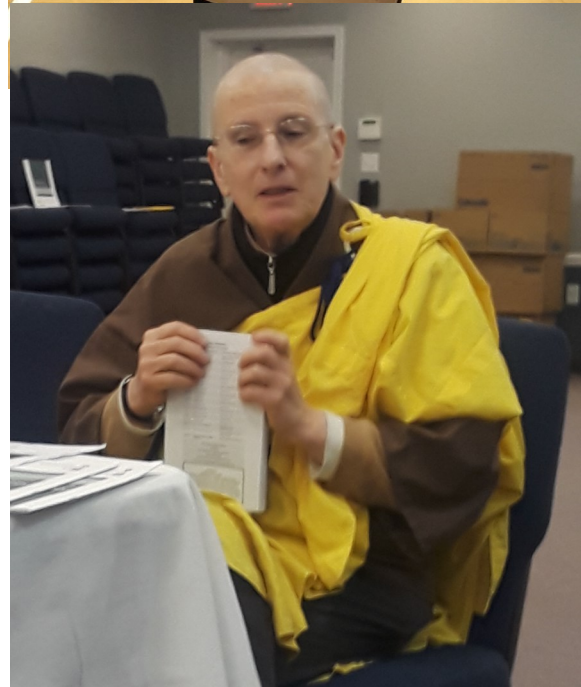


ANNUAL REPORT 2019



*HARC's mission:
To embody mercy,
justice, and
love as
diverse faith
partners in
Washington County,
Maryland*



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From the President...

“Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light. And seeing that the light was good, God separated the light from the darkness.” Genesis 1:2-1:4



Rabbi Ari Plost
President, HARC

Where do our hearts turn when we seek out a light of mercy, justice and love?
As engaged supporters of the Hagerstown Area Religious Council, we turn towards one another, across our diverse faith partners in Washington County.

A primary reason why I came to B’nai Abraham to serve and why I have felt motivated to remain in the pulpit here is because of my passion for inter-religious cooperation. It is remarkable and special that so many in Washington County also choose to carry that torch.

It would be difficult for me to separate my role as the rabbi of Congregation B’nai Abraham from my role as the rabbi of our area. In this time of increasing fragmentation and division, of the many challenges facing institutional religion and rising anti-Semitism, every day I am amazed and humbled by the support, embrace and love that I feel.

Under my tenure as president, together, we have deepened and broadened our mission to focus on the systemic issues of injustice that impact all of us. We have cultivated wonderful new clerical and lay leadership of the Hagerstown Area Religious Council. We will now have for the first time and long overdue, a woman, Reverend Elizabeth Jackson, to lead us. I know you will support her, especially in this time of transition. We have raised the funds to adequately support a full-time executive director. We reach much further away to faith communities beyond Hagerstown, even all the way to southern Washington County. Our whole county is interconnected and I think we have taken good leaps forward to live up to that reality. We have demonstrated a consistent commitment to support one another through difficult times. And, we have worked with intention to nurture meaningful personal relationships and to serve those in need.

It takes real effort to kindle the light of inter-religious cooperation. Did you know that the spark that created the universe over 14 billion years ago emerged from dark matter? The stars were born from an explosion of energy that was outrageously hot but emerged from deep darkness. I think the deep darkness that we feel in our age is both the anxiety of folks not understanding or trusting one another and those who are truly suffering in a world of great inequality. But think of this: all throughout the world, good people like you and me, are lighting a remarkable flame that is emerging through this darkness. It is the flame of inter-religious cooperation at the essence of the Hagerstown Area Religious Council. This flame illumines God’s image in each and every one of us.

In our darkness, I see the Genesis of a Divine light in the Hagerstown Area Religious Council. I am so thankful for all of you who share of yourselves so that together, we can be God’s partner in this awesome journey of creation.

Shalom and blessings,

Rabbi Ari

Micah's Backpack

Micah's Backpack is a program that provides bags of nutritious food to hungry school kids over the weekends.

MERCY

HARC partners with 50 churches and organizations, Washington County Public Schools, and Maryland Food Bank to ensure hungry elementary school children and homeless middle and high school children get bags of nutritious food on the weekends during the school year.

HARC recruits new sponsoring congregations, applies for and manages grants, and organizes bulk purchases with Maryland Food Bank. The program continues to grow and, sadly, the need has not diminished. In fact, this school year has the team scrambling to fill waiting lists of additional need. **More sponsors are needed!**

2019 Updates:

- Currently serving **1,060 children** in 33 schools
- 50 churches and organizations participating
- More than \$50,000 received in grants and donations to support the program. Thanks to the following for their generous grants in 2019:
 - The Alice Virginia and David D. Fletcher Foundation
 - The Nora Roberts Foundation
 - United Way of Washington County
 - The Richard N. Funkhouser Foundation
 - First Energy Foundation
 - Church of the Holy Trinity UCC
 - Mathias Washington County Trust
 - Knights of Columbus and Knights of Columbus Auxiliary.
- Members of Kiwanis Club, MCI-H employees and Belk employees helped with bulk food distribution.



A food collection box at Fit in Boonsboro.



Above: Food collected for Micah's Backpack by MCI-H employees.



Left: Employees from JLG-Jerr Dan in Hagerstown collect and sort food for Micah's Backpack.

Micah's Backpack makes a difference, one child at a time.

“At the last Micah's Backpack community meeting in November, a pre-K teacher shared that she has a 4-year-old student in transition (the Washington County Public Schools term for homeless). This child receives a Micah's bag weekly. She began asking her teacher “is today a food day?” So the teacher began getting more food together to give the child to take home more often.

The person sitting next to the teacher in this meeting happened to be from the church that sponsors that school. The church has embraced this 4-year-old and is supplying more food.”

“Part of the work of the Micah's Backpack program is breaking down and organizing large pallets of food that come from the Maryland Food Bank. It's an immense job, as these pallets hold about 33,000 pounds of food!

Recently, the program received help from the court system program, Alternative Sanctions. Some young men came to help. Before we got started, I explained what needed to be done and who the food was for. One of the helpers told me his son receives a Micah's bag from his elementary school. We thought it was so meaningful that some of the community service hours could be fulfilled helping the program his son was benefitting from. It's a small world!”

— Carol Brashears

Currently there is a waiting list of children for Micah's Backpack. New sponsors and donations are always needed.

If you, your faith community, or organization can help, please contact HARC at 301-842-HARC (4272) or director@harccoalition.org

Thanks to the following sponsoring churches and organizations, who do the bulk of the day-to-day work of providing food for children through Micah's Backpack:

Bethel United Methodist Church
Brownsville Church of the Brethren
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Concordia Lutheran Church
Creid Samhlaigh Corporation
Emmanuel United Methodist Church
Evangel Baptist Church
First Christian Church
Gateway Ministries
Hagerstown Church of the Brethren
Hagerstown Church of the Nazarene
Haven Lutheran Church
Hilltop Fellowship Church
Hollowell Brethren in Christ
Hub City Vineyard
Interfaith Service Coalition
John Wesley United Methodist Church
Marsha Green & Family
Mt. Moriah Lutheran Church
Otterbein United Methodist Church
Paramount Brethren in Christ
Presbyterian Church of Hagerstown
Redeeming Grace Church
Rehoboth United Methodist Church

Salem Lutheran Church
Shiloh United Methodist Church
Smithsburg Valley Church
South Washington County Food Pantry & Churches
St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
St. Ann Catholic Church
St. James School
St. John's Episcopal Church
St. John's Lutheran Church
St. Joseph Catholic Church
St. Maria Goretti High School
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Funkstown
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Smithsburg
Trinity Lutheran Church, Hagerstown
Trinity Lutheran Church, Smithsburg
Unitarian Universalist Church
Valley Grace Brethren Church
Williamsport United Methodist Church
Zion Lutheran Church
Zion Reformed United Church of Christ



Learning Parties

Learning Parties are hands-on, interactive “parties” designed to teach parents fun, easy and meaningful ways of preparing their preschool-age children to enter Kindergarten “ready to learn.”

Learning Parties also foster support and relationships among parents and between congregations and families.

In 2019:

- St. John’s Episcopal church offered three Learning Parties series, including one for Spanish-speaking families.

- Distributed Summer Learning Kits to 100 families. Each included five books, cards and puzzles, markers, crayons, craft materials, and activities sheets.



Learning Parties engage children and their families in the fun of learning.



“My children had a great time and I made a mom friend!”

— a Learning Party mom

Interested in hosting a Learning Party in 2020? Contact HARC for more information: 301-842-HARC (4272) or director@harccoalition.org

8th Annual Community Book Drive

The Community Book Drive is a partnership of HARC, The Hagerstown Rotary Club, The United Way of Washington County, The Washington County Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), and FedEx Ground as part of the United Way’s Day of Caring.

The 2019 Community Book Drive, held in late summer, brought in more than **17,000 books** for children’s literacy efforts – a record number! There were more than 50 collection sites all over Washington County, including **20 houses of worship**. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hosted the Day of Caring book sorting in their gym. Thanks to all who participated!

Books are distributed to vulnerable children through the new **Community Book Warehouse**, where organizations and schools serving children in need and individuals can go to get books each month. Over the past eight years, the book drive has collected and distributed more than **100,000 books** for children’s literacy efforts.



Volunteers sort books donated to the Community Book Drive.

A team of volunteers from REACH of Washington County helps to sort books donated to the Community Book Drive.

This year's drive collected more than 17,000 books for children.



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hosted the Day of Caring book sorting in their gym.



Food Resource Collaborative

HARC continues to maintain a list of Washington County food and clothing resources that is shared with and distributed by houses of worship and local agencies to people in need. For an updated list, visit HARC's website: www.harccoalition.org/resources/food-and-clothing/.

Other helpful information under the Resources tab:

- Children and Family Resources
- Counseling Services, Faith-based and Support Groups
- Housing / Shelter
- Immigrant Services & Information
- Safety in Houses of Worship

'Enough for our Children'

JUSTICE

In 2019, HARC embarked on a vision of “Enough for our Children,” seeking not only to feed hungry children, but to harness the faith community’s efforts to find solutions to ensure every child in Washington County has enough to succeed and thrive – enough food, love, security and supports.

We held a “listening” campaign, inviting our members and other partner congregations and organizations to share what you see as the most pressing concerns for our children and families. We heard from the superintendent of Washington County Public Schools, the Director of the Washington County Department of Social Services, and the CEO of San Mar/Bester Community of Hope; and we heard from congregations in South County, Hancock, and the Hagerstown area.

From these listening sessions and a survey to members and participants, we developed a Justice vision moving forward, with focus in the following areas:

- Childhood Trauma and Mental Health
- Opioid/substance abuse crisis
- Transportation and Access needs

We have begun work in some of these areas as noted below.



ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and Building Resilient Communities

ACEs (a.k.a. childhood trauma) are common and present one of the greatest health crises of our time. There is a clear and scientifically proven cause and effect relationship between ACEs and many health and social problems, including mental illness, suicide, substance abuse, heart disease, lung disease, obesity, to name a few.

The opportunities for awareness and prevention are huge, and the focus of ACEs presentations and trainings offered to the community is to create understanding and ways to build resilient families and communities. Faith communities play a big role in preventing ACEs and helping people heal and build resilience. Faith and healthy relationships are an important part of resilience efforts.

In 2019, HARC coordinated or led the following trainings to educate the community and partners:

- Workshop for Spanish-speaking parents at a Learning Party
- Leadership Days class for the United Methodist Church Baltimore-Washington Conference
- United Way Volunteer Expo
- Hagerstown Exchange Club
- Boys & Girls Club of Washington County staff
- Staff of Big Brothers Big Sisters, Head Start and the Family Center (more than 90 attendees)
- Volunteers with Big Brothers Big Sisters

Additionally, HARC worked collaboratively with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to plan upcoming trainings for the education community and community at large. ECAC has a special focus on “trauma informed” education.

Transportation Collaboration

Following our “Enough for our Children” listening campaign, HARC identified gaps in transportation as an important need in our community that affects families and children. Other organizational partners also felt compelled to work on this issue, so HARC began a collaborative effort with Community Action Council (CAC), San Mar/Bester Community of Hope, Goodwill, South County Ministerium and interested individuals.

Partners came up with a draft plan for filling some of the gaps in transportation:

- Develop a Transportation/Access to Services resources list (will be ready for public use soon).
- HARC establish a flexible transportation fund to be used by partner congregations to support families and individuals in need in whatever way best fits their need, using a “ladder of services.” Fund could also be used to support requests from partner agencies.
- HARC establish a Lyft concierge account and partner with CAC to provide planned or on-the-spot rides.
- Ladder of services to be implemented depending on individual needs, funding availability, and creation of service/programs:
 - Basic rides to needed services
 - Bicycle program for local transportation needs
 - Sabbath bus runs
 - District/regions CAC bus runs
 - Automotive repair for families and individuals who own a car, but are one crisis away from losing it.
 - Vehicle provision (dependent upon donated or low-cost vehicles in conjunction with auto repair program)
 - Advocate for policies and budget priorities that support access to basic needs and transportation to all areas of the county.

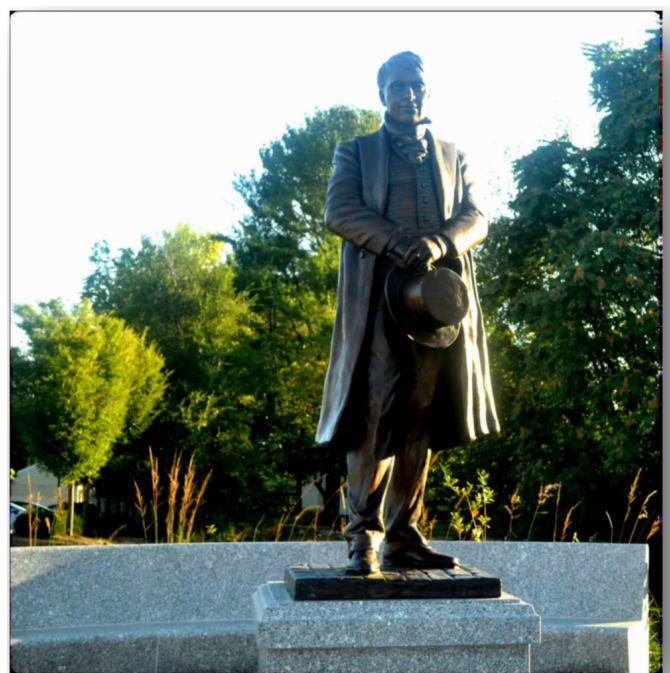
We look forward to working with our collaborative partners to move these strategies forward.

Thomas Kennedy Center & Memorial Park

On October 11, 2019, HARC joined in the inspiring dedication of **Thomas Kennedy Memorial Park**, located at 50 East Baltimore Street in Hagerstown, celebrating Thomas Kennedy’s contribution to religious liberty in Maryland.

Thomas Kennedy’s legacy of his tireless efforts to advance religious liberty and inclusiveness in 19th-century Maryland still applies to us today. HARC will continue to support this effort.

For more information, visit
www.thomaskennedycenter.org.



Washington Goes Purple

HARC and its Interfaith Coalition participated in Washington Goes Purple for the second year in 2019, a county-wide effort to raise awareness and prevention of opioid abuse. Many of our houses of worship adorned their buildings in purple for September, hosted awareness programs, and spoke from the pulpit about the opioid and substance abuse crisis.

We also partnered with Connections Six Eight UCC to host a Purple Prayer Walk in downtown Hagerstown, walking streets in all directions and praying for and with those in crisis and standing in solidarity as a community of faith in support of those battling addiction.



Washington Goes Purple hosts prayer walks and recovery walks during the month of September to raise awareness and to support those struggling with opioid addiction. This photo was taken at City Park in Hagerstown.



Interfaith Coalition of Washington County

The Interfaith Coalition of Washington County, Maryland, was formed by the Washington County Council of Churches (now the Hagerstown Area Religious Council or HARC) in February 2002 with representatives from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faiths to provide a forum for interfaith dialogue in our community following the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

People from Baha'i, Buddhist and Hindu traditions, as well as other religious and humanist communities, participate today. We see our coalition as an outreach of HARC and we appreciate this partnership.

The mission of the Interfaith Coalition of Washington County is to bring together people of different beliefs to promote peace, respect, and compassion in our local community.

Through dialogue and public presence, we

- welcome each person's unique spiritual perspective;
- strive to learn more about each other; and
- seek to honor the diversity of our various traditions.

Planning Team members

Coordinator: Valerie Wills

Vice Coordinator: Ed Poling

Secretary: Carol Haggerty

Treasurer: Salih Yumlu

Publicity: Sandy Boyer

At-Large: Temm Bikle, Julie Ferron, Paula Myers, Gwen Skrabak, Tom Thorsen



Events & activities in 2019

Interfaith Book Club: Organized by Gwen Skrabak and Kathleen O'Connell, this Seeker's Circle Book Club met six times through the year at the Washington County Free Library in downtown Hagerstown. They read and discussed books that relate to the religious life and traditions of several of the world's religions, as well as current issues in interfaith dialogue.

Interfaith Winter Retreat: A one-day retreat on February 2 at Shepherd's Spring Retreat Center with Leah Rampy. The theme was "Turning Toward Compassion: Conversations of Hope in Troubled Times." Leah has recently moved to Shepherdstown, W. Va., and is a valuable resource for contemplative life and practices. She formerly was the executive director of the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C.

Interfaith Forum: March 14 at Christ's Reformed Church, Hagerstown. A panel discussion with Don Stevenson, Gwen Skrabak, and Temm Bikle who shared their spiritual journeys. They dealt with the question: "Can Learning About Other Religions Strengthen Our Own?"

Interfaith Solidarity Gathering: March 22 at Islamic Society of Western Maryland. At the invitation of the Islamic Society, several people in the community spoke of their sorrow in light of shootings at a mosque in New Zealand. Ed Poling shared on behalf of the Interfaith Coalition our hope and prayers for solidarity with the Muslim community in Washington County.

Buddhist Peace Delegation

(pictured at right): April 4 at Congregation B’Nai Abraham. A potluck meal and visit with several people from the New England Peace Pagoda who participate in a walk for peace in New England, culminating at Washington, D.C. The theme was “Fearlessly Facing the Future,” the 18th annual “Walk for a New Spring.” Host was Venerable Temm Bikle.

Weekend trip to Yogaville: April 26-27. Several people traveled to the Charlottesville, Va., area to visit the first interfaith shrine and museum, founded by Sri Swami Satchidananda. The trip was led by Sandy Boyer.

Ramadan at Sufi Farm of Peace:

June 1. A trip to the Sufi community farm in Warfordsburg, Pa., to experience Sufi Muslim teachings and an Iftar dinner during the holy season of Ramadan. This event was organized by Halima Bach.

Fifth Annual Global Feast For Peace: September 22 at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Lappans, Md. A shared multi-cultural meal to celebrate the United Nation’s International Day of Peace. The keynote speaker was Don Stevenson, founder of the Interfaith Coalition in 2002. Songs of peace were led by Ed Poling.

Interfaith Forum: November 7 at Hebron Mennonite Church. Speakers Bob Keener, retired Mennonite pastor, and Paula Myers, coordinator of Baha’I community in Washington County, shared their spiritual transformation on the theme, “The Journey from Fundamentalism to Interfaith Advocacy.” This was followed by personal sharing in small groups.



From left: unidentified participant, Marge Poling, Temm Bikle, Towbee Shonin (holding banner), Valerie Wills, Grant Wills, Carol Haggerty, Paula Myers, Sister Clair.

Events planned for 2020

Seeker’s Circle Interfaith Book Club:

Meets at the Washington County Free Library in downtown Hagerstown; 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Thursday, January 16: *Made for Happiness* by Jean Vanier

Thursday, March 19: *Killers of the Flower Moon* by David Grann

Thursday, May 21: *Ninety-Nine Stories of God* by Joy Williams

Winter Interfaith Retreat: February 1, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.:
The Universal Language of Dance A day away to heal, dance, laugh, reconnect with the Divine, through different dance and faith traditions. Learn easy movements designed for all different styles, abilities, levels, body types, and ages. Reflect and journal on the language of dance and see films from the Dance4Peace Project, highlighting dancers from around the world. Enjoy the opportunity to get to know friends from different faiths.

Registration for the retreat is \$40, with continental breakfast and lunch included. Retreat leader is Candice Tritch, Founder and Director of Dance Alchemy-Baltimore, home of the Dance4Peace Projects.



Cost is \$40

To register for this retreat, email Sandy Boyer at sandy.boyer@gmail.com or call 240-409-5940

This retreat is held at
Shepherd's Spring Outdoor Retreat Center
16869 Taylors Landing Road
Sharpsburg, Md. 21782-0369



Interested in learning more about the Interfaith Coalition of Washington County?

You can learn more about our work and upcoming events:

- At the HARC website. Go to <http://harccoalition.org/interfaith-coalition/>
- On Facebook, search **Interfaith Coalition of Washington County**
- Contact **Valerie Wills**, coordinator, at vtwills@aol.com or phone **301-745-6576**
- Herald-Mail Calendar of Events page

The **Interfaith Planning Team**, which envisions, coordinates, and carries out these events, meets regularly through the year. Persons interested in interfaith dialogue are encouraged to attend or share their ideas with a Planning Team member for more information.

We continue to be enriched by the ongoing dialogue between people of our many religious and humanist traditions in Washington County. Such venues for conversation help to create a climate of respect, understanding and appreciation among the various communities. In a world where there is suspicion and distrust of people of non-Western faiths and cultures, we must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to keep these conversations alive. We appreciate your continuing support as a religious coalition in Washington County and invite your participation in our programs.

CLERGY FELLOWSHIP & SUPPORT

Opportunities continue to be offered for clergy and other ministry professionals to engage in fellowship, learning, and spiritual growth.

Monthly HARC Lunch Meetings

Monthly HARC Lunch Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 12:30 p.m. at rotating houses of worship and other partner locations. Many different programs were offered in 2019 focusing on HARC's goals, purpose, and important community initiatives.

Pastor's Bible Study

A Pastor's Bible Study group meets every Thursday from 3 to 4:30 p.m. at Rooster Moon Coffeehouse, 1551 Potomac Avenue in Hagerstown. This is a time for pastors to participate in a study without having to lead it, to dig into scripture, and to build relationships. If interested, contact Rev. Todd Young at rector@stjohnshagerstown.org or 301-733-2560.

Clergy Trivia Team

The Clergy Trivia Team meets Tuesdays from 7 to 9 p.m. at Funkstown Tavern, 23 West Baltimore Street, Funkstown, Md.; and Wednesdays from 7 to 9 p.m. at 28 South, 28 South Potomac Street, Hagerstown, Md. If interested, contact Rev. Katie O'Hern at pastorkohern@gmail.com or Rev. Todd Young at rector@stjohnshagerstown.org.

Connect with HARC

News Flash

HARC produces a weekly e-newsletter with news and information of interest to the faith community. Houses of faith throughout the county submit events and information to be included in the News Flash as well as other organizations with information of interest to the faith community. Sign up on the home page of our website or contact harcnewsflash@gmail.com. Submit news via the same email address or through the website submission form. Many thanks to volunteer Barbara Hamilton for compiling the News Flash each week.

Website: www.harccoalition.org

The HARC website is kept up-to-date with events, news, and resources. Many thanks to volunteer Charlotte Trout for her help.

Facebook & Instagram

Like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/harccoalition. Thanks to volunteer Kelly Conrad for maintaining our Facebook page with news, events, and posts of interest. Also "Like" our HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope Facebook page, managed by George Rae.

New in 2019, you'll also find HARC on Instagram: [@harcofwcmd](https://www.instagram.com/harcofwcmd).



PUBLIC WITNESS

Good Friday Cross Walk

This annual walk followed the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, April 19, 2019. The event was held in Hagerstown's City Park, with more than 100 people participating across Christian denominations.

Washington Goes Purple Prayer Walk (see Justice)

Community Thanksgiving Service

This annual service of thanks was held on Sunday, November 24, 2019 (the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving) at First Christian Church on Potomac Street in Hagerstown. It was a beautiful service with leaders from the Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Baha'I faiths all sharing their own traditions of giving thanks.

DEVELOPMENT

Development Team

By the end of 2019, HARC's Development Team had lost two of its four members. Nevertheless, the team was able to accomplish some important goals for the organization, focusing on public relations, social media, member support, and fundraising to increase the sustainability of our work together.

Update for 2019:

- Launched HARC's new website
- Developed guidelines for use of the Members Only portion of the website
- Updated information in the United Way's Volunteer Connect tool to advertise the team's need for a Fund Development Volunteer
- Had an increase in donations that allows HARC to employ a full-time Executive Director for at least two years
- Created a HARC Instagram account - @harcofwcmd

Thanks to our small but talented team: Rev. Jake Caldwell, Rev. Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey, Kelly Conrad, and Kathy Powderly.



In 2019, the 7th Annual **HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope**, HARC's biggest fundraiser of the year, was held on Saturday, June 8, on the C&O Canal Towpath. There were three distances to choose from, with all hikes ending at Shepherd's Spring Outdoor Retreat Center in Sharpsburg, Md., in a celebration of food, music and fellowship!

An additional "challenge hike" of 23 miles on the Appalachian Trail in Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland supplemented the main hike. Both hikes had beautiful weather and good turnouts.

The two events raised more than \$16,000 in proceeds, which was divided between HARC and Micah's Backpack.

Mark your calendar for the 8th Annual HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope

*Main hike: **Saturday, June 6, 2020***

*Challenge hike: **Saturday, May 16, 2020**
on the Appalachian Trail in Pennsylvania*

*Registration available online at
www.harccoalition.org*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

HARC's Board of Directors:

President: Rabbi Ari Plost, Congregation B'Nai Abraham

Vice President: Rev. Elizabeth Jackson, Otterbein United Methodist Church

Treasurer: Richard Willson, John Wesley United Methodist Church

Secretary: Bishop Jack Castle, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Interfaith Coalition Coordinator: Valerie Wills

Board Secretary: Brenda Horsch

Rev. Jake Caldwell, First Christian Church

Rev. Todd Young, St. John's Episcopal Church

Bill Pike, Unitarian Universalist Church of Hagerstown

Sue Graff, Zion Reformed United Church of Christ

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