

Hagerstown Area Religious Council



2017 Annual Report

Table of Contents

From the President.....	3
From the Executive Director	4
Community Worship	4
Childhood Education and Well-being.....	5
Food Resource Collaborative	7
Bester Area Faith Community Collaborative	8
HUB NETwork.....	8
Clergy Care and Support.....	9
ACE Interface / Building Self-Healing Communities	9
Peacemaking Efforts	10
Interfaith Coalition.....	11
HARC Hike For Hunger & Hope	13
Financial Reports	13
Get Connected	16
HARC 2017 Board of Directors.....	16

From the President

Rabbi Ari Plost



All across the country this year, community interfaith organizations such as ours have helped Americans to more fully encounter the divine presence that exists both within and beyond the walls of our sanctuaries. But HARC is special and distinctive from many of these other type of organizations.

Over and over again, I hear other clergy remark upon the uniqueness of the special inter-religious relations that exist in our area. I would like to think that HARC both reflects and supports the visible manifestation of God's presence amongst us.

As we approach our New Year, at a time of growing divisiveness and discord, with some concern—even fear—among religious minority groups, I feel particularly blessed to serve at the helm of an organization committed to religious diversity, solidarity, and cooperation. It is a profound celebration of our community's values of religious inclusion that a rabbi should lead a faith coalition where the majority of the membership is Christian. This is all the more true in the year 2018.

In Judaism, the number 18 has special meaning, known as "*chai*," or "life." On one occasion this past year, I heard that a Muslim organization received donations in support of their faith community rebuilding from an act of hate. But these were unusual denominations. \$36? \$72? \$144? Is it a message? They soon discovered that Jews tend to give gifts in increments of 18.

By no design, the number eighteen also made an appearance in HARC this year. When I invited my fellow clergy to join me on the pulpit during our candle-lighting ceremony of Thanksgiving (which you can see on the cover of this annual report), I realized in looking afterward at the picture taken...together, we held eighteen candles.

This year, there are many new voices and ideas as part of HARC. If you have not reached out, we do want to hear from you. If you have already, thank you. We plan to spend a good amount of time this year receiving input and envisioning our next steps ahead. Most of our new leadership are relatively new faces in the community, even if we represent well established houses of worship that have been around quite a while.

As we enter into 2018, I'm filled with the new *chai*—the new life—of our upcoming year. Thank you so very much for your support and involvement in HARC. And thank you for being a good friend.

Shalom,
Ari

From the Executive Director

Kathy Powderly



As I look back on another year, I am once again struck by how much God continues to bless our work together through HARC. This has been a challenging year for our nation, and our community has felt the pain of division as well. Yet we have stood together in Washington County and supported one another across faith and political divide because we know one another and we know God's love unites us all.

The work we have done to uplift, serve, and foster peace has been a witness to God's love in these challenging times. It is the work of many dedicated individuals and congregations from numerous houses of worship throughout Washington County, engaging in ministry, in relationship, and in love of humanity.

The report contained in these pages highlights many ways in which **we can do more together than we can alone**. Thank you to all of you who have blessed HARC, the community, and me with your gifts, talents, service, and friendship. May God continue to bless you as you have been a blessing to one another and the community.



Community Worship

Holy Week Services—HARC-sponsored annual mid-day Holy Week services followed by lunch. Our gratitude goes to John Wesley United Methodist Church for planning and hosting the event each year.

Good Friday Cross Walk—This annual walk followed a sort of "Way of the Cross" on Good Friday again this year. The event was held in City Park once again with more than 100 people participating.



Community Thanksgiving Service—This annual service of Thanks was held the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving at the synagogue. Participation across denominations and faith traditions was at an all-time high with 18 clergy participating in the service and 33 people (including two additional clergy) participating in the massed choir.

Childhood Education and Well-being

MICAH'S BACKPACK

HARC partners with churches, organizations, Washington County Public Schools, and MD Food Bank to ensure all hungry elementary school children get backpacks of food on the weekends during the school year. Additionally, the program began serving homeless middle and high school youths this year.

HARC recruits new sponsoring congregations, applies for and manages grants, and organizes bulk purchases with MD Food Bank. The program continues to grow and, sadly, the need has not wavered.

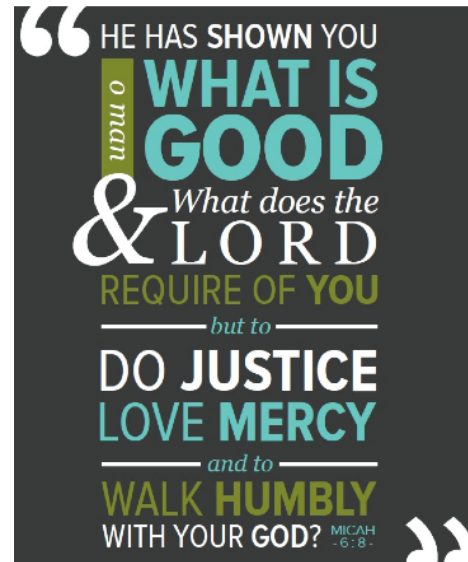
2017 Updates:

- Currently serving **1,029 children** in 32 schools.
- 50 sponsoring churches/organizations participating.
- More than \$60,000 received in grants and donations to support the program. Thanks to the following for their generous grants in 2017: The Alice Virginia and David W. Fletcher Foundation, The United Way of Washington County, The Nora Roberts Foundation, The Community Foundation of Washington County, The Richard N. Funkhouser Foundation, Walmart (local store), The Hagerstown Lions Club, Knights of Columbus & Knights of Columbus Ladies Auxiliary.
- Members of Kiwanis Club helped with all of the bulk food distributions.

Quote from a school counselor:

"It is wonderful! I'm so pleased we can be a part of this awesome program—the benefits and amazing things it has done for our recipients and for some staff-student relationships is immeasurable....please be assured every single bag being delivered to our school is much appreciated by our kids and by us!"

New sponsor congregations needed for the 2018-19 school year! Contact Kathy Powderly if you can help.



LEARNING PARTIES

Testing in 2016 indicated only 33% of children in Washington County entered Kindergarten fully ready to learn, meaning two thirds of children are not ready. While quality preschool programs help address this issue, parental involvement is known to be the most important factor. Learning Parties are hands-on, interactive “parties” aimed at teaching 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 2017:

- 7 HARC-sponsored Learning Parties were held in four locations.
- Combined 113 parents and children age five-and-under served (some duplicated).
- Thanks to St. Mark's Lutheran Church, St. John's Episcopal Church, and Trinity Lutheran Church in Smithsburg for hosting and coordinating Learning Parties!
- We also partnered with Judy Center to host a Learning Party.
- Parents found supportive networks among their peers and volunteers.
- A number of families returned for more than one Learning Party and several remained engaged with the host church.

Quotes from parents/grandparents:

"When's the next Learning Party? I want to come back."

"I loved all of it! Good information. Very nice ladies."

On what they will do differently after the Learning Party or what they learned:

"Stop, listen and recognize emotions, praise positive behavior, give more choices to encourage good behavior."

"Do science! Explore, talk about the world my child experiences!"

"How to utilize literacy everywhere you go. Stores, home, on the road, etc."

Want to host a Learning Party in 2018?

Contact Kathy Powderly for more information.

6TH 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.

This year's Community Book Drive brought in nearly **14,000 books** for children's literacy efforts! There were 70 collection sites all over Washington County, including **20 houses of worship**. Thanks to all who participated! Books are distributed to vulnerable children via more than 30 local organizations and schools.



Over the past six years, the book drive has collected and distributed more than **72,000 books** for children's literacy efforts.



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. Partners in maintaining this include Community Action Council and Reach. For the most recently updated copy of the list, visit the HARC website—www.harccoalition.org—and click on Resources⇒Food.

A volunteer is needed to help maintain this list. If you can help, please contact Kathy.

Bester Area Faith Community Collaborative

An active collaboration of 12 houses of worship in the “Bester area” of Hagerstown began in 2016 and continued to meet and grow relationships and partnership opportunities in 2017. This collaboration is led in partnership with the Bester Community of Hope. The purpose is to strengthen the neighborhood and our individual houses of faith through collaboration and communication.

In 2017:

- 2 new congregations joined the collaboration;
- Information, events and resources were shared among the group throughout the year to increase communication and decrease duplication of efforts;
- Faith community members in this group “plugged in” to neighborhood efforts, including a block party, Babypalooza, “Walking School Bus,” Bester Elementary PTA events, and more;
- Several congregations partnered to offer events to the community.

We look forward to growing this collaboration in 2018!



HARC continues to contribute to the guidance of the HUB Network through representation on its Board of Directors. In 2017 HUB Network re-examined its mission to assist churches in serving the least, the lost, and the left out and realized that much of the work we set out to do is now being done by Valor Ministries, Reach, and other area organizations. Instead of working to survive as an organization HUB decided to radically shift to where a need exists in the community that is not being filled. Through much discernment on the board and input from two public meetings, HUB has decided to focus on:

- Blighted properties—re-purposing blighted properties in key areas of the city for ministry
- A Big Map—of what God is already doing throughout the city so that we can work in partnership, not in silos

Clergy Care and Support

Opportunities continue to be offered for clergy and other ministry professionals to engage in their own spiritual care and growth:

Pastor's Bible Study meets every Thursday from 3-4:30 pm at Rooster Moon coffee shop. Currently the group chooses a passage from the Revised Common Lectionary to read and discuss. But this is not a preaching preparation study; this is a time for pastors to participate in a study without having to lead it, to be the student rather than the teacher for once!

HARC **4th Thursday clergy lunch** is a time for pastors to, in the words of one participant, "take off the collar" for a time...to eat, to share stories, to solicit others' thoughts or wisdom, and to generally get to know colleagues in the area. Currently the group meets for lunch at Gourmet Goat in the back room.

The **Clergy Connections and Self Care Interest Survey** was recently introduced to gather information on ways faith leaders would like to engage in fun and meaningful activities with one another. The purpose is to build relationships and support and to foster self-care. If you are interested in being connected to other clergy, please take the survey! Opportunities for connection gleaned from the surveys will begin to be offered starting in January 2018.

ACE Interface / Building Self-Healing Communities

What if we could reduce drug use, child abuse, diabetes, heart attacks, suicide, and a number of other major health problems in the people of our community all at once? What if the faith community could play a big role in that reduction simply by doing what our faith calls us to do?

The "ACE" study is landmark research that shows many major health issues are largely attributable to adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, and that "toxic stress" has neurological and biological effects on people throughout their lifetimes. Knowing how and why this happens, how to deal with it, and how to prevent it has a proven track record of reducing poor health outcomes in communities like ours.

HARC has been given a great opportunity to bring this important information to the faith community in Washington County so we can be a part of the solution in our own community. In November Kathy Powderly was part of the first cohort in Maryland trained in ACE Interface and "Building Self-Healing Communities." She's excited to offer the training to member congregations. Learn more at a presentation to be given at the March HARC meeting.

Peacemaking Efforts

STATEMENT OF PEACE

The Statement of Peace is a covenant toward kind and peaceful interactions with one another brought to the Washington County community by Dr. Salih V. Yumlu, HARC and the Interfaith Coalition in February 2016. In 2017 we reached a milestone: more than 500 people have signed this document agreeing to live out the statement to the best of their abilities. We encourage anyone of any faith or no faith to sign the document and live out its purpose. In a time of deep divisions and uncivilized discourse, this is an opportunity to create unity, peace, respectful dialogue, and kindness.



In addition to signing the Statement of Peace, this year we offered opportunities for our community to learn how to live out their commitment to peace. The following programs/events were offered:

- **Be Brave Enough to Start a Conversation That Matters**—the role of the Community with and to itself: How can we play well in the sandbox together, develop respectful dialogue, encourage kindness, and love our neighbor better? Hosted by HARC and Character Counts.
- **How to Respond and De-escalate Challenging Situations**—training by the Hagerstown Police Department
- **Hagerstown Interfaith Candle Vigil For Unity and Peace**—led by Interfaith Coalition and HARC
- Local religious leaders and members of the African American and Hispanic communities shared their views of the health of our religious and racial climate—a HARC & Interfaith Coalition shared meeting.

“WE’RE GLAD YOU’RE OUR NEIGHBOR” SIGNS



"Love the stranger as thyself" (Leviticus 19:34) • Hagerstown Area Religious Council

HARC began offering these signs to the community in January 2017 as a way to extend love and welcome to ALL of our neighbors as an extension of our faith. There are now more than 100 signs all over Washington County witnessing to a welcoming community of faith. Let's double this number in 2018!

Interfaith Coalition

Ed Poling, Coordinator

The Interfaith Coalition of Washington County, formed in 2002, brings people of different beliefs together to promote peace, respect, and compassion in our local community. People from Jewish, Muslim, Christian Baha'i, Buddhist, and Hindu faith traditions as well as other religious and humanist communities participate.

We continue to be enriched by the ongoing dialogue between 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 persons of diverse 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.

Our **Interfaith Book Club**, organized by Gwen Skrabak and Kathleen O'Connell, met six times through the year at the Washington County Free Library, choosing books that describe the religious life and traditions of several of the world's religions and current issues in interfaith dialogue.

We discussed **"The Current State of Religious Tolerance in Washington County"** with a panel of leaders of Muslim, Jewish, African-American, and Latino communities in a joint meeting with HARC.

A quickly-called **open meeting at the Western Maryland Islamic Society** in February gave people across the Washington County community an opportunity to speak publicly in support of the Muslim community in light of the Presidential Executive Order banning travel to several majority Muslim countries and the halting of the settlement of Syrian refugees in the US.

"Neuroscience, Your Brain, and Peace" was our **Interfaith Winter Retreat** at Shepherd's Spring Retreat Center, led by Rev. Sandy Boyer, minister of Unity of Hagerstown.

An **Interfaith Candle Vigil for Unity and Peace** at First Christian Church in March, moderated by Maheen Haq (Smithsburg High graduate and student at UMBC) allowed the community another opportunity to show solidarity with our Muslim neighbors and other groups marginalized because of actions taken by the U.S. government.

"Who is My Neighbor? Developing Relationships Outside the Box" was our Spring Interfaith Study Series in partnership with Otterbein United Methodist Church, where we interviewed leaders of various religious, cultural, and ethnic communities.

We co-sponsored **"Interfaith Dialogue: Why it Matters and Implications for Building Resilient Communities"** at Shepherd University in March.

Our **Peace Walk & Covered-dish Dinner** in April was a meal we hosted for pilgrims walking for peace from Leverett, Massachusetts. It included a peace walk in Hagerstown from Synagogue B'Nai Abraham to the Islamic Society of Western Maryland.

In May we partnered with Washington County Boy Scouts at Camporee for their **American Cultures merit badge program** where we taught classes to 78 Scouts on Bah'a'i, Buddhism, Humanism, Islam, and Judaism.

Our **Global Feast For Peace** in September at St. Mark's Episcopal Church celebrated the United Nations International Day of Peace. We had presentation by Dance Alchemy, and guided meditation and a recommitment service to a life of peace.

"Building Trust in an Age of Hate" was the Interfaith Forum at Covenant Church in Shepherdstown we co-sponsored with Ezekiel's Place, which featured a dialogue between Pastor Joel Rainey and Imams Faruq Post & Syed Burmi.

In the Fall we co-sponsored with Attitudes for America **Bridging the Cultural Divide**, six weekly seminars led by Zunny Miller-Matema.

In December Hebron Mennonite Church was the site for **"We Are Each Other's Business"** an interfaith forum featuring a national video presentation by Eboo Patel, founder of Interfaith Youth Core, followed by a local group discussion.

EVENTS PLANNED FOR 2018

Seeker's Circle Interfaith Book Club. Washington County Free Library. 7:00 to 8:30 pm

Thursday, January 18 *When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chodron

Thursday, March 15 *Good Without God* by Greg M. Epstein

Thursday, May 17 *The Heart of the Amish* by Suzanne Woods Fisher

Joint Meeting with HARC February 13, "Sibling Rivalry in the Abrahamic Family," a panel discussion by leaders of Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions of what our sacred texts say about how we are to relate to people of other faiths.

Interfaith Winter Retreat Saturday, February 3, at Shepherd's Spring Ministry Center; an all-day retreat introducing "Sacred Listening Circles" in an interfaith setting. An opportunity for in-depth listening and sharing across faiths in a small group setting of trust.

If you'd like to learn more about our work or upcoming events, you can always find us on the HARC website (click "Interfaith"), or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/125909250824944>.

HARC Hike For Hunger & Hope

The 5th Annual **HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope** was held on the C&O Canal this year for the second time by popular demand, with all hikes ending at Shepherd's Spring Outdoor Retreat Center. An additional 2-day "challenge hike" of 41 miles on the Appalachian Trail in Maryland supplemented the main hike. Together, these two events raised more than \$10,000 in proceeds, which was divided between HARC and Micah's Backpack.

Please mark your calendars for this year's hike:

Saturday, June 9.

New this year: a photo scavenger hunt and special rates for youth groups!



Financial Reports

Balance Sheet As of December 31, 2017

	Total
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
Learning Parties	5,973.05
Micah's Backpack	44,888.74
Operating Reserve	7,152.00
Operations	12,850.85
TOTAL ASSETS	\$70,864.64

Budget vs. Actual, January–December 2017

	Actual	Budget	Over/(Under) Budget
Income			
Grants	4,472.00	2,000.00	2,472.00
Hike income	8,618.34	12,000.00	(3,381.66)
Individual contributions	7,986.00	7,500.00	486.00
Interest earned	4.97	6.00	(1.03)
Partner Contributions	6,691.91	7,200.00	(508.09)
Partner Contributions - Dues	8,570.30		8,570.30
Pass Through Income			
Designated, Learning Parties	7,176.71	10,000.00	(2,823.29)
Designated, Micah's Backpack	79,917.73	65,000.00	14,917.73
Other designation	2,084.00	1,000.00	1,084.00
Total Pass Through Income	\$89,178.44	\$76,000.00	\$13,178.44
Special Offerings	1,090.10	1,000.00	90.10
UMC Grant	5,285.00	5,285.00	0.00
Total Income	\$131,897.06	\$110,991.00	\$20,906.06
Gross Profit	\$131,897.06	\$110,991.00	\$20,906.06
Expenses			
Community Support			0.00
Learning Parties	5,520.90	10,000.00	(4,479.10)
Micah's Backpack	63,441.91	65,000.00	(1,558.09)
Other Pass Through	2,722.60	1,000.00	1,722.60
REACH Social HELP Fund	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00
Robert W Johnson Comm. Ctr.	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00
Wash. Co. Museum Art Show	250.00	250.00	0.00
Total Community Support	\$73,935.41	\$78,250.00	-\$4,314.59
Events			
Good Friday Walk	44.00	100.00	(56.00)

Hike Expenses	1,648.99	1,500.00	148.99
Passion Week Honorarium	400.00	400.00	0.00
Thanksgiving Service		100.00	(100.00)
Total Events	\$2,092.99	\$2,100.00	-\$7.01
Executive Director			
Compensation	20,400.00	20,400.00	0.00
Professional Expenses	215.55	447.00	(231.45)
Total Executive Director	\$20,615.55	\$20,847.00	-\$231.45
Operational Expenses	65.61		65.61
Books Subscriptions Memberships	766.00	960.00	(194.00)
Community relations	528.76	576.00	(47.24)
Fees			
Bank Service Charges	15.00	50.00	(35.00)
Email Program	378.00	336.00	42.00
PayPal fees	40.89		40.89
Post Office Box	236.00	228.00	8.00
Website	327.74	180.00	147.74
Total Fees	\$997.63	\$794.00	\$203.63
Fundraising Materials	79.82		79.82
General Office Expenses	430.18	312.00	118.18
Total Operational Expenses	\$2,868.00	\$2,642.00	\$226.00
Transfer to Reserve	7,152.00	7,152.00	0.00
Total Expenses	\$106,663.95	\$110,991.00	-\$4,327.05
Net Operating Income	\$25,233.11	\$-	\$25,233.11
Net Income	\$25,233.11	\$-	\$25,233.11

Get Connected

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 email harcnewsflash@gmail.com.

Website: www.harccoalition.org—HARC website is kept up to date with events, news, and resources. Many thanks to volunteer Charlotte Trout for her help.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/harccoalition—like our page! Volunteer Charlotte Trout maintains our Facebook page with news, events, and posts of interest. Also “Like” our HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope Facebook page.

HARC 2017 Board of Directors

President (Sept-Dec): Rabbi Ari Plost, Congregation B’Nai Abraham

President (Jan-Sept): Rev. Gregg Meserole, Christ’s Reformed Church

Acting 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: Rev. Ed Poling, Hebron Mennonite Church

Rev. Audrey Hollenburg-Duffey, Hagerstown Church of the Brethren

Rev. Jake Caldwell, First Christian Church

Barbara Hamilton, Otterbein United Methodist Church

Bill Pike, Unitarian Universalist Church of Hagerstown

Julie Ferron (Jan-Sept), Congregation B’Nai Abraham



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