

Housing Crises Around Us

Housing Crises Around Us Our Ministry to the community is influenced by the housing crisis in our area and beyond. Ascentria (formerly Lutheran Social Services) is focused on relocation of immigrants in Worcester, Springfield and Concord, NH. Additionally, St. John has long supported Family Promise in Metrowest which provides transitional housing assistance to family groups in temporary need. During COVID this need moved from church-based temporary quarters to hotels and now to more permanent facilities in Natick. Family Promise is also located in other areas in Massachusetts and beyond. In Massachusetts it has been the focus of numerous recent Boston Globe articles, primarily regarding the town of Beverly. The need continues for on-site volunteers in these towns and funding is supported by our Outreach funds. Constant relocation, overwhelming bureaucracy, mental health, insufficient funding for individual families, and staff burnout are all characteristics of the housing crisis. Closer to us, all rooms in the former Best Western motel on Rte.2 in Concord were contracted by the state to house former unhoused state citizens and to provide emergency shelter to asylum-seekers and immigrants from many countries. 90 of the 105 rooms for families and singles are set aside for this purpose. MOC (Making Opportunity Count) based in Leominster provides case management 24/7, meals, and transportation services to area and out-of-area schools on a state contract. In Acton, also managed by MOC, 11 families with a total of 37 people including 21 children (2 newborns) are now living in the former Acton Minuteman Inn on Rte. 2. These new neighbors come from a variety of backgrounds including Haitian, Latin American, and Massachusetts natives. More rooms in this Inn need further maintenance before additional families can move in. In Concord, the Concord Community Chest is identifying needs beyond those provided by MOC. In Acton, AB Resource Center is collecting items needed by these families. Your Outreach Ministry team is monitoring ongoing needs in both places and currently those needs have been baby wipes and diapers for the most part. Collection boxes in the lounge will be in place for some time to come to accept your contributions and deliveries may go in many directions according to need. Additional needs such as winter clothing, new bottles and pacifiers are also on the list. The list will change over time so please check future announcements as we learn more. Community response has been positive in both towns even as school and other resources are being stretched, and by charitable and faith area groups such as us. We are grateful for all donations in this effort and expect that the collection of diapers and other needed items will endure for some time to come. Thanks to all for your support.

T-MOBILE funding for REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS, ASYLUM-SEEKERS

The Lutheran Church has a long tradition of supporting people globally displaced by war, oppression, famine, life-threatening circumstances and climate change. We at St. John support three Lutheran organizations and a local asylum group. They are summarized here.

GLOBAL REFUGE

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), a *global* organization, was formed in Baltimore in 1939 as a source of legal advocacy for refugees, asylum seekers, immigration parolees and those fleeing oppressive conditions at home. Until recently, Linda Hartke, a confirmand of St. John was the President/CEO of LIRS. St. John's history is rich with the stories of support for the Walter and Elisabeth Klein family fleeing East Germany, and the Cosme and Iris Carvajal family displaced from Chile. Both families were embraced by this congregation's 24/7 support, settling them in Maynard, and welcoming them as worshippers. LIRS changed its name to **Global Refuge** in January of this year in order "to identify ourselves ever more clearly and create a bigger table of supporters, regardless of their faith traditions just as our work does. As **Global Refuge**, we become ever more accessible to clients, partners and supporters, without altering our core mission. {This new identity} strengthens our relationships with Lutheran communities as well as with non-denominational and interfaith partners".

<https://www.globalrefuge.org/>

ASCENTRIA

The Martin Luther Orphan's Home in West Roxbury opened in 1872 and became Lutheran Social Services (LSS) in 1992, with expanded *regional* social services in Massachusetts and beyond, serving immigrants and refugees, broken families, veterans, older adults, the developmentally challenged, teen parents, and providing in-home care, adoption, foster care, and repurposed vehicles for transportation. LSS became **Ascentria** in 2014, and serves all six New England states from Worcester. Your individual donations and Outreach Ministry funding have supported **Ascentria** as a joint product of the ELCA and LCMS.

<https://www.ascentria.org/service-category/refugee-and-immigrant-services/>

Global Refuge and Ascentria are contractors to the federal and state governments because of their history and their ability to organize, but always need additional support from the Lutheran community and from secular sources. The name changes eliminate the perception of a group attached to a single religion which acted as a barrier for some foundations and corporations. Andrea Bovill, CEO of Ascentria said, "when there's limited resources, some people may say, 'this is too narrowly religious.'" These statements notwithstanding, we at St. John accept that both organizations are in our Lutheran DNA and we continue to maintain our long-standing support to them and their work in God's name.

ELCA AMMPARO

The 1995 ELCA social statement addressed care for the uprooted - refugees in foreign lands and the internally displaced due to persecution or general violence. Our *national* border crises in 2014 put a

spotlight on almost 70,000 unaccompanied children and an equal number in family units fleeing Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. In 2015 ELCA's **AMMPARO** (*Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation, and Opportunities*) was formed to operate there and at the southern border. Currently the ELCA has programs to accompany these children in and from the Northern Triangle through global ministry, and through the church's domestic ministry, synods and its partners, such as Global Refuge. Tricia Sarvela (daughter of Janet and Walter) was sent by the Peace Corps to Agua Buena, Honduras from 1988-1990. St. John supported her garden projects and the construction of adobe homes. Later Paul Keto traveled to Honduras with the NE Synod supported by the Madeleine Drop Fund, and St. John supported him with shoes and supplies. Our members more recently, led by Jen Adams, helped Guatemalans at Jardin de Amor build, supply, and fund a school. Tricia, Jen, and St. John continue to change and stabilize lives there.

<https://www.elca.org/ammparo>

DIAS

Dignity in Asylum was formed in Concord to support *local* asylum-seekers or humanitarian parolees during the complicated process of applying for permanent asylum. They do not qualify for legal representation, housing, or food stamps. DIAS and the communities surrounding Concord provide safe supportive assistance with daily living, housing, meals, transportation to doctors' and lawyers' appointment, English classes, and children's services. St. John is one of 5 area churches and many businesses helping DIAS. We are blessed to have regular in-person contact with these families through Joanna Ellis.

<https://www.dignityin asylum.org/>

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.” Matthew 25:35

T-Mobile funding for FOOD INSECURITY

From this church we can travel for about 15 minutes in any direction, passing by comfortably large high-value homes to reach many of the highest performing public schools in Massachusetts and arguably in the nation. Inside many of these schools are food pantries.

School pantries are stocked by individuals and by town pantries, which started in Acton in the 80's, then in Sudbury, Maynard, and Stow by 1994, reflecting realities in our materially comfortable region. School pantries and backpack programs provide necessary weekend nutrition. When housing costs reach 50% or more of income, food and everything else becomes a problem. Nationally 38 million Americans live in households that fell below the official poverty line in 2021. 32% of Massachusetts adults live with food insecurity. Single parents, new immigrants, blacks, and Latinos are the most vulnerable. The richest country on earth has more poverty than any other advanced democracy. Aid from tax credits, SNAP/WIC, and brief pandemic relief, is vital but insufficient for workers in service, retail, hospitality, health care, landscaping, elder or childcare, and other fields where wages have not budged much since the 1970's.

Working-class Finnish day laborers and Maynard mill workers built this church and its predecessor on hope, faith, and limited funds. The cadence of the woolen mill machines ended in 1950 but in 1957, MIT's Ken Olsen came to town to create Digital Equipment and to transform Maynard, the region, and St. John. He even gave the church a van. From the mid-west and elsewhere came a stream of hi-tech workers and their families along with other professionals and spouses to work at Digital and in education, healthcare, science, financial services, and law in well-paying jobs. Bob Collings founded Data Terminal Systems in Maynard and reshaped the retail checkout experience. The boom of the 60's,70's, and 80's led to an average worship attendance of 205 in the late 80's. Sunday School enrollment hit 130 with 23 teachers in the mid-90's. But with a foot in Sudbury and another in Maynard, we soon watched churches around us begin to close or consolidate - Mission Evangelical Congregational, St. George's Episcopal, First Bible Baptist, Maynard Methodist, Union Congregational, St. Casimir, and recently St. Bridget. They all helped people in times of need. Only St. Mary's Indian Orthodox and Holy Annunciation Orthodox are around in Maynard today.

Dale Cali, growing up poor in Romania during WWII, saw her younger self in the food insecurities of the area. She began volunteering at the Acton Food Pantry soon after it opened. Dale collected and delivered St. John's first food contributions to Acton, and she helped clients at the pantry. Acton Food Pantry, now serving 350 clients/week from 66 towns, and Open Table Concord (300/week), are the two most active area pantries. Sudbury, Maynard, and Stow pantries are smaller but busy and volunteer led. Acton and Open Table, with Cummings Foundation funding, have recently started mobile delivery to the isolated, infirm or to those unable to schedule within pantry hours. St. John T-Mobile funding supports the following local pantries.

Acton Food Pantry

Concord Food Pantry (Open Table)

Maynard Food Pantry, Maynard Backpack Program, Thanksgiving and Christmas meals

Stow Food Pantry

Sudbury Food Pantry

The 80's, 90's, and 00's left many families behind. Consumers got lower prices with NAFTA, the opening of China, the purchasing and pricing power of Walmart, Home Depot, Lowes, Costco, Best Buy, Dunkin, and Target. But local businesses were replaced by lower wage chains with part-time labor. Bob Carter found no buyer for his Concord furniture store. Digital/Compaq, Polaroid, Sun, Apollo, Data General, Prime, Wang and their suppliers disappeared. Large packaging companies here in Maynard, Fitchburg, and Dennison Corp in Framingham closed. Our neighborhood became divided economically. St. John membership and Sunday School shrunk and changed. Sunday School children who got educated in top schools and colleges, left the area, many never to return. But our cleaners, medical and dental technicians, baristas, retail employees, landscapers, barbers and hair stylists remain and are low-paid, whether they live here or in Winchendon or Nashua. Many have long commutes. They visit pantries. Their children visit school pantries.

To help with food insecurity, T-Mobile funding also supports:

Mt. Calvary Community Supper in Acton: On March 6, we sponsored and served the weekly community sit-down meal at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in Acton. Our next visit there is October 2, 4-6 PM. The task is simple. The gratitude is sincere. Join us.

Project Bread: Connects people with food assistance and pantries, helps people enroll in SNAP and WIC, lobbies for legislation, supports various pop-up meal sites and at schools during the summer; provides community training.

The Greater Boston Food Bank: Since 1974, now distributing 109MM lb. of food-to-food pantries, soup kitchens, meal programs, senior centers, about 50% free, the remainder at deep discount. 91% of funds go to food acquired from the federal government and private food industry donors.

N.B. The Federal/Massachusetts minimum wage is \$7.25/\$15. Federal/Massachusetts minimum restaurant wage is \$2.13/\$6.75 which assumes tips will get them to minimum wage levels.

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