

Report to Diocesan Convention 2018

The Rev. Meredyth Wessman Ward, Urban Missioner
The Rev. Deacon Julie Butcher

When we began the Urban Ministry in Worcester four years ago, we could not have imagined the growth in numbers and support which we have experienced. Each year we are able to increase our hours and programming, both at our storefront at 799 Main Street in Worcester, and as part of the continuing ministry of presence in the wider neighborhood.

Walking Together is now open each morning from about 8:30 to noon, offering coffee and snacks and conversation and support to all who come by. We serve between 50 and 60 people each morning, some coming in to grab a cup of coffee, some to charge a cell phone or get in out of the rain, and others to talk about their lives.

We offer help in getting into detox, give information about programs and services available in the community, and create a safe space for people to rest and connect in the midst of their day. Many of our visitors are homeless or marginally housed, and most have some experience with substance abuse.

Some people come in each day, others stop by once or twice a week. Most we know by name. Many share their gifts with us, whether by sweeping the floor, filling a coffee carafe, or sharing their experience, strength and hope with others.

The storefront is well used by the wider community as well. We have regular AA and NA groups, as well as a single father's support group, ESL classes and a job skills class. Many of those who stop by each morning are part of one or more of the other groups who use the building.

With the help of AIDS Project Worcester, we have been offering Narcan training each month at our storefront. Narcan is the opioid reversal drug, used to stop overdoses in progress. Since our neighborhood is ground zero for the opioid crisis in Worcester, we encourage our neighbors to carry it. We have supplies of Narcan at the storefront, and those who attend the training are able to receive two doses to take with them.

Another side effect of the opioid crisis is the number of people with abscesses and skin infections. Dirty or dull needles, contaminated drugs and living outside all contribute to the problem. We offer basic first aid, and also refer people to local clinics for care.

Laundry Love continues to be a significant part of our ministry. On the second Thursday of each month we offer free laundry, a simple meal of pizza and juice and water, and activities for kids. We serve between 50 and 60 households each month. We show up with detergent, dryer sheets and trash bags (for instant laundry bags), as well as six party-sized pizzas, paper plates and napkins, cases of water bottles and juice boxes. The volunteers who help with the kid area bring play dough, legos, books and craft supplies.

One of the wonderful things about Laundry Love is the way different groups have collaborated with us over the past year. In the Spring we had student nurses joining us to offer "baby boxes" which provide a safe space for a newborn to sleep. They also did wellness checks with some of the pregnant moms. We also have regular visitors from the Worcester Parenting Alliance who bring

books to give to each child. Volunteers from ACTS International bring clothing and other items to share with our guests. In June and July we had representatives from Worcester's Head Start program registering children for September enrollment.

We gather for prayer each night at Laundry Love. The circle stretches all around the laundromat at the end of the evening. We pray in thanksgiving for the time we share and the community gathered, offer prayers for those in need, and mark occasions and offer prayers on behalf of those in the circle.

This year we have been blessed by volunteers from several different parishes and communities. During the winter we had two students from Holy Cross College join us as part of their Community Based Learning program, and this Fall we have three students from the same program with us each Friday.

Deacon Julie and I are always willing to speak to parishes and groups about our work at Walking Together. We are available to preach at parishes in the diocese or join outreach or mission groups to talk about ways people can intersect with our ministry or form one of their own. We are excited about the possibilities which may come out of our Revival in the coming year.

I would like to thank our Board Members for their service this year:

Holly Dolan, Holy Spirit Sutton
Elizabeth Harding, St. Stephen's Westboro
Karen King, All Saints Worcester
Stephen Hill, First Congregational Church, Auburn
The Rev. Canon Richard Simpson, Diocesan Staff
The Rev. Nancy Strong, St. Matthew's, Worcester
Phil Magnussen, All Saints Worcester
Mary Robbins, Worcester Area Mission Society

I am also grateful to the parishes and organizations which have supported us in the last year:

All Saints, Worcester
St. Matthew's, Worcester
Immanuel Lutheran, Holden
First Congregational, Auburn
Christ Church, Rochdale
Trinity, Ware
Trinity, Southbridge
Good Shepherd, Clinton
Nativity, Northboro
St. Michael's on the Heights, Worcester
Grace Church, Oxford
St. Stephen's, Westboro
St. Francis, Holden
Holy Spirit, Sutton
Suds Up Laundromat
Dismas House, Worcester
Holy Cross College, Worcester
PEO, Charlton
and many individual donors whose generosity makes our work possible