

Report to Diocesan Convention  
2020-2021  
The Rev. Meredyth Ward  
Urban Missioner, Walking Together

I would like to begin by thanking Bishop Fisher for the privilege of serving the diocese here in the Main South area of Worcester. It is an honor to serve the last and the least on behalf of the Church.

This year has been difficult for the people I serve, as it has been for all of us. Those who are homeless or marginally housed (living in cars, couch surfing, using shelters or tents) have found it almost impossible to practice social distancing. When public drinking fountains were shut down in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus, people who did not have access to a tap at home could not get drinking water. As unemployment surged many of our folks struggled with food insecurity. And as 12 Step groups and other resources moved online, those on the other side of the digital divide became separated from the communities which helped to keep them sober.

At Walking Together, we did our best to help meet some of these needs, within the guidelines set by the state and the diocese. Sometimes we were able to be open to folks who would come to our door to receive food and toiletries. We had a table across the door, and we interacted from a distance.

As numbers continued to surge, we took to the streets in our vehicles. We had a running joke that we were the world's strangest ice cream trucks. We would drive around, find our folks, and open the trunk to distribute food parcels, bottles of water, clean socks and hygiene supplies. Instead of ice cream sandwiches we had shampoo and condoms, instead of soft serve we had granola bars and tuna fish. When we pulled into a parking lot or to the side of a street we were met with grateful delight. People passed things hand over hand to those who were farther away, and folks shared with each other when we ran out of a particular item.

During the spring we were able to reopen as infection numbers improved. We watch the numbers carefully, and we require masks to enter the space, but we have been able to open several days each week. While we are not back to where we were before the virus hit us, we are able to help charge cell phones, gather to talk, share resources and encourage those trying to stay sober. In person 12 Step meetings happen in the storefront twice a week, and we have lists of both in person and on line meetings happening at other times.

One of the values we hold is that of mutual aid. Everyone has something to offer to the community as a whole. No one is simply a recipient. Folks help sweep our floors and take out the trash. Volunteers from sober houses wash windows and organize donations. Folks waiting for us to open pick up the trash on the street. One of the ways we participate in this flow of mutual help is by working with the Worcester Refrigerator community, or Woofridge. This group has four refrigerators

located on the streets of Worcester, open 24/7 for our neighbors. Donations come in from restaurants, grocery stores, individuals and organizations. One of our contributions this summer has been fresh herbs. With the help of David Ammerman of Church of the Good Shepherd in Clinton, we have grown basil, mint, cilantro, thyme and tomatoes in large planters outside of Walking Together. The fruits of this work have shown up in the fridges this summer.

We have been blessed with wonderful donations from individuals and congregations over the past year. St. Francis in Holden has held an in-gathering of food and toiletries and water for us every other week. Good Shepherd in Clinton and Trinity Shrewsbury have also contributed regularly. Immanuel Lutheran in Holden collected warm coats and sweatshirts for us, as well as feminine hygiene products.

We have just recently returned to in-person Laundry Love. While it was unsafe to gather in large groups, we provided \$20 laundry vouchers for our regular attendees. Now we are gathering again on a monthly basis, and hope that it will be safe to continue into the future.

We are very grateful for the support and prayers of communities and individuals.

St. Matthew's, Worcester

St. Luke's , Worcester

Immanuel Lutheran, Holden

First Congregational, Auburn

Christ Church, Rochdale

Trinity, Ware

Trinity, Southbridge

Good Shepherd, Clinton

St. Michael's on the Heights, Worcester

St. Stephen's, Westboro

St. Francis, Holden

Holy Spirit, Sutton

Bethel Lutheran Church, Auburn

First Congregational, Worcester

Keeping Worcester Warm

Suds Up Laundromat

Southbridge Savings

Thrivent Financial

and the many individual donors whose generosity makes our work possible

I am also very grateful for the work of our board:

Ms Elizabeth Harding

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Mr. Steve Abdow  
The Rev. Deacon Dianne Wilson  
The Rev, José Reyes