

REPORT OF HANDS ACROSS NIAGARA

In the time since our 2013 Synod, when Bishop Michael said that “Hands Across Niagara is one of the most dynamic and life-giving programs we have engaged in as a diocese for many years,” we have been able to make a series of grants to fund justice-based partnerships across our diocese. These grants are possible because of the generosity of Anglicans who make the gifts that support vibrant ministry in their own parishes, in our diocese, and around the world through our partners at the Anglican Church of Canada. Donations to Hands Across Niagara in 2013 totaled \$35,406. We been able to fund innovative projects that are changing the lives of people in the neighbourhoods God is calling us to serve. The grants we made in 2014 include:

Church of the Transfiguration in St. Catharines, in partnership with Community Care and others, planted community gardens which will grow produce to improve access to healthy food for vulnerable people in St. Catharines. The project establishes the only community gardens in their part of St. Catharines, with the potential to engage children, students and isolated seniors in planting, tending and harvesting the produce. For members of Transfiguration, the community gardens will provide an opportunity to get to know their neighbours and to learn first-hand about the conditions that leave people without enough food to eat each month.

Grace Church in St. Catharines promoted eco-justice through the community gardens they are cultivating in partnership with Greening Niagara, the YWCA, and neighbouring congregations. The project has grown out of a visioning process undertaken by the congregation and Grace and is aligned with the church's sense of mission. The organic produce they grow will decrease reliance on GMO plants; plot holders from the community will receive instruction and support as they learn to produce their own food; the YWCA will cook and serve some of the produce in their community living facility. Through education and advocacy, the congregation will become engaged with grass-roots environmental and food security movements.

St. Alban's in Beamsville offered support, community and education to the largely Spanish-speaking group of temporary workers employed at farms around Beamsville. The parish has been a point of contact for temporary workers accessing the program. In addition to offering support with translation and interpretation, the project offers opportunities to communicate with family in Mexico and ESL classes in partnership with the Believer's Bookshelf in Beamsville.

St. Andrew's in Grimsby is partnering with the FORT, a local youth drop-in, to support at-risk youth with a program to improve their self esteem and overall wellness. Working with FORT counsellors and an art therapist, volunteers from St. Andrew's will spend time with youth engaged in a writing program: in a confidential and supportive environment, youth will be encouraged to write their own stories. Their efforts will be celebrated as stories are published and distributed at St. Andrew's and beyond. At St. Andrew's, volunteers will present their own reflections upon the experience of working with youth at the FORT in an effort to raise awareness of the circumstances faced by some youth in Grimsby. Over the long term, the goal is to create a safe and inclusive space where youth experience acceptance from their peers and from the broader community.

St. Elizabeth's in Burlington is working with Refresh Foods, Age-Friendly Community Connections and four neighbouring congregations to pilot a seniors lunch in the East end of the city. Targeting isolated and low income seniors, the lunches will provide community and a source for learning about services available to seniors on Halton. Connections in the community improve wellbeing for isolated seniors; this seniors' lunch will also address the problem of isolation by equipping seniors to advocate for themselves through the work of Age-Friendly Community Connections.

St. Luke's in Burlington, in partnership with Refresh Foods and three local congregations, is hosting a Downtown Community Lunch targeting people who may be living on a low income, newcomers to Canada, and seniors. The partners are using the meal to foster community, out of which will grow the ability to equip their guests for self-advocacy. The community which develops around the meal will support one another as they take steps to improve their own situation. Already, a movement to advocate for transit service to be restored in the downtown was sparked by concerns raised by lunch guests and is growing in the wider community.

The members of the Hands Across Niagara Granting Committee are:

(Chair) Derek Anderson, St. Matthew's, Burlington
Dorothy Brown, Church of the Transfiguration, St. Catharines,
Susan Curran, Church of the Incarnation, Oakville
Sandra Harper, St. Paul's, Westdale,
Steve Hopkins, St. Christopher's, Burlington,
Simon Jacques, St. James', Guelph,
Bill Mous, Director of Justice, Community and Global Ministries
Christyn Perkons, Director, Congregational Support and Development
Peter Scott, St. Mark's, Orangeville,
Irene Walback, All Saints, Erin,
Frank Whiting, Holy Trinity, Fonthill.

We are grateful for the service and commitment of this hard-working group who study, pray, and evaluate grant applications in a consensus-decision-making environment.

Hands Across Niagara, of course, replaces the Anglican Appeal in our diocese. Donations to Hands Across are divided equally among:

- The Anglican Church of Canada (funding ministries such as the Council of the North, the PWRDF, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission),
- The Diocese of Niagara (funding grants for ministry partnerships which target the root causes of injustice), and,
- The donor's parish (where congregations are encouraged to use the money to fund local justice and servant ministries)

Hands Across Niagara is helping Anglicans live out our Diocesan Vision, by gathering resources to connect with God's mission in the world. We are grateful for the generosity of everyone who made a gift to Hands Across, and we are delighted to be able to share the good news stories of the ways that Anglicans in Niagara are connecting in new and transformative ways with their neighbours as a result of Hands Across grants. For more information, or to donate, please visit

<http://niagaraanglican.ca/ministry/hands-across-niagara>

Respectfully Submitted,

Derek Anderson