

Common Call

Community of Congregations of Oak Park and River Forest

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<http://www.Lgrossman.com/comcong.htm>

March 2010

CONTENTS

- Page 1– Annual Meeting Report
Special Announcement
- Page 2– Treasurer’s Report
Events of Note
- Page 3– Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry Report
HFGB Report
- Page 4– HFGB Report
- Page 5– HFGB Report
Emergency Clothes Closet
NAMI Metro-Suburban
Dues Report



Our mission: To develop a community among the churches, synagogues, and other congregations of faith in Oak Park and River Forest and enable common service.

Special Announcement

Community of Congregations is moving to delivering the newsletter electronically. Please e-mail Jane Wood, editor, to have your name added to the e-mail list. This month’s newsletter was sent electronically to all for whom we have e-mail addresses.

COMMUNITY OF CONGREGATIONS ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

At the Community of Congregations’ 2010 Annual Meeting, delegates enjoyed good food and fellowship and made some important decisions about the future of the organization.

Like proud parents seeing their child off to college, the Community of Congregations approved the Food Pantry’s plan to become an independent not-for-profit organization. As the pantry’s staff and consultant explained, the needs of the pantry have outgrown the Community of Congregations—the pantry needs a board and staff that can focus intensively and exclusively on its goals. 2010 will be a transition year as the pantry forms a new legal entity and applies for its tax exemption. During that transition period and beyond, pantry leadership intends to maintain close ties with the Community of Congregations. Delegates voted to accept the Food Pantry’s strategic plan, specifically approving the formation of a new, independent entity to address hunger in our community.

Both the Food Pantry and the Community of Congregations’ other major project, the Holiday Food and Gift Basket program, have seen large increases in the number of families in need. Thankfully the community has risen to the challenge of meeting the increased need of these difficult economic times. Leaders of both of these projects reported to delegates about how our community has responded to the record need with record contributions of time and money.

Delegates also took care of business by approving a 2010 budget and approving changes in the Community of Congregations’ by-laws. The budget recognizes the changes to come in the food pantry’s transition year. It also anticipates a move toward more electronic communication and less use of the post office.

The by-laws were updated mainly to clarify the roles of various groups within the organization. The new by-laws make clear that congregations are the organization’s “members,” and they act through their spokespeople, the delegates. The leaders formerly known as the “Executive Board” will now be called the “Board of Directors,” as is standard in other not-for-profit organizations.

The Annual Meeting celebrated the work of the Community of Congregations in 2009 and set it on course to meet the challenges of 2010.

Pam Meyerson
Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT

Community of Congregations

2009 Actual	Income:	\$8,196
	Expenses:	<u>\$10,434</u>
	Net Income:	-\$2,238
	Reserves in the bank:	\$4,361

Despite efforts to constrain costs, expenses exceeded income.

2010 Approved Budget	Income:	\$9,212
	Expenses:	<u>\$9,210</u>
	Net Income:	\$2

Changes to income are increased donations by Congregations due to suggested donation levels based on Congregation size and fees for submissions to our newsletter to help defray costs. Changes to expenses include moving the newsletter to e-mail and reduced administrative time.

Food Pantry

2009 Actual	Income:	\$279,340
	Expenses:	<u>\$209,853</u>
	Net Income:	\$69,497
	Reserves in the bank:	\$177,569

Community generosity, increased USDA allocations and good fiscal management enabled the Food Pantry to continue to step up to increased demand and add to reserves that will support their mission in future years.

2010 Approved Budget	Income:	\$310,600
transition year)	Expenses:	<u>\$370,523</u>
	Net Income:	-\$59,923

As the Food Pantry invests in its transition to a standalone non-profit agency (with the continued and increasing support of the Community) the budget estimates deficit spending as an investment in the long term.

Holiday Food & Gift Basket

2009 Actual	Income:	\$52,673
	Expenses:	<u>\$42,902</u>
	Net Income:	\$9,771
	Reserves in the bank:	\$23,273

Community generosity and good fiscal management enabled the HF&GB to continue to step up to increased demand and add to reserves.

2010 Approved Budget	Income:	\$52,020
	Expenses:	<u>\$52,660</u>
	Net Income:	-\$640

With the income gap of reduced funding by the Food Pantry, we budgeted increased giving to enable the program to maintain its outreach. A plan is to be developed and Congregations are encouraged to consider increased support of this program.

Valerie Lester
Treasurer

Events of Note

World Day of Prayer

Friday, March 5, 2010
1:00 p.m.
Franklin Park United Methodist Church
9857 Schiller, Franklin Park
More information at 847-455-5858 or
<http://www.wdpusa.org/>

Winter Farmers Market

Sunday, March 7, 2010
9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
St. Giles Catholic Parish
1025 Columbian, Oak Park
More info at <http://www.faitainplace.org/>

Labyrinth at Euclid

Tuesday, March 9, 2010
Friday, March 26, 2010
7:00–9:00 p.m.
Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church
405 S. Euclid Avenue, Oak Park
For more information call Rev. Cossy
Ksander at 708-386-2669

Community of Congregations Community Meeting

Thursday, March 18, 2010
For more information contact Rev. Harriette
Cross at safirefour@aol.com

Taizé at Euclid

Friday, March 19, 2010
7:30 p.m.
Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church
405 S. Euclid Avenue, Oak Park
For more information call Rev. Cossy
Ksander at 708-386-2669

Taizé at Unity Temple

Friday, March 26, 2010
7:00 p.m.
Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist
Congregation
875 Lake Street, Oak Park
For more information visit their site at
www.unitytemple.org

Peace Vigil

Every Friday Evening
7:00-8:00 p.m.
First United Church of Oak Park
848 Lake Street, Oak Park
For more information contact Bob Haisman
at 708-997-1993 or
Gardenoprff@sbcglobal.net



OAK PARK RIVER FOREST FOOD PANTRY

2009 Year in Review and New Directions for 2010

In its effort to provide hunger relief in 2009, OPRF Food Pantry provided nutritious groceries, produce, meat and dairy products to 11,088 local families comprised of 40,442 individuals. This represents a 63% increase from 2008 visits to the Pantry. Over 350 volunteers participated in a variety of ways to help serve this burgeoning client base.

The Pantry marked 2009 as its most successful year of fundraising to date. Income rose 51% from 2008 for a total of \$279,340. In recognition of its overall excellence in the field of finances, the Pantry received the 2009 Best Fiscal Management Award from the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

Pantry partnerships were developed and strengthened in 2009. Advocacy efforts on behalf of the Pantry led to a partnership with Breakthrough Urban Ministries and the Greater Chicago Food Depository. This collaborative effort resulted in the development of a cooperative transportation service plan culminating in the purchase of a 22-foot commercial delivery truck. The delivery system now services 20 different food pantries on the west side of Chicago allowing pantries to decrease delivery costs and purchase more food. A partnership with West Suburban PADS and AmeriCorps allowed the Pantry to expand its service to clients to include benefits counseling.

At the Community of Congregations Annual Meeting, the strategic plan for Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry was presented and officially approved. The plan is ambitious and exciting, as it must be in order to meet the increasing need we have witnessed over the past few years. First and foremost, the Pantry's mission statement was revised to better reflect the work of the Pantry:

The Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry's mission is to work together as a community to reduce hunger locally through

- Direct hunger relief services
- Hunger awareness education and
- Advocacy to influence anti-hunger policy

The Strategic Plan outlines 10 main goals which will lead the Pantry to fulfill the new mission statement:

1. Strengthen the staffing and organizational supports that will enable the Pantry to operate successfully and to expand its work
2. Create an independent governance structure and transition from being a "program of" to becoming a "partner with" the Community of Congregations, creating and then operating under the guidance of our own board of directors and form Pantry's own 501c3 organization
3. Increase the Pantry's capacity to provide hunger relief to a greater number of clients and improve the nutritional value of food distributed
4. Continue to provide benefits counseling on site to our clients
5. Connect clients to other agencies that provide additional social services
6. Strengthen the volunteer program, both in numbers, and in depth of experience
7. Take the steps necessary to prepare the organization to expand into a larger space better suited to projected programs and services
8. Advance hunger awareness through education and outreach to create a more informed community motivated to take action
9. Engage in advocacy efforts to influence public policy and government funding around hunger issues
10. Develop fundraising and communications strategies that will enable the Pantry to grow its base of supporters and ensure adequate resources

We hope to always keep our close ties to the various communities of faith in our villages, and see this move as a way to strengthen our shared vision of social justice through hunger relief. The Community of Congregations has been incredibly supportive of this move. We will continue to work closely with them during this transition year and in the years to come.

Kathy Russell, Executive Director
Michele Zurakowski, Director of Operations



HOLIDAY FOOD AND GIFT BASKET Another successful year

The success of the Holiday Food and Gift Basket (HFGB) in 2009 is testament to the generosity throughout the Oak Park and River Forest communities.

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HFGB *continued*

Every year the need for the services of the program increase and every year our two communities step up to meet that need. 2009 was no exception.

In 2009, we served 958 referrals—families, senior citizens and single adults and this was an increase of nearly 70 referrals over 2008. These referrals represented nearly 2300 individuals, more than 1000 of them children. Referrals came to us from the Oak Park and River Forest schools, both townships, some churches and a variety of social service organizations.

Many of the social workers told us this was a very different year. They expected the need to increase because of the economic climate and it did. They didn't expect the number of people who refused to be referred because, they said, there were others in greater need.

Strong Sponsor Support

We were quite concerned in the fall that we would not have enough funds to purchase food gift certificates or sponsors to shop for and wrap holiday presents. Thanks to the incredible generosity of nearly 400 sponsors -congregations, schools, businesses, families and individuals - every single person in the program received a food gift certificate prior to Thanksgiving and holiday presents delivered to their door in mid-December.

These 400 sponsors actually represent hundreds and hundreds of individuals who sponsor through their congregations, schools, businesses or community organization.

So many churches and temples participated by donating funds, sponsoring families, volunteering to drive:

- Ascension Catholic Church
- Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church
- First United Church of Oak Park
- First United Methodist Church
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
- Oak Park Friends
- River Forest United Methodist Church
- St. Edmund Parish
- West Suburban Temple

Oak Park River Forest High School and Julian Middle School once again sponsored large numbers of families. Thanks to the Bar Mitzvah project of

one young man, Brooks Middle School also became heavily involved this year.

Thanks to So Many

There are so many people and organizations that make this program work—Oak Park and River Forest Township Youth Services who so generously fund us every year. The Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry who helps fund food gift certificates. The Oak Park Police Department who helped deliver gifts and direct traffic on delivery days. The Wednesday Journal which gave us such incredible coverage throughout our season. River Forest Township, which provides us with office space and a computer. The Community of Congregations and this newsletter which so effectively helps us spread the word every year. And, of course, United Lutheran Church which turns over its entire church to us for a full week every year as our drop-off and delivery site. There are so many people and organizations that make this program work:

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Thank You Letters

We are reminded of the importance of this program to so many when we see the incredibly heartwarming gratitude of the recipients expressed in the thank you notes we continue to receive. These thank you notes from recipients are mailed to the sponsor who provided the gifts. Here are excerpts from just two of the thank you notes we have received.

One parent wrote:

"I would like to thank everyone that is responsible for providing my children and I with the abundance of Christmas gifts delivered to us on December 12. I can truly say that when I could not provide my children with Christmas gifts this year, God sent me some of his angels."

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HFGB *continued*

Another parent wrote in an e-mail received on delivery day:

"I am a first year recipient in the holiday gift program. I can't express how grateful I am to have learned of such a program. In a normal case, I would be a working class citizen helping others that are in the same situation I am in now. Recently, I lost my employment and have been battling a lifetime illness. It was such an honor for me to see my son have something for this holiday as we have been without necessities such as health insurance and sometimes even food. . . .the thought of affording gifts at this time was not a reality until four young ladies showed up at our door on December 12 bearing gifts for my son. We're elated and thank God and you for allowing us to be involved in this program. It is because of this, I know in my heart, I will work again and real soon. You will always be remembered and I will always remember to reach out to someone when I am able to again also."

This Year's Challenges

We know that this year will present its own challenges. No doubt the troubles in the economy will mean more people in need. And, we also know that those who are able to help will continue to face their own struggles. That means we will have to work harder than ever to raise funds and to seek sponsors. You will be hearing more from us in the next couple of months through our spring fundraising drive. We hope that all of you will keep this program in mind as you consider your own giving or that of your congregation in the coming year.

On behalf of the three of us and the people served by the Holiday Food and Gift Basket program, thank you so much for your support.

Marcia Alpert, Mary Jane Welter and Valerie Woods
HFGB Coordinators

holidaybasket@hotmail.com

EMERGENCY CLOTHES CLOSET

Thank you again for your generous support of the Emergency Clothes Closet. As the winter months wane (oh, they are waning, aren't they?) we continue to need outerwear and underwear! We are having trouble keeping up with the demand for long underwear, gloves, boots and coats. Donations can be dropped off during regular business hours at Calvary Memorial Church, 931 Lake Street, at the west parking lot door.

We would like acknowledge the generous sponsorship of Nordstrom's Rack, REI and The Container Store. They are keeping our community a bit warmer this winter.

Donna Baer



NAMI METRO SUBURBAN is Pleased to Announce: Family-to-Family Education Program For family members with a relative suffering from mental illness

This is a series of 12 weekly classes structured to help families understand and support individuals with serious mental illness while maintaining their own well-being. The course is led by a team of trained NAMI family member volunteers who know what it is like to have a loved one struggling with one of these brain disorders. There is no cost to participate in the NAMI Family Program. Registration required; class size is limited.

Classes start Thursday, March 25th, 2010 7:00 p.m.– 9:30 p.m. at the Edward J. Hines, VA Hospital, Hines, Ill.

For further details and registration call Bonnie Jordon, 708-383-4367.

Family Support Groups

This is a support group for family and friends of individuals with mental illness. The group combines education and skill training with self-care, emotional support and empowerment. The group meets the first Tuesday of every month or third Wednesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at the Community Mental Health Board Conference Room Lower Level 30 1100 Lake Street, Oak Park, IL

For further details and registration call Eunice Jensen, 708-383-2274.

2010 COMMUNITY OF CONGREGATIONS

About 50 congregations in Oak Park, River Forest and surrounding communities have contact with the Community of Congregations through membership and/or participation in its ministries including the Holiday Food and Gift Basket Program and the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry.

The following congregations and faith communities are current with their 2010 dues:

**Ascension Catholic Church
Faith In Place
St. Catherine-St. Lucy Parish
St. Edmund Parish
St. Luke Parish
United Lutheran Church
Unity Church of Oak Park**

We thank these congregations for their support.

Oak Park-River Forest
Community of Congregations
P.O. Box 3365
Oak Park, IL 60303-3365
Visit us at: <http://www.lgrossman.com/comcong.htm>

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Oak Park IL

Save These Dates

Friday, March 5, 2010 1:00 p.m.

World Day of Prayer

Franklin Park United Methodist Church

Sunday, March 7, 2010 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Winter Farmers Market

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Taize at Euclid

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Friday, March 26, 2010 7:00 p.m.

Taize at Unity Temple

Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Every Friday Evening

Peace Vigil

First United Church of Oak Park

If your congregation or organization has a special celebration or activity that you would like to share with the Community of Congregations community, please send your information to Editor Jane Wood at woodnflute@comcast.net by the 5th of the month.

Community of Congregations Executive Committee

Officers: President, Rev. Harriette Cross; Vice President, _____; Secretary, Pam Meyerson; Treasurer, Valerie Lester; Immediate Past President, Rev. Lowell Eckberg

At-large committee members: Joe McDonald, Harriette Robinet/McLouis Robinet, Dr. Bradford Wainer

Administrative Secretary: Jane Wood