

Newsletter, October 2024



A Note from Art Williams Gather the Spirit for Justice (GTSFJ) Board Vice President and Program Committee Chair

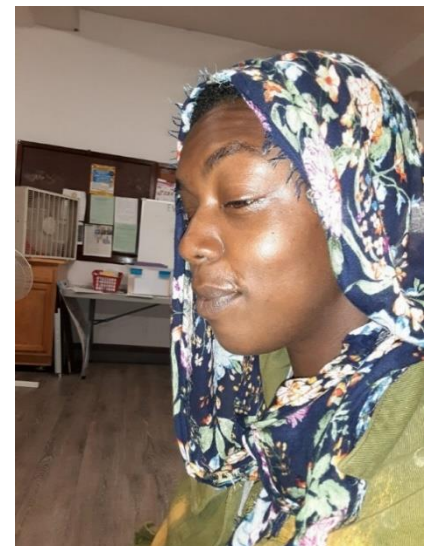
Well, signs of Fall are in the air, and oh my, so much has changed with Gather the Spirit! A new location; a new, expanded menu for Common Ground on Saturday mornings, expanded ESL class offerings, and plans for even more added programs are keeping us busy.



We are being helped by many cheerful, enthusiastic new volunteers. Many new guests are joining our old friends in coming to visit us. More and more folks who first came to us as guests end up staying as some of our most dedicated volunteers! (You know who you are.)

Yes, a lot has changed, but many things have stayed the same: Our mission to build community on Allison Hill will not change. Our dedication to helping our friends; and providing a safe, clean, positive environment for individuals and families to gather in fellowship and to grow as people remains the same. If you have not visited our temporary location at First Church of the Brethren, 219 Hummel Street, I urge you to swing by and tell us what you see on any Saturday 9-11am.

Gather The Spirit For Justice is a non-sectarian organization, but we could not do what we do without the generous support from the churches who house us; and the dozen or so faith communities and civic organizations that provide donations and volunteers to make everything come together. We are so grateful to both Christ Lutheran Church and First Church of the Brethren for allowing us to operate our programs within their walls. As our services and numbers of visitors continue to expand, we are always striving to improve our processes to ensure everyone has a positive experience. The first three weeks of September in our new location have been, well... if I called it Controlled Chaos I would be half right. But we are always experimenting with ways to streamline queuing lines or to get the grits ready sooner, etc. Suggestions are always welcome. Volunteers are always welcome. YOU are always welcome. See you this Saturday!



News from Ben Perez, GTSFJ Program Director

Hello Friends:

What an exciting and energizing month we have had at Gather the Sprit for Justice! We just wrapped up our third Saturday in our new temporary location--First Church of the Brethren--and have expanded our breakfast menu; to the point where we probably need to consider renaming our Saturday event "Common Ground Breakfast" instead of "Common Ground Coffee!"

For the past three weeks, we have proudly featured pancakes, scrambled eggs and sausage links. This past Saturday we also incorporated grits into our menu--serving them with either butter and cheese, or sugar and/or syrup. On Saturday September 14th we had more than 200 people in the building! (170 guests and more than 30 volunteers.)

I want to extend a warm thank you to our dedicated volunteers, all of whom have really come through for us by arriving early and helping us find our rhythm in our new space. Additionally, a significant number of volunteers have been coming in during the day on Wednesdays to help organize and optimize our new space.

Finally, I'd like to thank our gracious hosts at First Church of the Brethren--especially Pastor Josiah, Pastor Lexi and Alan, Chair of the Building Resources Team--for making us and our guests feel so welcome! October will hopefully bring with it continued growth, as well as at least part of the long-anticipated expansion of our programming.

New Location

Due to ongoing plumbing issues at Christ Lutheran Church, the nearby First Church of the Brethren at 219 Hummel Street Harrisburg offered GTSFJ temporary use of its facilities to conduct our Saturday morning breakfasts, English classes and other activities. Attendance at the breakfasts has increased tremendously at our new location. We are less than a five-minute walk (0.2 miles) from our former location, so our familiar regulars attend.

And new attendees from among the First Church of the Brethren congregation and its neighbors have also been visiting. We are thrilled with the large dining space in the Brethren's fellowship hall and happy to add our activities to the array of services the Brethren offer to the community (e.g., a free clothing and household articles store, grocery distribution and children's activities). Because the last few weeks have been so productive, we are currently talking with the Brethren about a possible longer-term partnership. Stay tuned!



Recent statistics for 2024:

Sept 7 17 volunteers, 112 guests, 82 meals prepared


Sept 14 34 volunteers, 179 guests, 115 meals prepared (!)

Sept 21 27 volunteers, 131 guests, 84 meals prepared

Neighbor 2 Neighbor

Gather the Spirit is working with a number of other members of the Capital Area Coalition on Homelessness to conduct a special event for faith communities. The goals of the event are to raise awareness, provide education, and share information among providers and volunteers.

GTSFJ's Program Director, Ben Perez, has been asked to speak at the event and to lead one of the workshops. Ben will speak about the US Supreme Court's Grant's Pass decision, as well as his own personal experiences on the streets of Harrisburg, and navigating the "system" that is intended to be a lifeline for unsheltered persons. GTSFJ will also have a table you can visit to meet board members and volunteers and learn more about us. Please attend if you are able and share the flyer below with your own faith community. The event is free, but registration is requested at [Neighbor 2 Neighbor October 26, 2024 – Capital Area Coalition on Homelessness \(cachpa.org\)](https://cachpa.org/neighbor-2-neighbor-october-26-2024) (link also listed on the flyer).



The flyer features a photograph of a person in a red jacket holding a cardboard sign that reads "HOMELESS PLEASE HELP". A circular graphic on the left says "Ready to Help? Join us for". The event title "Neighbor 2 Neighbor" is prominently displayed in red. Below it, the text reads "AN EVENT FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES TO LEARN HOW TO HELP ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS". The date and time are "OCTOBER 26, 2024 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM" at "HARRISBURG AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE COOPER STUDENT UNION ONE HACC DRIVE, HARRISBURG". A list of activities includes: "Raise Awareness", "Share information", "Meet existing providers", "Attend educational sessions", and "Commit to Ongoing Engagement". The schedule is: "8:30 AM: Registration and Coffee", "9:00 AM: Poverty Simulation (Tri County Community Action)", "12:00 PM: Networking Lunch and Table Displays", and "1:00 PM: Breakout Sessions". A note states "There is no cost to attend, but space is limited, so REGISTER TODAY!". The registration link is "https://cachpa.org/neighbor-2-neighbor-october-26-2024//". A QR code is provided for registration. The footer mentions "The CACH Faith-Based Initiatives Group partners with the Capital Area Coalition on Homelessness to leverage the energy of faith-based organizations in addressing homelessness." and includes a logo of a house with a heart inside.

English as a Second Language (ESL) for Latinos Classwork

This story was written by ESL student Jennifer Lucero in response to a question asked in class: What are you most thankful for? She came to the U.S. about 12 months ago speaking very little English.

I am very grateful to have met so many good people in this country and it makes me very happy to share with people from so many places and learn from each of them. Because I have been very blessed since the first day I was able to be here, I think how can I not be grateful for all the things that have been presented to me during this year? My life changed. Now I have the opportunity to be here with you in this church where I was received with great affection. I have the honor of being able to call you friends. Without knowing it, the month of August 2023 brought me to a great place. I cannot say that everything has been joyful and beautiful because I have also had to go through bad days where I feel that trying hard is not working, and I miss so many things about my country such as speaking out loud. In this country I have had to lower my voice sometimes, but I know that Guatemala is not a safe place for me. Now I am fortunate to be able to fight every day for a better life and I can only tell you once again that God has been very good to me and my family. I am sure that I will still have many more things to be thankful for in the future.

ESL for French and Creole Speakers

To finish our class for the summer, we planned something special for the students and did a field trip to State Street to have a guided tour of Saint Patrick's Cathedral and another of the Pennsylvania Capitol Building. There were 20 adult students and a toddler who went on the tours with Andy Back and me. We walked about 30 minutes from Allison Hill down to the Capitol complex.



Father Brommer was our first guide and he graciously welcomed us into the church. He used very simple language and explained basic facts about the architecture of the church and of the stained-glass windows depicting the stories of Jesus. I did a French translation every few minutes so the students would be sure of what they heard.

I probed Father Brommer a bit to talk about the history of the congregation, about the Irish who came here because of extreme poverty and famine in their homeland, knowing that would resonate with many in the class. He spoke to that and then to the changes

in the makeup of the congregations and informed the class that currently there are other Haitians in the church. He welcomed them to come again, but without pressuring them.

After that we had a tour of the state capitol building. The students really loved being in the space. While we waited for our custom tour to start, some called their family back home and put their phones on video to show their family the beauty of the rotunda. In addition to the architecture, the tour guide spoke of Violet Oakley and her many paintings in the capitol. She was a young woman of 28-years-old when she received the commission to do these works of art at a time when women were not allowed in the capitol and not allowed to vote.

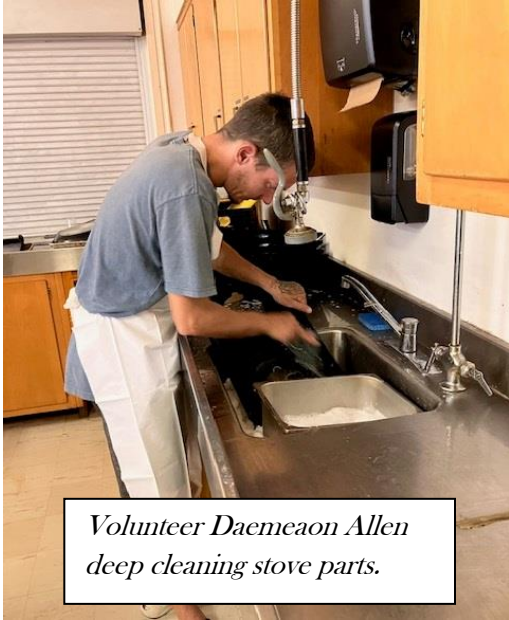


It was a positive day for the class with a lot of smiling faces on our walk back to Allison Hill.

Classes resumed September 14th and to our surprise, we had 38 students, almost double the number we had a month earlier. Many improvements are already underway to accommodate this increase and were noticeable during the September 21st classes. These include efforts to find us more space to work in small groups, efforts to incorporate technology into the classroom and show the students how they could use technology outside the class to improve their learning, efforts of volunteers to come early so they could screen the students to group them more appropriately by their abilities before the classes started and agreeing to stay later to help with a second class, and finally, by having more volunteers to work with smaller groups encouraging greater participation. (Kevin Geist)

Kitchen News

We are now serving grits, eggs, pancakes and sausage to our guests and that has been very popular. We could really use a few more dedicated kitchen crew volunteers to serve the food, act as runners, and work on setup and cleanup! (Kathy Williams)



Volunteer Daemeon Allen deep cleaning stove parts.



Little Helper



Board VP Art Williams defrosting one of the refrigerators



Photo IDs, Driver's Licenses, and Birth Certificates

We continue to assist neighbors in obtaining IDs, drivers' licenses and birth certificates. These vital documents are essential for applying for employment, cashing a check, requesting public assistance, driving, applying for housing, receiving medical care and accessing other services. While the documents are a necessity, the cost is prohibitive for the largely low-income population of Allison Hill. IDs and licenses cost from \$40.50 to \$42.50 and birth certificates cost \$20. In May, we provided checks for these documents to 23 neighbors, in June 37 checks, in July 39, and in August 37. Disbursements for the four months totaled \$5,116. (Ann Van Dyke and Brian DeBease)



Toiletries Update

The GTSFJ Common Ground Coffee now has a wonderful new space and we are distributing toiletries between 9 and 10 each Saturday to old and new customers in the Fellowship Hall. As Ben and his kitchen crew serve up fantastic breakfast fare, we currently distribute two items to each person from what has been generously donated. That may seem very little, but even two items can make a big difference for a low income or homeless friend. It's exciting to see all the new faces and learn new names.

As Toiletries is not a funded operation, my big news is we have just mailed close to forty packets to places of worship/civic organizations explaining our programs and asking them to consider running a one month Toiletries Drive. The packets contain toiletry lists, explain how easy it is, answer lots of Q&As, as well as providing contact information for those interested in volunteering for one the GTSFJ's other services. If your group is interested, please contact gismart@mac.com.

Fingers crossed, this could be step one in making our toiletries operation self-sustaining (our long time goal) and allow the distribution of a greater number and more diverse items to each customer. (Gail Ismart)

Recent stats – 80 neighbors served on 9/14/24, 68 on 9/28/24 and 87 on 10/5/24.

Toiletries List

- Toilet Paper
- Dish Washing Liquid (Dawn, Ajax, etc.)
- Laundry Pods (baggies of 5/or large container)
- Laundry Sheets
- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Soap/bars and body wash
- Socks - All sizes, new and clean used
- Razors - Packs we can divide
- Deodorant
- Lotion
- Vaseline
- Pads/Tampons
- Diapers/Wipes
- Toothbrushes/Toothpaste
- Disinfectant Wipes
- Cleaning Supplies
- Kleenex/Tissue boxes
- Sweatshirts/Hoodies
- Umbrellas/Rain Gear
- Handwarmers
- Winter Only- Adult's Gloves, Hats & Scarves
- Children's Gloves, Mittens, Hats, Scarves

More Fun Things

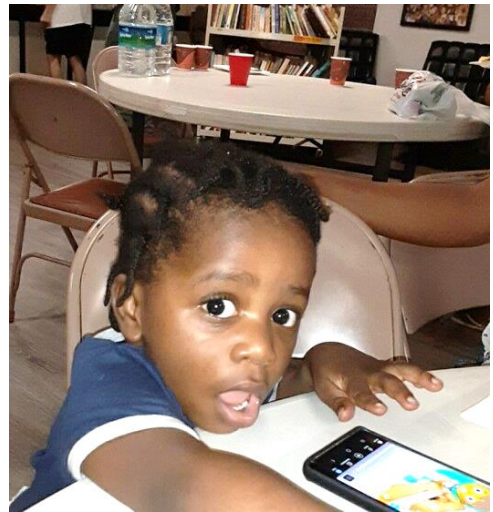
Sing Along: Three of our regular volunteers have several times given impromptu concerts and encouraged us to sing along during Saturday breakfasts. Singers Jonne and Kathy and pianist EvAnn bought a little extra fun to our mornings.



Meet Some of Our Neighbors and Volunteers



And More Neighbors and Volunteers



Sharing News from our Friends

Christ Lutheran Church, 124 South 13th St., Harrisburg, 17104 Office Phone (717) 236-8382

- **Medical Outreach Clinic:** The clinic is a free, nurse-run walk-in clinic that provides simple lab tests, basic physical assessments, and health education. Open Monday-Friday 10 am-2:30 pm. No appointments needed. 717-260-9320.
- **Dental Clinic:** Volunteer dentists, support staff and translators offer care 3 days a month for urgent dental conditions requiring simple extractions and fillings. No appointments, all walk-in, first-come-first-served, free of charge. Call to learn upcoming dates.
- **Spiritual Care:** Pastor Best offers spiritual care to church members, community residents and staff of partner organizations. Please let him know if you would like to talk about how he can provide spiritual care to you, your staff, or the members of your organization. Pastor Best will be in the Medical Outreach Clinic waiting area from 1:00-2:00 pm every Wednesday to chat.

Brethren Community Ministries: On August 24th, GTSFJ joined other local organizations and Allison Hill neighbors at the BCMPeace Block Party. Clay and Mike represented us by handing out treats and telling neighbors about our services. The block party offered music, games (notice our beloved corn hole game behind the table!), arts and crafts, and food to help neighbors enjoy the end of summer and get ready for the start of school.



TRINITY CHURCH OF GOD
HEEDING GOD'S CALL TO END GUN VIOLENCE

END GUN VIOLENCE DAY

HONOR THOSE LOST TO GUN MURDER AND DEMAND STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE GUN LAWS AND REGULATIONS

TRINITY CHURCH OF GOD
244 HARRIS STREET, HARRISBURG, PA 17102

SUNDAY
OCTOBER 6TH
3 PM

HEEDING GOD'S CALL TO END GUN VIOLENCE & TRINITY CHURCH OF GOD

QUESTIONS?
HARRISBURG CHAPTER CHAIR:
PASTOR ERIC JACKSON EJACKS1957@GMAIL.COM
PHONE: 717/743-0711 OR 717/982-1050
LEARN MORE: HEEDINGGODSCALL.ORG

Heeding God's Call to Prevent Gun Violence: We have lost 15 people to gun violence in the Harrisburg area...so far this year. Please come on October 6, not just to grieve and hope, but also to take action by signing letters to legislators requesting their support for specific gun safety legislation.

TELL US HOW TO USE YOUR DONATION!

If one of our activities especially touches your heart, you can designate how we use your donation:

- Sponsor an ID, driver's license or birth certificate. Donate \$42.50 for an ID or license or \$20 for a birth certificate. (Indicate "vital documents" on your check or with your donation.)
- Sponsor one Common Ground Coffee breakfast for \$100 **OR** bring us enough pastries, fruits, juice and paper plates to feed 160 individuals **OR** *(this is the most fun of all!)* bring enough food and paper plates to feed at least 160 individuals and bring your own crew to do the serving. Contact Art at artwilliams7@gmail.com to arrange a Saturday of your choice.
- Sponsor an English textbook for \$8. (Indicate "ESL" on your check or with your donation.)
- Help sponsor a toiletries distribution. (Indicate "toiletries" on your check or with your donation.) You can also drop toiletries off at the community center any Saturday morning or leave them anytime on the porch at 4384 North 6th Street in Harrisburg.

Checks for donations to GTSFJ can be mailed to:

Austin Cheers, CPA,
Miller Dixon Drake, PC,
701 N 2nd Street
Harrisburg, PA 17102



You may also use Paypal with the address gtsfjinfohbg@gmail.com
https://paypal.me/GTSFJ?country.x=US&locale.x=en_US

or venmo us @GTSFJ or donate via the GTSFJ website: gatherthespiritforjustice.org

You can also help by volunteering: VOLUNTEER during COMMON GROUND COFFEE: Open every Saturday morning, 9 to 11 am for coffee and conversation! Volunteers prepare and serve snacks, welcome and interact with guests, and assist with setup and/or cleanup. To volunteer, contact Art Williams at artwilliams7@gmail.com or drop by any Saturday morning. This link will take you to our volunteer signup page: <https://ttsu.me/zu5ejm> Or contact Glen at gdunbar47@gmail.com to volunteer in our English as a Second Language classes.

Contact Information

Patricia Allen	patschano@mhuinc.com	Art Williams	artwilliams7@gmail.com
Clay Lambert	clay.jh.lambert@gmail.com	Brian DeBease	brian.debease@scouting.org
Ann Van Dyke	avandyke3@outlook.com	Linda DeBease	ldebease@icloud.com
Glen Dunbar	gdunbar47@gmail.com	GTSFJ office	717-512-9449

Mailing address for checks: Austin Cheers, CPA, Miller Dixon Drake, PC, 701 N 2nd Street,
Harrisburg, PA 17102

**Our Mission: Gather the Spirit for Justice seeks to strengthen community in
Allison Hill, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**