



219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104  
(717) 234-0415

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

Happy Spring Everyone! As the days get warmer, I'm **SO GRATEFUL** to our hosts at First Church of the Brethren for the use of their nicely air-conditioned building! It's great that our number of volunteers each week continues to trend upward. But our friend, Ann, pointed out yesterday that everyone is still very busy! That's because we are intentionally packing **A LOT** of activity into Saturday mornings at Gather the Spirit. One of the more recent additions is our Red Cross team that conducts blood pressure screenings on the first Saturday of each month. Tom and his team have joined us enough times now that they are getting to know and remember folks. This is great! Since, of course, it's all about building community and making new friends. :). We are very committed to partnering with other groups who can help folks on the Hill. So, keep a look out for more new friends to join us for breakfast!



## **Note from Ben Perez, Program Director**



Gather the Spirit's Saturday breakfast and Sunday shelter programs currently bring together more than 300 neighbors and volunteers every week, for food, conversation, and—when needed—assistance with overcoming barriers to their ability to carve out a better life here in Dauphin County.

We write multiple checks to PENNDOT every Saturday because, when one is starting from nothing, one can't get the money for the ID without a job, and can't get a job without ID.

We teach English to non-native speakers in space that we rent from First Church of the Brethren—space that is undeniably private property, and which is subject to full 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment protection. By improving their English skills, our guests are able to apply for—and now in some instances keep—their jobs. (A recent executive order implemented a new English-proficiency requirement for all CDL (Commercial Driver License) holders. This covers not only bus drivers and truckers, but taxi and limousine drivers as well.

We refer some of our most vulnerable unhoused guests for immediate short-term housing assistance funded by third-party donors—ranging from two or three days to two to three weeks if we are able to utilize the YMCA or YWCA in lieu of pricier options. When we successfully get someone off the street this way, we immediately deliver a box of shelf stable and microwaveable food to each person—how horrible to finally get to rest in privacy, but to have no food in the room! We provide an entire milk-crate size box of food, plus utensils, salt and pepper, and at least one reusable microwavable container per person.

We continue to keep an ear to the ground as an organization, as our (quite literal) round tables and willingness to listen helps us to quickly identify emerging challenges to our most vulnerable neighbors, and then to take what steps we can to mitigate them.



## New Board Members



**Kim Gilchrist Jarrett** is a lifelong resident of Harrisburg, PA. She attended the Harrisburg and Central Dauphin School Districts, then graduated from HACC and Penn State University. As an RN, Kim worked full-time for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. She primarily worked for the Harrisburg State Hospital and the PA Department of Health. Kim retired in 2016, kept her license active, and has worked many part-time positions since.

Kim has served as a Substitute School Nurse, Summer Camp Nurse and STD Consultant for the Commonwealth. She also spent 2 years giving Covid vaccines, including to the homeless and under-served community.

Kim has volunteered for various agencies such as Gardenia, Catalyst Cancer Education, PSU Office for Cancer Health Equity, and the Gather the Spirit breakfast on both Market Street and now at First Church of the Brethren on Hummel Street. Kim told us that, when she returned to the Gather the Spirit breakfast, “I immediately felt right at home. I began bringing in family, friends and Sorority Sisters to volunteer. Everyone loves the program. I am so honored to be a part of the Board. I will work hard to help in creating an even greater program.”

**Sol B. Vázquez-Otero**, a native of Bayamón, Puerto Rico, spent more than 50 years as a social justice activist, first as a university/law student and then as a community activist. Sol is an educator, photographer and lawyer. She is currently retired. Sol worked at Disability Rights Network, Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Association and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.



**Kristal Turner-Childs:** Kristal is currently the Director Public Safety at Harrisburg Area Community College. She is a seasoned law enforcement and public safety professional with over 25 years of experience with the Pennsylvania State Police, where her various positions included Director of the Bureau of Forensic Services and Public Information Officer. She rose to the position of Deputy Commissioner with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Kristal earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice, a Masters in Organizational Leadership and a Doctorate of Humane Letters. Her certifications include FBI National Academy Graduate, Northwestern School of Police Staff and Command Graduate, IS 700 National Incident Management System, and Emergency Operations Planning.

## Stories of our Neighbors

**Jenny:** Over the winter, volunteers became aware of the living situation of a beloved senior neighborhood lady, Jenny (pseudonym). The person with whom she shared a very small apartment often locked her out, even overnight, and sometimes denied her access to the bathroom. That person was also able to drain Jenny's bank account. At the same time that we became aware of how bad Jenny's situation was, we also became aware of a local safe house for women run by the sister of a neighborhood volunteer. We learned that the safe house had one open bedroom because a resident had moved out that day. There was a lot of serendipity going on. A neighborhood volunteer and a member of the Board went with Jenny, very quickly packed up all her belongings and immediately moved her into the welcoming safe house where her furnished room, meals, toiletries and laundry would all be provided for less than what she was paying to live in her previous miserable circumstances. Jenny is finally being treated with the respect she deserves.

And here's the bigger picture: 1) Allison Hill needs so many more residences like that safe house. 2) We suspect that if we had in-depth conversations with just about anyone who comes into the center, we would learn that they too are dealing with miserable situations. 3) The safe house is now a new neighborhood partner organization, and through them we will receive five laundromat gift cards every week! 4) More individuals and organizations are stepping forward every month to help provide meals, toiletries, funds for IDs, support for our ESL classes, and to simply be there providing a safe and welcoming place. – Ann Van Dyke

**Augustin:** Augustin (pseudonym) is a mature gentleman who has come to class irregularly since last June. It is especially difficult to teach Haitians who speak only Creole, and it was always a struggle to teach Augustin. I tried to talk to Augustin about learning the vocabulary using our class app, but he said he didn't have any extra time during the week. In addition to teaching English, we know that providing support and community is vital for all of us. So, we teachers have done our best to help Augustin when he attends. Recently he lost his job and communicated that to his teacher, saying that he was very sad. The teacher worked individually with Augustin that day and said that he noticed some areas where Augustin understood better than ever before.



Then last Saturday, Augustin arrived half an hour early. I took this opportunity to talk with him, and he indicated he still didn't have a job. I said: "Ooh, well that means that you have plenty of time to learn English now." He smiled. I asked him if he was studying using our class phone app with audio/video resources. He said yes. I had him pull up the app and listen to one of the vocabulary videos, which feature pictures or words, and the student is to repeat what the narrator says. He repeated what the narrator said and did that well. He then pulled up the next video and started saying the words before the narrator said them. I was so ecstatic. He felt good to get my sincere congratulations on his efforts.

Also last Saturday, we had fewer teachers than normal and a good number of students, so, we had to have most of the teachers work with 4 students. I had 4 students, and Augustin was one of them. Usually under those conditions, Augustin remains silent. He was responsive, however, and when there were times another student struggled to respond correctly, Augustin knew the answer and spoke up. It was awesome! – Kevin Geist

## Grants and Gifts

***Derry Presbyterian Church:*** Art and Pat were invited by volunteers Karen and Mike Leader to visit Derry Presbyterian Church, which has supported us in the past with volunteer hours and financial gifts. During this visit, we shared updates about Gather the Spirit's expanding activities. The church kindly gifted Gather the Spirit with \$4,000 for program support.

***The Kiwanis Club of Harrisburg:*** Gather the Spirit board member Glen, who is also a member of the Kiwanis Club of Harrisburg, told us of wonderful work the group does to support children's needs and encouraged us to apply for a grant. In April, Kiwanis awarded us \$1,100 to purchase and distribute diapers, baby wipes, shampoo, children's hats and gloves, and other toiletries for the young people in our Allison Hill neighborhood. Kiwanis Club of Harrisburg President Jean King and David Cordier visited us to present the check and take part in our Saturday morning activities.



***Market Square Presbyterian Church:*** Along with recent increases in Saturday attendance, requests for financial help obtaining IDs, licenses and birth certificates have also increased. Additionally, partner agencies and faith-based groups regularly refer individuals to us for help with obtaining these documents. Most recently, Gather the Spirit partnered with Market Square Presbyterian Church, a local church that is very active in serving the low-income and unhoused population. The church had been paying for IDs for some of its visitors and referring others to Gather the Spirit; however, church staff felt it would be more efficient to refer all their requests for IDs to Gather the Spirit. To cover the expected increased load, the church contributed \$3,500 to the Gather the Spirit ID budget for 2025. This generous support will allow nearly 90 individuals to obtain vital documents that allow them to drive, apply for employment, access services, apply for housing, cash a check, receive medical care, etc.

***Health Harrisburg Line Dancers and FEMPOWER Shift Walkers:*** Many thanks to new Board member Kristal Turner-Childs for encouraging Health Harrisburg Line Dancers and FEMPOWER Shift Walkers to donate many boxes and bags full of much needed and appreciated toiletries. And many thanks to these two young men who provided the muscles to carry it all in.





As part of its outreach to enhance the health and well-being of our communities, *Capital Blue Cross* presented Gather the Spirit \$500 to support of our English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Our ESL instructors donate their time and expertise to help their dedicated students improve their language skills. This donation will be used to purchase textbooks, reference books and supplies to further their efforts.

**LinkedIn:** @Capital Blue Cross <https://www.linkedin.com/company/capital-blue-cross>  
**Facebook:** @CapitalBlueCross <https://www.facebook.com/Capbluecross>  
**Instagram:** @CapBlueCross <https://www.instagram.com/capbluecross/>  
**Twitter:** @CapBlueCross <https://twitter.com/capbluecross>

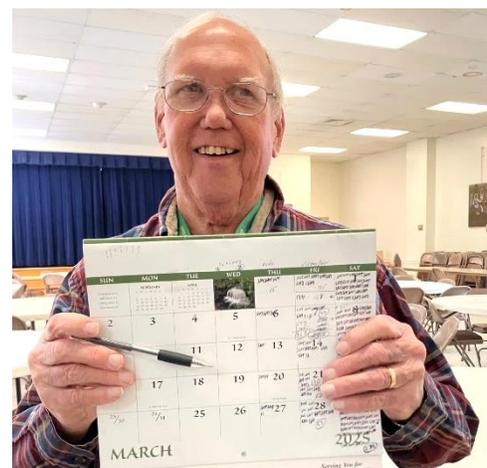
## Leadership Harrisburg Volunteer Event

Gather the Spirit volunteers staffed a table at the 5th annual Leadership Harrisburg Volunteer event. We met a lot of great organizations and individuals who are interested in building up the Harrisburg community. So many inspiring stories about ways to help advance our community!



## Gather the Spirit Statistics

You can see that Guy uses his own “high tech” system (i.e., hash marks on a calendar) to keep a count of how many visitors and volunteers we have each week. We use these numbers to help us estimate, for example, how much food and supplies to purchase, and how many toiletries we will need. Please join us on Saturdays so that we can include you in our counts.



Date	3/1/25	3/8/25	3/15/25	3/22/25	3/29/25	4/5/25	4/12/25	4/18/25	4/25/25	5/2/25	5/9/25
<b>Guests</b>	149	164	125	192	239	175	176	180	154	172	185
<b>Volunteers</b>	35	29	37	25	55	31	39	44	50	42	33

## English as a Second Language (ESL)

ESL for French Speakers – Annual Report 5/2024-5/2025 Submitted by Kevin Geist

Because of awareness raised in the community about the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg's (UCH) aid to a Haitian family and my sponsorship of a young Haitian man, Andy Back and I were invited to help teach English to Haitian and African immigrants, who were originally from French-speaking nations, in Allison Hill with Gather the Spirit.

**Summer** - During our first visit in May 2024, there were only 5 students. However, over the following weeks the number of students kept increasing. I reached out to members of my church, and many started to assist. From May to August, we had 2-4 teachers helping each week. We ended the summer courses with a tour of Saint Patrick's Cathedral and the Capitol.



**Fall** – When we restarted the classes in September, attendance was between 25 and 39 students. During this period, we switched church facilities, moving to First Church of the Brethren. We started with just one classroom that could comfortably accommodate 16-18 students, about half of the class. We also used the dining area to teach with a simplified process that focused on basic vocabulary so that it was easy for students to join into a group in that chaotic environment. We divided the class into 2 sections with half the students in the dining area and half in the classroom. We would switch groups after 45 minutes. From September through Mid-December, we struggled with logistics of settling into newly prepared classrooms in the facility and timing and resource conflicts with other initiatives. Our weekly volunteer base grew to 13 during this time.

**2025** – In January, with logistics largely settled, we began using an updated curriculum that added free audio/video resources to accompany a new version of a local author's ESL book series. We now had comprehensive resources and a good number of native speaker volunteers to give almost individualized attention to small student groups, each at their ability level. In February, I invited the students to our church to hear a special multi-lingual service about our relationship with a family in Haiti and the testimony of the eldest son. Some students participated in the service by allowing their joy or concern to be read aloud. In March, we took a field trip to the State Museum, which students enjoyed immensely. We continue to build precious relationships with our ESL students and friends.



# Toiletries

## Toiletry Needs Change with the Seasons!

The needs of our low-income and homeless community are changing with the season and now include **ponchos, light rain jackets, umbrellas, and basically, any rain gear.** We are able to give out toiletries, cleaning supplies and seasonal items to about 120+ people in the few hours the "Toiletry Closet" is open on Saturdays.

We could really use **shampoo, dish soap, bars of soap, body wash, deodorant, hand sanitizers and cleaning supplies.** What we DO NOT currently need are tampons, adult diapers, or women's sanitary items. We also have plenty of bags, both paper and plastic. Also high on our need list is large tubes of **toothpaste;** we have plenty of toothbrushes for adults but not toothpaste to pair them with. Finally, for children we particularly need **children's shampoo, wash, and toothbrushes.** – Gail Ismart gismart@mac.com



*A few members of our toiletries service team*



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## The Free Store

Restocking and organizing the Free Store is one of the ways GTS partners with our host congregation, First Church of the Brethren. There is a small group that sorts donations and restocks the Store every Wednesday afternoon from 1–3 pm, and we'd love to have you join that group whenever possible! Please do keep us in mind should you have housewares, toys, clothing or shoes to give away. Contact either Patricia Allen at 717-649-1386 or Ann Van Dyke at 717-982-1050.



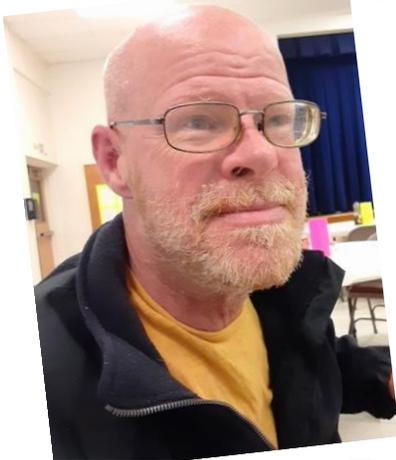
# Meet Some of our Neighbors and Volunteers



# More Neighbors and Volunteers



**And More....** (It's been a busy month!)



## Sharing News from Our Friends



Upcoming Event - *Candles on the Water* to remember the victims of bombing in Hiroshima & Nagasaki - Sunday, August 10 at 6:30 pm. Shane Claiborne will be speaking. More info later!

We are happy to announce an interesting series from our friends and volunteers at the *Catholic Workers House* on Market Street in Harrisburg. Please share and plan to attend.



**St. Martin de Porres**  
CATHOLIC WORKER  
Harrisburg, PA

ST. MARTIN DE PORRES CATHOLIC WORKER'S  
MAY SPIRITUALITY SPEAKER SERIES

 "Dorothy Day: Radical Devotion" by Jeff Kongen <small>Author, former coordinator of Dorothy Day's local cause for canonization</small>	 "Prayer and Work: the Benedictine Spirituality of Dorothy Day" by Dr. Carmina Chapp <small>St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Dorothy Day Catholic Worker Farm</small>	 "The Black Catholics Who Built the American Church" by Nate Tinner-Williams <small>co-founder, Black Catholic Messenger</small>	 "Dorothy Day and the Works of Mercy in the Jubilee Year" by Martha Hennessy <small>Maryhouse Catholic Worker, genealogist, and granddaughter of Dorothy Day</small>
SATURDAY MAY 3, 9:30 AM	SUNDAY MAY 11, 3:30 PM	SUNDAY MAY 18, 3:30 PM	SATURDAY MAY 24, 9:30 AM

All talks held at St. Francis of Assisi Church, 1439 Market Street in the basement of the church

CONTACT [HARRISBURG@CWMAIL.COM](mailto:HARRISBURG@CWMAIL.COM) OR SEE [STMARTINDEPORRES.CWM.ORG](http://STMARTINDEPORRES.CWM.ORG) FOR MORE INFORMATION



One of our partner organizations is the interfaith gun violence prevention organization called Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence. ([www.heedinggodscall.org](http://www.heedinggodscall.org)). The Harrisburg Chapter has been active since 2009. The Memorial to the Lost will be in the yard of Beth El Temple, 2637 North Front St., Harrisburg from May 12 - 27. The Memorial contains about 50 shirts which bear the names of people who have lost their lives to gun violence in the Harrisburg area.

Please notify Ann Van Dyke at [avandyke3@outlook.com](mailto:avandyke3@outlook.com) if you know of a congregation of any faith that would like to host the Memorial in the yard of their place of worship or if you want to learn more about the Chapter's work. The ultimate goal of Heeding is legislative change that would decrease the number of illegal handguns.

**Christ Lutheran Church**, 124 South 13th Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104 Phone (717) 236-8382

- Medical Clinic: Free, nurse-run, walk-in clinic that provides simple lab tests, basic physical assessments, and health ed. Mon-Fri 10 am-2:30 pm. No appointment 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.
- Fit on the Hill: Exercise class every Saturday at the church begins at 11 am. All ability levels are welcome.
- 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 members of your organization. Pastor Best will be in the Medical Clinic waiting area from 1:00-2:00 pm every Wednesday to chat.

# 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 \$150 **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](mailto:artwilliams7@gmail.com) to arrange a Saturday of your choice.
- Sponsor an English textbook for \$10. (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 6<sup>th</sup> Street in Harrisburg.



Checks for donations to Gather the Spirit 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](mailto:gtsfjinfohbg@gmail.com)

[https://paypal.me/Gather the Spirit?country.x=US&locale.x=en\\_US](https://paypal.me/Gather%20the%20Spirit?country.x=US&locale.x=en_US)

venmo us @Gather the Spirit or donate via our website: [gatherthespiritforjustice.org](http://gatherthespiritforjustice.org)



**You can also help by volunteering:** VOLUNTEER 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 at [artwilliams7@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:gdunbar47@gmail.com) to volunteer in our English as a Second Language classes.

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## Contact Information

Located in First Church of the Brethren, 219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104

<https://gatherthespiritforjustice.org>

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Kristal Turner-Childs

Sol Vazquez-Otero

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**OUR MISSION: Gather the Spirit for Justice seeks to strengthen community in Allison Hill, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.**