

Beyond the Red Doors

Neighbor to Neighbor

Margaret Tjimos Goldberg, Bobbi Eggers and Sue Bodson

Throughout its history, Neighbor to Neighbor, a secular, independent, non-profit organization located on the campus of Christ Episcopal Church, Greenwich, has been keenly focused on an often unnoticed and underserved portion of the community. Neighbor to Neighbor began in 1975 in the basement of Christ Episcopal Church when a group of compassionate people started collecting gently used clothing, linens, towels and household items and distributing them to those in need. Food was also provided on an emergency basis.

In 1984, responding to the increasing cost of living in town, the Greenwich Department of Social Services asked Neighbor to Neighbor to initiate a weekly food distribution program for Greenwich families in need of significant assistance. That led to a new program where volunteers packed bags with food items for three meals for three days for each member of the families served.

Evolving to meet client needs, Neighbor to Neighbor opened a "Client Choice" Food Pantry in September 2005, one of only a few operating in the state of Connecticut, and a model for food pantries in neighboring towns. Clients now have the opportunity to choose their nutritious food with the aid of a shopping list that provides quantity guidelines, based on the number of people in their families.

Hunger is easy to miss

Hunger is a silent epidemic. Every community is home to people who struggle with hunger, in different ways, with various solutions. According to Feeding America, 1 in 9 people or 37 million people face hunger in the United States today, including more than 11 million children and nearly 5.4 million seniors.

Outsiders may think Greenwich is an affluent town, a bedroom community of Wall Street. But in fact, it is a diverse, international blend of people from all economic levels. Hunger and food insecurity impacts people throughout town. Historically, Greenwich residents have been, and continue to be, generous and philanthropic. They are responsive to the needs of others, but with busy schedules and bustling families, helping residents understand those needs can be challenging. In a community like Greenwich, the existence of wealth translates into a higher cost of living, making it that much harder for some people to meet basic needs like shelter and food.

As of October 1, 2019, 19.8% of Greenwich Public School students qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch benefits (or 1,794 students). Under Connecticut State regulations, students qualify for these benefits if family income is below federally specified levels, which vary, according to the number of children in the family. Those classified as ALICE (asset-limited, income-constrained employed people) have jobs, but still face significant challenges, such as paying for necessities like food, shelter, transportation and health care, while still above eligibility guidelines for many state subsidies. Close to 9,000 residents are in need and qualify for Town Services. Some families are forced to choose between food and medical care. Providing proper nutrition is important for emotional and physical health and can have a ripple effect in schools and in our town.

Services expand in response to need

Today, Neighbor to Neighbor offers three distinct food programs as well as a clothing program. The primary program provides eligible Greenwich residents with a free weekly supplement of food for three days for each family member. Also, a one-time emergency food supply is available to residents of neighboring towns. The third food program is the weekly Summer Supplement, available to eligible Greenwich students to help bridge the gap during the summer months when school-supplied free or reduced-price meals are not available. Clothing, linens and small household items are available by appointment in the Clothing Room to eligible residents.

This year, groceries distributed through Neighbor to Neighbor enabled clients to prepare 390,000 meals, including over 500 turkeys with all the trimmings at Thanksgiving. Last summer, the program provided breakfast and lunch to students who normally receive free or reduced lunch benefits at school and distributed more than 500 backpacks filled with school supplies in August. This past holiday season, Neighbor to Neighbor distributed nearly 1,000 new toys to families they serve.

From Christ Church's basement to a center to serve the community

Celebrating new beginnings, Neighbor to Neighbor is building a new, ADA-compliant, energy efficient building, leased on the Christ Church Greenwich property, anticipating completion this year. "We are extremely grateful to Christ Church for the support in their building for so many years," said Pam Kelly, Board Member and Co-Chair of the Building Committee. The new 6,300 square foot building will be a sunny, home-like building with easy access for both donors and clients. Because the building is no longer in the basement of the church, it is fresh, updated, and easier for donors and clients to access. "The friendly, welcoming architecture of the new Neighbor to Neighbor building has been designed to be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood," Pam said. "We want to treat everyone with the utmost respect. That includes our neighbors, the environment, the church and our clients."

*Executive Director of Neighbor to Neighbor since December, 2019, **Margaret Tjimos Goldberg**, is an experienced administrator in the nonprofit sector. **Bobbi Eggers** is a public relations professional who has worked with several non-profits. **Sue Bodson**, president and founder of Emboss LLC, specializes in compatible, strategic partnerships between non-profits and businesses for the greater good of both.*

Resources:

- [Feeding the Community](#) by Renee McKenzie, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 6, 2017
- [Hunger Games](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 23, 2013
- [Feed the Poor or Fix the Roof?](#) by Dan Austin, Vestry Papers, July 2007
- [The Hunger Games](#) by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 20, 2012

Sacred Stories and Listening

Alli Gannett, Karin Hamilton and Jane Hale

Editor's Note: This Coffee Hour at The Commons podcast is a conversation with the Reverend Jane Hale, missional priest-in-charge at Trinity Church in Brooklyn and a tri-town missional curate. Hale shares her experience of going out into her neighboring towns and practicing "sacred listening," which she says has helped her "encounter the people and the stories that God needs me to encounter." Find the complete podcast [here](#) and a transcript [here](#). Below is an introduction to the Coffee Hours at The Commons podcast.

Faith meets daily life over a cup of coffee and casual conversations at [Coffee Hour at The Commons](#), a podcast produced by the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Much like the experience of coffee hour at a parish hall, most Coffee Hour at the Commons podcasts are conversational, with one or more guests covering a broad range of topics. Their stories show how the Holy Spirit moves through the lives and work of everyday people. Guests have included bishops and beekeepers, philanthropists and pilgrims, surfers and social media specialists, actors, archivists, and architects.

In its 6th season, with over 70 episodes, the podcast is the brainchild of Karin Hamilton, the diocese's former Canon for Communications and Media. Alli Gannett, Karin's partner in crime at the podcast's inception, was the sole host after Karin retired in June 2019. Jasree Peralta joined her as co-host in Season 6.

Resources:

- [Sacred Stories and Listening podcast full transcript](#)
- [The Evangelistic Opportunity of Being a Regular](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 11, 2019
- [Walking Wet](#) by Lisa Kimball, Vestry Papers, March 2019
- [Formation Moves into the Neighborhood](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2019

We are SMM

Karen Peña

Sitting atop a small hill in a mostly flat town is a place that welcomes followers of all beliefs through its red doors. St. Mary Magdalene (SMM) in Manor, Texas, is a multicultural, multigenerational community that is being transformed by God's generosity. The majority of those who attend our services and have become part of the SMM community, have either never attended church or stopped attending a long time ago.

A relatively young community, SMM began in 2010. We worshipped in a number of places in Manor until 2014 when we moved into our new "home on the hill." After settling in and figuring out the logistics for managing our worship and parish life, we felt we were in an appropriate place to begin looking for ways we could help address needs and shortages outside our walls.

Opening our doors to serve the community beyond

After conducting surveys in the city of Manor and attending neighborhood group meetings, SMM identified a need for affordable places where local nonprofit organizations could meet. The church has traditionally been a place of gathering, and SMM carried on that practice, opening its facilities to outside organizations that include We Are Blood, Toastmasters, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Foster Community of Central Texas, Organic Food Gardening classes and the Prom Dress Boutique, where teen girls pick out donated formal dresses, shoes and accessories for their school proms. These non-profit groups and others were welcome to use the church free of charge.

The Manor Community Wellness Alliance, a collective effort made up of area residents, church leaders, school district staff, social workers, volunteers and medical professionals who saw the need for a free clinic for the uninsured and underinsured met at the church for two years and held its "Manor Free Clinic" rehearsal there. Now active in the area, Manor Free Clinics are operated on a volunteer basis and offer services free of charge to anyone who does not have health insurance.

Currently, the Welcome Center for Immigrants is hosting English language courses at SMM, as well as providing low-cost immigration legal services and citizenship workshops. It aligns with the value SMM places on welcome, and we're enthusiastic about offering a safe space for these activities. We also arranged to host the El Salvador Mobile Consulate for the first time. Previously accessible only in Houston and Dallas, the Consulate provides services that include passports, free legal help, marriage licenses and identification cards.

Member-led projects build relationships and confidence

Our members reflect an abundance of interests, and with our assistance and encouragement they have been able to realize some of them. Member-led projects and the good will they generate were catalysts for expanding SMM's local reach. Last year, we started a Men's and Women's Ministry, a book club and multiple campaigns that included Socks of Love and the Sewing Workshop.

Socks of Love, a well-known campaign, collects white tube socks, fills them with toiletries, water and snacks and distributes them to the homeless. The project was initiated by Yasmin Aguilar, along with the Women's Ministry. With Christmas a few months out, they took advantage of the season's spirit of generosity to bring this campaign together.

While a young congregation brings energy and enthusiasm, it can also bring hesitation and confusion. Socks of Love was our first opportunity to begin a project ourselves, to explore our networking skills, find sponsorship and creative ways to ask for community contributions. Every action in the project was a celebration. It took roughly a month-and-a-half to gather the necessities, coordinate several “sock filling” assembly lines and prepare to distribute to local and neighboring areas. We are grateful and proud of the Women’s Ministry for sharing this vision and for their courage in using their abilities to bring our congregation and neighbors together.

The Sewing Workshop came about through a need for clothing protectors for the residents at our local nursing home. Edna Fournier, an SMM member, had sewn a few of these and offered to make a few more. When we learned that the nursing home had more than 70 residents, another community project was born. Friends, family, neighbors and SMM members donated a large amount of cotton and flannel material with lively prints. It was fascinating to see how many seamstresses we had in our congregation and surprising to learn that people outside of our church were interested in putting their hands and sewing machines into this work as well.

After hosting an enjoyable evening of tracing, cutting, sewing and ironing, we had 83 clothing protectors, and are looking forward to the next sewing workshop. We are grateful for members like Mark Longley, who discovered this need through an associate and friend; Edna Fournier, who has directed several campaigns with her infinite skills and attentive eye for quality-control; and Amy Rodriguez and Elizabeth Diaz, passionate needle workers, who spent late nights sewing the majority of the clothing protectors.

Through these projects, I learned that growth happens within you when you are in a community with people who have experienced more life than you. Sharing the drawing board with this level of diversity and learning about one another’s lives has helped us value one another. SMM’s culture of inclusivity and unfailing support has come from the grace and patience of our pastor, the Rev. Alex Montes-Vela. His introspective nature gives him the ability to model by example, through listening effectively and recognizing when adjustments or a reset are necessary.

In the short time that I’ve been a member of St. Mary Magdalene, I have seen a burst in curiosity and profound devotion in our parish for the needs of the Manor community. With the momentum that built this past year, I’m eager to see what relationships will develop this year and how we can be a link to the next project.

***Karen Peña** is 28, bilingual, a first generation Mexican-American and a first-time Christian. She is senior warden at St. Mary Magdalene in Manor, Texas and manages the church’s weekly e-newsletter and social media communications.*

Resources:

- [Extending Ministry Footprint through Building Use](#), an ECF webinar presented by Paul Stephens on December 11, 2019
- [Rummage Ministry](#), by Lu Stanton León, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- [Transportation Ministry](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 1, 2017
- [Episcopal Asset Mapv](#), an ECF webinar presented by Katie Mears on November 3, 2015

Be A Blessing for Young Families

Timothy Carr

*Tell the sweet story of Christ and His love,
Tell of His power to forgive;
Others will trust Him if only you prove
True, every moment you live.*

*Make me a blessing, O Savior I pray,
Make me a blessing to someone today.*

For diverse reasons, church attendance has declined over the last two generations. This is not surprising news. But there is also good news if we pay attention to the communities that surround us – and particularly, the people raising children in those communities. There is a natural curiosity, an innate yearning for spirituality and community at work in our culture today and little residual institutional bias. Today's young parents have definite ideas about the cultural context they long to create for their children. I propose that the church has an important role to play in that context, a role that, even today, has broad popular appeal in our country.

I offer the suggestions that follow for you to consider in your unique situation. They are based on a few common traits in today's churches – limited funds, underutilized space, older, faithful folks and lots of grace and love to give.

Preparation

When you decide to connect with families beyond the doors of your church, there are some steps to take to ensure that you are visible and set up to welcome them.

- Review and refine your Google rating and comments for your church. This is also a good time to update your web presence, so that it reflects your commitment to supporting families with children.
- Choose a room for young person activities and make sure it is inviting and comfortable.
- Solicit the help of a coordinator to welcome and assist in organizing activities for young people.

Community involvement

Here are just a few ways that you can look beyond your church's doors to share your space and your interest in supporting families and activities in your community.

- **PTA Affiliation** – Introduce yourself to the leadership of your closest elementary school and its PTA. Offer to assist with activities and fundraising.
- **Young Moms Support Group** – Being a mom today is challenging. Offer meeting space for a self-maintaining mothers support group at your church.

- **Young Parents Meet Up** – The challenges parents face today are hard on relationships. Demands are many and varied. Ask long-term relationship partners within your congregation to offer a discussion group.
- **Adopt a Grandparent** – The transient lifestyle of our culture today creates loneliness for both seniors and families. Consider setting up “support” families where love develops and the benefits are many.
- **Team Sponsorship** – Meet with the leaders of the girls’ and boys’ softball teams and see if your church could sponsor a team.
- **Scout Troop Sponsorship** – Call your local Scout headquarters and offer space and other support for their program at your church.
- **Children’s Music Group** – See if there’s a community music group for children that would be grateful for rehearsal or meeting space in your facility.
- **After School Homework Group** – Work closely with your local elementary school to see about setting up a homework session after school one afternoon a week. There may be retirees in your congregation who would enjoy giving their time to helping students.

Church Programs and Liturgy

You may see some of those who bring their children to your building for Scouts or music lessons or attend the mom’s group or parents meet up on Sundays. Here are some way to make parents and young people welcome in the life of your congregation.

- **Acolyte Service and Children’s Choirs** – The desire to serve seems natural and innate. Families become more involved with the church when their children have a role to play in Sunday services.
- **Children’s Bible Study** – Learning is important in this context, as many young parents today have had little or no experience of spirituality and religion growing up.
- **Family Service** – Introduce a 30-minute service for families that includes song, story and communion. In my experience, for that service the children’s ages range from 2 to 6 years. Parents and children learn together and love the informal interaction.
- **Celebration of Communion** – An annual celebration, similar to First Communion, of the sacrament of the eucharist. Children attend classes to prepare. Families are asked to participate with snack and activities.

These efforts – Preparation, Community Involvement, Church Programs and Liturgy – should assist you in connecting and supporting families with children in your community. I advise you to start slowly with something that appeals to your faith community and fits your unique situation.

There is tremendous grace at work when we intentionally address the needs of those in our communities. You and your flock can be a blessing to families who need community, empathy and love. The needs and the response of this new constituency can fire up your congregation and kindle an energy that will make your church a blessing in your community.

*The Reverend **Timothy P. Carr** is rector at All Souls Episcopal Church, Miami Beach, Florida. Prior to becoming All Souls rector in 2019, he served at St. John’s Church in Boonton, NJ. Carr is married to*

Dr. Edwin A. Acevedo who is a Superintendent of Schools. They have an adopted, grown son, Mario. Their dogs, Barney, a cocker spaniel and Teddy, a rescue terrier, both enjoy the role of parochial canines.

Resources:

- [Are You Ready for People to Google Your Church?](#), by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 16, 2018
- [Community Engagement: A Little Church that Could](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 10, 2014
- [Jesus was Right There, in the Bounce House](#) by Bob Leopold, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 3, 2013
- [Cathedral in the Night](#) by Christopher Carlisle, Vestry Papers, November 2013

Somos SMM

Karen Peña

Situado en la cima de una colina en una localidad prácticamente llana hay un lugar en el que sus puertas rojas están abiertas para toda la gente, independientemente de sus creencias. Santa María Magdalena en Manor, Texas, es una comunidad multicultural y multigeneracional que está siendo transformada por la generosidad de Dios. La mayoría de las personas que asisten a nuestros servicios religiosos y han pasado a ser parte de la comunidad SMM, ya sea nunca asistieron a una iglesia o dejaron de asistir hace mucho tiempo.

Una comunidad relativamente joven, SMM comenzó en 2010. Rendíamos culto en un número de lugares en Manor hasta 2014, cuando nos mudamos a nuestro nuevo “hogar en la colina”. Después de instalarnos y determinar la logística para manejar nuestro culto y nuestra vida parroquial, sentimos que estábamos en un momento apropiado para empezar a buscar maneras de ayudar a dirigirnos a nuestras necesidades y a las escaseces más allá de nuestros muros.

Abrir nuestras puertas para servir a la comunidad más allá

Después de haber realizado encuestas en la ciudad de Manor y de haber asistido a reuniones de grupos de la vecindad, SMM identificó la necesidad de contar con lugares asequibles en las que organizaciones locales sin ánimo de lucro se pudieran reunir. Tradicionalmente la iglesia había sido un punto de reunión y SMM, continuando esa práctica, abrió sus instalaciones a organizaciones externas, entre ellas We Are Blood, Toastmasters, Alcohólicos Anónimos, Foster Community of Central Texas, clases de cultivos orgánicos y Prom Dress Boutique, en la que niñas adolescentes pueden escoger vestidos, zapatos y accesorios de gala para los bailes de fin de curso de sus escuelas. Estos grupos sin ánimo de lucro y otros podían reunirse sin cargo en las instalaciones de la iglesia.

La Manor Community Wellness Alliance (Alianza para el Bienestar de la Comunidad de Manor), un esfuerzo colectivo de residentes de la zona, líderes de la iglesia, personal del distrito escolar, asistentes sociales, voluntarios y profesionales médicos que vieron la necesidad de contar con una clínica gratuita para los no asegurados y los subasegurados, se reunieron en la iglesia por dos años y realizaron allí su ensayo de “Clínica Gratuita de Manor”. Las clínicas gratuitas de Manor, ahora activas en la zona, funcionan con personal voluntario y ofrecen servicios gratuitos a todas las personas que no tienen seguro de salud.

En la actualidad, el Centro de Bienvenida a Inmigrantes está impartiendo cursos de inglés y proporcionando servicios legales de inmigración y talleres de ciudadanía de bajo costo en SMM algo que cuadra con el valor que SMM da a la bienvenida y nos complace muchísimo poder ofrecer un servicio seguro para estas actividades. También hicimos arreglos para brindar un espacio al Consulado Móvil de El Salvador por primera vez. Este consulado itinerante, que presta servicios que incluyen pasaportes, ayuda legal gratuita, licencia de matrimonio y tarjetas de identificación, anteriormente solo era accesible en Houston y Dallas.

Proyectos encabezados por miembros forman relaciones y confianza

Nuestros miembros reflejan una cornucopia de intereses y con nuestra asistencia y estímulo pudieron hacer realidad algunos de ellos. Los proyectos encabezados por miembros y la buena voluntad que generan fueron catalizadores de la expansión de las actividades de extensión local de SMM. El año pasado iniciamos un Ministerio de Hombres y Mujeres, un club de libros y campañas múltiples que incluyeron Socks of Love (Calcetines de Amor) y el Sewing Workshop (Taller de Costura).

Calcetines de Amor, una campaña muy conocida, recolecta calcetines y los llena con artículos de tocador, agua y refrigerios y los distribuye a los sin hogar. El proyecto fue iniciado por Yasmin Aguilar, junto con el Ministerio de Mujeres. Varios meses antes de la Navidad, aprovecharon el espíritu de la temporada para lanzar esta campaña

Si bien una feligresía joven trae energía y entusiasmo, también puede traer vacilación y confusión. Calcetines de Amor fue nuestra primera oportunidad para iniciar un proyecto nosotras mismas, explorar nuestras destrezas de formar vínculos y encontrar patrocinadores y maneras creativas de pedir contribuciones a la comunidad. Todas las acciones en el proyecto fueron una celebración. Llevó aproximadamente un mes y medio reunir los artículos, coordinar equipos de “llenado de calcetines” y prepararnos para distribuir en zonas locales y vecinas. Estamos agradecidos y orgullosos del Ministerio de Mujeres por compartir esta visión y por su valentía en emplear sus habilidades para unir a nuestra feligresía y nuestros vecinos.

El Taller de Costura surgió de la necesidad de contar con protectores de ropa para los residentes de nuestro hogar de ancianos local. Edna Fournier, una miembro de SMM, había cosido algunos de ellos y ofreció hacer unos pocos más. Cuando nos enteramos de que el hogar de ancianos tenía más de 70 residentes, nació otro proyecto comunitario. Amigos, parientes, vecinos y miembros de SMM donaron una gran cantidad de tela de algodón y de franela con estampados vistosos. Fue fascinante ver cuántas costureras teníamos en nuestra feligresía y fue sorprendente enterarnos de que gente

de afuera de nuestra iglesia también estaba interesada en poner a trabajar sus manos y máquinas de coser.

Después de haber sido anfitrionas de una agradable velada de trazar moldes, cortar, coser y planchar, tuvimos 83 protectores de ropa y estamos alegres de iniciar el próximo taller de costura. Estamos agradecidos por contar con miembros como Mark Longley, que descubrió esta necesidad mediante un asociado y amigo; por Edna Fournier, que dirigió varias campañas con sus infinitas destrezas y capacidad de control de calidad; y, por Amy Rodríguez y Elizabeth Díaz, que trasnocharon cosiendo la mayoría de los protectores de ropa.

Mediante estos proyectos aprendí que el crecimiento ocurre cuando estamos en una comunidad con gente que tiene más experiencia de vida que nosotros. Compartir la mesa de proyectos con este nivel de diversidad y conocimientos y aprender sobre nuestras vidas nos ayudó a valorarnos los unos a los otros. La cultura de inclusión y apoyo inquebrantable de SMM emana de la gracia y la paciencia de nuestro pastor, el Rev. Alex Montes-Vela. Su naturaleza introspectiva le permite dar el ejemplo escuchando con efectividad y reconociendo cuándo es necesario hacer ajustes o empezar de nuevo.

En el poco tiempo en el que he sido miembro de St. Mary Magdalene, presencié un gran surgimiento de curiosidad y profunda devoción en nuestra parroquia hacia las necesidades de la comunidad de Manor. Con el impulso que se formó el año pasado, estoy ansiosa por ver qué relaciones se desarrollarán este año y cómo podremos ser un enlace para el próximo proyecto.

***Karen Peña** es una mexicana-americana de primera generación bilingüe y de 28 años de edad y una cristiana por primera vez. Es guardián mayor en Santa María Magdalena en Manor, Texas y administra el boletín electrónico semanal de la iglesia y sus comunicaciones en los medios sociales.*

Recursos:

- [St. Alban's: ¿Por qué Crecer?](#) por Brent Owens, Vestry Papers, septiembre 2011
- [Ministerio de Pañales](#) por Ema Rosero-Nordalm, ECF Vital Practices blog, 5 de abril 2013
- [Grupos Pequeños, Gran Impacto](#) por John Adler, Vestry Papers, julio 2014