

Dream Team Update

by Mark Oudersluys, Team

Five years ago, at the kick-off of the last Forward in Faith Campaign, the church’s consultant, Jeff Susor, stated that he believed that Forward in Faith would be the last building campaign for FUMC. However, he went on to say that from conversations with individuals within the church, he believed that the next capital campaign the church would undertake would be for outreach or to address community needs.

In February of 2017, when it was apparent that the Forward in Faith Campaign was nearing completion, the Outreach Team asked the Church Council for permission to form an exploratory committee to evaluate undertaking a capital campaign to provide assistance to individuals in our community. After the Church Council approved the formation of the committee, a small group began meeting to review past church community service capital campaigns with the potential of establishing a future campaign.

First UMC is located in the center of the city, has always had a heart for the city and its residents, and has a long history of community engagement. In November of 2017, the Church Council approved a motion to bring the question of a campaign to the congregation at its annual meeting. At the December 2017 meeting, the congregation gave its approval to establish a committee to study and develop recommendations

that would involve raising approximately \$1,000,000 to make a lasting impact in Kalamazoo.

In February of 2018, a group of twenty individuals began exploring how the church could make a difference in the community. In March, the congregation was asked to provide direction as to what areas the Dream Team should concentrate its efforts. The congregation indicated their two highest priorities were housing and hunger.

In April, the team began to have discussions with a wide variety of organizations to learn more about poverty, homelessness, affordable housing and

hunger in Kalamazoo. For the last ten months, the team has met with non-profit organizations working in the areas of housing and hunger, housing development companies, financial institutions, community foundations, and with government officials. We have learned that the issues related to poverty and homelessness are extremely varied and complex. We have also come to realize that while we are undertaking a rather unique project for a church (having a capital campaign to address the needs of individuals

in the community), we are not the only organization working to address these issues. As a result, we are attempting to work in conjunction with not only non-profits but also with the city of Kalamazoo and our community foundations. If we are successful in working together on common goals, we can significantly increase our impact.

Through our discussions, the team has learned that Kalamazoo has many non-profit organizations that are very effectively addressing the needs of housing and hunger and we discussed with them how we could work together. Late last year, the team reviewed all of the information that we had received and determined which non-profits best shared our goals. These non-profits are: Housing Resources Incorporated, Habitat for Humanity, Open Doors, Kalamazoo Collective Housing, the YWCA and Loaves & Fishes. In addition, we identified a consortium of nine organizations that are working to improve neighborhoods and assist individuals in retaining their homes.

At our recent meeting, the team determined what specific projects we hope to undertake, projected costs and a timetable for implementation. Over the next several months, our goal is to have multiple information sessions with the congregation, answer questions, and invite the congregation to participate in our dream to take action as a church to improve the lives of others.

