



PRESS CONFERENCE
FOLLOWING ELECTION, FAITH LEADERS LOOK TO FUTURE
& CALL FOR DANE COUNTY TO FUND HUMAN SERVICES
Wednesday, November 5th, 4:30 p.m.
City County Building (Lobby)
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Madison 53703

Local faith leaders take issue with the suggestion from Dane County Human Services that people in the faith community should do more to make up for inadequate county funding of human services. They plan a press conference today to call on county officials to meet growing demands for vital human needs.

The press conference will take place ahead of tonight’s meeting of the Personnel and Finance Committee of the Dane County Board. The committee will take up the human services budget. The budget includes amendments passed out to members of the Health and Human Needs committee that make additional cuts to services. Among speakers at the press conference are Rev. Michael Schuler, First Unitarian Society; Rev. Stephen Marsh, Lake Edge Lutheran Church; and Rev. Dr. Miranda Hassett, St. Dunstan’s Episcopal.

Madison-area Urban Ministry (MUM) asked local congregations to share what they are now doing to support the safety net. Grace Episcopal Church, for example, supports the Men’s Drop-In Shelter (Porchlight), a First Monday Community Meal for an average of 100 to 150 guests, a \$6,000 per year discretionary fund for housing, utility, and other assistance, and a Food Pantry (open four days a week, with a budget of \$55,000 that fed 12,000 individuals and 4,800 families in 2013). Above and beyond these programs, around \$20,000 of the church operating budget goes to local outreach.

Rev. Eldonna Hazen of Congregational United Church of Christ says their congregation members are generous with giving and assist people with eviction prevention, bus passes, food coupons, gas cards, utility shut-off prevention, hotel vouchers and more. The church provides over \$47,000 in direct and indirect support to assist with community needs. “How much more should one church be expected to provide?” she asks.

In the words of another local minister, “Churches in Dane County have always supported the safety net... but to suggest that ‘the churches’... do more as a way of justifying the unwillingness of elected leaders to lead, is tantamount to a human services tax on religious communities. This should be a community wide response and that will require our County Board to find the political will and courage to find additional funding for human services.”

Clergy remind county officials that congregation members are individuals facing their own economic challenges. They are constituents who pay property taxes to support human services, and who also donate directly to local nonprofits. The faith community alone cannot continue to bear the brunt of Dane County shortfalls in the human services budget.

So faith leaders call upon the Personnel and Finance Committee of the Dane County Board to adequately fund a sustainable human services budget. In the 2015 budget, Dane County failed to allocate sufficient funds to new human service initiatives and is now proposing cuts to programs for vital needs. This results in a “lose-lose” outcome: neither existing county programs nor new county initiatives will receive enough funding. Adding up what local congregations already do amounts to an enormous effort by people of faith to meet the needs of vulnerable members of the community. Dane County must also do its part.

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