

The Presbyterian Hunger Program and Congregational Vitality

Serving one another with gifts we have received

Connecting with the programs of PHP can energize and enliven congregations and presbyteries as they serve local communities. Here are a few snapshots of the variety of ministries that help revitalize congregations as they engage the communities around them:

In Savannah, Georgia, First Presbyterian Church, Butler Memorial Presbyterian Church and Skidaway Community Church participate in a **Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO)** group called Justice Unites Savannah Together (JUST). Forty percent of Savannah residents earn less than \$50,000 each year and are struggling to afford quality housing. JUST researched housing trust funds, which allow developers to keep rents affordable. Savannah had a housing trust fund, but the city had only been investing \$500,000 annually — not enough to make a substantial difference in the housing crisis. JUST organized and helped motivate people in their congregations. Together they advocated for the city to invest \$10 million of American Rescue Plan money into the fund. Thanks to their efforts, the mayor and city council allocated \$7 million of their 2022 budget for the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund. Mayor Van Johnson publicly credited JUST with pushing for this historic investment. This kind of organizing demonstrates the kind of vital and energizing work that people of faith can do when they work together with others for positive change in their community.

Hunger Action Advocates (HAAs), serve in presbyteries to educate, motivate and facilitate hunger action. They encourage congregations and presbyteries to engage in hunger relief, development assistance, public policy advocacy, education, and interpretation about sustainable living and earth care concerns. Jessica Fitzgerald, HAA for the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia, shared that Suffolk Presbyterian Church has a long history of faithful hunger ministry. They help support seasonal agricultural workers through the Eastern Shore Migrant Farm Workers Ministry, provide dry beans to the Society of St. Andrew for food bags, and support the Suffolk Christian Fellowship ministry with food, clothing, hygiene products, diapers and more. In 2021, church educator Beth Lyon-Suhring offered “Come to the Table,” a six-week discipleship study to raise awareness, provide education, and inspire advocacy. The study focuses on scripture and people’s relationship to food. HAAs and Suffolk Presbyterian Church are inspiring servant leadership, demonstrating outward incarnational focus, and helping create lifelong disciples.

How can your congregation get involved?

- Go to pcusa.org/hunger to learn more about root causes of hunger and find a number of ways to advocate in solidarity with people.
- Take steps to become a Hunger Action Congregation (pcusa.org/hac) or an Earth Care Congregation (pcusa.org/earthcarecongregations).
- Start or participate in a Congregation-Based Community Organization (pcusa.org/cbco) or engage with a Joining Hands Network (email Valery Nodem at valery.nodem@pcusa.org).
- Like and follow PHP at **Presbyhunger** on Facebook and Twitter.
- Support the work of PHP through One Great Hour of Sharing (pcusa.org/donate/OG300000).

Prince of Peace, a Presbyterian church in Crofton, Maryland, is a new **Earth Care Congregation** that sees the value of caring for the earth in a holistic way. They incorporate caring for God’s creation in their worship, education programs, church facilities and grounds, and take their environmental ministry into the community. They are well-known for hosting an annual Used Book and Media Sale, which raises money for mission activities, and this year they added a kickoff event where community members donated used bicycles. The bikes went to Wheels of Hope, a program that provides refurbished bicycles to meet transportation needs for at-risk youth, the local sober living community and more. This event allows the church to live out its faith in the broader community, meeting needs for transportation and health, while also saving bicycles from the landfill.

Congregations, presbyteries and individuals are revitalized when they work to address hunger, poverty and their root causes through global relationships. For over 20 years, clergy and church members in the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy have acted in solidarity with Red Uniendo Manos Peru — PHP’s **Joining Hands** network in Peru. Together they have advocated for health care for people affected by lead contamination, helped shine light on the connections between corporate operations in Peru and those in Missouri, and supported the restoration of land damaged by mining activities. Participants have been part of a movement of people working to address local and global systems of economic, environmental, and racial injustice, and they share that it has been a life-changing experience. Study, prayer, planning, worship, leading workshops, travel and advocacy have brought people together in solidarity and mission and have helped bring vitality to congregations and the presbytery.

Ladson Presbyterian Church, a **Hunger Action Congregation (HAC)**, is the oldest African American congregation in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. Once a month, church members offer a hot breakfast for their unhoused neighbors in need, serving up grits, eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, juice and fruit. Twice yearly the church invites the guests to a community birthday party where food, clothing and toiletries are provided. During September’s Celebration of Life Birthday event, information about record expungement, job training and community resources is made available. Some guests who were served by the program now participate as members of the congregation and help serve others. While changes have been made during the pandemic, Ladson has continued to be a light, partnering with others to reach hundreds of neighbors each week. Ladson has been an HAC since 2019 and exemplifies outward incarnational focus, a mark of vital congregations.

