

A Home for the Night

In March of 2019, the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area declared itself a Matthew 25 presbytery, accepting [an invitation from the Presbyterian Mission Agency](#) to “actively engage in the world around us.”

*Then the righteous will answer him,
‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food,
or thirsty and gave you something to drink?
And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,
or naked and gave you clothing?
And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’
And the king will answer them,
‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these
who are members of my family, you did it to me.’*

EMerge will periodically feature stories of PTCA congregations living out the call of Matthew 25, in their own ways and abilities, and in their own words. Today: four Saint Paul-area congregations who support Project Home.

For the month of November, the round tables and chairs that usually fill the ground-level fellowship hall at Central Presbyterian Church in Saint Paul are by-and-large put away, replaced by large cardboard walls that create living spaces for participants in Project Home, an effort of Interfaith Action of Saint Paul. And why?

“It’s important to us, because it fits our mission,” says Sharon Zopfi-Jordan, Central’s coordinated mission chair. “We say ‘We’re in the city for good.’ That means helping when there’s a need.”

At First Presbyterian Church in South Saint Paul, Project Home has found a monthly home in July for a quarter of a century. “It’s a hands-on mission that people can really get into,” says coordinator Ruth Krueger of FPC’s participation. The same is true for The House of Hope Presbyterian Church in Saint Paul, another month-long host to Project Home.

Annually, Project Home provides more than 10,300 shelter beds to help stabilize families who struggle with paying rent or putting food on the table. Each month, two area faith communities partner with Interfaith Action to host up-to twenty emergency shelter beds each. The planning and work to pull that off is done almost completely by volunteers.

At Central, inviting volunteers to staff this effort begins well before its formal November 1 start. Announcements go out months ahead. Weekly coordinators provide information and reminders (and scramble when a volunteer suddenly can’t cover her or his time). All for a simple outcome: “We want people to feel welcomed,” Zopfi-Jordan says.

Guests spend nights in the church, arriving in the early evening and heading out first thing in the morning. An evening snack and light breakfast are provided to them. So is a sense of fellowship and welcome, where community becomes less of us and them, but simply us. “This is not just a place to stay,” Zopfi-Jordan says, “but a welcoming place.” Volunteers will often play games with the children or help them with their homework. They’ll talk with the parents, telling each other life stories. “We learn the people are just like us,” Krueger says.

Both Central and First Presbyterian utilize both evening hosts and overnight hosts. At least two church members sleep in the church every night, just like their guests, should anything be needed. “It takes a minimum of five volunteers a day,” Krueger says. “At least three—maybe four or five—for the evening, and two overnight hosts. For a month, that’s 150 or more.”

At First Presbyterian, that workload has presented the opportunity for a broader community effort. No longer able to fully fill that many volunteer slots, First has reached out both to Edgcumbe Presbyterian in Saint Paul and St. John Vianney Catholic Church in South Saint Paul. Both congregations take a week. Edgcumbe also dedicated its Christmas Eve offering to Project Home.

It’s a ministry that has also expanded beyond the explicit intent—a month of shelter. “The need for these families is greater than simply the month we host them,” Zopfi-Jordan says. That’s why Central does a diaper drive on Father’s Day, to help re-stock Project Home’s shelves. It’s also why they have become more involved with Minneapolis’ Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative and MICAH, the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing located in Saint Paul.

“It’s not for everyone,” Krueger says. “Initially, people are nervous. Experience changes that. Members reach out to others to tell their stories. ‘Why don’t you come volunteer with me,’ they often say. People invite family members and friends. People support each other.”

Interfaith Action provides a permanent day center for families whose evening shelter is churches, and offers [resources for faith communities](#) who want to either become an overnight shelter site or provide volunteers for another site. Additional, the PTCA’s Committee on Congregational Vitality recognized the commitment of these four congregations in with a small Opportunity Grant in December from its budget.

Lord, when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you? At these Saint Paul Area churches, one way that happens is through their commitments to Project Home. Because it’s their mission—and because, together, as a Presbytery and denomination, it’s our Matthew 25 calling as well.

Do you have a Matthew 25 story to tell from your congregation? Please contact Jeff Japinga, executive presbyter (ep@ptcaweb.org), with the information.