



The Ubuntu Journey

South Central District UMW Action Day at Cornerstone

October 1st was a clear, bright and brisk fall morning when over 50 United Methodist Women from throughout the Tampa Bay area came ready to serve the Ybor City neighbors and bless 200 pre-schoolers through their service. This long awaited "Action Day" started as a spark when some of the women participated in a 2014 United Methodist Women General Assembly Ubuntu event in Louisville, Kentucky.

Ubuntu roughly translated means "human kindness." It is an idea from the Southern African region which means literally "human-ness," and is often translated as "humanity toward others," but is often used to mean "a universal bond of sharing connects all humanity". It is this Ubuntu philosophy partnered with the group's life verse from Matthew 5:3-4 that drives United Methodist Women in the Tampa Bay area to embrace social justice issues and put their faith into love and action. As a result,

in a few hours on this very special day in October, these dedicated women of all ages helped Cornerstone start two ground breaking efforts: An annual food distribution to Ybor City families and the kick-off of a weekend snack program called Care Packages for Kids.

With funds provided through a grant from United Methodist Women National in New York, Cornerstone partnered with Feeding America's Tampa affiliate to bring a large refrigerated semi-truck full of enough meat, fresh produce and other perishable and non-perishable food items to serve 300 families for a week. Because of the donations made by UMW units throughout the district, nutritious contents were ready and waiting inside the building so that 250 weekend care packages for toddlers and preschoolers could be built and sent out to four of the 160 early learning centers sponsored by Cornerstone with the hope that UMW units in those neighborhoods would continue to build packages and serve those centers children over the year ahead with weekend care packages on a regular basis.

In 1895 the foremothers of United Methodist Women led by Eliza Wolff established the place where the gathering in Ybor City was held as a safe place where children could be cared for while their immigrant parents worked long hours in the cigar factories to make a better life for their families in America. The location, known as historic Ybor City, was once a hub for the cigar industry where thousands of immigrants from Italy, Spain, Cuba, and France came to find work and realize a prosperous life for their families. Row houses built for cigar factory workers still line the streets and the large clock visible on the exterior of the JC Newman Cigar factory still reminds the neighborhood when to go to work, when to go home and when to break for lunch. Time marches on but some things never change. Cigar factories are no longer providing jobs in the neighborhood but the families who in this inner-city neighborhood are still predominately working poor families trying to make a better life for their families. The JC Newman Cigar factory is the only cigar factory still operating in the area and the Eliza Wolff Settlement building is still there too, offering hope and help to a neighborhood through the work of Cornerstone Family Ministries. The Eliza Wolff Settlement building is still owned by United Methodist Women and is one of its 99 national mission institutions along with the Rosa Valdez Center located in a neighboring inner-city neighborhood known as Old West Tampa where Cornerstone operates an accredited early learning center and lab school. Over the years, hundreds of Women's Home Missioners, Deaconess and United Methodist Women have served at both locations and hundreds of thousands of children have been impacted through their work and financial support to Cornerstone as they nurture young bodies, develop young minds and foster hope through Christ to over 20,000 children each year in five Florida counties that make up the Tampa Bay area. Their services include the sponsorship of over 160 partners that provide over 4,000,000 nutritious meals to children living below the poverty level each year and the Rosa Valdez Early Learning Center and Lab school that provides quality early childhood education to 100 infants, toddlers and preschoolers each year while also serving as a lab school where women, who are the first in their families to go to college, can work and earn their degree through Cornerstone's partnership with two area colleges and the TEACH scholarship program that allows those women to earn their degree free of college debt.

By the time the day ended over 325 families and over 250 Care Packages for Kids were packed and ready to distribute to children at Cornerstone's most needy partner centers in Suitcase City, Plant City and Tampa's Inner-city. The staff of Cornerstone and the neighbors will not soon forget the generosity of these women and the love they show through their prayers and support throughout the year and their commitment to the beacons of hope represented by the Wolff Center Settlement building and the Rosa Valdez Early Learning Center and Lab School facilities that UMW National so generously continues to maintain and make available to Cornerstone as they do their tremendous work of love throughout the Tampa Bay area.

We are looking for groups to adopt our neediest partner centers all across the Tampa Bay area and collect, build and distribute Care Packages for Kids full of nutritious weekend food. This partnership is a wonderful way for your church to connect with needy families and invite them to attend your church. Child Care Centers are a perfect place to touch both child and parent. Contact Carrie Brown at cbrown@cornerstonefm.org for more information.