

# Together

A Broome County Council of Churches Newsletter

Spring 2017



Council of Churches

## From our Executive Director



For 75 years the Broome County Council of Churches has been crossing bridges. In the 1980's when hate groups were targeting local Jewish Temples, the Council of Churches organized a no hate campaign and helped our Jewish neighbors.

In recent years we have partnered with the Children of Abraham to cross even more bridges as we have encouraged Muslims, Christians, and Jews to sit down and talk about the commonalities and differences in their faiths. Apart from the conversations on faith, we have begun to realize that there are more that unite us than keep us separate as citizens of this area. We all need to live together and participate with each other in order to make our community a safe and welcoming place for all people.

While this is one example of bridges that we have helped cross many more come to mind. Through practical service projects we help volunteers cross the divides of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and economic status. By building wheelchair ramps, by feeding hungry people, by assisting older adults who need a little help to remain independent, by helping those in jail adopt healthy patterns of behavior and re-enter lives outside of jail we help cross boundaries and gaps between people.

One of my favorite bridges we build involves the jail ministry program. Through our literacy program in the jail, we have inmates who might not have great literacy skills read children's books into a recorder. CD's of the recordings are made and the book and the CD are given to the children of the inmate. Often these recordings are the first time the children have had a book read to them by their parents. By encouraging these habits in the family, we hope to create bridges to a more literate future.

In the coming 76<sup>th</sup> year we are working toward an employment project that will help people who need some work experience find skills in forklift operation, food handling and safety, and warehouse operations. These will help people find employment in local businesses and help reduce food insecurity. We want to help feed the hungry, but we also want to help reduce the need of CHOW at the same time. Bridges are being built!

When the Council of Churches was founded, we had no idea of what kinds of bridges we would cross or how many lives we would be able to impact. One thing has remained constant through those years; we know

continued on back

Programs offered at the Broome County Council of Churches

Broome Bount  
CHOW Hunger Relief  
Encounter Radio/TV Program  
Faith in Action Volunteers  
Hospital Ministry  
Jail Ministry  
Ramp It Up  
Senior Living Ministry

Inside This Issue

COAD in Action ..... p. 2  
Faith in Action Volunteers ..... p. 3  
Jail Ministry ..... p. 4  
CHOW ..... p. 5  
Hospital Ministry ..... p. 6

*"Connecting compassion with needs; inspiring growth with dignity"*

# COAD Gets A Work Out

It started snowing on the 14<sup>th</sup> and by the 15<sup>th</sup> Broome County was buried in 30 to 36 inches of snow. COAD was there to help.

There was one particular man in his late 80's that came out of his house as they were finishing and threw his arms up in the air declaring: "Free at last, free at last"!!

215 calls were received from people who were unable to dig themselves out due to age or disability. COAD's organizational setup went into high gear. County maps were collected and laid out so that the location of callers could be pinpointed. Phones were manned to check if help was still needed and if there were emergency situations. Member organizations were contacted in search of shoveling crews.

**Broome County COAD, a membership organization, comprised of independent agencies and organizations aiming to provide a collaborative structure to coordinate the work of community organizations and resources to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters in Broome County was incorporated in 2009.**

Three days, 34 phone hours, 312 snow removal hours with crews from six member organizations and two individual volunteers; it was well into Sunday when the Civil Air Patrol finished the last request.

A big shout-out to the Broome County Council of Churches, Fairview, AmeriCorps, Binghamton University, Turf Grow, the Civil Air Patrol and individuals for volunteering their time and energy to assist those in need. This joint effort assisted 140 of our community members.

## Thanks!

This is why COAD was created; so that we as a community can function as a unit when difficult times and disasters strike. As our Broome County Executive Jason Garnar, said, "Broome County was hit hard by Winter Storm Stella. While the storm may have knocked us back, the resiliency and preparedness of Broome County blew us away. It is comforting to know that when adversity strikes that the people of Broome County are always prepared to rise to the challenge."



## Things are changing at the Broome County Council of Churches!

Many of you know Mike Leahey who has served as our CHOW Director for over four years. Mike is moving to Development and Community Relations Director. He will be in touch with donors and working at raising the visibility of the Council in the community. We are so excited to welcome Mike to this position.

Jack Seman is being promoted to CHOW Director. Many of you will know Jack from his work in the warehouse, but you may not know that he started with us as a volunteer and has moved up through the organization from the bottom up. Jack is a strong advocate for CHOW in the community and will do an excellent job as director.



We at FIAV are grateful for all our volunteers; those who have been with us for many years as well as those who are new, regardless of the path they chose to join us. Each one builds a much needed bridge for the older adults in our community. We look forward to the future and new bridges to build.

## The Commitment of Our *Faith in Action* Volunteers

Those of us who work in the *Faith in Action* offices often feel humbled by the commitment of our volunteers. Some weeks, the seemingly endless list of those requesting services can be overwhelming. But, through the commitment of our volunteers, one by one, we see the appointments fill. For 20 years, they have been bridging the gap between our office and our care receivers, providing transportation, friendship, a helping hand, and independence. Many of our volunteers have been a part of Faith in Action for a very long time. Some join us as part of church outreach. Others read or hear about us from agencies or friends. Sometimes, bridges are built in exciting and unexpected ways.

Every spring and summer we get calls for yardwork and household chores. Last May we received a call from a staff member of OPWDD at Tracy Creek Treatment Center. This teacher was looking for opportunities for her students to volunteer. By the summer, these eager young men, accompanied by a staff member from their school, were mowing yards, pulling weeds, washing windows, and cleaning those hard to reach, high spots, much to the delight of several of our care receivers. "To me, they were so gracious and they came out and did a wonderful job.", says Helen Perkins, one of the grateful recipients of some yardwork. "Our guys are faced on a daily basis with challenges due to their variety of disabilities. They were excited and proud to help elderly persons with some light household duties and yard work. Also getting a chance to have a nice little conversation with someone can put a smile on their face. It highly helps to improve their self esteem and having something to look forward to. Thank you for this opportunity to serve the community.", the teacher commented. When asked, the students remarked that they were so happy to give back to the community and they just wanted to help people.

In August, we received a call from volunteer, Dianne Emick. Among her many volunteer "jobs", she works once a week as a nurse. She let us know that we would be receiving a call from her co-worker, Nikki Benedict, from the ICU staff at Binghamton General Hospital. Each year, the unit council chooses a person to help at Christmas. When asking for ideas, Dianne explained the services of FIAV. The unit council came up with the idea of "adopting a care receiver". When Nikki called to see if this would be possible, we were delighted to find out they intended to not only adopt for Christmas, but this would be an ongoing activity. Currently, the ICU staff is visiting and offering assistance to Sharon Thompson, who lives alone and has no family in the area. "Sending Nikki is a blessing.", she tells us. "I'm so glad when she comes to visit. I can't thank you enough." And, if helping Sharon isn't enough, the ICU unit will soon be "adopting" a second care receiver.

Susan Spencer — Director of *Faith in Action* Volunteers  
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"Sometimes, what you are looking for comes when you're not looking at all."  
~Anonymous



**FAITH**  
IN ACTION

## Dining For Dollars

What makes a delicious dinner even better? Being serenaded by local clergy and supporting a worthy cause! The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Dining For Dollars was held on October 27<sup>th</sup> at the Polish Community Center. Diners were treated to halupki and mashed potatoes while being served by 15 clergy from area churches. All were participating in friendly competition to earn big tips for *Faith in Action* Volunteers.



Guests were also treated to the music of Doug Beardsly and an array of raffles available to choose from. From the sounds of the laughter and friendly chatter heard around the room, it was evident the night was a huge success!



Join us this year — October 12, 2017 — for another great evening of Dining for Dollars

# IN THE LAST YEAR 898 VOLUNTEERS DONATED OVER 67,410 HOURS OF SERVICE MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFT

The Council is so grateful to our hundreds of volunteers, who take our mission and programs out into the community and make lives better every day. Thank you!

Our volunteers couldn't do the work *they* do, though, without the partnership of those who support the Council through annual gifts. Your donations make a real impact in our communities. Without that partnership, none of the good work in this newsletter could happen. Please consider a gift today!

Secure online and mobile-friendly donations can be made through the Council's website at [broomecouncil.net](http://broomecouncil.net). If you'd like the convenience of making donations automatically, either monthly or quarterly, we can get you started as a Sustaining Donor, charging your gift on your credit card per your giving schedule until you notify us to stop. For more information, call Belynda Raminger at 724.9130 x-302.

The Council also accepts gifts of stock or mutual funds. Call extension 308 for information.

From our heart to yours: Thank you.

## Jail Ministry News

### *Fuel for ministry,*

Jail ministry is extremely difficult. The tangle of problems faced by inmates and their families are more often than not, monumental. Our nation's correctional system is geared more for retributive justice rather than restorative justice. Policies inside the walls are cumbersome, security issues limit access, stigma creates barriers with reentry, and barriers are many with referrals. Assisting our returning citizens in finding forgiveness, recovery and positive reintegration is often extremely frustrating. However, the people we minister to are actually part of our local community and when they return back to our local neighborhoods, families and congregations who have opened their doors to them, they can be a great source of fuel for our inspiration and continued labors.

The walls often seem insurmountable and chasms may appear too deep, but sometimes we are able to make doors and build bridges, but may not see them for some time. One evening I left the jail for home but was extremely agitated over a number of irritating issues that I had encountered that day. As I was driving to a gas station I was speaking through a Bluetooth earpiece to Deacon Dorothy Pierce, who is one of our Jail Ministry Staff, discussing these problems. I pulled up to a pump and stepped out of my car and suddenly a driver of a van pulled in on the opposite side, slammed on her breaks, bolted out of the door and exclaimed "Chaplain Cris!" Bubbling over she shared with me that now being out of jail she was having success in recovery, found employment, was back with her family and was reunited with her children as she motioned to a van load of kids. Sitting on the passenger side was a friend of hers, who also jumped out and shared with me a similar story of her own success after her release. Meanwhile Deacon Dorothy was still connected on my Bluetooth earpiece and was listening to the entire conversation as was exclaiming in my ear: "see Cris, it does make a difference!"

On another day, at the very same gas station, I was filling my car and a young man on the other side of the pump kept peering over his car at me in an odd way. After filling his car he came over to me and told me that he was a little embarrassed, but decided he had to share with me that he had been in a series of classes that I teach in the jail and they made a difference in his life. He was now working at a decent job in the profession he was trained in, had bought a car, reunited with his family and found a church home.

These people are our neighbors, family members, coworkers, classmates, fellow parishioners and all part of our community. When they succeed crossing a bridge home we all are successful.

Rev. Cris Mogenson, Jail Ministry Program Director  
Coordinating Chaplain, Broome County Sheriff's Correctional Facility



**Jail Ministry**

# CHOW® Works -- A new step toward providing for those in need in our community

The CHOW® Works Winter 2017 cohort is set to graduate three participants on Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup>; a fourth participant will graduate in June. Throughout their time in the program, participants have gained valuable work experience in the CHOW® warehouse and on the CHOW® markets. This experience will not only help round out participant resumes, helping them to secure employment, but their efforts benefited countless families by feeding the food insecure in our community.



CHOW® warehouse pantry order prep.

In addition to the over 1200 hours of on-the-job-training and exposure to educational programming provided by area professionals, participants will leave with a General Forklift Operator Certificate, OSHA 10-Hour Safety Training Certificate, and ServSafe Certificate. The certificates and work experience coupled with employment, financial, nutrition, and wellness programming will help make our graduates more marketable to local employers.



CHOW® Fresh - market management

Additionally, participants have received targeted case management, which has resulted, for example, in obtaining a Learner Permit, managing motor vehicle fines, and connecting with community providers to help support participants and their families.



Forklift certification

As participants prepare to transition into permanent jobs, board members, George Cummings, Rev. Becky Drebert, and Anne Wolanski, donated their time and insight to help participants prepare for interviews. The mock interviews gave participants an opportunity to practice their interview skills and articulate their new knowledge and skillsets.

CHOW® Works participants have been applying to jobs and going on job interviews, coming one step closer to becoming self-sufficient, getting off the tax rolls, and creating a stable future for themselves and their families.

We will welcome our spring 2017 cohort on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Katie Blaine — CHOW® Works Program Coordinator  
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Thank you to board members, George Cummings, Rev. Becky Drebert, and Anne Wolanski, for donating your time to interview CHOW Works participants! Your time and feedback was very much appreciated!



## The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee

has helped CHOW® celebrate 40 years of fighting hunger by securing funding to purchase these two vehicles, allowing us to increase our capacity to safely acquire and distribute greater quantities of food to the 68 emergency food assistance programs which we support throughout Broome County. As our partnerships develop, we are distributing 40,000 (over 33,000 more meals) more pounds of food monthly (140,000 total) to help those in our community who struggle with food insecurity. We are also able to distribute more nutrient dense foods (fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats and non-meat proteins) which not only fight hunger, but also help prevent long-term chronic disease.



**The Rumble Ponies and Tioga State Bank Set Up a Baseball Challenge to Benefit CHOW®**



**\$20 donation to CHOW® For every strike out. Estimate ~ \$5,000 for the season.**



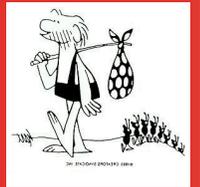


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**The Hunger Walk is Coming – September 17**  
**Call or Drop By for Your Posters and Envelopes**  
**Get Your Sponsors and Form Your Teams.**



**Our thanks to BUD**  
**(Binghamton University Dining Services) and their**  
**food donation campaign to benefit CHOW.**



## Hospital Ministry Insights

The Hospital Ministry will be evolving in 2017. We are building bridges into the future. Hospital Ministry was the first of the ministries of the Broome Council of Churches. It has had a proud history of dedicated Pastors and Volunteers seeking to bring the hope and care that only God can give to staff, patients and their families in times of medical uncertainty.

This past year God has given us more chapel volunteers so that people can be reached on an almost daily basis. The longer I am the Hospital Chaplain, the more staff has learned to trust and depend on our ministry. We are a body as the Bible calls it with all parts God directed working for the good of patient, staff and families. This ministry is also bridging into the future as we find ways to work with other hospital chaplains of all religions, support groups and medical facilities around the state in this new day of specialization. Hospital ministry does not necessarily stop when a patient or family leaves our local hospital. The key is; God cares and is there for all peoples.

**May we be excited about the bridges God is building.**

Rev. John Koopman, Hospital Ministry Director

continued from front.....

that if we are going to make it in this world, we must hold to the faith that loving God and loving our neighbor requires more than just words. Words must cross a bridge and people of passion and grace must find ways to create a healthy future for each other. We will do this as always, together.

Thanks for being a part of this amazing journey.

Peace and towels,

Rev. Dr. Joe Sellepack