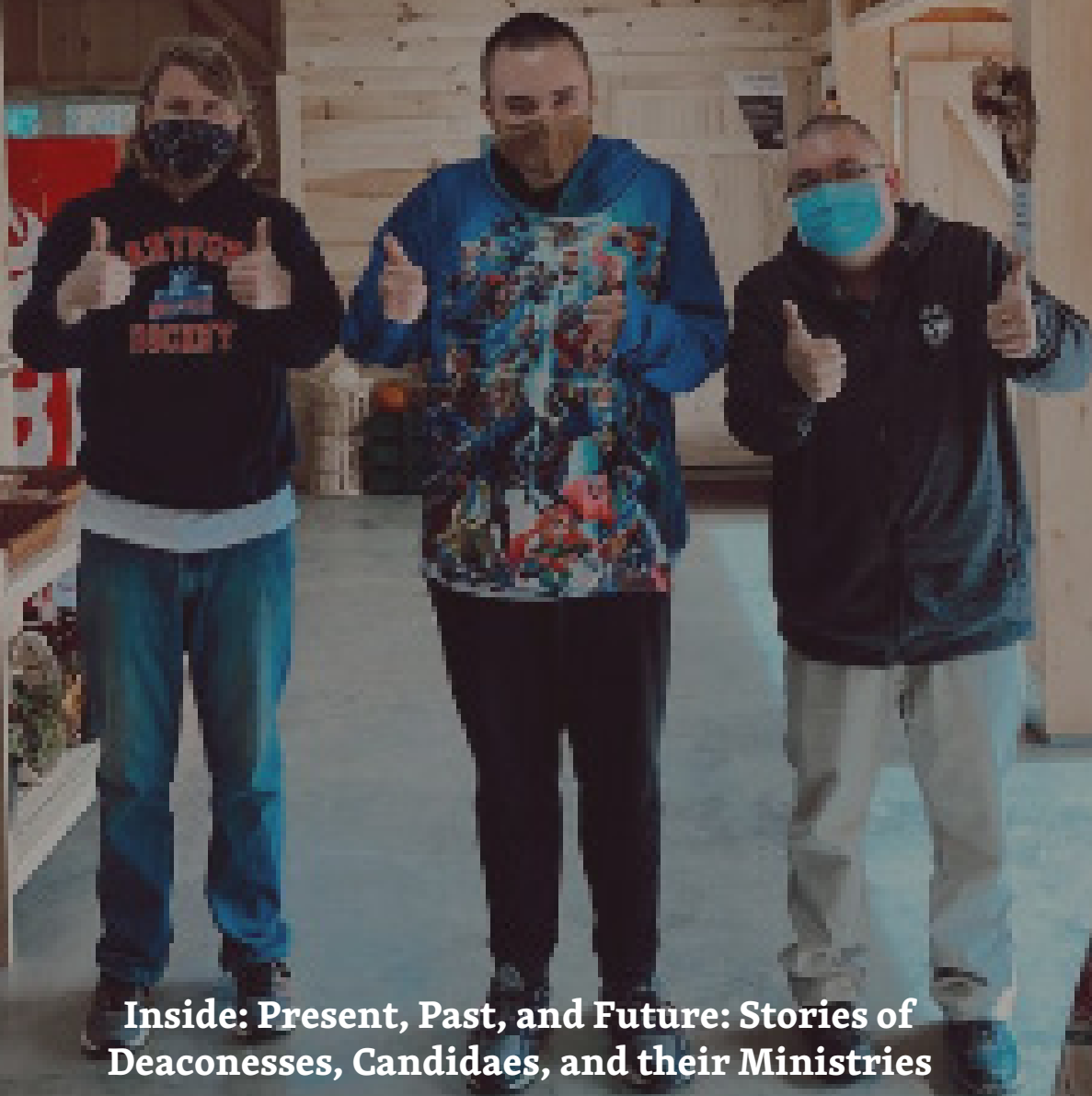


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**Inside: Present, Past, and Future: Stories of
Deaconesses, Candidaes, and their Ministries**

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A Vision Becoming a Reality

by Sister Carol Weaver



It all started in August 2019, when I had an opportunity to explore the farm property in Coventry, Connecticut, with Patrick Byrne, Executive director of Creative Living Community of Connecticut (CLCC), and Deacon Cynthia Hall, Board Chair and President of CLCC. It was my first visit as a mission grant relator for our Community. It quickly opened a vision door to a reality that provides a shared living experience for individuals with and without developmental disabilities.

As Patrick and Deacon Cynthia gave me a tour of the property, I saw old buildings that would be torn down and several that would function going into the future. I could see one section come alive with Alpacas, a level field of grass where the apartment building would be built, a pretty wildflower garden under a grape arbor with a beehive ready to greet its future occupants, and so much more!

The Deaconess Community's mission grant has helped provide necessities to get the farm off the ground and take CLCC into an optimistic and grace-filled future. To quote Deacon Cynthia, "The farm program will reduce food insecurity in vulnerable populations by improving the health and well-being of autistic and disabled adults through gardening and providing access to nutritious, healthy, affordable food." Another outstanding feature is the training and guidance to residents in the development of self-advocacy.

After numerous email exchanges giving updated news of the farm's progress, I was eager for my next visit on October 11, 2020, for the ribbon-cutting event for their beautiful new farm stand! Sister Virginia Strahan and I had the pleasure of attending and meeting the people behind the CLCC, with Patrick graciously

lifting up our community in his opening remarks.

I was also impressed with the outreach CLCC has achieved with public, faith-based, and civic partners, reflecting our values with enthusiasm and promise! What a pleasure to be their mission grant relator for the past two years! God is good! All the time!



Just What the Community Needed

West View HUB

In June 2019, the West View HUB was off to a great start, with over 500 people attending their Grand Opening. The HUB, which connects the West View, Pennsylvania community with schools, businesses, spiritual centers, and local leadership, was just what the community needed.

The HUB was designed to be "a one-stop spot for the community," said Scott Pavlot, Executive Director of the Community Life Enrichment Foundation (CLEF). He established CLEF as a 501c3 charitable organization and created the West View HUB as its first project.

HUB is indeed a one-stop spot for the community, as it houses a "library, food pantry, technology center and much more," continued Pavlot. "We wanted to do something to make a difference in this community." And a big difference it did make.

The HUB is in a former PNC Bank – a reading room for children was created inside the old bank vault, and former teller stations were converted into an internet café with computer terminals. The technology center provides access to public computers and free Wi-Fi, something Pavlot says about 30 percent of the community didn't have access to before. A children's theater was created using the interior of a Boeing 727 jet that was purchased after a Netflix series was filmed in the area.

The HUB was off to a great start, offering various programs, including after-school tutoring, book clubs, yoga, chess club, Girls Who Code, reading circles, traditional library services, and a small food pantry, which was serving 15-20 residents weekly. They worked with a local agency and the United Way to provide residents free tax preparation and financial clinics.



Then COVID hit

The pandemic forced HUB to suspend onsite activities, and the library was closed. But when one door closed, another opened when the West View HUB began to receive inquiries regarding food distribution. Initially, West View HUB ramped up their pantry, and as word got out, there was a slow increase in use. During this time, the library served as a pantry, and twice a week residents were allowed to come to the outer door and request food. As a result, the HUB realized a weekly increase of greater than 200% between January and April, and by May 1, it had fed 1,941 residents.

In addition to local partnerships, HUB management personnel participated in the Farm-To-Table initiative, which provided dairy boxes containing milk, cheese, butter, and sour cream. By July HUB was feeding over 400 residents a week. Soon food began to be provided to a low-income senior tower with over 150 residents when extra food was available.

Throughout the fall of 2020 HUB continued to see consistent numbers ranging between 500 and 600 residents per week. By Thanksgiving, over 105 boxes with turkey certificates and all the fixings for a complete Thanksgiving dinner were provided, and 131 boxes were delivered at Christmas. On December 22, HUB provided food for nearly 800 residents. It is estimated that HUB has provided enough food for approximately 500,000 servings of food in 2020.

As social distancing and COVID-related isolation recedes, The HUB continues to be blessed with new opportunities to serve the community, and all partners are excited with the prospect of taking on additional challenges.

The pandemic forced HUB to suspend onsite activities, and the library was closed. But when one door closed, another opened.

Miracles Come in Many Different Shapes and Sizes

by Sr. Monica Denk

Miracles come in many different shapes and sizes. The Deaconess Community of the ELCA, also serving in the ELCIC, has the privilege of partnering with organizations worldwide that do, indeed, work miracles. “Suncani Most” or “Sunshine Bridge” kindergarten in the city of Livno, Bosnia-Herzegovina, is one of our partners changing lives on many different levels.

Forty children are enrolled in the kindergarten, but this is no ordinary kindergarten. Not only does it bring together children and staff from the diverse ethnic and religious populations of the country, but it is also disabilities integrated and inclusive of children from socially deprived areas. Here, Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim families from the Bosniak, Croat, Serb, and Roma communities deliberately choose to educate their children together and learn from each other. As a result, the integration ratio brings six children with disabilities and seven from socially deprived circumstances into the inclusive mixture.

Bosnia-Herzegovina (abbreviated BiH) still suffers from the civil war of the 1990s, following its independence from Yugoslavia. The cemeteries are sad reminders of the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the civil war, as are the physically disabled persons who were injured by explosions. Unemployment today stands at 32 percent.

Divisive attitudes could easily be – and sometimes are – perpetuated. It takes courageous staff and families who refuse to live in the past divisions and choose to live as peacemakers, building a new community and society.

The first such kindergarten was set up in the city of Mostar. The Deaconess Community also provided supportive funding there. Diakoniewerk Gallneukirchen in Austria was asked to sponsor and develop a multi-ethnic and disabilities integrated kindergarten in Mostar. The professional expertise provided through the relationship with Gallneukirchen undergirded the successes that the Mostar staff were able to enjoy. The Mostar kindergarten established itself as a leader and example for the country. Through its global network with other diaconal organizations in the Kaiserswerth General Conference

(the European Conference of Deaconess Motherhouses and Diaconal Organizations), the Deaconess Community was invited to join the partnership in BiH, first in Mostar, and now in Livno.

Not only does it bring together children and staff from the diverse ethnic and religious populations of the country, but it is also disabilities integrated and inclusive of children from socially deprived areas.



The successes were as simple as the children from the kindergarten being willing to interact in public with other children with special needs rather than avoiding them or being afraid. At kindergarten, they had learned that it was safe and normal. Other children, who were non-verbal, learned to communicate and found release from their frustrations of not being understood.

Parents, who did not know how to deal with their children's special needs, were able to find guidance and support.

Along with the fascinating field trips these pre-schoolers are exposed to through their visits to the bakery and food market, the hotel and firehouse, the fishpond, and the music school, there are visitors who come in from local partner organizations. For example, the local agricultural school has students who visit weekly, introducing the children to gardening and growing such things as strawberries.

The coronavirus pandemic has created challenges that the staff has done their best to work around. Classes were canceled for a time, and then attendance was limited, so the children were divided into two groups. Teachers maintained family contacts and community outreach, sometimes by delivering groceries to families and individuals needing assistance. Even without the regular activities of the kindergarten, the staff maintained their presence as signs of hope in difficult times.

In their leadership role, the Livno and Mostar kindergartens will be hosting their 4th International Symposium on Inclusion on October 4, 2021.



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The Well – A Safe Space for Women

The Well is a women's shelter in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that ministers to vulnerable, homeless women by providing them a safe place to stay. The shelter is supported by The Welcome Church and the Bethesda Project in Philadelphia.

Last spring, due to COVID-19 concerns, the women were relocated to another site organized by the Bethesda Project. Thankfully, in July 2020, they were able to return to The Well's prior location. Providing a safe space for each woman remains a priority in their organization. The shelter is currently able to receive only one new woman per week to help reduce the risk of infection.

The ministry reports, "The Well continues to be a place where community, gifts, and leadership are nurtured and celebrated."

The Well is a low-barrier shelter, which means it does not have many pre-entry rules and conditions. Immediately responding to the needs of the individual and providing emergency shelter is a priority in low-barrier environments. Women are usually referred to the shelter by The Welcome Church or by the City of Philadelphia.

Drawing on their partnerships, The Well was able to provide equine therapy at Gateway Horseworks in Malvern. When the pastors of The Welcome Church and the staff of the Bethesda Project came up with the idea, the women couldn't wait to get started. Not only is it a way for them to engage in a fun, healthy activity, but therapy with horses is known to reduce stress levels and improve mood. "It is a calming and beautiful place," said Rev. Schaunel Steinnagle, "there is also a vegetable garden, and together with the horses, it helps people experience how we care for horses and how we care for ourselves, with the food we eat." At the end of each session, the participants were able to select fresh vegetables to bring home.

"Participants do not ride the horses," continued Rev. Steinnagle, "all of our interactions are based on the

ground, and there is no pressure. People can interact in any way they feel comfortable, by petting a horse or simply being in their presence. People are given safe space to make decisions concerning how close they will get to the horses and other decisions, and room to make connections, if they so desire."

Questions are sometimes posed. Space is offered to think and consider. Even when the people gathered ask questions about the horses, the answer is more than likely to be a question: "What do you think?" By the end of the sessions, participants were positive in their assessments of the program, expressing gratitude for having been able to participate and sadness that it had to be over.

People can interact in any way they feel comfortable, by petting a horse or simply being in their presence.

Trusting relationships are built with the animals and lead to positive feelings of love, respect, empathy, and safety. A mental health professional and equine specialist work with the women to find solutions to past issues and trauma. This activity fits with the vision of The Well: Caring for all needs (not just physical) while sharing in the building of community

Rev. Steinnagle also said people enjoyed the openness of the farm location. "It was expressed that the farm is simply less 'boundaried' than a city full of people all the time. It is easier to relax and think there."

The Well is grateful for all who have helped them provide basic needs through shared meals, health kits, and monetary donations. As Jesus ministered to the woman at the well in John 4, The Well ministers to women in need in and around Haverford.



Drawing on their partnerships, The Well was able to provide equine therapy at Gateway Horseworks in Malvern.

Shobi's Table – A Food Truck Centered in Jesus Christ



Shobi was a compassionate Biblical character in the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel who selflessly provided wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, and lentils to David's soldiers during their time of need. Shobi's Table, a mobile "Pay-As-You-Can-Café," strives to show the same hospitality for the communities of St. Paul, Minnesota.

Their mission: "Shobi's Table is a kitchen-based community who works together towards daily and sustainable justice, mercy and love made edible and available to everyone."

From noon to 1:00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, you will find volunteers serving scrumptious, made from scratch lunches to everyone who comes to the food truck. This ministry of the St. Paul Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America feeds the community in body and soul. Using rescued food from TC Food Justice, Shobi's Table serves up fresh, healthy meals whether the customer can pay \$0.25, \$1, \$10, \$100, or nothing at all. The ministry believes in the radical justice of everyone giving according to their own means for the sake of the whole community.

The food truck has no set menu, but you can expect burritos, sandwiches, wraps, salads, pastas, fried rice, fruit, and more. Locals often help fundraise for the ministry by hiring Shobi's Table for catering. With their "dollar for dollar" match program, if twenty sandwiches are purchased for a catered event, 20 sandwiches are given to customers

coming to the truck who can't afford to pay.

Not only do they care for the community; Shobi's Table is committed to being good stewards of God's Creation. While focusing on prepping and serving delectable meals for the community, the ministry also organics recycling, citing environmental justice as one of its core values.

The staff and volunteers believe that "every meal we serve is a gift from God, and at God's table, everyone has a place to be fed," and they are thankful for those who support the ministry with their gifts of time, donations, and generous prayer. Every time the food truck is open, Shobi's Table continues to bring the community together with the love of Jesus, one meal at a time.

Lower Lights Ministries Helps Break the Cycle of Addiction and Poverty in Columbus, Ohio

In 1991, the members of Lower Lights Community Church and Pastors Dave and Jane Fulks had a vision of starting a ministry that would help meet the emergency needs of local families. At that time, they probably never imagined how that small ministry would evolve into what it is today and how it would impact thousands of people in Columbus, Ohio, for years to come.

Lower Lights mission: “Compelled by the love of God, Lower Lights Ministries invests in the restoration of the whole person and reconciliation of communities through transformative relationships and leadership development.” The ministry has five programs, all of which help to meet needs, build relationships, and transform lives.

**Without insurance restrictions,
there is no limit on the length
of stay for women in the
program.**

Lower Lights Recovery (LLR) is the program that the Deaconess Community helps to support. LLR provides housing for women who have substance use disorders. The program is unique because it offers help to vulnerable women, free of charge, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. This means that LLR has the freedom to select programming that is in the best interest of individual participants. In addition, it does not limit services to what is covered by insurance such as Medicaid.

Without insurance restrictions, there is no limit on the length of stay for women in the program. Unlike coverage through Medicaid or other insurance carriers, participants in the program benefit from long-term recovery support where women can work at their own pace toward greater living independence while still benefiting from the structure and support of the program. Grant Coordinator Whitney Vosler reports, “For many women, this support has made the difference between personal growth and relapse, and in some cases, their relapse could have resulted in death. Simply put, support from the Deaconess Community is saving lives.” **A testimony from one of the participants reports, “Lower Lights Recovery helped me find the light at the end of a very dark tunnel. The program is about finding hope and never giving up on yourself.”**

The Deaconess Community helped fund Rachel's House, another Lower Lights program in a previous grant cycle. Rachel's House provides housing for female ex-offenders immediately after incarceration. Offering help with addiction, encouraging healthy relationships, and promoting economic stability, 89% of participants do not return to prison within three years. Lower Lights also offers family housing for low-income families and individuals. One participant commented, “The way they treat people inside the community and outside the community, the way they wanted me to treat myself, was really just, to me, how Christ [is].”



Faith on Foot Reaching People in the Street

The lack of shelter, inaccessibility of facilities, and exposure to inclement weather are daily obstacles for the unhoused. Faith on Foot, an outreach ministry supported by Rutland United Methodist Church, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, and in partnership with Project Rutland, is working with members of their Rutland, Vermont community to break down the obstacles. Faith on Foot serves and supports the community through listening and offering assistance.

Each Thursday morning, rain or shine, volunteers known as street chaplains gather and then set off on foot to share practical support and care with people in the community. The chaplains recognize they are standing on holy ground as they meet their neighbors in need. Working to meet basic needs, the chaplains carry hygiene kits containing essential items and invite their neighbor to share in meals. On average, the group passes out 300-400 kits yearly; during the winter months, cold weather survival gear is distributed to ward off frostbite and other conditions.

To help fight hunger, members of this faith community deliver Meals-Ready-to-Eat to outdoor locations where people sleep and live. The organization also heads up a free café called The Comfort Zone, which is open Monday-Thursday mornings. However, when the pandemic started, Faith on Foot had to get creative in distributing meals. So, to keep everyone safe and healthy, The Comfort Zone is now an outdoor café. Patrons enjoy breakfast outside at the tables and chairs, or they get their meal to go.

The chaplains recognize they are standing on holy ground as they meet their neighbors in need.

A local guest, Jim, first learned about the café after receiving a hygiene kit containing socks from a street chaplain. Apprehensive of the "sock people" and the res-



In addition to leaving meals and emergency supplies at several sites in November 2020, Faith on Foot was able to use funds from the Deaconess Community to purchase travel shampoo bottles and convert a donation of full size shampoo into bottles to use in personal care kits.

taurant at first, he soon began to look forward to visiting each day. Not only does he enjoy daily meals now, but he also loves to volunteer at the café by helping, cleaning, and organizing. On average, The Comfort Zone feeds 70+ hungry people each day it is open.

A local guest, Jim, first learned about the café after receiving a hygiene kit containing socks from volunteers. Apprehensive of the "sock people" and the restaurant at first, he soon began to look forward to visiting each day. Not only does he enjoy daily meals now, but he also loves to volunteer at the café by helping, cleaning, and organizing. On average, The Comfort Zone feeds 70+ hungry people each day it is open.

Although there have been new challenges due to the pandemic, Rev. John Michael Longworth shares that he is proud of the organization's no-quit attitude: "[We have a] real, deep conviction from God that if we said, 'This is too hard,' and closed down, we wouldn't be doing what

the Spirit is calling us to do." Rev. Longworth is excited that people from other faith groups and the community are becoming interested in getting involved with the organization. Many are coming together to see how they can help and volunteer.

Faith on Foot strives to provide a sacred space for guests and help meet the needs of those struggling in the area while sharing the love of God. Faith on Foot street chaplains greet everyone with love. Whatever the need, they are there to help and provide encouragement and guidance.

The We Care Team Gives Hope to Refugees

“Border Crisis” immediately calls out for action as horrific images and stories stir our hearts in love of our neighbor. Refugees and asylum-seekers who often come to the United States desperate and scared are our neighbors. Many feel as if there is no help available to them as they journey across the border. However, The We Care Team of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, is working tirelessly to advocate for humanitarian aid on their behalf.

We Care was brought to life one Sunday morning after a transformative service at St. Paul Lutheran Church. As the churchgoers gathered, many asked, “What can we do to help the refugees and immigrant families on the borders today?” The group decided that it was not Christ-like to sit by and abandon those who have escaped from poverty, terror, and persecution. As a result, they decided to form the We Care Team.

Among their various activities, the organization provides aid to asylum-seeking families, helps individuals gain U.S. citizenship, and aids in safety planning. They also offer support to victims of crimes and sex trafficking.

Last year, one hundred percent of the Deaconess Community grant supported nine families who needed legal representation through the Asylum Law Clinic at Compass Immigration Legal Services.

When Emmanuel was seeking asylum in the United States due to political persecution in the Congo, We Care provided support to him. Because of the help, he continued to pursue his passion for music while holding a full-time job. With hard work and dedication, Emmanuel won the Best Jazz Musician award at the Central Pennsylvania Music Awards in 2019.

Gloria came to the United States with her family after her parents protested against the current president of Venezuela. Her father, mother, and brother were granted asylum, but Gloria was not. Thankfully, with her degree in International Logistics, she obtained a work permit

and now works as an international account manager for one of the largest distribution companies in central Pennsylvania.

Additionally, through the organization's help, the church's youth minister, Moses, was granted Permanent Resident Status in August 2020. Other significant successes of the organization include supporting ten asylum-seeking families, helping a parent from Morocco enroll her young child into public school, and advocating for a client that resulted in his retaining a job.

We Care calls on churches, community members, students, and others from all walks of life to join their team or contribute in some capacity. Their work and partnerships is critical as the team advocates for our neighbors seeking to flourish as they flee Afghanistan, other war-torn countries, gender and race violence, oppression, persecution, poverty, and climate-change destruction.

We Care provides aid to asylum-seeking families, helps individuals gain U.S. citizenship, and aids in safety planning

2021 Mission Grant Partners

Renewing Grants

Café Esperanza, Reading, Pennsylvania
Creative Living Community of Connecticut, Inc., Manchester, Connecticut
Earth Ministry, Seattle, Washington
Evangelisches Diakoniewerk Gallneukirchen, Upper Austria, Austria
Faith on Foot Street Chaplaincy – Good Shephard Lutheran Church, Rutland, Vermont
Family Promise of Tulsa County, Tulsa, Oklahoma
Joy Reigns Lutheran Church Recovery Rental Assistance Program, Edgewater, Maryland
Lower Lights Recovery, Columbus, Ohio
Nawakwa Growing Project, Arendtsville, Pennsylvania
Maine Poor People’s Campaign, Portland, Maine
The Well, Hartford, Pennsylvania
Oregon Fellowship, Portland, Oregon
Together Here Ministries, Duluth, Minnesota
WE CARE Team, Carlisle, Pennsylvania
West View HUB, West View, Pennsylvania

New Grants

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Orleans, Louisiana
Kids Above All, Chicago, Illinois
Lutheran Center, Lincoln, Nebraska
Lutheran Church in Liberia, Liberia
Shobi’s Table, St. Paul, Minnesota
Trinity Education Foundation, Everett, Washington

Congregations, social ministry organizations, and other non-profits are invited to seek funding to seed new programs or expand existing ministries. Grants are available for a single year or up to three years.

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