

Interchurch at 50



A Brief History of
Interchurch Social Services of Knox County, Inc.

By Rev. Mearle L. Griffith

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Interchurch Social Services (ISS) of Knox County, Ohio was designed by a group of Mount Vernon congregations in August of 1968 to meet a long-felt need in the community to be a resource for people to turn to in all kinds of personal and family emergencies.

Fredrick N. Lorey records the early start of Interchurch in the History of Knox County 1876-1976 (Second Edition). He writes that Interchurch was actually formed as a ministerial Alliance on August 31, 1961 as an effort in church unity among Mount Vernon congregations. It had a broader mission than social services; however, early records show that a goal was to have a systematic way to serve indigent persons who were going to various parsonages to seek assistance.

Among the other ideas that formed Interchurch were an expressed desire for church unity through combined worship services and other educational programs for church members and the larger community. Lorey recounts an ecumenical service on the afternoon of January 30, 1966 at St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church. He notes that "for some five years, Roman Catholics and the several protestant denominations had been cooperating, at times rather gingerly, in a search for Christian Unity. The service at St. Vincent de Paul was a culmination of that effort." Ecumenical services in late January were part of a National Council of Churches initiative known as "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity," observed in many communities across the country.

Founding Congregations

Lorey also seems to be the best record for the founding churches in the Interchurch Ministerial Alliance. ISS historical records have differing numbers in early publicity, which may be explained by the undated brochure listings of congregations. Lorey's history indicates that Interchurch was "born on August 31, 1961, at a meeting attended by representatives of Gay Street Methodist Church, Mulberry Street Methodist Church, St Paul's Episcopal Church, First Christian Church, First Congregational Church and First Presbyterian Church. Soon thereafter, in November 1961, Faith Lutheran Church and the former Evangelical United Brethren Church joined. In March of 1962, First Baptist Church joined and later withdrew, as St Vincent de Paul joined. The first dinner meeting of Interchurch Ministerial Alliance was held on April 29, 1962." It is believed that the alliance included both pastors and representative lay people from each participating congregation.

Interchurch Social Services of Knox County, Inc. Formed

It was likely that this group developed the vision for an expanded social service outreach based on the expanding needs of the community. The expanded social service ministry, named Interchurch Social Services (ISS) of Knox County, Inc. was enlarged and incorporated from a committee of the ministerial alliance to a separate board. A 1971 version of the ISS Constitution indicates that the board shall include at least one member from each church electing to participate.

The original board was made up of 24 persons plus Mrs. Jean Fullemann as chair. Members and interests represented included:

Mrs. John Baughman	Mount Vernon Public Schools
Mrs. James Blanchard	Danville Community Action Center
Dr. James Carhart	Knox County Physician
Mr. James Dunning	Kenyon College Student
Rev. Lawrence Dunnewold	First Congregational Church and Head Start
Mrs. Jack Fribley	Mental Health
Mrs. Jean Fullemann	First Congregational Church, Chair
Mr. Richard Harvey	Chair, Mount Vernon Interchurch
Mr. Charles Hastings	Extension Service
Rev. Edgar Higgins	First Presbyterian Church
Mrs. Dorothy Longaker	Head Start
Sister Phillip Maria	Mercy Hospital Administrator
Mr. Thomas Mills	Mount Vernon Pharmacist
Mrs. Edward Morris	Social Work
Mr. William Mossholder	Mount Vernon Attorney
Rev. Robert New	Knox County Health Planning Council
Mrs. Robert Ranson	Mount Vernon Public Schools
Mr. Edward Schroeder	Mercy Hospital
Mr. Roland Shepard	Clinical Psychologist, Kenyon College
Father James Smith	Vice President, Mount Vernon Interchurch
Mrs. William Walker	FISH
Mr. William Walker	Treasurer, Mount Vernon Interchurch
Dr. Robert Westerheide	Knox County Surgeon
Mr. James Claggett	Social Worker, Moundbuilders

The social services ministry began with a gift of \$1,500 from The Bexley Society, just before Bexley Hall, a theological training institute, left Kenyon College in Gambier to join Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in New York. The budget for 1971 was anticipated at \$6,200 with \$3,600 pledged from eight participating churches.

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church provided office space at 100 East High Street for the early venture that opened its doors in the fall of 1968. Mercy Hospital provided the first executive director, **Sister Ann Hinchon**, who served for a year. She came to Mount Vernon from Sisters of Charity of Nazareth to be on the staff of Mercy Hospital, but was released to work solely for Interchurch as director of the Social Services Committee in carrying out the ecumenical efforts of ten congregations. The congregations who had united together included those mentioned above plus Harcourt Parish in Gambier and Seventh Day Adventist, Mount Vernon. At about the same time, Mount Vernon was busy preparing for its future. Mount Vernon Nazarene College was opening its doors, plans were being made for the opening of the Knox County Joint Vocational School as well as a new Mount Vernon High School building, and Junior Achievement was making its first sales pitch to the area.

Interchurch Executive Directors

Sister Ann Hinchon	1968	1 year
Jean Bertschy	1969-1970	1 year
Jean Fullemann	1970-1988	18 years
Jolene Stulka	1988-2004	16 years
Joy Harris	2004-Present	14 years

A newspaper story on October 2, 1968, indicated that Interchurch had already provided services to 18 families in its first weeks of operation. Head Start mothers were identified as the first clients. "We hope to be able to serve the already existing major social services in the community in a manner they recommend we serve," the nun said in the article. "And we hope to be liaison between all other agencies such as hospitals, schools and YMCA." The director said the service office was born of the need to provide help to the community's ministers who are faced daily with so many social needs.

Among the purposes of Interchurch identified in the beginning:

- Offering information about available services,
- Arranging referrals to other agencies,
- Helping those with need negotiate with an already established organization,
- Providing concrete help such as finding employment, housing and financial assistance,
- Soliciting the aid of volunteers to provide direct services, if needed.

Service Area/Population Served:

The 1970 census provides a glimpse of the Knox County population and the needs identified for a social service ministry. With a population of 41,795, a total of 32 percent was urban (13,373) and 68 percent was rural (28,422). The county had 3,319 children under five years and 10,496 between five and 17. Another 23,305 residents were aged 18-64 and 4,675 were over age 65.

Household income data from 1967 showed 23.1 percent of the households had incomes between \$0 and \$2,499. Another 14.7 percent of the homes had incomes between \$2,500 and \$3,999. The largest percentage (33.3) of households had incomes between \$4,000 and \$6,999. Another 14.1 percent of households had incomes between \$7,000 and \$9,999. The average Ohio family income for that period was \$9,203. Nearly 85 percent of Knox County residents lived below that state average and only 14.4 percent of Knox County households had incomes above \$10,000.

Knox County Welfare Department in 1970 reported 879 cases, with 475 listed as new applicants processed. Interchurch offers services to Knox County residents at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Jean Bertschy, a registered nurse, became executive director in 1969, but decided to resign after a year to get a job with summers off to accommodate the schedule of her children.

Jean Fullemann, who served for 18 years from 1970 to 1988, became executive director after serving on the original committee that created Interchurch social services and chairing the Interchurch Board of Directors for two years. A Mount Vernon News feature story at Fullemann's retirement from Interchurch cited her accomplishments. Joann Bell, former ISS Board Chair, is quoted on the "tremendous success" of ISS under Fullemann's leadership.

"The agency was a one-person, two-room operation at St Paul's Parish House with a \$4,500 budget when she started. Today the agency has a staff of 15 plus a large corps of volunteers, occupy an entire building and operate on a yearly budget of \$127,000." Under Fullemann's leadership, ISS opened a branch office in Centerburg and a second-hand clothing store on North Main Street called Clothes-n-Counters."

She also contributed much to new programs and services of other agencies. "She was instrumental in the beginning of Knox Area Rural Transportation (KART), the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, New Directions and passage of the first Children Services levy," according to Bell. After 18 years at ISS and 48 years of public service, Fullemann left ISS to return to college to work on a degree in psychology so she could provide services closer to the client.

Jolene Stulka became executive director in 1988, when ISS was ready to celebrate 20 years of service to residents of the county. She served for 16 years before retiring in 2004. Stulka had a background in sales and marketing, with an emphasis on counseling and guidance. She also served as past president of the Christian Women's Club. During her tenure, ISS opened branches in Fredericktown and Danville.

Joy Harris became executive director on July 6, 2004, and continues in the position at the 50th Anniversary. A lifelong Mount Vernon resident, Harris was formerly executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Knox and Morrow Counties for nine years prior to joining ISS. She also was a case manager for an additional nine years. She has also been associated with Kno-Ho-Co Day Care and Miller Ranch for Boys in Newark. Among the accomplishments under her leadership, Harris led community efforts to design the building, raise the funds and move the agency to its new building location on West Gambier.

During Harris' leadership, ISS has established relationships with the Ohio Benefit Bank, which provides assistance with tax preparation for low income clients and assists with various applications for income supports, and AEP's Neighbor-to-Neighbor program bringing additional financial resources to the county to aid with electric bills. ISS has also established an ongoing relationship with United Way that has brought additional financial resources in to provide financial aid. ISS has contracted with Jobs and Family Services (JFS) Prevention, Retention and Contingency Program to provide back-to-school vouchers for clothing, school supplies, and household taxable items over a 10-year period, bringing approximately two million dollars in direct aid and support for the local economy. The program was discontinued by JFS in 2016.

As has been true across the ISS history, relationships have been developed with MVNU Social Work Department and Kenyon Learn & Serve Program, giving students an opportunity to learn. In addition, visibility has been increased in the social work community by involvement with: Family and Children First Council; Knox Health Planning Partnership; The Emergency Needs Coalition; and The Winter Sanctuary which has expanded the scope of ISS with its partners.

ISS has worked with OSU Extension in developing a gleaning program and through our association with Mid-Ohio Food Bank and Feeding America, ongoing contracts have been initiated with Wal-Mart, Kroger, and Baker's IGA to reclaim "bent & dent" as well as fresh foods approaching their "sell by" date. ISS has also established reclaim programs with Kentucky Fried Chicken and Subway.

ISS has also written grants to local funders to purchase the small box truck permitting pick-up of food products and distributing them throughout the county through food pantries. ISS also partners with CHOMP Ministries, so they can use the truck once or twice a month to travel to Mid-Ohio Food Bank to bring fresh produce back for distribution through free produce markets in Mount Vernon.

In an interview, Robert Lantz, retired banker and long-time treasurer of ISS, observed that "the executive directors have provided excellent leadership, have been well thought of and garnered community support to do as much as possible." He remembers that the ISS organization "was always well thought of and well-supported. The work they were doing was appreciated." Lantz recalls that the organization generally had sufficient funds to operate, "but not much more!"

In 1969, the ISS office moved from the Episcopal Parish House to a larger Sunday school room in Gay Street United Methodist Church. In 1978 as the ISS programs expanded a larger space was secured at Gay Street UMC.

Leader in Innovation

Across the years, ISS has been a leader in innovation and has responded to the need for additional services. Some of the examples of services and programs initiated to fill a need at the time were:

The need for a safe place for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse was identified in 1982 and after a year of discussion by interested community leaders and ISS staff, it was determined to open an apartment upstairs in the ISS office building at 114 East Gambier. Mary Hendrickson was the first and long-time director of the program, "New Directions Domestic Abuse Shelter and Rape Crisis Center of Knox County." Since the 1990's Soroptimist International of Mount Vernon and Knox County have supported New Directions, as it became a separate organization. Joan Stallard said the group adopted the cause of preventing domestic violence and joining with New Directions was a perfect fit. Lori Jones-Perkins is the current director and the program provides a shelter at an undisclosed location.

In 1984, ISS sponsored a Pastoral Counseling Service under the direction of Dr. Julia Brodie. The service offered personal, marriage and family counseling through a network of trained local pastors.

In 1987, ISS recognized a need for more adequate housing and developed a Habitat for Humanity effort to renovate housing and make it available to families who might not otherwise be able to secure home ownership. ISS purchased a home at 402 East Ohio Ave., Mount Vernon, to renovate and resell to a lower income family. Rev. Roy Godfrey, then pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, and his wife, Ruth, were leaders in bringing Habitat for Humanity to Knox County.

It was a branch of a national program developed by Millard Fuller as a not-for-profit Christian housing ministry to work with the poor to improve their living conditions. Former President Jimmy Carter and his wife Roselyn were long-time volunteers for Habitat for Humanity and gave it greater visibility. In 1991, ISS Habitat for Humanity built a home at 110 West Pleasant Street in Mount Vernon for Ron and Dawn Davis and family. In addition to habitat, ISS offered numerous programs to help persons find and acquire adequate housing, employment and job skills. Some examples were helping people move from unheated cars, garages and barns to other accommodations. When ISS studied the need for more adequate housing, more than 1,300 families in Knox County were identified as needing proper housing.

An Endowment Fund Campaign was undertaken in 1987-88 to raise \$100,000 to provide funds for building maintenance and utilities, so that other donations could go directly to client needs. The members of the successful campaign committee were H. Landon Warner, chairman; Gerald Walker, John Ryerson, Steve Mullendore and Edward Schroeder. While it was hoped that the endowed funds would provide \$7,000 to \$8,000 annually for building maintenance and utilities, the expanded program of ISS has far exceeded the initial endowment. Executive Director Joy Harris advised the board in a recent report that the maintenance and utilities costs are now in the range of \$35,000 per year and that funding this expense is one of the greatest needs of the agency.

Christmas in July literally was developed on a radio interview show. Gloria Parsisson was being interviewed by Helen Zelkowitz on WMVO's "Coffee Cup" show and the topic was the requirements of ISS in serving the needy population at Christmas. Parsisson was sharing that the need was great at Christmas time, but that ISS also had needs all year long to provide food for the hungry of Knox County. The radio host quipped, "You need a Christmas in July!" and the program was begun about 35 years ago. All four ISS branches still continue "Christmas in July" drives to provide food for needy persons and families across the county each year.

In 1982 Interchurch Social Services reported receiving more than 6,000 calls for information and services. Executive Director Jean Fullemann told the board that the increase in calls was more than a 50 percent increase over 1981. To handle the increased responsibilities part-time social workers Gloria Parsisson and Vicky Youngman were added to the ISS staff.

114 East Gambier Street

In August 1981, the Mount Vernon office moved to a residential home at 114 East Gambier Street. The home was purchased following receipt of a "surprise" bequest of nearly \$26,000 from the estate of Roselle Johnson and a grant from the Community Trust of \$30,000.

The Long-Range Planning Committee produced a four-page document outlining the benefits of having larger space ("rooms rather than a partitioned room"), greater space for privacy with clients, conference and meeting rooms, kitchen and bathroom facilities as well as storage. The document was intended for supporting churches as an explanation and rationale for the purchase decision. The ISS Board also saw the home purchase as a pledge to the future and a vote of confidence in the work of ISS.

While the newly purchased residence was intended to house all ISS operations, history shows that expanding programs and services required more space. First, Clothes-n-Counters was relocated to a small storefront on North Main Street in 1984. Some five years later, the thrift shop was moved again to larger quarters at 15 E. Vine Street.

New Building

After searching for many years for a location that would again provide space for all Mount Vernon operations (thrift store, pantry, financial aid and management offices), a new one-story facility was opened at 306 West Gambier Street in March 2009.

After the River's Edge Hunting and Fishing Store burned to the ground earlier in 2008, store owner Gary Gray decided to construct a building that could be sold to ISS. Joy Harris says the benefit of the new building would "provide ample space for pantry storage, administrative offices and Clothes-n-Counters Thrift Store all under one roof and all on one floor."

"On one floor," was often cited as a rationale for the new space as both previous locations used basement space which made services inconvenient for clients and volunteers. The food pantry was located in the basement of 114 E. Gambier and food had to be carried to the basement, packed up for clients and carried back up the stairs again. The same was true for the thrift shop on E. Vine. Clothing and other items were stored in the basement until space was available on the upstairs floor.

Harris indicated that more than half of the funds for the new building were in hand in the fall of 2008. She said the E. Gambier home was for sale and the proceeds from the sale of the E. Vine location to The Main Place had been added to the fund. She indicated that an additional \$160,000 would be needed to complete the purchase and finish the interior of the new building to serve the organization's needs. The funds needed for the interior were raised through a fundraising campaign.

Branches

Branch offices were opened in Centerburg (1984), Fredericktown (1991), and Danville (1995). Each branch operates with a separate budget to meet the needs of their community and the surrounding local school district. Gloria Parsisson, a part-time social worker with ISS in the early 1980s, recalls the early discussion about the need for services to be offered closer to the clients. She remembers two women from Danville traveling to Mount Vernon to receive services and indicated that they had to rob their children's piggy bank to have gas money to make the trip. That experience made her and her staff colleagues realize that delivery of services near the client was vitally important.

Centerburg

The ISS branch in Centerburg developed slowly after Parsisson located an under-used building owned by the local Jaycee organization at 40 North Clayton Street. She led an effort to distribute government commodities to area residents from that location each month, as the beginning services locally.

She remembers that Rev. Bob Adams of the Four Square Baptist Church had a pickup and volunteered to pick up commodities in Mount Vernon each month and deliver them to Centerburg for distribution.

After awhile ISS was able to secure the services of a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) worker and a food pantry was opened in the back of the building on a limited schedule, which has served continuously. When the Jaycees decided they no longer needed the building, ISS was able to secure it for their first branch. Parsisson remembers that the volunteers needed for the branch came from members of four local congregations--Centerburg United Methodist Church, Centerburg Lutheran Church, Centerburg Church of Christ and Four Square Baptist Church.

An article in the November 8, 1984, issue of the Centerburg Gazette indicates an open house was held the previous weekend and the headline says "ISS Ready to Serve." Rev. Mac Kelly, Centerburg United Methodist Church, and Gloria Parsisson, the part-time founding branch manager, are photographed with a new sign identifying the Centerburg ISS branch location. At their opening, they added a thrift store in the front of the building and Twice Treasured Thrift Shop has operated continuously ever since. Other services have included financial counseling and assistance, agency referrals and assistance as needed.

Fredericktown

The Fredericktown branch of Interchurch Social Services opened in June of 1991 at 69 North Main Street. Fredericktown Area Church Association (FACA) had a dream of an arrangement with interchurch, after operating a thrift shop which closed in April of 1989. The FACA churches provided funding to provide for fixed expenses. The new thrift store was called "Auntie Alice's Corner Cupboard," in honor of the ISS volunteer work of Alice McCutchen.

Sandy McQuigg was named the first Fredericktown branch manager. More than two dozen volunteers were identified as providing needed services from the FACA congregations. As the new branch opened in Fredericktown, several experienced volunteers with expertise transferred from Mount Vernon to their hometown to get the ministry running smoothly. They were June Shinnaberry, Mildred Hulse, Alice McCutchen, Leona Montgomery, Jane Thayer, Phyllis Grimm, Evelyn Chesser and Sharon Chesser.

Danville

A branch of ISS opened in the former Church of Christ on July 17, 1995. It had been the dream of pastoral leadership in Danville for more than five years for ISS to be the first organization to locate in the Sanctuary, a new ministry center providing a variety of services located at 302 South Market Street in Danville. The Association of Danville Area Ministers developed the concept of a locally based facility to serve the needs of the area and contacted ISS about a Danville branch in 1990.

During those five years, Rev. James Stuller, pastor of the Danville United Methodist Church, and Father Richard Snoke, St. Luke Catholic Church, kept the dream alive. Stuller served as chair of the ministerial association and later as President of the Sanctuary Board.

Martha Finan was selected as the first Danville branch manager. At its opening, the Danville branch offered a food pantry and financial assistance to families in crisis as well as a thrift shop, called The Church Mouse, featuring clothing and housewares for the general public. Dorothy Thompson, also of Danville, was named house manager, overseeing the thrift shop, food pantry and volunteers. Alice Anan provided staff assistance through a training program for older adults.

In addition to Danville, the branch was established to serve Howard, Glenmont, Walhonding, Martinsburg, Frazeysburg, Millwood, Jelloway, Amity, Greer, Brinkhaven, Tiverton, and Bladensburg.

In September 2011, The Sanctuary completed a new facility for the Danville branch of Interchurch. The former Church of Christ was determined to be structurally unsound and not financially feasible for repair. A new location was built behind 304 South Market, behind a remodeled two-story building which was to become offices for the Sanctuary services. The church was demolished and additional parking provided.

Interchurch Social Services of Knox County, Inc. (ISS) at 20 years (1988)

On Sunday, October 16, 1988, a special service was held to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of Interchurch Social Services at Gay Street United Methodist Church. The 3:00 p.m. service was followed by a reception and an open house was held at the ISS building, 114 East Gambier Street. The open house also provided an opportunity to display a quilt composed of symbols of most member congregations which had been in development for more than six years. The quilt is comprised of 12 inch by 15 inch squares including a church symbol and embroidered name of the congregation, quilted by the Knox County Quilters. This popular memento hangs in the food pantry at the ISS office in Mount Vernon.

Another 20th Anniversary project was a new sign for the ISS office built and erected by the Knox County Joint Vocational School carpentry class. The sign was constructed in the shape of a cross and hung at the East Gambier location.

The anniversary service included a combined choir of 31 participating congregations. Lay and clergy leaders participating in the service were Rev. Roy Godfrey, Rev. Paul Daggett, Rev. Stuart Wells, Joyce Heaton, Leonard Helser, Rev. John Capper, Mitzi Graham, Peggy Turgeon and Ann Hudson. Shirley Rardon recognized the ISS volunteers and Marge Moore was director of the combined choir.

Officers installed for the upcoming year for ISS were Mary F. Snyder of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church re-elected president; Rev. Paul Daggett, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, vice president; Leonard Helser of the First Presbyterian Church, treasurer; and LuAnn Freppon of the Green Valley Methodist Church, secretary.

Current Services

Year-end totals for 2017 for the four branches of ISS by services provided, based on available resources:

Branch	Pantry	Utilities	Housing	Medical	Gasoline	I&R*	Misc.	Total
Centerburg	507	66	16	6	25	108	679	1,407
Danville	883	139	16	8	44	14	14	1,118
Fredericktown	537	96	33	5	33	69	6	1,316
Mt. Vernon	4,979	311	135	42	124	1,312	688	7,571

- Clothing Assistance – a complete outfit is provided for each individual or family member once every month. When available, coats, boots, hats, and gloves are also provided.
- Food Pantry – A variety of food is available once every 30 days. Individuals and families receive the basic ingredients for 3 meals for 3 days, a total of 9 meals. Snacks and taxable items, such as soap, laundry detergent, and toilet paper, are also included. All locations are Customer Choice Pantries, meaning that families can choose what foods their family will eat. See chart above for the number of clients in each branch for food pantry utilization.
- Financial Aid/Discretionary Fund – Assistance is available twice a year for those with disconnect notices on utilities. Rent and deposit assistance is also available. We also provide assistance with prescription costs, with the exception of pain medications, and gasoline vouchers for out-of-county medical appointments. Prescription assistance and gasoline vouchers are available once every 60 days. See chart above for the volume of services provided in 2017.
- Turn the Tide – A Christmas event that includes three components: Holiday food baskets, Tree of Sharing, and Adopt-a-Family. Established clients may sign up for assistance with the holidays in mid-October. Eligibility for this program only is 185% Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- Other Services – Kiwanis “Coats for Kids” distribution, the Ohio Benefit Bank, AEP’s Neighbor-to-Neighbor Assistance Program, *Information and Referral. ISS also provides a worksite for court-appointed community service workers and the Work Experience Program (WEP).

Board of Directors

As ISS moves into its 50th year of service, the following persons are serving on the Board of Directors, with officers noted:

Wally Thomen, President, Centerburg UMC

Kasie Alexander, Vice-President, First Congregational UCC

Carol Durbin, Treasurer, St. Luke’s Catholic Church

Mary Jane Schlairet, Secretary, Mulberry St. UMC

Joe Bell, Gay St. United Methodist Church

Brian Breece, Green Valley UMC

Peggy Dunn, St. Luke’s Catholic Church

Rev. Scott Elliott, First Congregational UCC

Wendy Fetters, Harcourt Parish Episcopal

Mitzi Graham, Community Member At-Large

Linda Johnson, Amity UMC
Rev. David Kendall-Sperry, St. Paul's Episcopal
Ann Knight, New Life Church of the Nazarene
Pat Harris McQuigg, St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Rev. Timothy Mohon, First Baptist, Fredericktown
Dan Myers, Faith Lutheran Church
Sally Rogan, Harcourt Parish Episcopal
Brenda Schultze, First Presbyterian Church
Dorothy Thompson, Danville UMC
Alice Williams, The Shepherds House
Eva Yarman, Amity UMC

Ann Jurkowitz, Faith Lutheran Church
Rev. Rachel Kessler, Harcourt Parish Episcopal
Jerry Mann, First Presbyterian Church
Ron Meharry, First Congregational UCC
Betty Mossholder, Brandon UMC
Carol Navin, Gay St. UMC
Michael Schillaci, St. Paul's Episcopal
Audrey Spearman, Danville UMC
Ulysses Vawters, Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Phyllis Workman, Lakeholm Church of the Nazarene

Staff

ISS has one full-time and 12 part-time staff in addition to four contract employees.

Volunteers

More than 100 volunteers (includes community service workers) donate time to ISS offices each week. Volunteers serve in the pantries, the thrift stores, and at the reception desks. Others take charge of recycling efforts, picking up bread and other donated goods from local grocers, restaurants, or orchards. They also volunteer at special events such as Turn the Tide. Most volunteers spend 3 – 5 hours one day a week at Interchurch. Without their support, ISS would be unable to provide the level of service that is needed.

For 50 years, ISS has provided a variety of emergency assistance services and a Christian presence to thousands in need in the Knox County area. The organization's mission statement reflects that commitment: "Interchurch Social Services is a Christian, faith-based ministry, uniting community resources to meet the needs of those in crisis."

Finances and Program Impact

Currently, 24 churches and church organizations provide financial support for the ISS programs through the Mount Vernon branch. They are:

Amity United Methodist Church
Brandon Baptist Church
Central Christian Church
East Ohio Conference UMC
Faith Lutheran Church
First Church of the Nazarene
First Presbyterian Church
Gay St. United Methodist Church
Liberty Chapel United Methodist Church

Beulah United Methodist Church
Brandon United Methodist Church
Community Christian Fellowship
Ebenezer United Methodist Church
First Baptist Church
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Church of the Foursquare Gospel
Harcourt Parish Episcopal Church
Lock United Methodist Church

Grove Church of Christ
NewLife Church of the Nazarene
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Vineyard Church

Mulberry St. United Methodist Church
Owl Creek Baptist Church
Trinity Assembly of God

In 2017, the Mount Vernon office of ISS operated on a budget of \$291,457. Congregations and church organizations, individuals and group donations provided the largest portions of funds to support the budget with more than \$106,000 contributed. Food for the Hungry provided \$80,000 and thrift store profits more than \$33,000 for services provided. Income for 2017 was \$274,056.09, which was \$17,400.91 under budget. Expenses were \$256,805.84, which was \$6,142.19 over budget, leaving a net income of \$17,250.25. Mount Vernon's income budget for 2018 is \$236,610 and expense budget is \$235,455.

Cristy Miller, Client Aid Counselor on ISS staff, reported to the January meeting of the Board of Directors that through the Mount Vernon branch 249 children and 13 teens were served at Christmas which included 103 families in the Turn the Tide program. For November-December, financial aid was provided to 93 families, 40 utilities, 26 housing, 5 medical, 22 gasoline, 180 information and referral, and 106 miscellaneous. The office asks for proof of identification, proof of income, and proof of address before giving assistance.

Sandy Daubenspeck, pantry manager, reported the pantry helped 757 families during November & December 2017. There were 148 Christmas boxes provided in 2017. (This compares to 179 in 2016 and 190 in 2015.) For the 2017 year, 4,979 clients were helped through Interchurch pantry.

Lou Baker, thrift store manager, reported to the board, giving an example of a typical month (November). There were 591 paying customers and 347 voucher customers (222 adults, 125 children) — 210 vouchers were issued, with a total of 938 customers in the store that month.

In the Mount Vernon thrift store, in that monthly example, 63 percent of customers were paying individuals and 37 percent were non-paying customers using vouchers. Of those 37 percent voucher customers, 64 percent were individuals and 36 percent have children on their vouchers (parents with children or grandparents raising their grandchildren). So with the November example, the thrift store provided more than \$1,200 worth of clothing to voucher customers, based on modest thrift store prices, as well as dozens of free coats worth several hundred dollars. "All of these items met a desperate need in our voucher customers' lives. But, this also means that we have just two-thirds of our customers carrying the store," Baker explained. "This means we live in a generous community, and this allows us to do a good job of providing clothing needs for people in financial need, but we want to attract and keep paying customers whose purchases keep the store open," she added.

Baker provided statistics that show the incredible growth of the thrift stores and their contribution to the financial success of the agency. She notes that 1983 records for Mount Vernon thrift store show sales of \$5.25 (January 13) and \$6.60 (January 19) while comparable sales for the same date in 2018 were \$165.50 (January 13) and \$181.83 (January 19). Nine and thirteen voucher customers

were also served this year on the January dates. At thrift store prices, many adult items can be purchased for a low cost of \$2.00 compared to a quarter in 1983. February sales in 1983 were \$3.80 on the 24th, compared to \$324.90 this year. March 1 comparison for 1983 was \$4.60 and \$160.04 this year. These numbers demonstrate the value of the thrift stores to ISS operations as well as an appreciated service to the community.

Centerburg

Income for the Centerburg branch in 2017 was \$62,015.37 which was \$8,265.37 over annual budget. Expenses were \$58,272.57, which was \$3,178.57 over budget, leaving a net income of \$3,742.80. The Centerburg annual budget for 2018 is expected to exceed \$52,600. Thrift store sales provide the largest portion of the budget, with Food for the Hungry, individual and congregational donations providing most of the remaining funds needed.

New branch manager, Sheryl O'Neil, reported for November and December a total of 52 food pantry clients; seven gas vouchers; seven utility bills; one rent assistance, and 156 miscellaneous assists. There were eight households given financial aid in the amount of \$917.39. The thrift store sales were \$5,259.92. They helped another group providing 60 Thanksgiving meals. They provided food for Christmas for 22 families without children and 31 families with children. There were 49 families given gifts for Christmas. Sponsoring Churches for Centerburg include: Grace Lutheran Church, Lock Federated Church and Centerburg United Methodist Church.

Danville

Income in 2017 at the Danville branch was \$60,143.39. Expenses were \$61,709.68, leaving a net income loss of \$1,566.29. The Danville branch operates on an annual budget of \$64,870 in 2018. Congregational funds, Food for the Hungry and thrift store sales provide the largest portions of funds to meet the budget. Danville also has a successful Christmas in July campaign fundraiser.

Sue Wadian, Danville branch manager, reported that in November and December they provided 175 food pantry families, 24 utilities assistance, two housing assistance, and seven gasoline vouchers. They provided 28 Christmas boxes with food and 54 boxes with both food and Christmas gifts. The breakdown of ages for Christmas gifts was eight under one year old; 24 from 2-5 years old, 56 from 6-10 years old, 40 from 11-16 years old, and 13 from 16 and up for a total of 141 children served. The Danville branch has three staff and 11 volunteers.

Sponsoring churches for Danville branch include: St. Luke's Catholic Church, Bladensburg Church of Christ, North Bend Church of the Brethren, Howard United Methodist Church and Danville United Methodist Church.

Fredericktown

Income for the Fredericktown branch in 2017 was \$79,623.52 which was \$10,981.10 over budget. Expenses were \$69,399.80, leaving a net income of \$10,223.72. In 2018, the Fredericktown branch

is operating on a budget of nearly \$63,175, within Food for the Hungry campaign, individual, group and church contributions as well as thrift store sales providing the major portion of the funding.

Katie Frazier, Fredericktown branch manager, reported 89 families used the food pantry in November and December; 34 households received financial aid; 19 utilities assistance; four housing support; one medical; seven clothing vouchers and 10 gasoline vouchers. There were seven new clients and 417 customers in the thrift store. 70 families were served through Turn the Tide and all received a Christmas dinner food basket.

Sponsoring churches for the Fredericktown branch are:

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| Fredericktown First Presbyterian Church | Fredericktown United Methodist Church |
| Fredericktown First Baptist Church | Berlin United Methodist Church |
| Batemanstown United Methodist Church | Owl Creek Church of the Brethren |
| Salem United Methodist Church | Green Valley United Methodist Church |
| Fredericktown Seventh Day Adventist | NewLife Community Church |
| Waterford United Methodist Church | Fredericktown First Church of God |
| Jelloway United Methodist Church | North Liberty United Methodist Church |
| Fredericktown Church of Christ | Christ the King |

Across the four branches of ISS more than \$400,000 dollars will be provided to give goods and services to the neediest citizens of Knox county during the 50th year of operation. In addition, thousands of dollars more will be provided through thrift store vouchers and food pantry provisions. The list of services provided above for 2017 demonstrates the need for Interchurch Social Services and the value that this ministry is providing for Knox County residents.

Leaders of ISS indicate that their presence in the community has sensitized friends, neighbors, coworkers and employers to the issues of poverty and provides an outlet for their response. In 1984, an editorial in the Mount Vernon News asserted “Interchurch Social Services has done more to unite Knox Countians in serving humankind than any other agency.” That statement is as true today as it was all those years ago.

Food For The Hungry

A major funding partner for the success of ISS has been a community-wide drive spearheaded by WMVO radio personality Charlie Kilkenny and his wife Carol. Kilkenny was aware that due to unemployment in the area, Interchurch Social Services had requests for services at Christmas from more people than they had resources to supply. He conceived a program to ask the community for more support through a remote broadcast at the Mount Vernon Shopping Plaza in December 1982. Carol Kilkenny named the operation, “Food for the Hungry”. A Mount Vernon News article records that Kilkenny spotted a new red pickup in a dealer’s showroom and imagined that he would promote filling that pickup with food for the county’s neediest, through distribution by ISS. WMVO management agreed to donate portions of their programming to promote the event on Wednesday prior to the drive and word spread.

The result of the first “Food for the Hungry” was a total of \$1,400 collected and 5 pickup trucks of food donated. The charitable car dealers at Colonial Car Company brought out a new pickup each time one was filled. At 6:00 p.m., with a police escort, accompanied by Mount Vernon Mayor Bette K. Winan, the caravan of food proceeded to the Interchurch office on East Gambier Street where unloading and organizing took more than two hours.

What started for a particular situation has continued for 36 years to help meet the increasing needs in our county. Published reports for 1987 indicate that \$21,000, including a \$5,000 match gift from WMVO/Cable Television/WQIO and 13 truckloads of food donations, were shared with Knox County’s neediest through ISS and Salvation Army. By 1992 the “Food for the Hungry” drive produced \$38,000 in cash and nine truckloads of food.

The progressive success of the event, “Food for the Hungry” set a goal of \$70,000 and 40 truckloads for 2001, after \$69,000 was collected along with 39 truckloads of food in 2000. At that juncture there were 31 collection points across the county to receive food and the goal was met. The total raised in 2016 was \$249,867.26, far exceeding the \$190,000 goal. In 2017, the drive contributed a record \$341,818.00 and Joy Harris was presented a check of \$32,473.64 as the first quarter funding for the four branch offices on Tuesday, January 29, 2018. The Food for the Hungry website lists the following partners who work to coordinate the fund drive:

Mount Vernon Nazarene University
Mount Vernon News
WRP CPAs
Spectrum
90.9 WNZR
News Talk Sports Radio 1300
WMVO and 100.9 FM
Super Q 93.7 WQIO
Psi Iota Xi
Delta Kappa Gamma
Knox County Career Center
Knox Pages.Com
Kenyon College
Kokosing River Productions, LLC
First Knox Bank
Central Ohio Technical College

What is obvious, but needs to be stated, is that Knox County residents are to be commended for their generosity in providing sustained support for services to the most needy and have made a significant difference in the lives of those citizens, both past and present, and, hopefully, into the future.