

## **A History of Interfaith for Older Adults** **(Central Community Interfaith = Central City Churches)**

by Shannon Meagher, Gesu Parishioner and Interfaith Board Member

Interfaith was founded in 1973 by several congregations on Milwaukee's east side who were concerned about isolated older adults. These congregations pooled their resources to more effectively reach out to these adults. The Interfaith Neighborhood Outreach Program is a direct *descendant* of those early efforts. Interfaith Older Adult Programs was incorporated in 1975.

Central City Churches Interfaith was founded in 1975 and had an office at Gesu until 2000. It was made up of nine churches: Gesu Catholic Church, Calvary Presbyterian, Central United Methodist, St. James Episcopal, Redeemer Lutheran, St. Paul Lutheran, Redeemer Lutheran, Our Savior's Lutheran and St. Rose Catholic Church, with an ecumenical board. Each congregation paid dues to Interfaith to support the programs.

Around 2000, the neighborhoods around CCC started to change in part due to Marquette's expansion, so the food pantry which was located at St. Paul's was moved to Our Savior's where the 4 days a week Central City's Outreach Ministry was started to serve those who are poor, older adults and young alike, in the surrounding neighborhoods. Included is a hospitality room next to the pantry for neighbors and homeless people to come for coffee and a sandwich and use of a phone. Today, this pantry also provides Stock Boxes for older adults.

### **Expansion of Programs**

In 2002, the CCC Interfaith was merged with Community Interfaith to the north. The merged area was larger and became Central Community Interfaith, and its office moved to the Washington Park Senior Center. More churches were now a part of Central Community such as St. Michael's Catholic Church, Cross Lutheran, Hope Lutheran and Reformation Lutheran. Besides a board that is made up of representatives from each church (although not all churches are represented), who meet monthly at the Washington Park Senior Center, there is a Clergy Board that meets at Our Savior's made up of Clergy or a representative from the original Wisconsin Avenue churches (CCC).

The churches along Wisconsin Avenue which make up Central City Churches became sort of a cluster. The dues they contribute are paid to CCC who then gives 51% to Central Community Interfaith. The remaining 49% goes towards a full-time Food Pantry employee as well as the other services offered at Our Savior's. The "new" congregations from the north, pay dues directly to Central Community Interfaith. Sadly, a number of churches have not been able, in the last few years, to afford to pay full, or in some cases, any dues to Interfaith, or send a representative to the board, so the "Neighborhood Outreach Sites," have grown to welcome sponsorship from businesses, which include board representatives and financial support. We would also love to have a business or two become sponsors for Central Community Interfaith.

### **Support and Services of Interfaith Older Adult Programs**

Many programs are run out of the Washington Park Central Community Interfaith office such as the "Neighborhood Outreach Program," which provides assistance and information to help older adults remain safely in their homes and neighborhoods. The "Telephone Reassurance Program" is a program in which volunteers call residents who sign up for free, to receive a daily call to make sure they are OK. Volunteers also drive older adults to doctor's appointments and provide outdoor "hands-on" services such as lawn cutting and snow removal.

Gesu Parish has continued to support Interfaith for Older Adults through dues to Central Community Interfaith and Central City Churches. We have a board member, Shannon Meagher and a lay representative on the Clergy Board - Erika Voss. Our parish members have been able to donate food for the food pantry, but we always welcome new, older adults who might need a call a ride or shoveling!

The Senior Centers that Interfaith manages such as Washington Park offer education and service opportunities for older adults, from sports and fitness to crafts and computer classes. Senior Meal Programs and Employment Services for adults over 50 are also located at some of the Centers, including Washington Park. Older adult volunteers are linked to work with children in schools, clinics and Head Start sites and receive a small stipend. Some parishioners from Gesu volunteer in the tutoring program at Elm School in Milwaukee.

Other programs offered to older adults through Interfaith are: Personal Care Plus trained workers who provide in-home assistance with personal cares, light housekeeping and companionship, all at an affordable rate to individuals who need that little extra assistance to remain safely in their homes, (including apartments.)

The Family Caregiver Support Network offers information and support for family members and friends helping older adults. The Case Management Unit, under contract with the Milwaukee County Department on Aging and Community Care provides nurses and a social worker for older adults who are eligible for the State Family Care Program.

In all the Older Adult Interfaith Neighborhood Outreach Programs, and especially in our own Central Community Interfaith, we welcome your involvement. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me, Shannon Meagher, anytime at 414-510-0562. Visit the Interfaith website at: <http://home.interfaithmilw.org>, or find them on Facebook, Twitter or Youtube.