

Imagine No Poverty – Norma’s Reflection
January 24, 2021

The original idea for this service topic came some time ago in a question addressed to me: What is ICRH? What is the Strickler Center? What do they do? Then, at a recent worship team meeting, as we looked at the month’s theme of imagination, someone said, “Why not ‘Imagine No Poverty’” Thus this service was born!

So my role today is to tell you about ICRH and the Strickler Center.

However, I’ll start with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quote that was just read. He ended by saying “...the question is whether our nation has the will to get rid of poverty.” I won’t speak about the nation’s response, but rather the local response.

First, let’s make sure we’re all on the same page about our local community. Most of you know that Isabella County has one of the highest poverty rates in Michigan, as well as a high homeless rate. Looking at 2020 statistics:

- 23% Mt. Pleasant’s non-student poverty rate
- 18% The rate of homeless youth in Isabella County without a family
- 135 The number of Mt. Pleasant school children without a fixed address (thus homeless)
- 510 The number of homeless individuals in Mt. Pleasant

This is a population largely invisible to most citizens.

Back in 2013, these numbers were similar, and a group of local people had the will to do something about it. They formed a group to research funding, rotational shelter models, permanent shelter models, programming and city permissions, and, based on their research, decided to establish a rotational, seasonal shelter. Thus, ICRH, the Isabella County Restoration House, was born and soon became a 5013C entity.

In its first season, January 2014-March 2014, ICRH served 49 individuals with an average of 9 guests per night, and was supported by 12 host churches and approximately 1000 local volunteer hours.

Last year, 2019-2020, 182 individuals were served with an average of 28 guests per night, and was supported by 32 local organizations, including 24 churches and approximately 4000 local volunteer hours.

Where did/does UUFCM come in? For three years, from 2014-2017, we served as the Welcome Center. Our fellowship hall welcomed guests from 4:30-6:00 for registration, snacks and conversation before they went to the church hosting that week. For seven years, 2014-the present, we have served as a partner church to another church, providing meals and volunteers for two weeks during the season.

What does ICRH do? Our mission is to provide temporary shelter and empower a path to self-sufficiency for our guests. The first part is obvious; we provide evening meals and overnight housing to our guests. In order to help our guests move toward self-sufficiency, they are each helped to develop and supported in working on a plan to meet their specific needs, whether it be a driver’s license, birth certificate, connection to mental health services, job applications, and/or connections for getting housing.

Our vision is Homeless No More. Thus, we work to help people get to a better place with a roof over their heads.

I could talk all day about ICRH, and you're certainly welcome to contact me if you have questions or would like more information, but let's switch to the Strickler Center.

The Strickler Center was also born from a group of local citizens who had and have the will to do something about poverty in this area.

The vision of the William and Janet Strickler Non-Profit Center is to reduce poverty in Isabella County by providing a shared space for non-profit agencies to coordinate, develop, and implement services to provide individuals and families with basic necessities. Started in 2017, the idea was to have one-stop shopping, so it brought together several outside agencies, each an independent 5013C organization, under one roof.

What are the agencies involved?

Food Pantry – provides groceries every two weeks (I'm sure you've seen the lines of cars stretching from the site of the Strickler Center [corner of Adams and High Streets] almost to Mission three days a week.)

Nutrition Club – provides bags of food to be sent home with school children two weekends a month

Infant Pantry – provides food and diaper relief for children 0-3 years old (This is the agency that we take a collection for every first Sunday of the month.)

Clothing, INC. – provides free clothing to anyone in need, from necessities like socks, pants, shirts, etc., to winter wear to clothing for job interviews

The Care Store – provides personal and household care items that are not eligible for retail purchase with a Bridge Card, such as toilet paper, shampoo, laundry detergent, cleaning supplies

All of these agencies need donations of goods, monetary donations and volunteer hours. I encourage you to see their websites for further information about how you can help.

I believe we are connected to all the people served by the agencies I've just talked about. We are connected by our UU Principles – the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations. We are connected by the words from the Story for All Ages - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the human right to have a place to live, food, health and safety. We are connected by our common humanity.

I find those connections are stronger for me and enrich my life when I get to know people and their stories by volunteering time with them when I can. I encourage you to do the same when you can and in whatever way you can. When we engage, we exercise our will to imagine no poverty.