



September 24, 2021 Diocesan Convention Report

1. What are the highlights of your ministry since the 2020 Diocesan Convention?

As a Ministry Partner with the Diocese of West Missouri Episcopal Church, the Council of Churches of the Ozarks (CCO) recognizes that our relationship is based on a shared mission of compassion in the name of Jesus Christ. This year, we inspired hope, met people where they were, restructured organizationally to improve service, protected against COVID, maintained human connection, updated systems, and increased partnerships by clarifying community needs. In short, this year challenged us to be a blessing and meet needs when people needed it most.

Since the last time we shared the impact of your partnership, you helped **Inspire Hope** for *more than* 100,000 people through the compassionate services of the multiple outreach services that make up the Council of Churches of the Ozarks. The need for compassion has never been greater. Fortunately, our community came together to not only protect the physical well-being of our neighbors, but also minister personally as well. It has been a time of fear and uncertainty for all of us, but especially for those struggling with the burdens and challenges of poverty. The Council of Churches remains a constant and trusted lifeline for our community - a weighty responsibility.

Beyond the numbers of individuals served, the past year represented tremendous growth and renewal for the Council of Churches of the Ozarks. Our new executive director, Jaimie Trussell, came on board in August 2020, and has overseen a transformation of our service model and strategic plan. Going from nine distinct outreaches, to one unified council, we are operating under a whole new system designed to better serve our neighbors in need. Some immediate and far-reaching changes to our systems include adapting our service models to protect partners and those we serve from COVID-19, a monumental undertaking. We identified safety, enhanced efficiencies, and increased impact while prioritizing the sacredness of human connection, allowing us to be the hands and feet of Christ when people needed it most. Going forward, many of our service changes will remain long after Covid is no longer a threat.

In the past year, we have made significant investments in infrastructure to better protect donor and client information - a looming threat in the new digital world. A new accounting software to replace *our thirty year old* version was launched, and many of our systems have moved to the cloud for both security and convenience.

Team members started imagining a future where we could adapt our services to be truly “wrap-around” in nature, and where our services could evolve to meet emergent needs. One of the most urgent needs is the oncoming "Silver Tsunami" of an ever-increasing population whose lifelong journeys have leave them unequipped to care for themselves or whose financial plans did not account (or prepare) for a time when dollars could only go so far. These people will need our help, and the Council team is already preparing to gear up to meet the need.

Our fundraising success has been unprecedented in the past year, consistently tracking above the five-year rolling average – demonstrating not only the faith the community has in the ability of the Council to serve, but also the generosity of those with whom we partner. As of this report, we are projected to surpass our 2021 annual goal by more than one million dollars.

2. Describe how these activities have furthered the work of the diocese and strengthened parishes and congregations? (Include the number of participants and/or people served.)

Compassionate outreach through Council of Churches programs brings the community together to inspire hope through life-changing services. Your participation demonstrates the love of Christ to the more than 100,000 guests, clients, volunteers, and team members engaged in the work we do. Last year our outreaches collectively recorded more than 76,959 service impressions – meaning tens of thousands of our most vulnerable neighbors received help and hope because of your investment!

Our Member Churches, such as St. John’s Episcopal Church and Christ Episcopal Church, are participating in the collaborative work of ministry and are strengthened through the daily services provided to our most vulnerable neighbors. We depend on volunteers from these congregations to deliver services across all our lanes of outreach. Our experience suggests that such involvement serves to strengthen congregations as these volunteers participate in fulfilling the mission of the church and the Diocese to grow in compassion and greater unity. The work of these Episcopal churches is also shared in our community, allowing other churches and Council partners to witness the care, concern, and consistency these congregations have for their neighbors. This service is what Mother Teresa spoke about when she advocated “Compassion in Action”.

Your parish and congregation offered compassionate action through food, hygiene, and holiday assistance to 23,261 families; inspired hope by providing safe overnight shelter, caregiver education, and day habilitation to 35,786 adults; encouraged love with nutritious meals, new clothing, mentor services, and holiday gifts for their children; and empowered independence with food delivery, non-emergency medical transport, essential home repairs and advocacy to 19,231 seniors.

3. What are your plans for ministry in 2021?

Our work is rich and diverse and difficult to summarize. It looks different to different people – depending on what services you need or have knowledge of. Streamlining our efforts to meet basic needs and move families from scarcity to security will allow us to keep doing all the great work we are doing, but also **SIMPLIFY** the message of what it is that we do here at the Council of Churches.

Related to messaging, we have long operated as distinct outreaches under the Council umbrella. You are likely very familiar with some of our services (like Crosslines), but also completely unfamiliar with others (such as Ombudsman, the One Stop, etc). Each entity operating in a silo has, unfortunately, created scores of duplicated systems and expenses within our own organization. In a season when resources are tight and we want to maximize our impact through wise stewardship, we have to eliminate these redundancies. Enhancing the awareness and collaboration among our many programs will also enrich our ability to serve neighbors and open our eyes to opportunities as they develop - allowing our programs to synergize. We will be working hard as **ONE** body to ensure that, while our separate service areas remain, our infrastructure promotes **UNITY**, efficiency, and fiscal responsibility.

This year we will be working hard to carry forward our mission to improve the quality of life for our most vulnerable neighbors by growing this ministry in strategic ways. As long as there are needs within our community, we are not content to maintain our levels of service. We must **ADVANCE**.

With all the changes our organization has experienced in the last 18 months, we rely more than ever on the stability of partners committed to a brighter future for families in need. I appreciate you taking the time to learn more about our organization and what we hope to accomplish.

In just the last year, we have already made unprecedented progress toward the decades-long dream of a united campus for the diverse ministries of CCO. A contract to purchase an ideal property has been executed, the sale of three of our current properties is progressing, architects are engaged, and our first \$500,000 in capital gifts have been raised. A grant has been received to begin freezer construction and our year-to-date donations are higher than they have ever been!

In short, we are fully ready to launch the most ambitious fundraising campaign in the history of the Council of Churches of the Ozarks, and it will not be possible without stakeholders who recognize a good investment when they see one.

We are racing toward a future where Dr. Reverend Dorsey Levell's dream:

- A **united ministry** with many unique strengths
- Impacting both **immediate needs** and **long-term transformation**
- Serving the **most vulnerable** people of southwest Missouri

- is no longer a dream, but reality.

4. How will you measure success in 2021?

Success will be measured by ensuring critical services such as food, shelter, and clothing are provided to the most vulnerable in the Episcopal Southern Deanery. In addition, although difficult to measure, we will be responsible for providing emotional support necessary to communicate a sense of being safe and being loved into each guest served. In being ONE outreach with many programs, the Council of Churches has the desire that each person we serve will know that we see them and value them as a person who matters.

Investments in new accounting software, comprehensive volunteer management software, updated donor software, and a new inventory software system will all make it easier than ever to track the numbers, demographics, and outcomes of people served. Monitoring and compiling data measurements (including guests served, areas served, analysis and comparison of prior years'/months' data) on a regular basis to be reviewed monthly by the CCO Board of Directors, CCO program leaders, and key stakeholders - with an annual review of all services to include a synopsis of the year's data to critically analyze and discuss community needs moving forward.

CCO will routinely seek feedback from member churches, community partners, volunteers, and guests to ensure services provided reflect the love of Christ and meet critical needs in the Episcopal Southern Deanery.

5. How does your ministry reflect the priorities of the diocese?

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs reminds us that while the highest level of human development is self-actualization, (which can be interpreted as defining one's relationship with God), the fundamentals required to sustain life must be provided for first. These fundamentals include basic necessities such as food, water, shelter. Without consistent access to these essentials, a person is stymied physically, mentally, and spiritually. At the Council of Churches of the Ozarks, we see our role as removing barriers as a person moves up through the hierarchy. Based on multiple references in scripture, Matthew 25 being the most well-known, our goal is to meet basic needs in the name of Jesus. Once these needs are met, we work with member congregations, such as St. John's Episcopal Church and Christ Episcopal Church, to move families up the hierarchy to develop safety, security, community and connection both within the local church and with the greater family of believers.

We feel our mission aligns well with the priorities of the diocese as we not only provide members multiple ways to effectively serve their community (we offered more than 7,022 different volunteer opportunities last year alone), but also opportunities to develop congregational leadership through the CCO Network and congregational membership. This was accomplished by connecting members to individuals living and working in Southwest Missouri – in need of help and hope – something we at the Council and within the Diocese understand comes from a relationship with God. We depend on our member congregations to steward our guests toward spiritual development as much as they depend upon us to provide food, shelter, safety, and security for those in need.

As our efforts expand externally, and we sharpen our mission and organization internally, we are equipped to make a broader impact and meet people where they are - with depth, with heart, with purpose. Partnering with you to serve in the name of Jesus Christ has led to results, and we are excited to continue raising the roof in how we serve and where we grow. Your trust and investment make all of this possible.