

FCCEJ CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF SERVICE TO GOD AND COMMUNITY

First Congo Church Gives Back Locally, Regionally and Globally!

Helping people outside of our four walls has always been a guiding principal at First Church. Supporting outreach programs at the local, state, national, and international levels has been at the heart of who we are since at least 1877, when the church ladies formed an auxiliary of the Women's Board of Missions. They proposed a series of collections on the first Sabbath of January, May and September to raise funds to help spread Christ's love and compassion for all people both locally and internationally. These collections not only helped spread the good news but also brought food, medical supplies and educational materials to societies in great need in the U.S. and beyond.

Since 1877, financial support has gone to Elizabeth Lund Home, Vermont Children's Aid Society, Red Cross, American Cancer Society, Camp Daybreak and Camp Thorpe (camps for children with mental and physical challenges), a Native American Reservation in South Dakota, Baird Center, COTS, Dismas House, Woodside Teen Center, JUMP, Heifer Project, Habitat for Humanity, Crop Walk, Meals on Wheels, natural disaster relief, and others too numerous to mention.

In addition to financial support, First Church has rolled bandages for a missionary in India, entertained at local nursing homes, collected clothing for the Church World Service, collected food for the emergency food shelf, prepared food baskets for the needy at Thanksgiving and Christmas, and sent toys and books to a Native American reservation at Christmas.

In 1955, a program on the importance of milk was presented to the Junior and Senior Sunday School students, and they become "little missionaries" by bringing in their pennies for the "Be Their Milkman" project to provide milk to children in Africa. The adult members of the Church also made financial contributions.

For Christmas 1976, Church members chose to not send Christmas cards to their Church friends. Instead they sent the money saved to the Mt. Silinda School in Rhodesia. The tradition of giving at Christmas continues with the "Giving Tree" – tags with Christmas wishes are taken by members and gifts purchased, making Christmas brighter for children in the local area.

Missions have not been without controversy in the history of First Church. In the 1970s the World Council of Churches, of which the United Church of Christ and First Church were members, sent \$55,000 to the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe. Some people felt that this was a terrorist organization and First Church's *Our Christian World Ministry* Committee sent a letter voicing their concern.

The newest mission for First Church is an every other year trip to Jamaica. In July 2015, a team of ten adults and youth worked there, repairing and painting a preschool and a clinic. This summer, another team will be planting a vegetable garden to provide fresh food for school children.

Giving back is an integral part of who we are at First Church, and it feels great!

By Ann Gray