

IMPORTANT UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

“Breaking the Cycle of Poverty”

Grace and Holy Trinity Church

Richmond, Virginia

A group of representatives from area congregations (GHTC, St. James, St. Paul’s, St. Peter’s, Boulevard United Methodist, Covenant Presbyterian, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist, Temple Beth Ahabah, and the Salvation Army, among others) along with representatives the City of Richmond’s Office for Community Wealth Building have met numerous times over the past year. The group wants to help individuals and families move out of poverty, and in a way that builds relationships and is truly transformative. By working together, we hope to achieve economic stability, one person/family at a time.

The community group looked a several models for this work and selected Circles USA. Circles USA is a national organization with an extensive track record. The Circles approach focuses on transformation through personal relationships. It is great match for the goals of the community group and it syncs perfectly with the goals of GHTC’s strategic plan.

Here is how the Circles USA model works:

- Community leaders and/or organizations work with Circles USA, Inc. to establish a local chapter. We are actively in the process of making this happen. A big step was taken recently when Goodwill of Central and Coastal Virginia agreed to house and provide vital administrative support to a local Circles chapter.
- The local chapter of Circles identifies up to 25 **Circle Leaders** (people desiring to move to economic stability) and recruits two to four **Circle Allies** for each Leader. The Allies provide encouragement for each Circle Leader.
- Both Circle Leaders and Circle Allies undertake training:
 - Circle Leaders enroll in the Circles Leadership Training Class to build financial, emotional and social resources as well as an Economic Stability

Plan. (Each Leader will develop their own plan based on their individual needs, aspirations, and goals.)

- Allies also receive training on the dynamics of poverty, how to provide effective support and how help establish a true partnership. Allies support the Circle Leader efforts through networking, listening and guidance. Allies are asked to make a commitment of 18 months duration.
- There are regular meetings with Leaders, Allies and other interested community members for planning, support and networking. Each meeting will focus on skills including; crisis management, education, job placement, job retention and economic stability. Meetings include meals and also programs for children.

The community group currently has three sub-committees.

*Organization-to develop an operational/legal framework and to determine who will be fiscal agent. (As noted, Goodwill of Central and Coastal Virginia has agreed to help us in this endeavor). The community group meets again on November 14 to start the process of creating a Board of Directors.

*Development- to determine how to cultivate the necessary funding for start-up, programming and evaluation. (The Vestry of GHTC is being asked to help fund this program, starting in 2017.)

* Mobilization- to determine what community organizations and people should be involved to help ensure success.

Look for more information in the coming months. If you have any questions or want to find how to become involved, please contact the Rev. Bo Millner. There are a number of other GHTC members who have been involved with this effort, and Bo is happy to put you in touch with them as well. Also, you might like to visit Circles USA on the web at www.circlesusa.org.

