



# INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

**T**here is nothing like a change to challenge the comfort and confidence of one's life.

On September 1, I began serving as Executive Director at Interfaith Coalition. In this new work I find myself coping with a common, though disconcerting dilemma. Depending on the day (or sometimes even the moment) I feel incredibly well-prepared or unbelievably ignorant. I feel the excitement (and frustration) of beginning work in a new place. I am like a child learning to walk, I want to step out and explore the world just beyond my reach. And I realize, as I step out in this new place, sometimes I will stumble.



Yet, I must walk. So, I am stepping into my place at Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County. While my steps at this time may be cautious, I join the work of this incredible organization knowing I have companions in my walk. The staff at Interfaith is amazing. They are smart and creative and willing to answer my questions. I already know the work of

Interfaith is possible because of volunteers, regular financial gifts, and each one of the congregations and community partners who walk with us in our mission to meet housing and other needs of children and their families. For Interfaith Coalition and all its programs, a change in leadership and ongoing changes brought by Covid-19 bring both challenge and opportunity. Our first steps taken together may be hesitant, yet given time, I am convinced we will be blessed to run!

In times of change, this is my prayer:

O Holy One, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us. Amen.

Thank you for walking with Interfaith Coalition through this time of change.

Shalom,

Deanna Wildermuth

## WHY WE DONATE

"We've been so impressed with all of the work that Interfaith Coalition has done over the years. They work with people experiencing homelessness, furnish warm coats to those in need in the winter, and provide soup, sandwiches, and beverages to people on the street through the CAST program, among

many other services. We've been so happy to be able to support Interfaith Coalition over the years and plan to continue doing so."

*Chuck and Dee Robinson, previous owner of Village Books and longtime Interfaith Coalition supporters.*



## CELEBRATION MARKS ANNUAL MEETING

By Cheryl Stritzel McCarthy

Interfaith's virtual annual meeting on Oct. 27 was marked by moments of warmth and joy as volunteers and staff celebrated the successful continuation of service to our neighbors in need. Despite considerable challenges posed by Covid protocols, Interfaith programs have carried on serving families experiencing homelessness.

"We all rallied quickly," said Carolyn Roy, program director for Family Promise and Family Housing. Family Promise had to pivot from its model of sheltering families in church buildings, with families moving every week, to sheltering at a static site. "We were fortunate to use First Christian Church for six months," Carolyn said.

Joel and Bethany Kennedy, married for 22 years with eight children, spoke movingly about the welcome they found upon moving into an Interfaith house.

Shannon Laws, Family Housing coordinator, mentioned the joy of working with families. Simple things like an in-unit washer and dryer, and a front door that can be locked, can be life-changing. "When a family thanks me for the home, for the Family Housing program, they're really thanking thousands of donors and volunteers," Shannon said. "When I get a hug, albeit it's been a while since Covid," Shannon laughed, "it's a hug for all of you."

Interfaith's CAST program surmounted significant obstacles to keep serving its simple meal to anyone in need three evenings a week in downtown Bellingham. Outreach Manager Janie Pemble said, "What might have been a sad story turned out to be a love story

“When a family thanks me for the home, for the Family Housing program, they're really thanking thousands of donors and volunteers.”

*Shannon Laws, Family Housing coordinator*

due to the massive determination of our supporters. Covid caused many other meal programs in the city to shut down. With CAST, 30 to 40 volunteers stepped forward for double and triple shifts.”

The meeting included heartfelt stories of thanks to outgoing Executive Director Laura Harker, and a warm welcome to incoming Executive Director Deanna Wildermuth. About 70 people logged into the meeting. Board member, Rev. Seth Thomas presented the proposal to raise the current 10 percent cap on non-congregational board members to 20 percent, which passed nearly unanimously. New board members were also approved: Crystal Bevis of New Song Church, Betsy O'Donovan of First Congregational Church, Brian Henshaw of Garden Street United Methodist Church, and the Reverend Kevin Park, director of mission services at PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center. Board member Nathan Dwyer of Bellingham Covenant Church renewed for a second term.

In closing, Executive Director Deanna referenced the image of redwood trees. "They're able to survive terrible storms because their roots are interlocked," Deanna said. "Our strength is: we don't stand alone."



## WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS



*Brian Henshaw*

### **BRIAN HENSHAW, GARDEN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Brian is a long-time resident of Bellingham, earned his MBA from Western Washington University, and believes there's no better place than the Pacific Northwest. He has worked

in the public sector for the past 22 years at the Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham, and now as the Finance Manager at the Skagit Public Utility District in Mount Vernon.



*Crystal Bevis*

### **CRYSTAL BEVIS, NEW SONG CHURCH**

After experiencing homelessness Crystal was able to utilize local community resources to obtain permanent housing for her and her children. She enrolled in college where she took courses specializing in addiction and

codependency counseling. Crystal strives to see other families overcome homelessness while understanding the many challenges in which homeless populations struggle.



*Rev. Kevin J. Park*

### **REV. KEVIN J. PARK, PEACEHEALTH ST. JOSEPH MEDICAL CENTER**

Rev. Kevin J. Park currently serves as the Director of Mission Services for Peacehealth St. Joseph Medical Center and is responsible for spiritual care, ethics, and

mission and values integration. Rev. Park and his wife have six children and live on five acres with an assortment of animals, and a (sometimes) thriving garden and small fruit tree orchard.



*Betsy O'Donovan*

### **BETSY O'DONOVAN FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

Betsy O'Donovan is an assistant professor of journalism at Western Washington University and the adviser for The Western Front, the university's

independent student newsroom. She has worked or written for ESPN, The Boston Globe, Publishers Weekly, StoryCorps, the Ashoka Foundation, the Knight Foundation, and many local and regional newsrooms. She lives in Bellingham with her husband, Jeff Shaw, and two charming and sometimes well-behaved basset hounds.

## INTERFAITH'S 2020 ANNUAL REPORT AVAILABLE NOW

The strength of Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County exists because we do not stand alone in our work, and we are committed to the mission of making certain that the most vulnerable in our communities do not stand alone either. Our 2020 Annual Report reflects how we stand together to meet our mission. View the full 2020 Annual Report on our website or email [info@interfaith-coalition.org](mailto:info@interfaith-coalition.org) to request a mailed copy.

### **FAMILY PROMISE & FAMILY HOUSING**

**39**  
FAMILIES  
SHELTERED

**75**  
CHILDREN

**48**  
ADULTS





**INTERFAITH COALITION  
OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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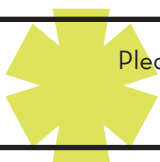
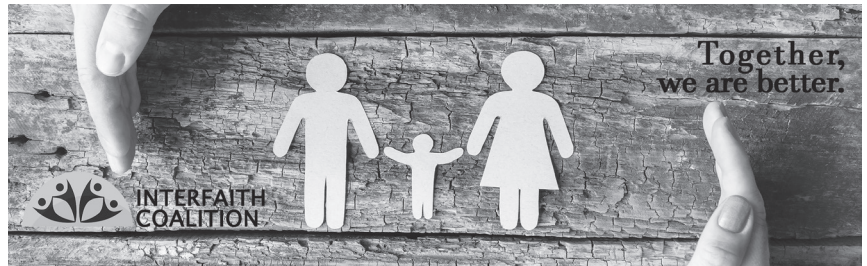
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## TOGETHER WE ARE BETTER

Families we serve stay together as a unit. This past year through Family Promise of Whatcom County, temporary housing, and supportive services, we helped 36 families. Some had the long road of homelessness mostly behind them, just needing someone to give them the chance to take a breath, while others still had a long road ahead. But grounded in faith, strengthened by you, and united with the determination of the families we serve, together we overcome. In the fortitude of togetherness, we ask you to make a year-end gift to Interfaith Coalition. Individual donations account

for 26% of our annual revenue. Empower local families to get out of poverty and into stable housing by donating online through our website or by mailing a check to Interfaith Coalition. Together we are better. [interfaith-coalition.org/donate](http://interfaith-coalition.org/donate)



Please note: Because we are all living day-to-day at this time, details in this newsletter are subject to change. Visit our site for the most up-to-date information: [interfaith-coalition.org](http://interfaith-coalition.org)

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OF WHATCOM COUNTY  
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