



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

WELCOME DEANNA

The Rev. Deanna Wildermuth will start Sept. 1 as new Executive Director of Interfaith Coalition.

Deanna, most recently pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on Mercer Island, has served for 23 years as a pastor for various congregations throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She is experienced with small and large congregations, from rural to urban, with budgets of less than \$100,000 to more than \$2 million.



“In each setting, the faith community found a way to care for the most vulnerable,” Deanna said. “Our work included building

homes, supporting shelters with meals and overnight hosting, educating children with special needs, fundraising, and meeting immediate as well as extraordinary needs.

“As people of faith, we are called to care for others. That has been part of my life from childhood, and is a continued commitment into adulthood.”

In the announcement from Interfaith’s Board of Directors, The Rev. Seth Thomas of St. James Presbyterian Church said, “Deanna comes with the skills, devotion, and passion to direct Interfaith’s growth.”

GRATITUDE TO LAURA

After 28 years of service to Interfaith Coalition, Executive Director Laura Harker is stepping down.

“It’s time for me to disengage from what has been an unbelievably satisfying position,” Laura said. “My work with Interfaith has never been a ‘job,’ but a vocation in the truest sense.

“This is a pivotal time in Interfaith’s evolution, and an appropriate time to pass the reins. So much has transpired in three decades! Never have I felt so much a part of a real coalition, one where, together, we accomplish so much.”

Janie Pemble, Outreach Director for Interfaith, said, “Laura has been the heart and soul of Interfaith for a long time. When I first came to Interfaith in 2004, I saw Laura had developed relationships with all the congregations and all the volunteers. When she spoke about our work, it wasn’t just nuts and bolts, but more about particular volunteers or congregations: what they’ve done, how generous and hardworking they are, their passion for helping families, children, the homeless.

“Kindness is the cornerstone of how Laura works with people,” Janie said.

Laura and her husband plan to stay in this area and contribute to Interfaith as they’re able.



By Cheryl Stritzel McCarthy

A HOUSE, HOPE, AND HEALING FOR LOCAL FAMILY

By Cheryl Stritzel McCarthy

At first, they didn't think it would last long. Joel and Bethany Kennedy figured they and their kids would have to stay in motels for just a couple of weeks before they found another rental.

"But as time went on," Joel said, "we realized it was going to be much harder, and take much longer."

They had been renting a home for \$1650 per month. Then it went up to \$2200. "We stretched, drained our savings, went into debt," Joel said. "I knew we couldn't afford it, but there were no other options."

The family was evicted.

They sought another rental, but after a few weeks, began to realize it might not happen. Married 22 years with eight children, they scrambled for options. For a time, the kids slept in a tent and the parents in the car.

"Homelessness takes a toll," Bethany said. "There's the nitty gritty of 'where are we going to be tonight' and the emotional stress of others seeing us as terrible people. Just getting food, cooking it, and figuring how to get everyone where they need to go, takes everything you've got."

The weather grew colder. Joel and Bethany borrowed money to purchase a membership to a camping resort in Birch Bay. The family was camping out in a cabin when they heard that Interfaith housing might become available. But it wasn't certain, it might be for just a month, and didn't alleviate the parents' constant stress.

When they understood that Interfaith Coalition housing, known as Our Savior's House, could be



Joel and Bethany will share their story as keynote speakers at Interfaith Coalition's Virtual Annual Meeting on October 27!

their family's home for a full year, they felt a rush of joy—though still tempered by caution. Years of profound stress did not allow them to instantly relax; it took time to shed the "survival mode" mentality that had dictated life for so long, Joel said. This house, owned by Our Savior's Lutheran Church, and one of 13 housing units that Interfaith either owns or manages, has sheltered and supported local families for 15 years, giving them time and stability to increase their income and move forward.

"Coming in, looking around, seeing this beautiful house, and seeing all that Interfaith had done to make us feel welcome, was amazing," Bethany said. "We'll be here long enough to normalize. The kids are so much more relaxed."

"The Interfaith volunteers were happy we were coming! They made the house beautiful. The little things—extra soap, toothbrushes, the blankets they made—almost went further than the big things."

In a thank-you to Interfaith, Bethany wrote, "Words will never express our gratitude for all you've done. Staying at Our Savior's House allows us to begin healing and putting our lives back together. This community is one we can be part of, and even give back to as we continue to stabilize."



HELPING FROM A DISTANCE

When the pandemic hit, our Family Promise volunteers could no longer sit down at meals with the families we serve or help the children with their homework after school. Like many of us, they lost the connection they had grown to treasure, that gift that comes with helping others and learning about ourselves in the process.

When volunteer Joyce Moseley-Sweeney had the opportunity to create a children's Welcome Box for families currently in the housing program, she couldn't resist. Relying on her many years of teaching, as well as being a mother and grandmother, she had an idea of what the children would like.

"I bought Uno, PlayDoh, art supplies, and donated some toys that my grandchildren have outgrown. I also bought bilingual picture books at Wee Ones Reruns and Village Books for the family who is bilingual." Moseley-Sweeney says. For that reason,

she also wrote on the box in big letters, "Bienvenido Ninos" ("Welcome children").

Joyce is a member of First Congregational Church and is thankful to be part of a larger faith community who comes together to help those in need. The week she made the Welcome Box, other members of First Congregational and of Red Cedar Zen Cedar also coordinated, masked up, and delivered meals for the families in Family Promise.

"I am delighted to provide assistance to families experiencing homeless who need shelter, food, compassion, and stability. I want these families to know that people in their community care and want to help them," says Moseley-Sweeney. "I enjoy bringing a little joy and fun to these kiddos," Moseley-Sweeney says with a smile.

Social distancing may be keeping us apart, but we can still be connected.

“

Repeatedly, I've witnessed the power of people acting together, one by one by one, so all might have food for their families and a place to call home."

*-Barbara Mathers-Schmidt
on why she donates to
Interfaith Coalition*



Volunteers are a cornerstone in helping families in Family Promise of Whatcom work toward stable housing.



**INTERFAITH COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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SAVE THE DATE

Virtual Annual Meeting
on October 27, 7 pm.
Join us as we share
highlights and look
ahead to the coming
year's goals. Details to
come www.interfaith-coalition.org

WINTER WARMTH DRIVE

Thanks to our dedicated and creative volunteer coordinators, the Winter Warmth Drive this year will be in place to help our neighbors.

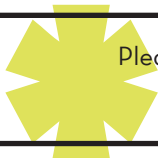
In Bellingham, donated coats will be collected and sorted into bags in October and volunteers will deliver them to agencies and other sites serving community members in most need. In Blaine, Deming, and Ferndale, as of this writing, specifics were still being worked out, but there will be a coat collection and distribution in those communities in October. More details to come soon.

Please consider donating your gently-used, good condition winter coats (please, NO light jackets or

clothing!), or consider purchasing a coat to donate to someone in need. We are especially in need of kids' coats and extra-large adult sizes. We will advertise coat drop-off sites, dates, and times in September.

Please note: Because of COVID-19 concerns, we ask donors to launder (used) coats and place in a garbage bag and tag the outside with the number and size(s) of the coats.

If you are interested in volunteering, or have questions, please contact Janie Pemble at janie@interfaith-coalition.org, or leave a message at 360-734-3983.



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

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ON FACEBOOK!**

