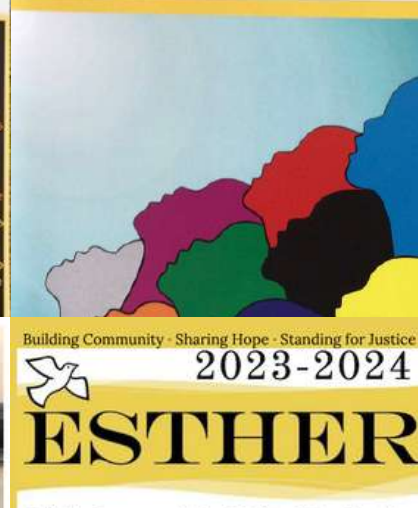
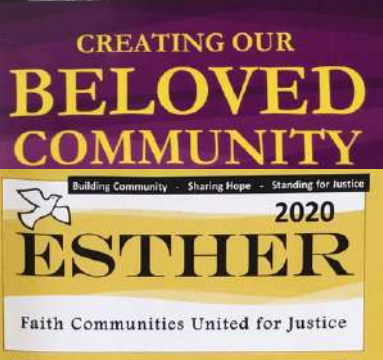
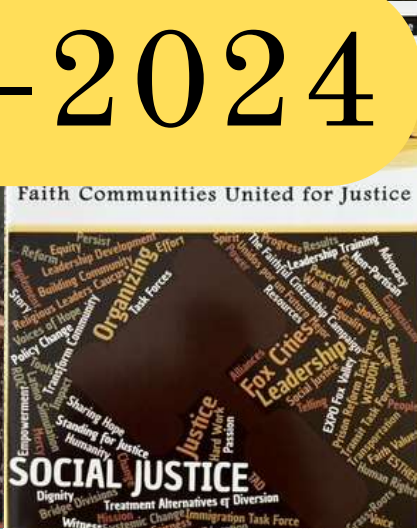
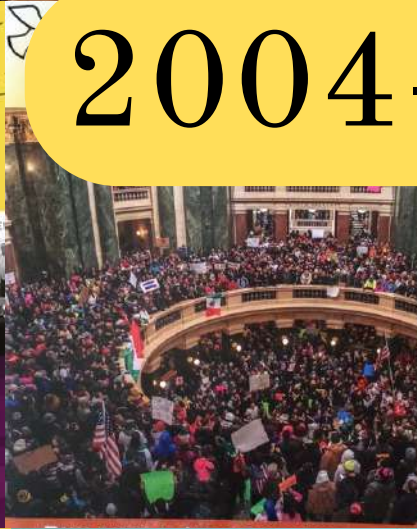
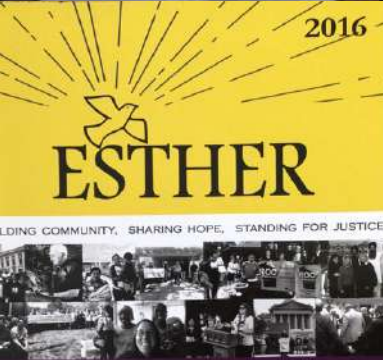


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Gloria Dei
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St. Mark's
St. Paul

New London:

Trinity

Menasha:

St. Timothy

Sherwood:

Christ the King

Winchester:

Grace

Winneconne:

Lord of the Lakes

Zittau:

Immanuel

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2024-2025 Yearbook

ESTHER
PO Box 784
Neenah, WI 54957
(920) 843-8083

office@esther-foxvalley.org
 https://esther-foxvalley.org
 https://www.facebook.com/esther.foxvalley

ESTHER is an affiliate of the WISDOM network

ESTHER'S Mission Statement

“Develop leaders, engage people, and build collective power in the Fox Valley to address economic and social injustices and work for more equitable communities that embrace diversity.”

ESTHER brings together communities of faith, organizations, and individuals to build community and to identify and act on issues of injustice.”

We:

- Build solid relationships with one another
- Establish a unified interfaith community voice that reaches beyond the divisions of race, creed, and socio-economic status
- Identify and address root causes of poverty, oppression, and injustice
- Respond to the social-justice concerns of people in the communities of the Fox Valley
- Empower people to challenge and eliminate injustices
- Work at local, state, and national levels and with community leaders to promote justice

ESTHER is an affiliate of WISDOM, the Wisconsin affiliate of GAMALIEL

ESTHER:

Empowerment, Solidarity, Truth, Hope, Equity, Reform



<https://esther-foxvalley.org/>



Affiliate Map of Wisconsin

CUSH

- Congregations United to Serve Humanity - Kenosha

ESTHER

- Empowerment Solidarity Truth Hope Equity Reform - Fox Valley

FREE

- Directly Impacted Women and Girls - Milwaukee

JOB

- Justice Overcoming Borders - Beloit

JONAH

- Joining Our Neighbors Advancing Hope - Eau Claire

JOSHUA

- Justice Organization Sharing Hope & United for Action - Green Bay

Menikanaehkem

- Gresham

MICAH

- Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope - Milwaukee

MOSES

- Madison Organizing in Strength, Equity and Solidarity for Criminal Justice Reform - Madison

NAOMI

- North Central Area Congregations Organized to Make an Impact - Wausau

RIC

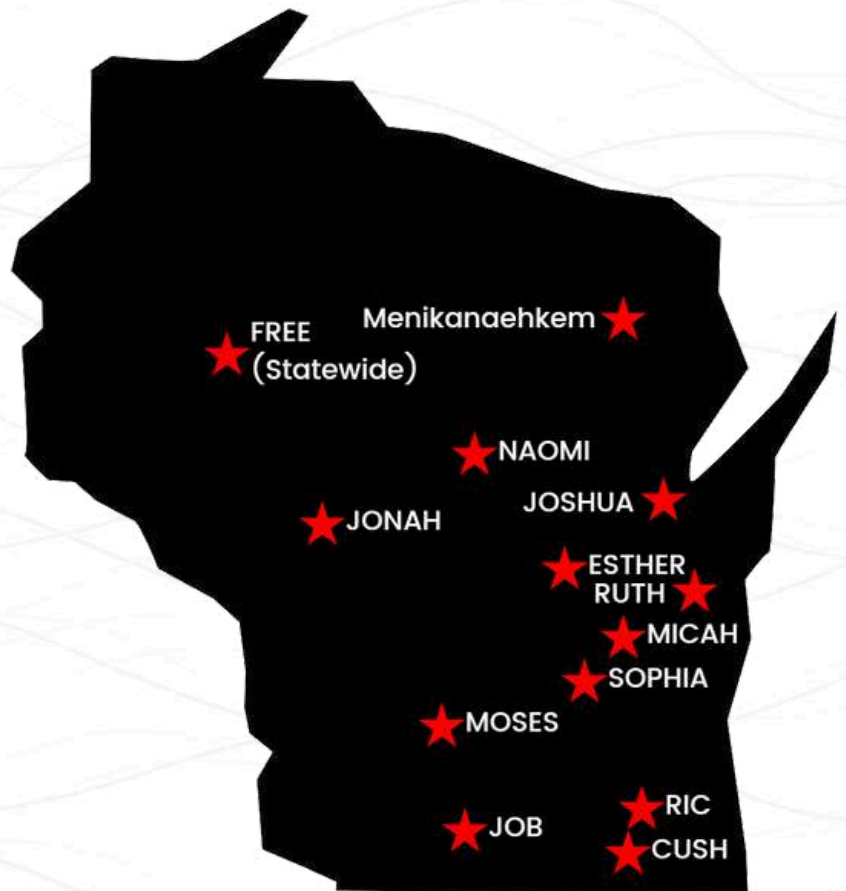
- Racine Interfaith Coalition - Racine

RUTH

- Responding with Understanding, Truth, and Hope

SOPHIA

- Stewards of Prophetic Hopeful Intentional Action - Waukesha



“
A Beloved Community...
*where everyone is welcomed,
 respected, cared for, and has
 enough*
 - Sara Companik”

Message from ESTHER's President

This yearbook reviews “what” our Community of ESTHER has done over the past twenty years. Here are some ideas about “why” we choose to work for social justice.

We often surround ourselves with friends who are like us. It can be easy, comfortable, affirming, and safe. But this kind of existence makes our lives and our world small. Travel, exploring different kinds of music, food, culture and even different faiths help expand our experience of this world.

Yet, we don't have to rely on travel to widen our world. We can meet people who are beyond our inner circle. ESTHER is rooted in making relationships. Our world becomes far richer as we see the world through different perspectives and experiences. We become open to hearing stories of others' values, dreams, and joys; but also, stories of when people have been harmed, pushed aside or treated as “other.” None of us are whole, if there is” someone” who cannot experience being whole.

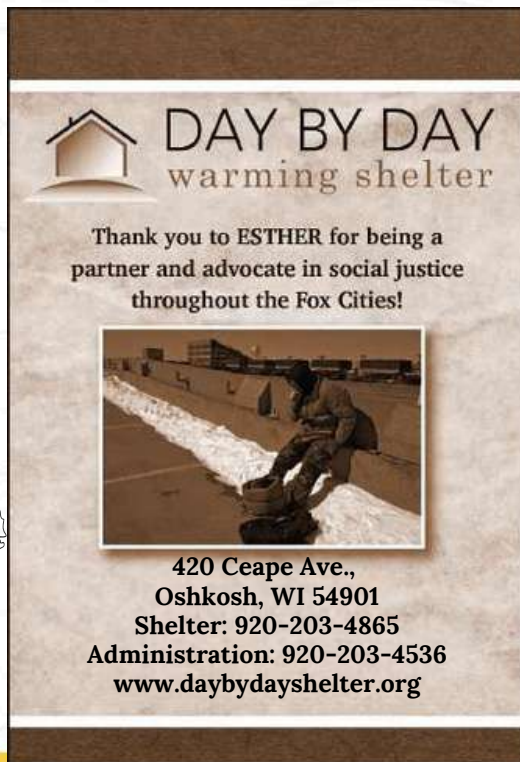
We are connected. We are one family. We are called to act, particularly when we find out that harm has been created by personal and cultural actions, policies and systems which we have had a part in creating and maintaining.

This is the story of the Beloved Community. You will read more responses from ESTHER members in this yearbook about what the Beloved Community means to each of them. Understanding the story of “why” makes our movement far more powerful and sustainable. Thanks for being part of it!



Connie Kanitz

Connie Kanitz
ESTHER's President



DAY BY DAY
warming shelter

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ESTHER's Staff



Katie Olson

LEAD ORGANIZER

“
 A Beloved Community...
Martin Luther King Jr's
dream becoming reality
 - Miracle Wheeler
 ”



Miracle Wheeler

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

As I take a moment to reflect on the work we've accomplished together in the 2 years I've been here, I want to express how deeply grateful I am for the opportunity to serve alongside such dedicated and compassionate individuals. Being part of the ESTHER community is more than just a job for me—it's a calling, a commitment to the shared values that unite us all: justice, equity, and the belief that together, we can create lasting change.

What I love most about my role is seeing the power of our collective action. Every meeting, every campaign, every story shared reminds me how vital our voices are in addressing the economic and social injustices facing the Fox Valley. From tackling housing insecurity to amplifying the concerns of marginalized communities, the work we do has a profound ripple effect on the lives of so many.

But there is always more we can do. I believe that by deepening our collaborations and strengthening our ties within the community, we can make an even greater impact. Whether it's through expanding our advocacy efforts, fostering more inclusive spaces for dialogue, or supporting one another in new and creative ways, the possibilities are endless when we work together.

I am excited to see what we can achieve as a team over the next 20 years of ESTHER. Let's continue to be bold, visionary, and persistent in our pursuit of justice. I look forward to hearing your ideas and working alongside you to make them a reality.

Miracle Wheeler is the dedicated BIPOC Organizer for ESTHER, where she uses her extensive lived experience and deep commitment to social justice to empower and uplift marginalized communities. As a Black woman with autism, Miracle brings a unique and powerful perspective to her work, making her a strong advocate for those who are often overlooked.

Miracle's work with ESTHER is deeply rooted in her commitment to her community. As a mother, a foster parent, and someone who has experienced the complexities of navigating social services and legal systems, she understands the importance of accessible, compassionate support. Her leadership is characterized by empathy, resilience, and a relentless pursuit of justice for BIPOC communities.

In addition to her organizing work, Miracle is pursuing certification as a Certified Parent Peer Specialist, a role that will further enhance her ability to support and advocate for parents within the community. Her strength in problem-solving, combined with her lived experience, positions her as a key figure in ESTHER's mission to promote equity, justice, and dignity for all.



Acienda Yang

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

I am very thrilled to be part of ESTHER to contribute to meaningful changes that are needed! ESTHER aims to unite people of faith to tackle injustice and build community. Our mission is rooted in shared values of equality and dignity, collaborating with individuals and local partners to empower everyone to contribute to a fairer society.

I enjoy hiking, cooking, and karaoke in my free time. Family is my priority, and I have a turtle named Autumn who brings me joy. I strive to travel internationally at least once a year to learn & discover new cultures. If you have any travel recommendations, I'd love to hear them!

ESTHER Executive Board



Connie Kanitz
PRESIDENT



David Fink
VICE PRESIDENT



Mary Bechle
SECRETARY



Gary Crevier
PAST PRESIDENT



Steve Hirby
EXEC. CONSULTANT



Diane Putzer
TREASURER

“
A Beloved Community...
*is a place for your successes
 and your mistakes, your energy
 and your tiredness, your
 wisdom and your curiosity. All
 of who you are – is welcome*
 - Gary Crevier
 ”



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Environmental Justice Task Force

Recently Appleton, WI was the 2024 winner as the best tasting municipal water in Wisconsin. This annual contest of The Wisconsin American Water Works Association is an award to which Appleton can rightly be proud of considering where the source of our water comes from, Lake Winnebago. The Environmental Justice Task Force had Dr. Bart DeStasio, a Biology Professor at Lawrence University, explain the condition of the Fox-Wolf Watershed, the Feeder lakes of Winnebago and the Lower Fox River. Dr. Bart's entire presentation is on the ESTHER website. I would encourage everyone to view it as Dr. Bart's presentation has very important information. The conclusion of this compromised watershed makes the WAWWA award all the more impressive, as Winnebago is a shallow, warm, polluted and dynamic system.

Dr. Bart DeStasio said that the challenges to the entire Fox-Wolf System are threefold. Invasive Species, Climate change, and pollution from land use policy. Historic temperate forest that surrounded more than 2/3rds of Lake Winnebago retarded phosphorus from leaching into the river systems that feed the lake. Because of Colonization, that forest no longer exists. Today's farming practices, urban lawns and municipal runoff increase levels of phosphorus, nitrogen and other pollutants and feed algae growth. Cyanobacteria, commonly called blue green algae, is toxic to fish, fowl, and mammals. This algae growth is fueled by rising temperatures of global warming. Under certain conditions the Cyanobacteria toxicity can become airborne. Zebra mussels, an invasive species, threaten water intake pipes as they have no predators here in North America making their growth rate unchecked. Zebra mussels are filter feeders. They feed on plankton and algae. One interesting fact is they do not feed on blue green algae because it's toxic to zebra mussels as well. This increases blue green algae as the zebra mussels remove good algae within the systems which makes more room for the blue green algae to expand.

Sharon Cook the Developmental Director of the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance was a featured speaker at the ESTHER EJTF Cookout on August 22nd. Sharon spoke about solutions and partnerships to mitigate damage and restore health to the watershed. Visit the Fox Wolf Watershed Alliance website for more information.



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Equity Network

Civic Engagement
To Reduce Disparities



Nancy Jones

2020 brought the pervasive disparities in our country into sharp relief, leaving many of us searching for ways to deepen our commitment to equity and racial justice work. Like ESTHER, many area organizations had been on their own journeys--learning about systemic issues and implicit biases. **How might our local organizations collaborate to take action to address or avoid disparities in Fox Valley communities?**

In December 2020, four local organizations launched the Equity Network. The network’s mission is to develop trust, cooperation, and communication between local organizations committed to improving equity and racial justice in the Fox Valley. We hold ourselves accountable to our stated values through shared civic engagement based in a civil rights strategy. Participating organizations are working together to urge consideration of the needs of all residents and decision making that intentionally builds greater equity. We work together to foster more effective monitoring of area policy-making boards with the goal of providing a vital and often missing link between the intention of the civil rights laws and realizing equitable outcomes locally.

2023-2024 Highlights

- Growing to 8 participating organizations with regular involvement from several more
- Deepening of relationships, trust, and communication
- Ongoing tracking of local use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds; celebration of allocations for early childhood, housing, and mental health in several counties and municipalities
- Continued monitoring of county/municipal/school district issues and opportunities for public input
- Open Meetings/Open Records forum hosted by League of Women Voters – Appleton-Fox Cities

Please join with the network to take a faithful stance for equity.

Participating Organizations (2024)

- CARES-Fox Cities
- ESTHER
- First 5 Fox Valley
- Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education
- League of Women Voters, Appleton-Fox Cities
- League of Women Voters of Winnebago County
- People of Progression
- Stronger Together Fox Valley

“
A Beloved Community...
everyone has all the resources they need to thrive, are safe, belong, and can disagree amicably
 - Penny Robinson
 ”

Contact Nancy Jones at newiequitynetwork@gmail.com for more information or to be added to the contact list for meeting notifications and action opportunities for your school district/municipality/county.

Housing, Equity & Racial Justice



Penny Robinson



Miracle Wheeler



This committee focuses on two main goals:

1. Becoming an antiracist organization
2. Building the Beloved Community

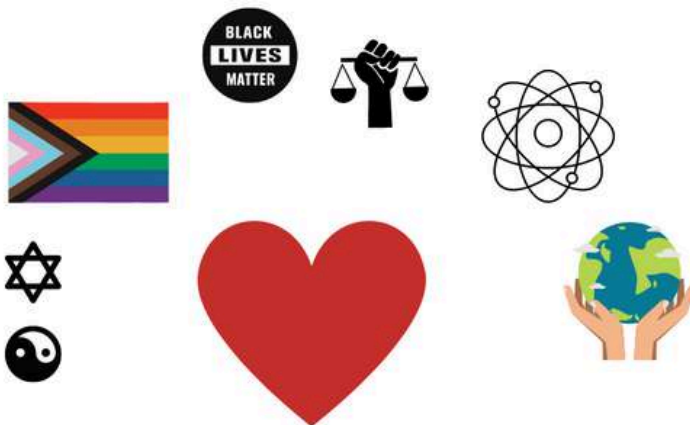
Strategies include:

- Partnering/collaborating with other organizations, deepen relationships with current ones: become co-conspirators, listen to those who are impacted and embrace them as leaders. Collaborating with EXPO, EXPO Free, VOCES, Native Justice Coalition, Menominee, Housing Advocates
- Identify strengths and challenges within our local court system - handed off to Transformational Justice Task Force
- Continue self-education – invited community to read and discuss *Poverty, By America* by Matthew Desmond. Concluded discussions with film: *The Invisible Class* and a call to action.
- Embraced housing advocates and issue as part of the committee. Newly-hired organizer became co-chair of committee.

To become an antiracist organization, we're using Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization by Crossroads Ministry. We need an organization to hold us accountable.

****Building the Beloved Community where everyone:**

- Has all the resources they need to thrive
- Belongs
- Can disagree amicably
- Is safe



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Immigration Task Force

My name is Ruth Brown. I am an immigrant from Costa Rica. I came to the U.S. about twenty-eight years ago. I come from a very diverse family. My grandfather was a 100% from the beautiful indigenous people of Central America and my grandmother was Italian. My mother was born in a Native Reservation and raised with cultural values of both parents, and from a very young age, I learned the importance of advocating and fighting for any issues related to social justice and equality.



Ruth Brown

I am the Chair of the ESTHER of the Fox Valley Immigration Task Force. I deeply love my role and feel proud of the work done. We have met with the different Police Departments in the area to discuss concerns, make ourselves known, and to seek support in our never-ending fight to reinstate driver's licenses. Our current project is voter registration for the Hispanic community. We collaborated with the League of Women's Voters, and have been tabling at the different Hispanic businesses to reach anyone who is eligible to vote. We provided information about registering, and tabled at LEAVEN, Menasha Public Library, FVTC and the Partnership. Tabling also took place at St. Pat's in Menasha to reach as many Hispanics as possible.

We wrote outreach and thank you letters to the different businesses to continue to nurture our relationship with the community. During Latino Fest, we reached 70 people who received information about ESTHER, and were also encouraged and informed about the importance of the Latino vote.



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Mental Health Task Force



Mary Sullivan

The combined ESTHER/First Congregational United Church of Christ Mental Health Task Force began meeting in October 2023. The group has been learning from each other – the church group has focused on education and ESTHER has been working on advocacy. We motivate each other. Mental health professionals from community organizations have led several presentations. We learned about action and advocacy. In October 2024 we will support the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) by walking as a team called “Faith, Hope and Love” in the annual NAMI Walk.

Much of the past year has been spent working on our Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged (WISE) certification. This certification applies mainly to faith communities, and other organizations can also be certified. Our goal is to demonstrate that our organization understands how to support those who experience mental health conditions, as well as their loved ones. We will continue to educate ourselves and the community about mental health conditions and about mental health organizations in the Fox Cities. We will explore issues that can be impacted by legislation.

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ESTHER Oshkosh/Housing Advocacy


The ESTHER OSHKOSH task force evolved this past year into being an influential force of advocacy for the unhoused in NE Wisconsin. This is primarily due to the impacted individuals who took leadership roles in the task force. Task force activities were supported financially by a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services entitled “Mobilizing Communities for a Just Response.” Below is a partial list of some of the activities we were able to accomplish to address local housing issues.



- The team held a news conference to highlight issues of homelessness in Oshkosh and the dire situation of those who have to sleep outside. This news conference was widely covered by the media and propelled ESTHER into other spheres of influence in Oshkosh.

- We interviewed 200 people in the community regarding their housing situation. We learned that lack of affordable housing is exploding in the area.
- We formed a housing advocate team of 8 individuals who were directly impacted and became our housing leaders.
- Advocates wrote a series of letters regarding local housing that were published in the Oshkosh Herald throughout the year.
- Advocates sponsored a candidate’s forum for all candidates running for Oshkosh City Council. The advocates designed specific housing questions for the candidates.
- Two public showings of the film “The Invisible Class” were held at venues in Oshkosh followed by a panel discussion with advocates.
- The team helped design and implement the NE Wisconsin Housing Policy Institute. This was a 2-day training event attended by 50 people with the goal of training for housing advocacy. There is now great interest in replicating the training in other counties.

Although the grant that help underwrite our advocacy work has now ended, we hope to continue the energy of our work into next year. One of our goals is to establish a Tenant Resource Center as a preventative measure to curb the acute rise of housing insecurity.



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Visit us at:
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Transformational Justice Task Force



Jennifer Verderami

ESTHER’s Transformational Justice Task Force aims to reduce jail and prison populations by advocating for community-based alternatives and humane treatment within facilities and supporting the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. Our mission is to prioritize restorative practices and rehabilitation, ensuring humane conditions and support for those impacted by the criminal justice system.

Who We Are: Our diverse task force includes justice-impacted individuals, family members, counselors, former corrections officers, parole agents, advocates, faith leaders, and concerned citizens, uniting a wide range of perspectives and expertise to drive meaningful change.



Lisa Hanneman

A Tumultuous Year: 2024 has been a year marked by both challenges and opportunities. The arrests of nine Department of Corrections employees, linked to the deaths at Waupun Correctional Institution, brought much-needed public attention to the systemic issues in Wisconsin’s prison system. Prolonged lockdowns in these facilities have also sparked outrage, prompting public protests, and further scrutiny of the damaging effects of isolation on inmates.

Highlights:

DOC’s Corrections Educators Association Conference: In April, our task force presented at the DOC’s Corrections Educators Association Conference. Our presentation, *Restore Our Communities: Support After Incarceration*, addressed crucial topics such as housing challenges, education, advocacy, and the resources available for recently released individuals.

Court Watch: Inspired by national programs, we observe bail hearings in the Outagamie County District Court to document disparities and ensure judicial accountability. In 2025, we plan to expand this initiative to include sentencing hearings, continuing our fight for equity in the courtroom and beyond.

End the Lockdowns Campaign: In February, we partnered with WISDOM and JOSHUA to host a forum at St. Norbert College to address the harm of prolonged prison lockdowns. We called on Governor Evers to end these practices and joined protests at Waupun and Green Bay Correctional Institutions, as well as Madison Action Day, advocating for reduced prison populations, facility closures, and investment in community resources to prevent crime and strengthen communities.

Crisis: Mass Incarceration in America – Film Screening & Panel Discussion

In October, we screened *Crisis: Mass Incarceration in America* at Fox Valley Technical College, followed by a panel discussing racial disparities, drug related incarcerations, and how societal fears contribute to mass incarceration. This event served as a platform for critical conversations about the justice system, alternatives to incarceration and the urgent need for reform.

Looking Forward: As we reflect on a challenging year, we remain committed to justice reform in Wisconsin. Join us at 6 PM on the first Tuesday of each month at St. Mark’s Church in Neenah or via Zoom. Together, we can build a system centered on rehabilitation and dignity for all.

Transit Task Force

In our meetings, we have been discussing transit in Winnebago County. There was a suggestion for a Transit Town Hall to discuss transit issues and examples with our elected officials. The possible dates were January 31st, 2025 or February 7th, 2025 with the event to take place at Fox Valley Technical College. Lisa Lewis from the Whitburn Center for Governance and Policy Research is helping to organize this event.

The January 31, 2025, date was chosen and planning for the event is moving ahead. We will continue to discuss needed documents and informational handouts, along with partners in participation. Transportation in Winnebago County Mapping (www.miro.com) was also completed.



Susan Garcia Franz

“
A Beloved Community...
No barriers to getting effective help
 - Kathleen (Kathie) Gribble
 ”

Holly Keenan continues to update the group about Make the Ride Happen (Oshkosh, Fox Cities, Waupaca) Updates and Winnebago Catch a Ride. Sarah Schneider also shares about the changes at Valley Transit and the opportunities to highlight successes they are seeing.

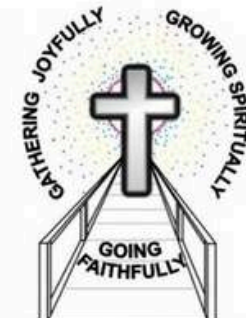
We found out from community partners that Go Transit has new routes that are now not including housing authority locations in some instances. We are in discussion on how to proceed. CMRT (Coalition for More Responsible Transportation) has monthly newsletters they share.

Transit Task Force Mission: **Engage people with multiple perspectives**

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- **Kirtan every Wednesday evening, followed by Guru Ka Langar**

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ESTHER's Journey of 20 Years



REMEMBER WHEN...



In November of 2004 ESTHER launched as an official organization. Twelve faith communities covenanted together at First Congregational UCC, Appleton in a common mission to share hope, stand for justice, and build community. Prison reform was the main issue at the time, quickly followed by housing and immigration.



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**



Twenty years! Working for justice in our country and our community has been an exciting, fulfilling, frustrating and educational journey. Our task forces have reaped some successes, but most of all, we have grown in understanding and commitment, as well as lasting relationships. Ours is a story of political struggle and personal growth. A couple of examples will give you an idea of our work.

Usually, a task force would get started because a few people were concerned about a small problem with a simple solution, but as they learned more, they came to understand that the problem was really a symptom of a much larger pattern of injustice.

Our Immigration Task Force began with such a specific problem. The Real ID Act of 2005 had made it impossible for undocumented immigrants to obtain or renew driver's licenses. They could no longer drive legally but still needed to get to work, the grocery store and school. So, a proposal was made in Madison to create a separate type of driver's license that would not be a Real ID but would allow our undocumented immigrants to drive legally. ESTHER, along with other organizations, campaigned hard in Madison to pass such a law.

That effort was not successful, but ESTHER also worked with local law enforcement agencies to get them to end the practice of stopping immigrants just to check their license status. In this ESTHER was successful in some jurisdictions. In addition, some farmers who employed immigrants helped to get carpools going as a way of minimizing the harassment of their employees. Thus, ESTHER was able to alleviate the problem for some people, and the task force's members learned that a problem may have more than one solution.

We learned that driving legally was only a part of a larger issue: the interests of our immigrants were not well represented in Madison. The undocumented immigrants were defenseless because too few members of the immigrant community were engaged politically.

So, the Task Force turned its efforts to voter registration. We found an ally in the League of Women Voters who have been working for many years to register people to vote and discovered that we have other potential allies.

continued...

REMEMBER WHEN...



Our many successes led to ESTHER being awarded the Wisconsin State Heritage Award in the State Capitol Rotunda during the annual Martin Luther King Jr. service. That same day UW-Oshkosh awarded ESTHER an MLK Leadership Award for creating Day by Day. Later in the year, our organizer, Stephanie Gyldenvand was named one of Oshkosh's 4 under 40 top leaders for her work to build up leaders that take action to address community issues.



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**



The Transformational Justice Task Force deals with our criminal legal system, especially our state's prisons, which impact many besides those incarcerated. One woman became involved because her son, who suffered from cancer, did not receive his daily medications while in the Outagamie County Jail. She discovered other prisoners suffered the same issue. In fact, the failure to give prisoners medications that they were supposed to receive, was endemic in Outagamie County's jail. By participating in many meetings with the various committees with responsibility for the administration of the jails, they learned how to interact with the county's bureaucracy and that the system has enormous inertia. It takes a long time and a lot of work to change any aspect of our criminal legal system, even when everyone involved acts in good faith.

They also learned of other injustices and rigidities in the system. For example, too little use was being made of Treatment Alternative Diversion (TAD). ESTHER was organized in 2004 around the issue of treatment instead of prison. Outagamie County pioneered the implementation of TAD as a way to handle minor drug infractions. Treatment Alternative Diversion programs are more effective and cost far less than imprisonment of offenders. Nevertheless, the program is consistently underfunded by the state. Our task force has been instrumental in expanding the program here.

We also learned that our criminal legal system perpetuates racial inequity by imprisoning Black people at far higher rates than White people. Even in Outagamie County, which has relatively few Black residents, the percentage of Blacks in our jail is far higher than the percentage in our general population.

Members of our task forces have learned that each issue is usually connected to other issues and the inertia of the system is so great that change is difficult even when everyone acts in good faith. Throughout our successes and failures, our frustrations and growth, we have created relationships and found allies. Our twenty years have taught us that if we keep working, the arc of history does indeed bend toward justice.



REMEMBER WHEN...



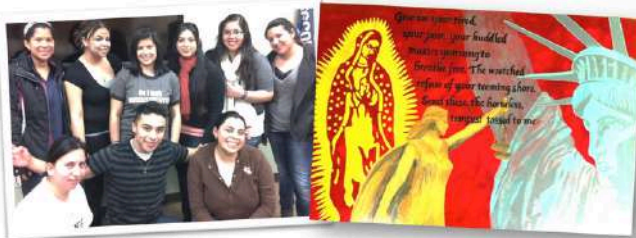
The Sikh Temple of the Fox Valley approached ESTHER to find out how to rescind property taxes the religious organization was levied by the City of Menasha. After working for more than a year with the Sikh temple and city officials, ESTHER leadership and clergy made a public appeal for the city to immediately deal with the tax issue, within two weeks the city council took the right action!



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**



REMEMBER WHEN...



ESTHER established and organized LUNA, a Latino youth group, which led efforts to pass in-state tuition for immigrant students and to introduce and attempt to pass a driver card bill. Over 30 youth created a traveling mural, which was displayed in community settings throughout the Fox Valley. Two students participated in Gamaliel's National Weeklong training, one of which led an action in D.C. calling for immigration reform.



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**



REMEMBER WHEN...



Leaders in ESTHER built relationships with local judges and local elected officials to gain support for treatment courts. In a short time, the first Drug Court was established, which paved the way for additional treatment and alternative courts such as the Mental Health Court and the SSTOP program. Leaders worked with Senator Carol Roessler to draft the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion grant program, which was approved by the legislature.



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**

REMEMBER WHEN...



We had several exciting events as our Health Care Task Force worked toward health care reform. Wendell Potter, an insurance CEO turned whistleblower spoke to 300 at First English Lutheran Church in Appleton. We marched down College Ave and rallied at the Thompson Center. In addition to forums and meeting with federal legislators in-district, several made multiple trips to D.C. to call for reform, which we won!



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**



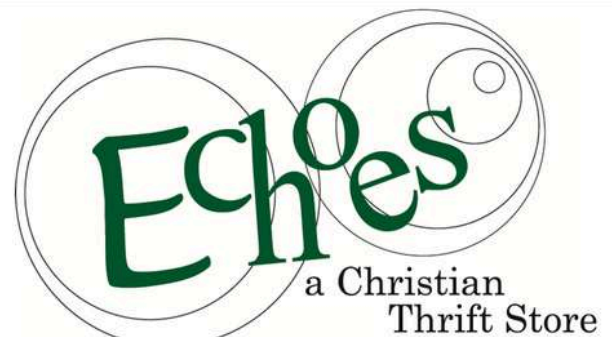
REMEMBER WHEN...



The Fox Valley was facing a 50% cut to transit service because of a change in federal funding. ESTHER established a transit task force, built relationships with Rep. Ribble and Rep. Petri, held a very large event at First English Lutheran Church in Appleton where both committed to solving the issue. After much work, including with federal legislators in other states, ESTHER, along with other groups passed the largest piece of policy in our history and saved transit!



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**



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REMEMBER WHEN...



ESTHER's first venture into housing issues was on workforce housing. Along with foundation support, ESTHER sponsored David Rusk who spoke about urban sprawl and the need for affordable homes where people work. Our housing task force sponsored two foreclosure prevention workshops and stopped the foreclosure of 50 homes. In Oshkosh, the local group worked with city officials and community leaders to ensure the start of the Day by Day Warming Shelter!



**WE WERE THERE.
YOU WERE THERE.**

ESTHER

faith community
dignity equality



CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN
A PROUD PARTNER OF ESTHER

“
A Beloved Community...
is vibrant and deeply integrated,
embracing the truth that no one
is "other", there is only "we."
- Connie Kanitz
”

END GUN VIOLENCE



Creating a State of Peace

Learn about WAVE's work and Equity Commitment
wavefund.org

Highlights of ESTHER's Memories

FOUNDERS & EARLY ADOPTERS

Rev Joe Ellwanger, Rev Joel Schlachtenhaufen,
Maynard Beemer and Gwen Gibson

ORGANIZERS

Stephanie Gyldenvand, Bill Van Lopik,
Katie Olson and Miracle Wheeler

ADVOCACY & ACTION

- A focus on affordable workforce housing even in our earliest years.
- Luna, a Latino Youth group
- Sikh Temple in Menasha, wrongly charged property taxes rescinded
- Testimonies for budget priorities at Joint Finance Hearings
- Madison Action Days, A morning assembly, March to the Capitol
- Legislative visits about priorities for Biennial State Budget
- Collaboration with Unidos Por un Futuro Mejor
- Day Without Latinos at Madison Capitol
- Saving Federal Funding for Transit working with Rep. Ribble and Rep. Petri
- Protests and demonstrations in Fox Valley, Madison, Milwaukee
- Rallies with Voces de la Frontera regarding immigration rights.
- Transformational Justice Campaigns
- Rallies, vigils, testimonies, and press conferences
- WISDOM 11 X 15 campaign: to reduce prison population to 11,000 by 2015
- Crimeless Revocations
- Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD), Treatment Instead of Prison (TIP)
and many more...

WITNESS & EDUCATIONAL EVENT

- Solitary Confinement Cell (3x), with Talib Akbar
- Walk in our Shoes: Understanding the Latino Experience
- Voices of Hope Theater: Reader's theater
- The Blanket Exercise: Immersion Experience of 450 years of Indigenous History
- Events to Learning about the Black Experience

FILMS & PANEL DISCUSSIONS

- 53206 (Milwaukee zipcode that incarcerates highest number of Black men in America).
- *I Am Not Your Negro*
- *13th*
- *The Letter*
- *Dawnland* (Maine's attempt at reconciliation with Indigenous regarding boarding schools)
- *Justice in Crisis*
- *The Invisible Class*

FUNDRAISING

Wine, Cheese, and Jazz event; Comedic interactive play of Romeo and Juliet led by Rev. Steve and Dee Savides; ESTHER annual banquets; 2020 Pandemic "virtual banquet" included a live streaming "banquet alternative" with featured speakers, prayer, song, videos from each task force and a video of us dancing on the hill at First Cong. UCC; Ice cream social and film about boarding schools of Indigenous children; Grant writing, Concerts, Cookouts and many more...

ESTHER PRESIDENTS:

2004-2005: Rev. Joel Schlachtenhaufen and Rev. Jim Seim
 2006-2010: Rev. Maynard Beemer
 2011-2012: Gwen Gibson / V.P. Sara Companik
 2013-2014: Penny Robinson
 2015-2019: Father Joseph Mattern
 2020-2023: Gary Crevier
 2024-Present: Connie Kanitz

ESTHER STAFF:

2009-2015: Ana Wilson
 (Immigrant Rights Proj. Director)
 2016-2022: Francisca Hiscocks
 2022-2023: Kayla Nessmann
 2023-Present: Acienda Yang

ESTHER ORGANIZERS:

2006: Virgie Davis
 2007: Rev. Joseph W. Ellwanger
 2008-2015: Stephanie Gyldenvand
 2016-2022: Bill Van Lopik
 2022-Present: Katie Olson
 2024-Present: Miracle Wheeler (Community Org.)

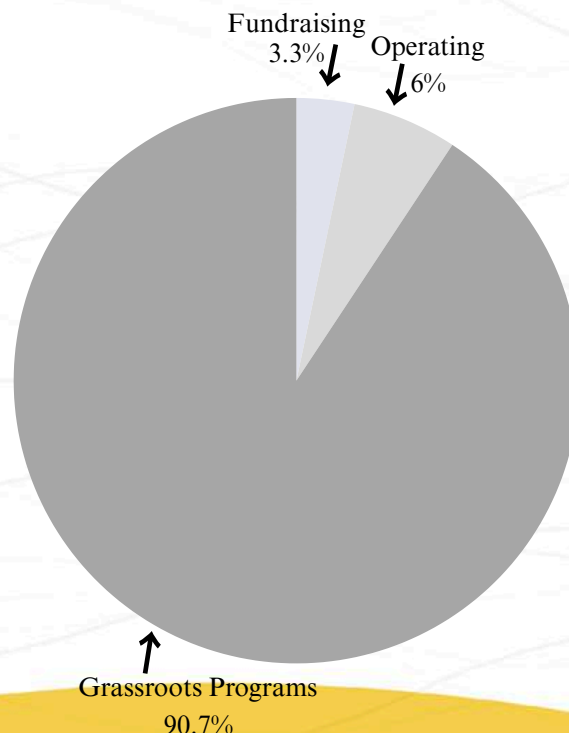
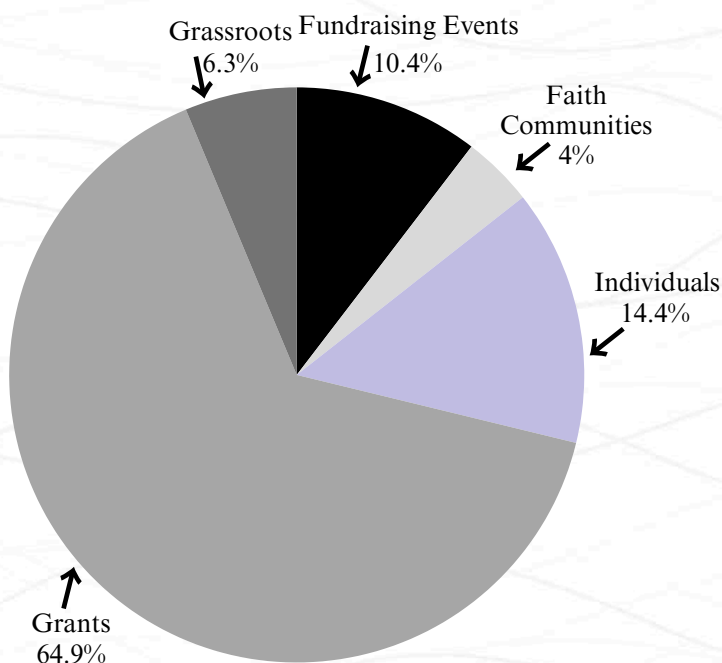


Revenue Report

01/01/2023 - 12/31/2023

Revenue \$206,267.31

Expenses \$164,931.92



ESTHER's Leadership Award

ESTHER Individual Award Recipients:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 2004 - Senator Carol Roessler/ Mito Kudaka | 2016 - Norys Pina |
| 2006 - Jim Mahan | 2017- Kristeen Clouthier |
| 2007 - Rev. Joel Schlachtenhaufen, David Rusk | 2018 - Lisa Hanneman |
| 2009 - Connie Raether/ Nancy Bourassa | 2019 - Father Joseph Mattern |
| 2010 - Tina Haffeman/Steve Hirby | 2022 - Sara Companik |
| 2011 - Kathy Groat/ Carrie Korb | 2023 - Connie Kanitz |
| 2012 - Penny Robinson | 2024 - Gary Crevier |
| 2013 - Jose A Lozano Pina | |

ESTHER Community Award Recipients:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 2008 - Coordinating Council/Valley Home Builders Association | 2016 - Fit Oshkosh, Inc. |
| 2009 - Circles of Support, Safe Streets Treatment Option Program | 2018 - Dignity & Respect Campaign; City of Appleton |
| 2010 - Wisconsin partnership for Housing Development | 2019 - Megan Kelley Foundation |
| 2011 - Community Health Action Team ThedaCare | 2022 - People of Progression |
| 2012 - Representatives Tom Petri and Reid Ribble | 2023 - League of Women Voters of Appleton - Fox Cities/Menikanaehkem |
| 2013 - Fox Valley Islamic Society | 2024 - First 5 Fox Valley |

ESTHER Banquet Keynote Speakers:

- 2004 - Covenanting Service/ First Congregational UCC, Appleton
- 2005 - Valerie Wylie/Deacon Robert Vincent on TIP/ Peter Geniesse/Carlos Herrera on Immigration
- 2007 - Nancy Heykes; Executive Director/ Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center
- 2007 - David Rusk; Urban Policy Consultant and author
- 2008 - Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson, Chief Justice of the WI Supreme Court
- 2009 - Kathy Kelly; Co-Coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence
- 2010 - Rev. Dennis Jacobsen; Leader in MICAHA, author of *Doing Justice*
- 2011 - John Nichols; Washington Correspondent for The Nation and author
- 2012 - Rev. Scott Anderson; Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches
- 2014 - Sister Helen Prejean; death penalty abolitionist and author
- 2015 - Douglas Walker, Coordinator of Criminal Justice Reform /United Methodist
- 2016 - Dee J. Hall/ Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism
- 2017 - Glenn E. Martin; President and Founder of Just Leadership USA
- 2018 - Leonard Pitts, Jr.; journalist, commentator, author
- 2019 - Winona LaDuke; advocate for the environment and author
- 2022 - Pardeep Kaleka; Executive Director for the Interfaith Conference
- 2020 - Traci D. Blackmon; Executive Minister United Church of Christ
- 2023 - Ana Garcia-Ashley; Executive Director of Gamaliel
- 2024 - Keith A. Findley; Professor of Law, Wisconsin Innocence Project | Surprise Guest, Author Jarrett Adams

Community Leadership Award

ESTHER is pleased to recognize Barb Tengesdal of First 5 Fox Valley with the 2024 Community Award.

[First 5 Fox Valley](#) (F5FV) is a collective impact organization whose purpose is “...to strengthen families and assure equitable access to culturally relevant resources that parents want and need.” With Wisconsin’s highly disparate health, educational and life outcomes for people from marginalized populations, First 5’s commitment to more equitable access and wellness for children from underserved families is essential to building more just communities.

In 2020, F5FV became the state affiliate for Help Me Grow National. [Help Me Grow](#) (HMG) operates an evidence-based model, designed to leverage and enhance existing community resources to build a comprehensive approach to early childhood system development. F5FV’s impact is seen in the *doubling* of the number of families and children served each year since HMG launched. This means more children receive developmental screenings and are connected to early intervention resources, leading to better long term health and well-being. More families feel seen, valued and supported by their community as F5FV HMG navigators listen to concerns, connect them with resources, and answer questions.

The impressive reach of HMG has been due, in large part, to Executive Director Barb Tengesdal’s unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and empowerment for families.

Barb’s collaborative approach has found ways to reach typically underserved families, such as:

- Building a diverse team of HMG navigators with community partners including a bilingual navigator at LEAVEN, rural navigators with ThedaCare and Catalpa Health, and a HMG navigator and doula at People of Progression,
- Recruiting a diverse team for the HMG advisory group
- Meeting families where they are, such as the partners listed above and at area child care centers.



Barb is a visionary, passionate leader with tremendous expertise and a deep understanding of how to create resource equity for all families, enabling our youngest community members to thrive.

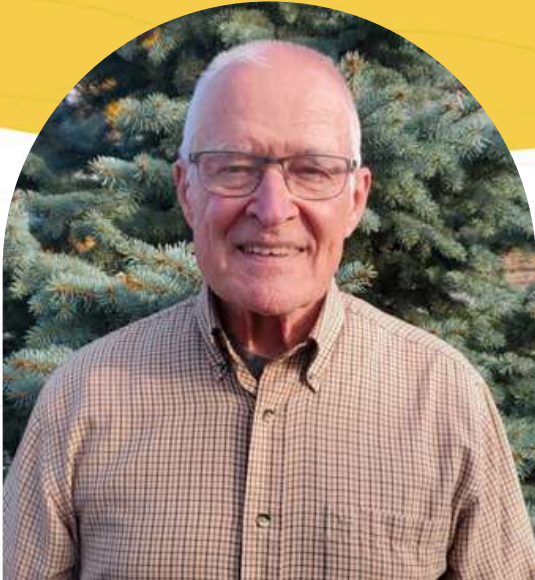
It was Barb’s vision to appeal to counties and municipalities to allocate 10% their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to establish an Early Childhood Investment Fund that resulted in Outagamie County and the City of Appleton to invest \$2.75 million in the [Together for Families Family Resource Center](#) (FRC). The downtown Appleton center will be the hub for connection with spokes in other areas of the county. Barb has built diverse teams to plan the FRC, including the parent team key in designing the space and programming to best serve today’s families.

Barb is a respected leader in the field of early childhood, and her work is attracting attention from around the state and nation. Other communities have joined Help Me Grow -Wisconsin led by F5FV, several other states are consulting with F5FV about the successful efforts Barb is leading, and F5FV was invited to participate in the national community of best practice, [EC-Linc](#). In addition, Barb has served with [Raising Wisconsin](#), the statewide collaboration for early childhood care and education.

The Fox Valley will benefit from Barb's vision, energy, and dedication for many years into our collective future.



Individual Leadership Award



Gary Crevier

Gary Crevier has shown extraordinary commitment and extraordinary understanding while serving as President. He has always made himself available to meet with members to talk about their concerns or about the challenges that they or our task forces faced. His many years as a missionary and social worker with incarcerated people have given him exceptional empathy and compassion, along with a firm faith in the possibility of positive change.

Gary is powerful in a quiet and humble way, and he also knows intuitively how to share inspiration and how to motivate people through effective calls to action. He has also been very successful in expanding ESTHER’s influence in the community by building relationships with people outside of ESTHER. He has been able to do that in part because of his skill in listening. He listens carefully, and he really hears what people say. He sees them for who they are, and that allows him to speak to them in terms of their interests and concerns. This skill has been very beneficial to ESTHER. He has been able to establish meaningful relationships that might otherwise have been missed.

Gary is very generous with his time. As president, he attended almost all task force meetings, going above and beyond our expectations. He attended services at many other faith communities, forging relationships with members of Black and Hispanic communities. Gary was often the first to volunteer for many ESTHER events. He led ESTHER through difficult times, working to develop and manage relationships with other organizations. His quiet and thoughtful demeanor led others to contemplate and examine their faith and the ways their faith impacted their actions. Gary has been the leader that ESTHER needed, and we are grateful for his leadership.



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Meet our Banquet Speaker

Keith Findley, Emeritus Professor, was a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin Law School until his retirement in January 2024. During his professorship at UW, Findley and Professor John Pray co-founded the Wisconsin Innocence Project. Also, for five years, Findley was president of the Innocence Network, an affiliation of 70 innocence organizations throughout the world. In 2018, Findley co-founded a non-profit, the *Center for Integrity in Forensic Sciences*, dedicated to improving the reliability and safety of criminal prosecutions through strengthening forensic sciences.



*Keith A. Findley,
Professor of Law*

His co-edited a book with 5 other scholars from a variety of disciplines--entitled "Shaken Baby Syndrome: Investigating the Abusive Head Trauma Controversy," which was published in 2023.

Professor Findley's primary areas of scholarship and expertise are in wrongful convictions, criminal law and procedure, law and forensic science, and appellate advocacy. He has previously worked as an assistant state public defender in Wisconsin. He has litigated hundreds of post-conviction and appellate cases, at all levels of state and federal courts, including the United States Supreme Court. He also lectures and teaches internationally on wrongful convictions, forensic science, evidence, and appellate advocacy.

Later in his career, Prof. Findley also became involved in policing issues. He served as co-chair of the Madison Police Department Policy & Procedure Review Ad Hoc Committee, which after four years of study issued a report in 2019 with 177 recommendations for reforms, including recommendations for creating a mechanism for civilian oversight of policing.

"No one is all evil," Findley said. "If there is a segment of our population that is needier and that suffers more injustice than prison inmates, I don't know what group it is...If we are a compassionate and caring society, we have to care about them."

Redeeming Justice: From Defendant to Defender: My Fight for Equity on Both Sides of a Broken System, by Jarrett Adams

Keith Findley, keynote speaker at ESTHER's 20th Anniversary Banquet on November 16, is a key figure in this 2021 book by Jarrett Adams.

Adams was seventeen when an all-white jury in Jefferson County, Wisconsin, sentenced him to twenty-eight years behind bars for a crime he didn't commit. In this unforgettable memoir, Jarrett recalls the journey that led to his exoneration—and inspired him to devote his life to fighting the many injustices in our legal system. With time running out for him to file his appeal, the Wisconsin Innocence Project at the University of Wisconsin Law School offered to represent him, both in drafting his appeal and representing him in court.

Without the dedication of Professor Keith Findley and his team of law school students, Adams would likely still be in prison today. He describes in the book the race against time to file the appeal in Federal court, working with the students and Professor Findley. His appeal was delivered to the court on the very last day the law allowed.

In the same vein as Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, Adams' *Redeeming Justice* helps shine a light on the inequities rife in our criminal justice system. It is an action-call to each of us to work hard to reform that system until it is in fact one of justice, and not one of injustice.

Meet ESTHER's Banquet Emcee

Hop onto Voices RandomISH



Eldridge, a UW-Milwaukee Graduate/Lecturer, is currently the Director of Cultural Transformation for Guardian Life.

In 2020, she also launched SLNTPTNRS DEI Consulting.

Voices RandomISH premiered in June 2019. It was created to tell the stories of the good in our Fox Cities communities.

On the show, Eldridge interviews guests to discuss popular culture topics relevant to the community at large.

In 2020, Eldridge launched the online purpose driven clothing store YourGeer.com.

This clothing site showcases original designs based upon popular culture. Shirt prices range from \$21.00-\$35.00. For every Voices RandomISH and First Responders shirt sold, \$5 is donated to charity.



Eldridge's Purpose: To use my voice to serve humanity by encouraging engagement in dialogue that is Enlightening, Inspiring and Uplifting!

www.youtube.com/@voicesrandomish



Eldridge Alexander

Eldridge Alexander is a fierce advocate for people of color in the Fox Valley and beyond. She spends her days as the Ambassador of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (J.E.D.I.) for Guardian Life. She also serves as a freelance DEI consultant and coach through her business SLNTPTNRS.

Eldridge is also the award-winning host of the YouTube and TikTok show "V.O.I.C.E.S. RandomISH."



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TIP Forum - April 2009



Interfaith Gathering (Roxanna Rashid & Joe Mattern) - July 2009



Religious Leaders Caucus - September 2010

“
A Beloved Community...
a place where everyone feels welcome, supported, and empowered to be their true authentic selves
- Katie Olson”

Support Our Work!

Every dollar you donate to ESTHER has a great impact on our community. We are working hard to eliminate barriers to justice by dismantling systems of oppression.

Below are options of contribution method:

- Make a secure online contribution by visiting us on the web at esther-foxvalley.org/support
- Want to sign up for monthly electronic deduction instead? Call us at (920) 843-8083 or visit esther-foxvalley.org/sustainer
- Mail in a check to:
ESTHER
PO Box 784
Neenah, WI 54957



Donate Here

Want to be more involved in ESTHER's work? Come and see!

Anyone who is interested in the issues we focus on is welcome to attend ESTHER's task force meetings (most task forces are held through Zoom teleconference)! If you have a heart for justice or if the issues have affected your life or a loved one's, we invite you to join us! All are welcome, any questions, please contact us!

Environmental Justice:

4th Tuesdays, 7PM-8:30PM | Zoom | Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/ejtf

Equity & Racial Justice:

2nd Mondays, 11AM-12:30PM | Zoom | Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/erjc

Immigration:

3rd Tuesdays, 6:30PM-8PM | Zoom | Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/itf

Mental Health:

2nd Mondays, 6PM-7:30PM | First Congregational United Church of Christ, 724 E. South River St., Appleton & Zoom | Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/mhtf

ESTHER Oshkosh & Housing:

3rd Thursdays, 2PM-3:30PM | Trinity Episcopal Parish Hall, 311 Division St., Oshkosh & Zoom
Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/oetf

Public Transit:

3rd Thursdays, 10AM-11:30AM | Zoom | Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/pptf

Transformational Justice:

1st Mondays, 6PM-7:30PM | St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 140 S. Green Bay Rd., Neenah & Zoom |
Contact: esther-foxvalley.org/tjtf

ESTHER's Faithful Contributors

Ana Acosta
 Karin Alvarez
 Rev. Jane Anderson
 Marian Anderson
 Barbara and John Auten
 Karen Bachhuber
 Ari Baker
 Mary and Michael Bauer
 Mary Kay Baum
 Alice and James Baumbach
 Mary Bechle
 Jerry and Gail Bednarowski
 Jerry and Mary Jane Belot
 Benji Benzschawel
 Georgia Berceau
 Russ Berggren
 Penny Bernard Schaber and Dale Schaber
 Mary Bissing-Olson
 Linda Bjella
 Patricia and Howard Blades
 Lou and Corine Blasczyk
 Michael and Catherine Bober
 Michael and Teresa Bonertz
 Gary and Jo Brantmier
 Trish Brehm
 Barbara and Paul Brinkman
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 †Jim Brygger
 Bonnie Buchanan
 ML Buley-Meissner
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 Christiana Coakley
 Carol and Greg Codner
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 Sara companik and Bruce Companik
 Gretchen and David Considine
 Jennifer Considine and Karl Buelow
 Donna J. Cook

Mamadou Coulibaly and Fatoumata Kroman
 Ms. Peggy Cox
 Karen Crawford
 Gary and Helen Crevier
 Marsha and Terry Dawson
 Tim and Sheryl De Hart
 Mary and Jerry Dees
 Kristin DeGrave
 Rev. Jennifer Denetz
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 Rick and Susan Detienne
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 Peter and Leticia Geniesse
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 John Gosling
 Richard and Karen Gosse
 Mary Grace
 LouAnn and Thomas Graf
 Renee Gralewicz
 Ms. Kathleen Gribble



continued...

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David and Chintana Haas
Greg and Mary Haasl
Tina Haffeman
Tom and Theresa Hannah
Lisa and Dale Hanneman
John and Linda Harmon
Clarence L. Harms
Mary Hartley
Pat Hauser
Robert Hausserman
Gerri and Bob Heffron
Jayne Heinrich
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Bruce and Ruthann Hetzler
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Eilene and John Hoft-March
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Helene and Jerry Iverson
Sharon and Paul Janty
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Joan B. Jensen
Sandra Johnson
David Jones
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Nancy and Ron Jones
Mary Kabacinski
Connie and Roger Kanitz
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Ms. Jane Keggi
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