



CMBA Grants Support Two Church Hunger Ministries

Two CMBA churches have applied for and received Our One Priority Congregational Grants for hunger related ministries that actively serve Midlands residents. During its January 2021 meeting, the Visionary Leadership Community (VLC) approved requests from Blaney Baptist and NorthStar Christian Church's Center of Hope for each to receive \$500 grants to meet specific hunger ministry needs. Both churches recently shared updates on how these funds were used.

"Over the years the association has been blessed by monetary donations from churches and individuals with a heart for those in need. I feel it a blessing to match these funds to churches with the same heart," says Cathy Locklear, CMBA Our One Priority Mobilizer.

Our [One Priority Congregational Grants](#) are available to active participating and financially contributing CMBA Member and Network Connection churches that are also engaging in efforts to serve as vital and vibrant missional communities. VLC expanded the list of ministry needs that qualify for the grants last year. According to Yvonne Murray, Center of Hope director and VLC member, the application process is user-friendly.

"When you hear the word 'grant,' there is intimidation with that. But the wording and questions were easy to understand," says Murray.

NorthStar's Center of Hope was birthed in September 2019, out of desire to provide practical and spiritual connections to people in need within the city of Forest Acres. Neighbors are reached with services like tax preparation help, ministries to seniors and the homeless and assistance with local housing authorities. A community garden is being planted right now, something Murray calls an example of "God giving us a piece of an idea and connecting us with folks who can run with it."

Murray says the ministry had to pivot when the pandemic hit and is working to respond to needs as they emerge. Center of Hope has several community partnerships including with Red Hill Baptist's food distribution and Prisma Health's Food Share South Carolina, through which the ministry serves as a distribution site for affordable produce and other fresh foods. Individuals and families pick up these orders at Center of Hope and volunteers help with occasional deliveries. Ministries like this give new perspectives on hunger relief, especially during hard times.

"I have helped families in Extended Stays that needed food until they could get connected with government services, and families impacted by COVID through job loss, diagnoses or other health issues. Early in the pandemic it was shocking to see bare grocery store shelves, food shortage and food insecurity really do happen. Your financial situation doesn't matter if there aren't products to purchase," Murray says.

As Center of Hope became a sort of community hub for produce and other fresh food distribution, the ministry quickly realized the need for a reliable refrigerator. Murray learned of the CMBA grant through her service on the VLC and began the application process last fall. Within a few days of receiving the check from CMBA she was able to purchase a new refrigerator that now stores perishables including meats, eggs, fruits and vegetables.

"I'm reminded that there are families that open an empty refrigerator and what that must mean to a mom

Our Family Stories is a series of stories provided by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association about the people and congregations of the family of Baptist congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina.

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or dad who can't make a complete meal that day. How do we as a Church respond and how to we get the message beyond the church walls to say to anyone that 'we are here and there is no barrier for you to come,'" Murray asks.

Like Center of Hope, Blaney Baptist also opened its facility to community partners looking for help during the pandemic. Pastor Jacob Helsley received a call last summer from Food for the Soul when that ministry noticed there were about 50 people traveling from Blaney's community of Elgin for a weekly meal distribution they had in neighboring Lugoff. The church was first asked to become a drive through distribution site, then invited to help provide meals as well.

"On Thursday nights we started serving those 50 people that had been driving to Lugoff and numbers began to steadily grow," Helsley recalls.

Volunteers from Blaney Baptist became the primary providers of both the food and evening distribution, which now serves 300 or more each week. Folks also pick up extra meals for their neighbors in need and local policemen have delivered some of the hot meals. Helsley says his service on the VLC introduced him to the CMBA grant, which went to fund about two and a half weeks of food.

Helsley says he is "thankful for the Kingdom partnership and cooperation with the association, which is cool to see and be a part of," and that Blaney Baptist is committed to continuing and even expanding its hunger ministry. The church is also looking at future opportunities that providing a meal and a place to eat also give to build relationships and share the gospel.

For her part, Murray says she is thankful for CMBA's support of Center of Hope's new refrigerator which represents a step toward the ministry's dream of inviting the community in for Bible studies and a cooked meal.

"I am very honored to be a part of CMBA that gives opportunities for places like Center of Hope and other churches to be afforded a grant to do things for the community. It's a blessing to be able to immediately meet the needs of the community through this resource. Any way that I can be a part of the association to give back and work because of that, I'm willing to do," she says.

For more information about Our One Priority Congregational Grants, email CMBA@ColumbiaMetro.org. Contact Locklear at CathyLocklear@ColumbiaMetro.org for additional support and resource information on hunger ministry.