

# Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council

FEBRUARY 2018

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## MAKING A BELOVED COMMUNITY “HOW THE FAITH COMMUNITY CAN TAKE ACTION TO HEAL AND SUPPORT THE FAMILY”

### HIGHLIGHTS IN THIS ISSUE:

**2**  
About UCICC  
page 2

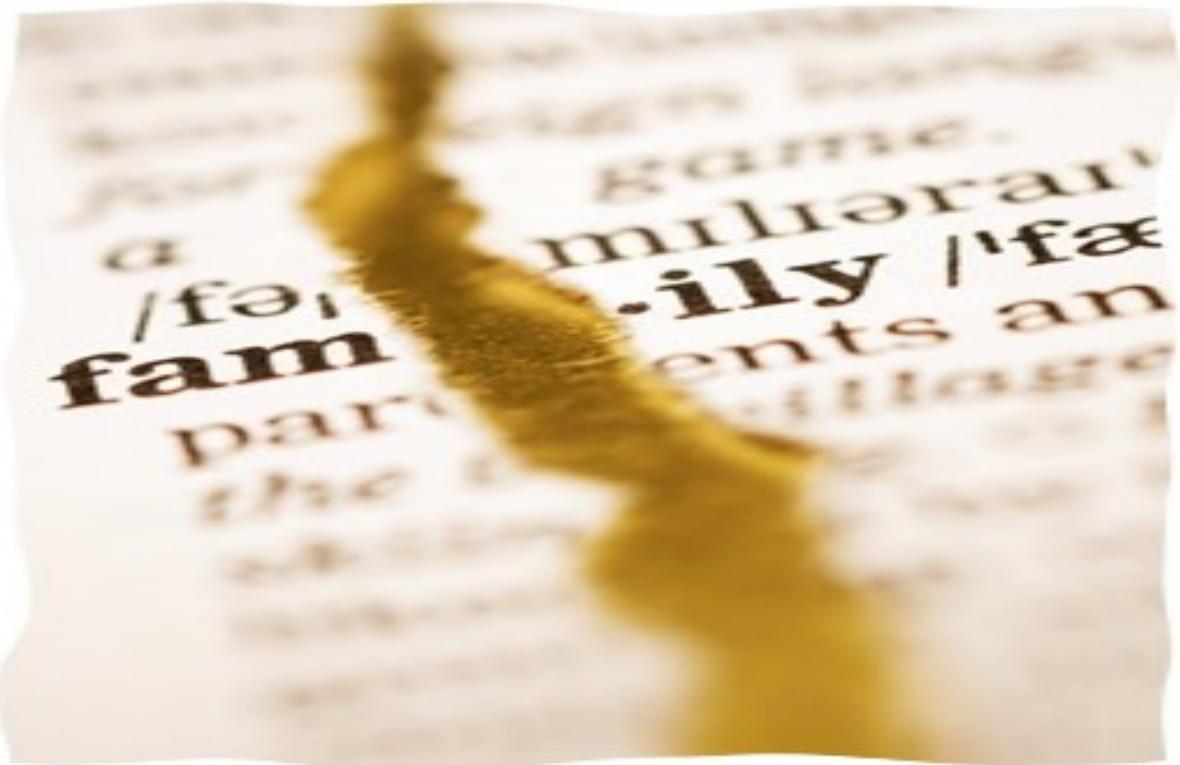
**3**  
Message from the  
Chairperson  
page 3

**4**  
Know Your Neighbor  
page 4

**5**  
Member Spotlight  
page 5

**6**  
Spotlight on Faith  
pages 6

**10**  
*Faith in Action!*  
pages 10–11



### UCICC EVENT: February 22, 2018



*See page 13*



## UNION COUNTY INTERFAITH COORDINATING COUNCIL Steering Committee Members

**Deacon Tim Williams-Chair**  
First Baptist Church  
Kenilworth

**Pastor E. Crawford—Chair Emeritus**  
Ebenezer AME  
Rahway

**Sidney Blanchard**  
Executive Director of CAU

**Rabbi Joel N. Abraham**  
Temple Sholom  
Scotch Plains

**Ayaz Aslam**  
Muslim Community Center of UC  
Elizabeth

**Pastor H. Bryant**  
Honorable Retired

**Denise Fernandes**  
Latino Outreach

**Erich Han William Kussman, Jr**  
Holy Cross Lutheran Church  
Springfield

**Pastor Mertz**  
First United Methodist Church  
Westfield

**Michelle Mobley**  
Director of Youth Service  
Residential

**Pastor Carmine Pernini**  
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Rahway

**Father Michael Saporito**  
The Parish Community of St. Helen  
Westfield

**Roderick Spearman**  
CAU Consultant

**Reverend Ronald C. Thomas**  
Fountain Baptist Church  
Summit

**Elder Arthur "Skip" Winter**  
Cranford Presbyterian Church  
Cranford

## About the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council

### Our Mission

The Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council works to facilitate regular interfaith meetings in order to make way for the building of bonds within the interfaith community.

We respect and encourage the inclusion and welcoming of others regardless of faith, race or disability. We strive to be proactive on social issues.

### Our Goals

- To grow the network of faith-based organizations in Union County.
- To encourage representatives from all faiths to join the Interfaith Coordinated Council including those of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, and other faiths.
- To be engaged in:
  1. **Community Building** within faith-based organizations and the general Union County population.
  2. The advancement of **Social Justice**.
  3. The intentional **inclusion** of others regardless of gender, faith, race.
- To be active in activities that are inclusive and community building.

### Our Objectives

- Sponsor regular engagement opportunities that facilitate the building of bonds within the Union County interfaith community and their congregations.
- Strengthen the Union County religious congregations through involvement, action and education in self-help.
- Build working relationships between Union County religious organizations and Community Access Unlimited that create opportunities for youth and people with disabilities and their support staff.

### Potential Advantages to Joining the Interfaith Community

- Develop interfaith solidarity.
- Avail yourself of increased visibility within the interfaith community and build opportunities to share educational and community events with the group.
- Build religious membership.
- Gain exposure for you and fellow congregation members to educational opportunities regarding entitlements, housing, and other services, including but not limited to: programs for seniors, youth, people with physical and developmental disabilities, etc..
- Create full and part time employment opportunities for congregation members with CAU.

# message

## from the Chairperson Emeritus

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10a

Imagine, for just one moment, that life deals you a blow that knocks you off your feet. Unexpectedly, there is a house fire, a cancer diagnosis, a lay off at work, a death in the family, an arrest, a divorce and before you know it there you are... off balance, out of sync, disoriented and alone. Imagine, trying carry this load, this heavy alone, disabled by the hardships and misfortunes of life.



Now imagine, for just one moment, that life deals you a blow that should knock you off your feet. Unexpectedly, there is a house fire, a cancer diagnosis, a lay off at work, a death in the family, an arrest, a divorce and before you know there you are... off balance, out of sync and disoriented but you did not fall. You did not hit the ground, because someone was there. Someone was there to hold your hand, to wipe your tears, to balance your steps and share your load.

There are and will be times in our lives when we will be dealt a massive blow and the difference between how we bounce back or if we bounce back is often our support system or lack thereof. Solomon, speaks to humanity in Ecclesiastes when he reminds us that two are better than one because they are able to keep each other up and help each other up.

Life was not meant to be lived in isolation and no person or family should feel alone. As children of God, we must learn how to support each other, so that no family and no person is swallowed up the wickedness and misfortunes of life.

As we look at support systems this month, ask yourself, when was the last time I picked someone up? When was the last time, I made myself available as a source of strength and support?

*Rev. Dr. Erika D. Crawford*

# Know Your Neighbor

## A Day in the Life

The following is based on true events.

“Attention passengers: We are temporarily being held at this station due to an unattended bag on the train.” I look up and take my headphones out of my ears, listening intently to the rest of the conductor’s announcement. I wait for the number of the train car and sigh heavily in relief when I’m sure it’s not the one I’m sitting in. A few seconds later, another announcement comes on and the conductor tells the passengers that they are free to evacuate the car where the bag was left. “Cops are on their way to the station to check the contents of the bag.”

Welcome to “Know Your Neighbor”, a section intended to give the Interfaith Community a Glimpse into the many facets of religion. Each faith has many facets that bring with it different experiences, practices, and beliefs even though we may find Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism at the core. We are all diverse and to Make a Beloved Community we must build a foundation of understanding our rich diversity as far as religious practices and daily experiences for those walking in faith. It is our hope that you will submit informative articles or first-hand experiences to help us all to Know Our Neighbor’s and Make a Beloved Community. Forward your submissions to UCInterfaith@caunj.org.

I was sweating profusely as a knot formed in my throat. A small part of me expected glaring stares from everyone on the train. Another part half expected someone to walk up to me and tell me it’s my fault. Those few minutes as we waited for the cops to arrive felt like an hour, maybe two. I did my best not to look too worried, simply because it also meant I looked suspicious. After all, I did say “Insha’Allah” and “Alhamdul Al-lah” earlier on the phone.

I glance to the man sitting across from me and he shakes his head. “They’re bringing cops here, means they think it’s a bomb.” I nodded, thankful that his contempt was not geared towards me. He gets up and off the train completely. I close my eyes and pray. I neither pray it’s not a bomb nor do I pray to get home safely. Praying for peace and safety is a luxury that I, and 3 million more Muslim Americans, do not have. Instead, I close my eyes and pray against all hope that whoever left that bag is not a Muslim.

It started in 2001. It was in that year that I had to stop thinking of how my actions reflect myself and instead think of how they shape the way Muslims are perceived. At just 11 years old I became inclined to apologize for things I did not do, to people I did not hurt.

I, like many others, became torn between fearing terrorism itself and fearing those who fear me by association. The despicable events of September 11th should have brought us closer as a nation, yet these actions along with the media have come to make “Islam” synonymous with “terror.” With each terrorist act that these so-called Muslims carry out in the wrongful name of jihad, two classes of victims are created. The first, those who are directly affected, whether they were wounded or lost their lives, and their families; the second, the millions of Muslims living in an illusion of peace around the country. We, who have done nothing wrong, are viewed as a danger to society, simply because we pray to a god that terrorists falsely claim as their own. One way or another, we have all suffered the ramifications of these un-Islamic actions.

As a woman who does not wear the hijab, my Islam is not so conspicuous, and in the face of racism, I am not always victim. It is in these situations that I have a choice to make. Yes, I will always choose to defend my religion. But the question becomes: how? As a Muslim woman myself? Or as an American woman, speaking as bystander? Unfortunately, the latter has a stronger voice, one that echoes confidence and trust, rather than self-defense. But, in choosing to defend with the louder voice, my identity begins to fade. I am both the Muslim and the American, and neither one should force me to forfeit the other.

# Member Spotlight

## Reverend Ron Thompson Townley Presbyterian Church

829 Salem Road; Union, New Jersey 07083.

By this time of the year, we are either on track or not regarding our New Year's Resolutions. May I encourage you to get back on track with them? Our desire to even consider a resolution springs from a willingness to try something despite the possibility it might fail. That impulse is a good impulse. It's the same impulse that urges us to talk a to stranger about our faith or to volunteer to work with a community group. It is not too late to make a resolution.

What would a resolution to ***Make a Beloved Community*** look like? This reminds me of similar question that Jesus was asked. In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, an “expert” in the law asked Jesus who was his neighbor. Jesus might have gotten into semantics and defined a neighbor as a person who is the closest to your dwelling. He may have added that a good neighbor would be the person who can be called on if and when the need arises. Using these criteria, many of us could begin to compile a list of neighbors. I am glad that Jesus didn’t go there.

Jesus took a better route. He told a story. He told a parable. He used a teaching method to not only nail the definition of a neighbor, but of a good neighbor. Some would say that there is only one kind of neighbor – a good neighbor. Jesus’ parable reveals that to be a good neighbor, it does not require the closeness of next door. It requires contact. To be a good neighbor, it does not require clerical status. It requires compassion.



A resolution to Make a Beloved Community must consist of compassionate contact in our community. Where is our community? It is wherever we can physically touch another being.

Sometimes, when we act on one of those good impulses and make a resolution, it doesn't turn out the way we hoped it would. The practice of failing and yet continuing to try, is what a faithful life looks like. God can use all those tiny failures we make. He shapes them by His grace into something wonderful we could never have imagined. Let us, by the grace of God, continue to move forward in 2018 resolving to make our community, a Beloved Community. Let's be good neighbors!

**Ron Thompson, Pastor**

# February Spotlight on Faith

## What Can Houses of Worship do to Support Criminal Justice and Support Prisoner Re-Entry Programs

**Mathew 25:36 – “I was in prison and you came to me”**

For many years now, individuals within congregations and houses of worship working together or on their own, have become partners in assisting people who are currently incarcerated, providing support to their families and working with both those incarcerated and their families upon their release from prison. The Rev. Liz Alexander, for many years served as the pastor of The Church of Gethsemane in Brooklyn, New York, whose main goal was to work with those imprisoned on Riker's Island, Sing Sing, Attica, Albion, Bedford Hills and other prisons throughout New York State and to supply spiritual and economic support to their families and to work with them upon their release to become independent successful members of society. While at Gethsemane, Pastor Liz initiated a correspondence church membership course that people could take while they were incarcerated. The following information was provided by Rev. Alexander through conversations and emails with me.

Founded as a New Church Development in 1986, and established as a church in 1989 is a congregation of the PCUSA, created by and for incarcerated persons, their families, neighborhood persons and people who feel called into ministry with the poor. While all houses of worship are not called to this ministry, Pastor Liz describes how all congregations can become involved in this ministry, each in their own way. **(1) Educate yourselves about mass incarceration.** Adult forums within your own house of worship or ecumenical gatherings within your individual community are great ways for people to learn what is taking within the prison system. Invite former persons who have been incarcerated to come and speak and share their stories; invite pastors who do prison ministry on a regular basis to attend and discuss how churches and communities can assist. Books such as “The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander and “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson are great places to begin discussion and to learn how the penal system really operates. **(2) Join with other congregations and houses of worship in creating a Prison/Reentry Working Group to learn and discuss issues and policies.** Assuming that enough interest has been generated by holding ecumenical discussion groups throughout your and surrounding communities, look to begin for a Prison/Reentry Working Group that can begin to work with those in need of this ministry. **(3) Visit jails and prisons and volunteer in educational or faith based programs that are offered to men and women who are incarcerated.** The task of becoming approved to go into jails and prisons is a process that may take a while. They key is not to get discouraged and to find a mentor who is currently involved in visiting prisons for ministry to help you with the process. **(4) Provide a Prison Reentry Aftercare Support Group.** Persons who have been incarcerated and their families need special attention upon their release. This is a great opportunity for individual congregations and houses of worship, or folks from different congregations working together to help provide the love and spiritual care that is necessary to guide folks back into everyday life. **(5) Work for prison reform, humane sentencing and restorative justice principles.** As persons of faith, we are all called to work to make a difference in the lives of others. Folks starting on the reentry process need advocates to not only assist them but to work through the system to make changes for the betterment of mankind. **(6) Be a welcoming place for people released from prison, jails and rehab centers.** Be that congregation or house of worship that persons entering reentry can feel comfortable around and discuss what they need as individuals to get their lives back in order. **(7) Become a job bank resource with other congregations to assist in finding reentry positions in today’s job market.** The main concern for men and women returning home are housing and jobs! Congregations and houses of worship need to know struggles and obstacles the people returning home face. “We are called to walk in solidarity with people seeking a second chance.”

**“Remember those in prison as though you were in prison with them.” Hebrews 13:3**

Rev. Liz Alexander currently is the Interim Pastor at Oak Tree Presbyterian Church in Edison. Prior to her serving at Oak Tree Edison, she was Associate Pastor at Riverside Church in New York City, Pastor of The Church of the Gethsemane in Brooklyn and Interim Associate Pastor at The First Presbyterian Church of Cranford.

**Skip Winter - First Presbyterian Church of Cranford**

# Ash Wednesday

## Christianity's Ash Wednesday: Encountering the Infinite in the Finite

*By Rev. Carmine Pernini*

On Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, many Christians will attend worship services where clergy will mark the foreheads of the faithful with ashen crosses while saying, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Ashes have long been used throughout Christianity and Judaism as a symbol of repentance and mourning. Ash Wednesday is the ritual beginning of the liturgical season of Lent, the forty day period of fasting and intensified spiritual disciplines in preparation for Easter and Christ’s resurrection. Traditionally, the imposition of ashes has been confined to church worship services, but today, many clergy impose ashes at local train stations to catch morning commuters on their way to work who do not have time to make it to worship services. Or, ashes are imposed at construction sites where worker’s hours prohibit leaving a job site to make it to church. This somewhat controversial practice, often called, “Ashes On the Go,” has also been used by clergy as a sort of “drive-through” experience where clergy stand on street corners and make ashen crosses on the foreheads of both drivers and passengers in their communities. It is not uncommon that the recipients of ashes rarely, if ever, attend regular worship services.

Ash Wednesday services, as well as the number of commuters and laborers who participate in “Ashes On the Go,” are among the most attended events of the year in many Christian traditions. It is worth pausing over the popularity of a liturgical act which reminds those who wear ashes that they are finite, mortal, and have limits on their personal liberty. It is curious that Ash Wednesday is as popular as it is given that American culture generally seems to deny either limits on individual autonomy or national expansion limitations (think globalization and even Puerto Rico). Technological advances, the avoidance of death, and our stigmas associated with illness and ability, tend to relegate regular engagement with our finitude to a dusty corner in a much larger room of national expansion and manifest destinies of old. The American cult of individualism says to us that we are limitless and if you have fallen on hard times it is well within an individual’s sphere of influence and autonomy to fix economic, employment, or housing challenges yourself (What movie doesn’t have a hero that solves all the problems?). That is all to say that we are culturally conditioned to avoid any sense of finitude and limitation. Yet, Ash Wednesday, and its seeming popularity, literally impress upon us a different message, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Maybe embracing our limitations is a good thing? And, maybe we know it and even long for limits. According to many child psychologists, limit setting in child rearing helps develop a child’s inner sense of morality. Today, when both liberals and conservatives decry the lack of common decency in the public sphere, maybe Ash Wednesday and its message of finitude has something not only to teach us, but maybe even confers upon us what we already know: that we are finite, and that thinking about that fact might enhance, rather than diminish, our appreciation of each other more so than the numbing and never ending message of personal, national, economic, and environmental resource expansion.

For Christians, Ash Wednesday’s message of finitude is closely related to the shape of the ashes themselves: the cross upon which Jesus died. Our finitude, or limits, are part of our relationship with the infinite – God. It is in this interchange, of when a forehead meets an ash encrusted thumb of clergy, where the human hubris of immortality is met with the sign of the cross constructed of ash reminding the faithful of God’s call to be humble, embrace our finitude, and finally be human rather than little gods ourselves. It is humbly, in the end, in our finitude that we embrace the infinite.

*Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:20*



## Good Mourning Congregations

How can faith based communities create supportive, healing space when loss impacts their temple, mosque or church? Here are four ideas.

**Realize that grief is a normal and necessary response to any type of loss:** death, illness, substance abuse, divorce etc. Grief is all the feelings and reactions we have after we experience a loss. Rabbi Earl Grollman rightly states, “Grief is not a disease, a disorder, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity. It is the price we pay for love.” Muslim scholar Muhammad al-Bukhari says, “We have been taught that sadness is a natural feeling that we express by shedding tears while adopting patience.” There is no time limit on grief. If someone important to us dies, we will miss that person for the rest of our lives.

**Members of the congregation need to consider their “grief beliefs” as this will affect the support they offer.** If we believe that grief is something to get over we may say, “Don’t you think it’s time you’ve moved on?” If we believe children are naturally resilient, we may ignore their grief. If we believe that we are to be strong in the face of grief, we may tell someone to be strong when what they most need a safe place to be vulnerable and express the pain of their loss. If we believe that being grateful will spare us the pain of grief, we might say, “Don’t be sad. You should be grateful that you had them for so long.”

**“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”** These words of Jesus in the Beatitudes hold great potential for healing. When it is safe for us to express our grief, to mourn, then we can receive comfort and begin to heal. When grief stays bottled up inside of us, it can lead to mental and physical illness, aggression, isolation, difficulty functioning at work or school or substance abuse. Rabbi Stuart Gershon says, “The world is driven by unresolved grief.” When congregations create safe space for their members to mourn, healing happens.

**Invite Imagine to provide the Good Mourning Congregation training for your faith based organization.** This training normalizes grief and provides specific ways for members to support one another after a loss. All of us have said things or have heard things said to us when we were grieving that were either unhelpful or caused us additional hurt. Maya Angelou reminds us, “When we know better, we do better.” We are all life-long learners about grief.

Written by Connie Palmer, the Clinical Training Director of Imagine, a Center for Coping with Loss located in Mountainside, NJ. Imagine provides free, year-round peer grief support for children age 3-18 and young adults 18-30 who are coping with loss due to the death of a parent or sibling and for children and young adults who have a parent or sibling living with illness. Concurrent support groups are available for parents and guardians in both programs. Imagine provides free year-round peer grief support for more than 250 children and adults from 48 NJ towns.

Imagine provides grief education to workplaces, schools and community organizations; training over 4000 teachers, parents, students, employees, social workers, counselors and members of community organizations. For more information contact Imagine at 908-264-3100 or visit us online at [www.imaginenj.org](http://www.imaginenj.org)



## **I Have the Right to Grieve: A Grief Bill of Rights for Adults**

- 1. I have the right to have my own unique feelings about the death.** I may feel mad, sad or lonely. I may feel scared, relieved, resentful or guilty. I may feel numb or at times feel nothing at all. No one will feel exactly like I do. My feelings don't need to make sense to anyone else. These are just feelings and having them is normal.
- 2. I have the right to express my grief.** When I need to talk, I will find someone who will listen to me. There will also be times when I won't feel like talking or when I need to be alone. I may express my grief through journaling, art, music or exercise.
- 3. I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.** Even though I am hurting, I may want to have fun or laugh for a while. I might also get mad and scream. I might feel sad and cry or I might not be able to cry at all.
- 4. I have the right to need other people to support me as I mourn.** I need people to pay attention to what I need and to be compassionate witnesses to my experience of loss. While I understand that some people will not be able to support me, I have a right to be upset when the people I depend on for support are not able to be there for me.
- 5. I have the right to know that grief affects me emotionally, cognitively, and physically.** I may be irritable and easily upset. Things that used to be easy for me to accomplish may be more difficult now. I may be forgetful, have trouble concentrating or paying attention. My body may ache or feel heavy. I may feel a buildup of kinetic energy that grief creates.
- 6. I have the right to have "griefbursts".** Griefbursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that hit me out of the blue—even long after the death. These feelings can be very strong and scary.
- 7. I have the right to mourn or express my grief in my own timing.** My grief is not a problem to be solved or something to get over. I don't know how long it will take for me to feel better. Please let me grieve at my own pace.
- 8. I have the right to not feel ashamed about my feelings and needs.** My feelings of grief and my need for support are normal.
- 9. I have the right to ask questions about the death.** I may want to figure out why the person died. Even if there is no answer that will satisfy me, I may need to try to understand why it happened. I may need to ask if there is something I could have done to prevent the death. The death may cause me to question my beliefs. If I believe in God, that belief may bring me comfort or I may be angry at God.
- 10. I have the right to think about my memories of the person who died. I have the right to talk about the person who died.** Sometimes those memories will be happy and sometimes they may be sad. Either way, these memories help me stay connected to the person who died; the person died, not the relationship.
- 11. I have the right to have mixed feelings about the person who died.** There may be qualities of the person who died that I miss terribly. There may also be things about them that I don't miss. I have the right to feel both ways about the person who died. I may be upset with the person who died for things they did to hurt me or I may be angry at them for dying.
- 12. I have the right to feel my grief, express my grief and, over time, to heal.** I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me.

Adapted from the Grief Bill of Rights written by Alan Wolfelt

# Faith In Action!

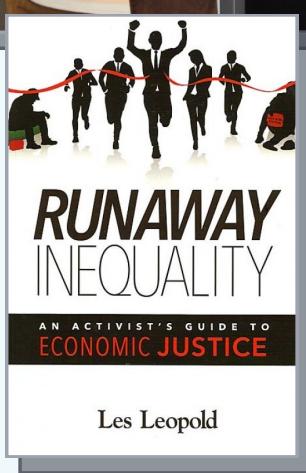
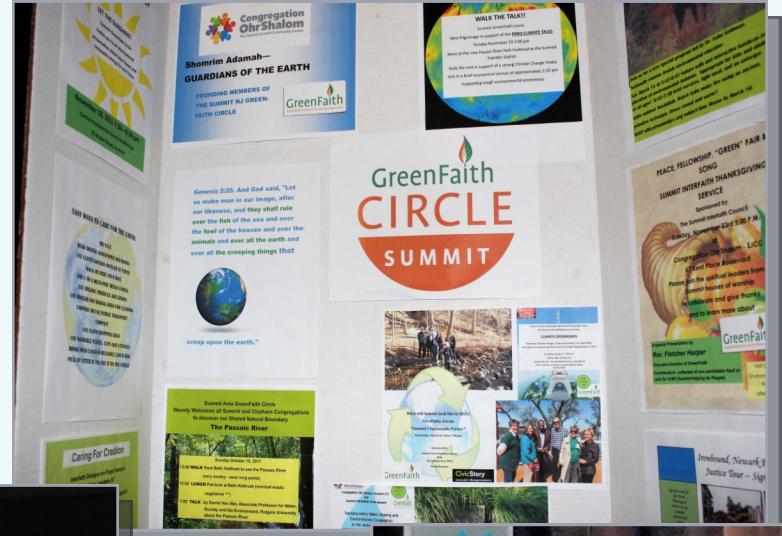
Places of worship, people of faith, and non-profit organizations gathered to discuss topics of concern in our community. We were able to discover that some of us are working on similar areas of concern taking the same avenues and may be more effective working together. We also discovered different needs around the topics discussed that many had not identified as a need.

Some of the topics discussed were:

Environmental Justice, Criminal Justice Reform, Immigrant Rights, Economic Justice & Labor, People with Disability's Rights & Inclusion, Women's Rights, LGBTQIA Rights, Children/Youth Rights & Supports

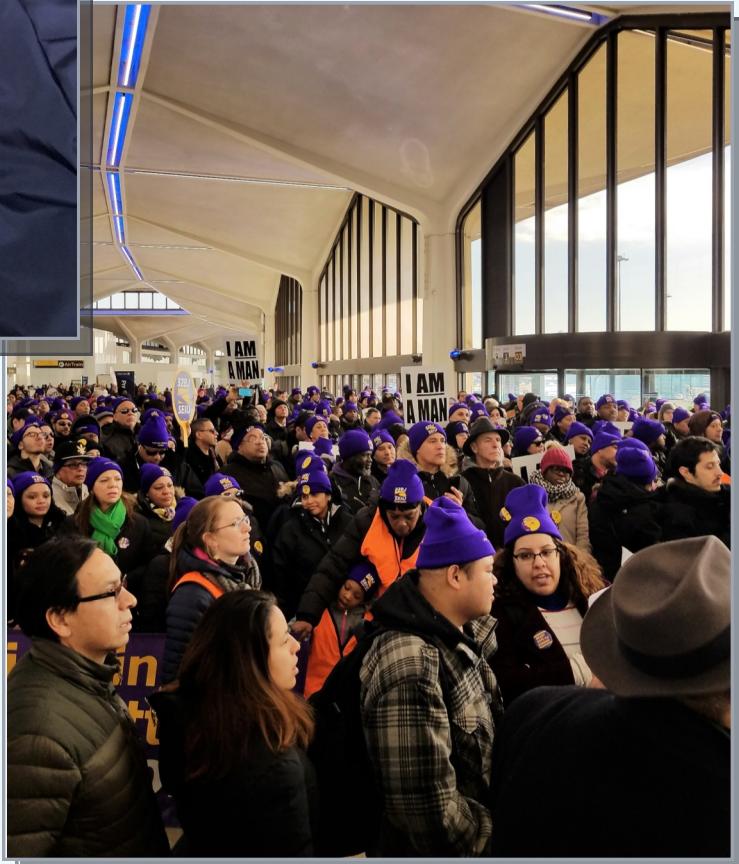
## A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: MAKING A BELOVED COMMUNITY

"Uniting the Interfaith and Non-Profit Community on Areas of Overlapping Involvement."



**UCICC hosts, A New Year's Resolution: Making a Beloved Community "Uniting the Interfaith and Non-Profit Community on Areas of Overlapping Involvement on 1/18/18 at Community Access Unlimited.**

# Faith In Action!



*"Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions but we must all protest." - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*



*Over 600 people, clergy, politicians, community leaders, and people of conscience gathered at Newark Airport on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monday, January 15, 2018 in solidarity with Service Employee International Union (SEIU), local 32BJ's demand for a living wage.*

**UCICC members join the 32BJ SEIU (Service Employees International Union) demonstration at Newark Liberty International Airport on January 15, 2018.**



ILLUSTRATION BY LUIS SANCHEZ

# Caged

By the New Jersey  
Prison Cooperative

**May 3 – 20**

2017-2018 SEASON, MAINSTAGE

**CAGED**

by the New Jersey Prison Cooperative

May 3 - May 20, 2018

Tickets \$13 - \$38. Student, senior, and group discounts available.

Caged by the New Jersey Prison Cooperative, directed by Jerrell Henderson, will be performed from May 3 to May 20 at The Passage Theater in Trenton, New Jersey. The play was written by students in the New Jersey prison system taught by the Rev. Chris Hedges. Rev. Hedges, along with the Rev. Michael Granzen, runs the prison ministry at Second Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

The play revolves around one African-American family in Newark and their struggle to hold at bay the economic and social forces that seek to destroy them. It tells the story of the cages, visible and invisible, that keep poor people of color in bondage inside and outside of prison. It chronicles the struggle to resist this radical evil. It lifts up the voices of those we rarely hear in the wider society to celebrate the dignity and spiritual strength of the oppressed that is at the core of the Christian Gospel.

Since the play was written in 2013 inside the New Jersey prison system it has undergone several revisions. Public readings have been held. It has been workshopped by three times by professional actors in New York City. Rev. Hedges has worked closely during the last four years with several of his students, especially Boris Franklin, who have been released to refine and focus the play for the stage. Writers, the formerly incarcerated, academics, actors and directors, including the theater directors Jeff Wise, C. Ryanne Domingues and June Ballinger, the film director Marty Brest, actor Eunice Wong, the theologian James Cone and former Black Liberation Army member Ojore Lutalo, who spent 22 years in isolation in Trenton, have attended workshops and critiqued the play to give shape to its current form.

Caged is a passionate, moving and unequivocal cry for justice. It rips open the barbarity of our penal system. It makes us feel the human cost. It is a searing indictment of our society by men and women who the state has demonized, discarded and attempted to silence.

**For more information on purchasing tickets hurry over to <http://passagetheatre.org/caged/>**



**Join us for  
A Continuum of Caring Think Tank**

**Community Access Unlimited**

**80 West Grand Street—Elizabeth, NJ 07202**

**On Site Parking Available at 70 & 80 W. Grand St.—Please See Security**

**Thursday, February 22, 2018  
5:30 Registration  
6:00 – 8:00 PM Workshop**

Come join the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council at Community Access Unlimited to participate in the Think Tank to create a Continuum of Caring response to the hidden needs in our communities. We will gather together and begin strategizing to develop a sustainable service delivery system. We will begin by rethinking, who we serve, how we serve and what coordinated services we can develop. There are many vineyards to labor in while addressing the needs of the underserved.



**For Further Information,  
Contact**

**Elder Rod Spearman  
908-377-0143**

**Rev. Ron Thomas  
908-477-4203**

Whether choosing to serve populations in Station House Adjustment, Pre-Trial intervention (PTI), Probation, Parole, the Intensive Supervision Program, the Drug Court, State and County Corrections Facilities or re-entry programs, there is much work to be done. Remember those who can go inside the institution are few, but there are many who can serve in other vineyards. Let's come together to work together, building relationships for the greater good of the Kingdom. Join the fellowship, as we rethink the way we do ministry.

***If not now, then when? We are blessed to be a blessing...come be a part of this Think Tank, you won't regret it!***

# HOW THE FAITH COMMUNITY CAN SUPPORT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF FAMILIES

"By taking part in the important discussion about mental health faith and community leaders can help individuals and families in need by lifting up messages of support and providing information on how to access services if necessary."

"Faith and community leaders are often the first point of contact when individuals and families face mental health problems or traumatic events. In fact, in times of crisis, many will turn to trusted leaders in their communities before they turn to mental health professionals. When leaders know how to respond, they become significant assets to the overall health system.

Faith and community leaders can help educate individuals and families about mental health, increasing awareness of mental health issues and making it easier for people to seek help. Community connectedness and support, like that found in faith-based and other neighborhood organizations, are also important to the long-term recovery of people living with mental illnesses.

Faith communities are also in a unique position to reach many of the millions of Americans who struggle with serious thoughts of suicide each year. Many people having thoughts of suicide feel hopeless, trapped, or are in such emotional pain or despair, that they struggle to face another day. Suicidal thoughts are often accompanied by a spiritual crisis or deep questioning about the purpose of life. If faith leaders are better able to recognize the signs of suicide and learn how to respond, they can serve as an expanded safety net for those most in need."

## What Can Community and Faith Leaders Do?

### Promote acceptance of those with mental health issues.

- ◆ Be an example of taking good care of your mental health by making mental wellness a priority in your personal life.
- ◆ Be inclusive. Mental health affects all of us.
- ◆ Foster opportunities to build connections with individuals and families dealing with mental health challenges through trust and acceptance.
- ◆ Foster safe and supportive environments for people to openly talk about mental health, stress, trauma, and related issues.
- ◆ Ask, "What happened?" instead of, "What's wrong?" when talking with a friend in need.
- ◆ Encourage and express empathy in your family, congregation, and community. Convey a message of nonviolence, acceptance, and compassion.

### Connect individuals and families to help.

- ◆ Learn/ train others on the basic signs of mental illnesses and other facts about mental health to encourage those in need to seek help.
- ◆ **Remind others that people can and do recover from mental health challenges and that help is available and effective.**
- ◆ Develop relationships with local mental health service providers and other family and youth organizations to help to direct individuals and families in need to available services and support in the community.

### Educate your communities and congregations.

- ◆ Invite mental health experts—including those who have experienced mental illness—to speak with your congregation or at community gatherings.
- ◆ Share facts and common myths about mental health.
- ◆ Support the development of a trauma-informed community. Trauma often lies beneath seemingly unrelated problems.
- ◆ Organize additional meetings, dinners, or other gatherings for members of your congregation or community to have conversations about mental health.

### *Did you know?*

*Mental health issues affect all members of society in some way, shape, or form. It is estimated that 1 in 5 Americans over age 18 will experience a mental health problem this year.*

*Mental health involves how a person handles stress, relates to other people, manages emotions, makes decisions , and perceives the world and their sense of purpose in life.*

**Information quoted and compiled from <https://mentalhealth.gov/talk/faith-community-leaders> & <https://www.samhsa.gov> . Please seek free additional information, tools, and resources via the websites noted.**

# How the Faith Community Can Take Action to Heal and Support the Family

The faith community is a large part of life for many people, both with and without disability. Often times it is difficult for people to know where to begin and how to help support their fellow friends best. Here are some steps you can take to make your community friendlier to families and people with disabilities.

**Invite people to your place of worship and make sure there is space for everyone to sit with the entirety of the congregation.** People with disabilities want to be included and feel like they belong. Their family members want to know that their loved one is accepted and valued. Making sure that people with disabilities and their families know they are welcome and able to sit together with the congregation (i.e. having an understanding attitude when someone makes noise unexpectedly and letting family members know it's okay or making space for someone with a wheelchair to be included in the seating arrangement) helps show through action that ALL are truly welcome.

## **Assess how you can make your place of worship more accessible.**

Often times people with disabilities are not able to access buildings in the community because of barriers we easily overlook. Consider installing a wheelchair ramp at your place of worship or starting a fundraising campaign to get one installed. When planning events held at different locations, think of the building's accessibility so it is open to all who wish to attend. Ask questions like; is there an elevator to the floor where our event is taking place? Is there a ramp leading to the building's entrance? Doing so will help families who need these accommodations to stay active and involved in their faith.

**Make friendships with people who have a disability.** Families want their loved ones to have meaningful friendships with people they trust. Reach out to someone with a disability and get to know them. Invite them out for coffee, to the movies, to your dinner party, to go bowling, to play softball, or go over to their house for some quality time. Making friendships with someone who has a disability gives them the chance to connect with you while providing their family a break from the responsibility of caring for their loved one. Families often neglect their personal well-being because they are not able to find free time to care for themselves. Becoming friends with a person with a disability will reward you with great friendship and help family members to find some respite to run errands, see the doctor, and recharge so they are better able to care for their loved one in the long run.

**Inform your friends of the help and resources available.** There are many resources available to families and people with disabilities. Encourage your friends to find the help they need and make suggestions to them. For families with school aged children, going to the school social worker is a great start. They can provide valuable information and assist with social services benefits when needed. Visiting [www.performcarenj.org](http://www.performcarenj.org) may be helpful as well to determine if a family is eligible for respite services that can help them recharge and take care of themselves. Going to websites like the Dept. of Human Services site (<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/>) will help identify programs that might be beneficial to families, such as the Personal Preference Program. This program allows families to be paid for the help they provide their loved ones. Suggesting websites like [www.rewardingwork.org](http://www.rewardingwork.org) is also helpful. This site provides a place to find workers who can help provide care when it is needed.

***Jumpstart Self Advocacy—a consulting service of advocates that conduct workshops focusing on quality of life needs for people with different abilities would love to come out to your organization.***

***Contact Charlene Walker via e-mail: [cwalker@caunj.org](mailto:cwalker@caunj.org) or call 908-354-3040 ext. 4371 for more information.***



*Alison Goodrich*

Assistant Executive Director  
Support Coordination  
Community Access Unlimited



# Religious Services at CAU

There has been some exciting things taking place at CAU! We have started a new initiative for the members of the CAU community to experience religious worship.

This ministry is geared towards the DD community and also to the TOPS youth program. There has been approximately 40-50 members that attend, and it has been a blessing to be able to serve this beloved community.

I would like to extend an invitation for you to speak at our religious services. These services are held on Saturdays at 11:00am and at 1:00pm and are an hour long. This an interfaith endeavor is open to all faith traditions and houses of worship. If you can provide worship, a positive inspirational message, and most of all, a heart to serve.

## Our objectives are:

1. To provide a safe space for our members to worship God
2. To foster spiritual growth through the diverse understandings of God
3. To build up the community in faith, hope, and love

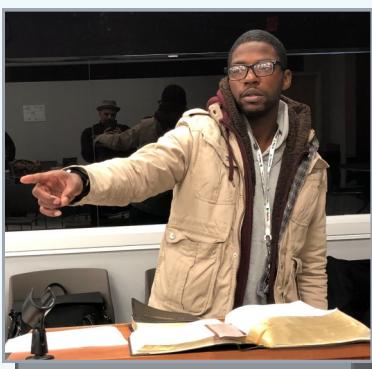
If you would like to volunteer in this amazing ministerial opportunity or find out more, please contact

Chaplain Erich Kussman at [EKussman@caunj.org](mailto:EKussman@caunj.org)



## About Chaplain Erich Kussman

Chaplain Erich Kussman is a graduate of Pillar College and received a Bachelor's Degree in Biblical Studies. He is pursuing a Masters in Divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary and is seeking candidacy in the ELCA. He is on the Steering committee of the UCICC. He is an author, activist, and public speaker. He grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey. He has articles published in magazines such as "First Things" and "Conspire!" He has years of experience in prison ministry. He desires to be the change he wishes to see in the world by doing God's will.





**YOU'RE INVITED  
To  
COMMUNITY ACCESS  
UNLIMITED's**



**BLACK HISTORY MONTH  
READ-IN**

**CAN YOU  
SING, DANCE, ACT ,  
RAP OR RECITE A PASSAGE FROM YOUR  
FAVORITE BOOK?  
EVEN IF YOU JUST WANT TO CELEBRATE  
WITH US.  
PLEASE JOIN US!!!!**

**When: February 17, 2018  
Where: Community Access Unlimited  
Auditorium  
80 West Grand Street  
Elizabeth, NJ 07207  
Time: 10am-1pm**

**For More Information Contact  
Tana Owens 908-482-0159**

# 2NDFLOOR® 888-222-2228 YOUTH HELPLINE

2NDFLOOR.ORG

2NDFLOOR® is a confidential and anonymous helpline for New Jersey's youth and young adults. We are here to help you find solutions to the problems that you face and we are available 24/7 and 365 days a year.

- ⇒ CALL: 888.222.2228 to speak with counselors 24/7
- ⇒ VISIT: [www.2ndfloor.org](http://www.2ndfloor.org) for message board posts
- ⇒ TEXT: 888.222.2228 for support



2NDFLOOR® YOUTH HELPLINE is a program of

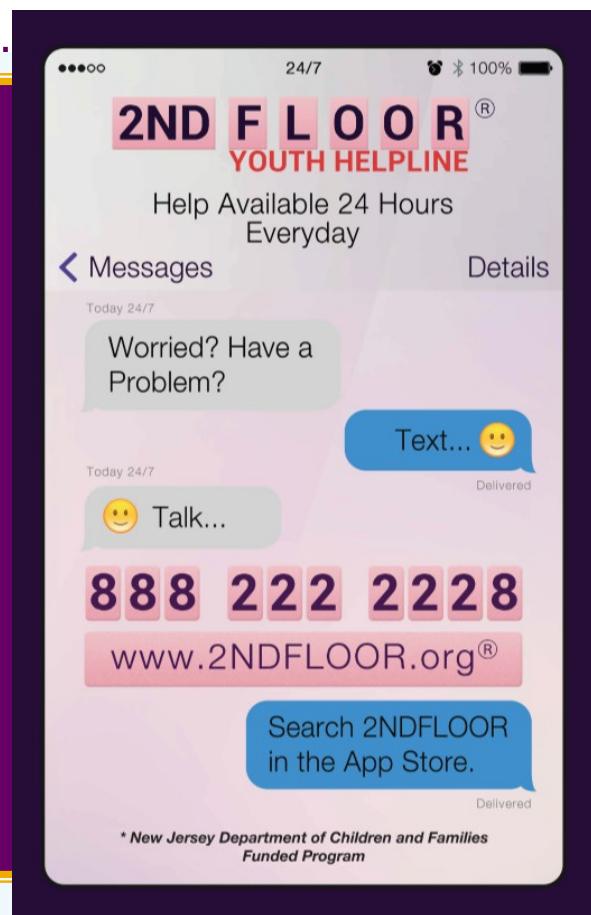


Turning Lives Around, Inc.

1 Bethany Road / Bldg. 3, Suite 42 Hazlet, NJ 07730

2NDFLOOR Youth Helpline is a free and confidential service for youth and young adults in NJ who can reach out for support with ANY problem or concern

- ~ Youth can call or text to connect with a counselor 24/7 and can also post messages on our website message boards
- ~ Youth, put our number directly in your cell-phone so you can access our services with ease and/or share our contact information with a friend or peer who may need our support.
- ~ If you have an Apple phone download our free app!



# UCICC –CAU COMMUNITY HELP LINE

**DO YOU NEED HELP WITH FOOD? HOME HEALTH OR PERSONAL CARE  
HOME AND PROPERTY CARE  
DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES?**

Call CAU's Information and Referral Office at  
**908-354-3040 [X 4272]** for answers and resources.

CAU's community service mission includes providing direct services to people in need as well as information on how to locate services provided by other agencies.

This month we highlight **three CAU services available to qualified recipients** in our Union County communities.

1] **Free home delivered meals** [6 week program; one meal per person per day] for Union County residents who are US citizens and their families who need food and who are:

\*Age 59 or younger [head of household];

\*Living in low income households;

\* Unable to access adequate food for themselves and their families.

\* Documents and interview are required to qualify.

**Contact Gene Tavera X 4272.**

2] **Homemaker-home health aide personal care assistance** in home for persons who require help to live independently at home. Services are provided at \$20/hour but may be free for those who are low income and age 60 or over, or any age with a disability. Services include light housekeeping, meal preparation, errands and personal care assistance.

**Contact Bill Webb X 4206.**

3] **Home and property care services** are offered at reasonable fees to assist home bound residents with yard and lawn care, leaf and snow removal, deep cleaning and clutter removal, home maintenance, handyman repairs and home improvements. There are no age or income requirements for these services and costs are based on which services and projects are selected. **Contact Bill Webb X 4206.**



# FAITH INTO ACTION

## NETWORKING OPPORTUNITY

**Are you a Union County citizen searching for a faith community within which to worship?**

**Perhaps we have what you are looking for!**

This is an opportunity for you to meet representatives from a variety of houses of worship within Union county, and learn what they are all about!

Please join us as clergy and congregation members from all different faiths meet and welcome members of the community.

The **Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council** invites you to an interfaith reception on:

Thursday, March 8, 2018  
5:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Suburban Golf Club  
1730 Morris Avenue, Union, NJ

**Will you Join us?  
Please contact us at:**

Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council  
c/o Community Access Unlimited  
80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202  
Phone: (908) 354-3040 x4371-Email: UCInterfaith@caunj.org





NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT  
OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



*Open your heart  
and your home*



All that is missing is **YOU!**  
**Become a foster or adoptive parent**  
Be part of the ride.



For more information contact:  
(877) NJ FOSTER, [www.njfoster.org](http://www.njfoster.org), (800) 99 ADOPT, [www.njadopt.org](http://www.njadopt.org)

# JOIN OUR TEAM!

Community Access Unlimited welcomes those with a big heart! Due to our continuing expansion, there are a number of **full time** and **part time** openings for those interested in guiding people with disabilities and youth at risk who are on the road to independence.

For those looking for part-time positions, CAU offers available house on the weekends and overnights! Minimum requirements are:

- Valid driver's license
- Access to vehicle daily to use for work purpose
- Original High School Diploma/GED/College Degree

## CAU Hosts a weekly Open House Mondays from 4 PM -6 PM

80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202

Don't forget your resume and come prepared to fill out an application

To make an appointment, please call an HR representative at (908) 354-3040 ext 4203. If you are unable to attend the open house, please fax resume to (908) 354-0283 or email to [rwright@caunj.org](mailto:rwright@caunj.org).

Experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities and/or youth at risk are a plus! Of course compassion for the work and a flexible schedule is also required when providing support to our members.

Working at CAU is not just a job but a career! We offer promotional opportunities for employees, competitive salaries and a comprehensive benefits package to full time employees!

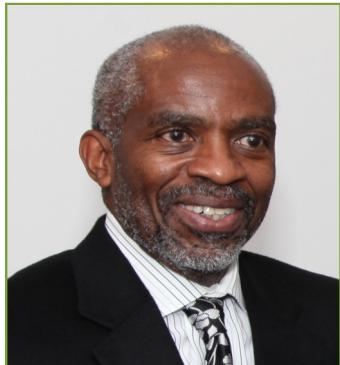
Please take the time to visit our agency website [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org) for more information and current openings. Community Access Unlimited is an Equal Opportunity Employer.



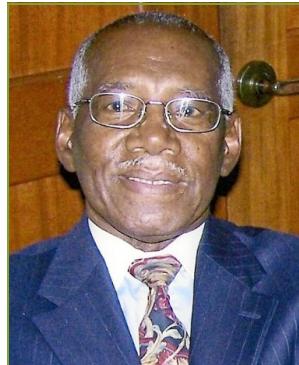
# **UCICC Outreach Coordinating Team**



*Sidney Blanchard,  
Executive Director  
Community Access Unlimited*  
*sblanchard@caunj.org*



*Roderick (Rod) Spearman  
UCICC Interfaith Coordinator*  
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*Pastor Howard A. Bryant,  
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*Pastor Carmine Pernini  
UCICC Interfaith Coordinator*  
*cpernini@caunj.org*



*AH 'Skip' Winter  
UCICC Steering  
Committee Member*



*Michelle Mobley  
CAU Director of Youth  
Service Residential*  
*mmobley@caunj.org*



*Charlene Walker  
UCICC Administrative Assistant*  
*cwalker@caunj.org*

## **Join & Be Active Today!**

- Attend monthly meetings.
- Invite other community leaders to attend our meetings and events.
- Support or host fundraising programs to support the Record Expungement Grant Program.
- Sign up for our mailing list.
- Share useful information about your organization.



### **Advertise in the UCICC Newsletter!**

Have an exciting event or program happening?

Reach out and build bonds with members of the interfaith community in Union County by advertising in this newsletter!

Please send all print-ready ads to Rod Spearman at [rspearman@caunj.org](mailto:rspearman@caunj.org) by the **13th** of every month to save a space!



Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council c/o Community Access Unlimited  
80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202  
Phone: (908) 354-3040 x4324 • Email: [UCInterfaith@caunj.org](mailto:UCInterfaith@caunj.org)

**[www.facebook.com/UnionCountyInterfaithCoordinatingCouncil](http://www.facebook.com/UnionCountyInterfaithCoordinatingCouncil)**



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PERMIT 225  
Elizabeth, NJ

80 West Grand Street  
Elizabeth, NJ 07202  
Phone: 908-354-3040 TTY/TTD: 908-354-4629  
Fax: 908-354-2665 [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org)

**Community Access Unlimited's Mission:** *To provide community access through effective and comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and at-risk youth, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives in the community.*

## UCICC & STEERING COMMITTEE UPCOMING EVENTS

### UCICC Steering Committee

February 1, 2018 at 10:00am  
80 W Grand St  
Elizabeth NJ 07202

See Right side

### UCICC Steering Committee

March 1, 2018 at 10:00am  
80 W. Grand Street  
Elizabeth, NJ 07202

See Right side

### UCICC Steering Committee

April 5, 2018 at 10:00am  
80 W Grand St  
Elizabeth NJ 07202

### Full UCICC Event

Prisoner Re-Entry  
A Continuum of Caring Think Tank  
February 22, 2018 at 6 pm  
**80 West Grand Street Elizabeth NJ 07202**

### Full UCICC Event

Faith in Action  
Date: March 8, 2018 at 5 pm  
Suburban Golf Club  
1730 Morris Ave.  
Union, NJ 07083

### Full UCICC Event

Know Your Neighbor  
Date: TBD  
Location: TBD



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