

CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES COUNCIL

Strategic Plan, 2009-2014

Envisioning the Future: The Christian Activities Council in Five Years

In five years, the Christian Activities Council will have fortified its reputation as a passionate and compassionate leader singularly committed to addressing social issues affecting the urban poor. It will be more widely known and respected in the Hartford region for its work and mission. The CAC's innovative, collaborative and effective approaches to improving the daily lives of the impoverished and marginalized and to removing systemic barriers to fulfillment of basic needs and equal opportunities will have established it as a national model.

The CAC will be both a place where people of faith convene to reflect and be in dialogue about social justice issues and a catalyst for bringing faith-based organizations across denominations together to address urban issues of common concern. Acting as a voice for the voiceless and a broker of opportunity for those in need, the CAC will be addressing issues of poverty and inequality in ways that promote systemic and sustainable change. Building on the success of its universal health care initiative, the CAC will be engaging urban and suburban churches, as well as other supporters and collaborators, in an expanded, regional social justice ministry. Clearly articulated goals and priorities relating to pressing social justice issues in Greater Hartford will have ignited the interest of member churches, whose congregations will increasingly be a source of volunteers eager to join forces with others for collective advocacy and action.

While the goal of catalyzing positive, sustainable change at both an individual and systemic level will have taken on even greater priority for the CAC, its fundamental commitment to promoting community stabilization and neighborhood revitalization within its geographic sphere of influence will continue to be a primary focus of the Council's efforts. As a cornerstone of this community-strengthening work in a city whose homeownership rate is among the lowest in the country, the CAC will be instrumental in promoting affordable homeownership opportunities for the urban poor and for those, like the disabled and elderly, who have special needs.

The CAC will increasingly be addressing community needs as defined by the community itself. Program focus and priorities will be determined in large part by potential to address identified community needs, to bring stability to the community, and to work with the community. The Council will be leveraging existing relationships – within the community, within city government, with churches across the region – to effect positive change. Its outcome-oriented programs will be more integrated and in synergy with each other. Urban and suburban churches will be joining forces in pursuit of common goals that reflect shared faith-based values. Increasingly members of churches both in and outside the city of Hartford will be working together, and with the CAC, to address poverty and social justice issues that afflict people throughout the region.

Physical facilities will be adequate, and staff and volunteer resources will be sufficient and appropriately trained, to fulfill the promise of CAC's mission and deliver high-quality programs and services. Board members as well as member church delegates will be passionate ambassadors for the CAC and effective advocates for its mission. A strategic marketing effort will have raised the Council's profile to potential partners and supporters, resulting in new sources for volunteers, collaborators, and funding. The CAC's financial foundation will have been bolstered by securing new, diverse and sustainable sources of operating support, and an effective planned giving program will be helping to grow the Council's endowment.

Reaching Our Destination: Goals, Strategies and Initiatives

GOAL 1: Be an empowering presence and a catalytic force committed to addressing the ravages of poverty and **improving the lives of the poor** and downtrodden in Greater Hartford

Key Strategies

- *Listen more carefully and intentionally to the community, and focus more selectively on areas of highest priority to residents*
- *Align CAC's programmatic initiatives with its agenda for systemic change to maximize impact*
- *Establish mission-based strategic alliances to expand program reach and increase the number of residents whose lives improve*
- *Engage member churches and their congregations more effectively as partners in outreach ministries*
- *Increase focus on immigrants, teenagers, and young adults*

Initiatives

- Regularly consult community stakeholders regarding needs, and base CAC's economic empowerment, health and wellness, and children's education initiatives on identified community priorities
- Provide information, resources and training that will equip and thus empower inner city residents and neighborhood groups to meet the challenges of urban life
- In collaboration with the UCC Connecticut Conference and appropriate community partners, develop strategies for helping individuals already connected with CAC (through programs such as Adventures in the City and housing counseling) secure meaningful employment
- Convene entrepreneurial minds from CAC member churches and think together about ways to create new jobs in north Hartford
- Design and implement initiatives to address the unique needs and challenges of Hartford's growing immigrant population
- Encourage all member churches to view CAC as their mission partner, and provide opportunities for churches to do mission work, in the city or in the suburbs, that supports CAC's programmatic priorities
- Make Upper Albany residents more aware of CAC's housing counseling services and Adventures in the City
- With new funders and expanded support from member congregations, develop CAC's Adventures in the City into a yearlong program serving two additional public schools and providing parenting classes, anger management programs, and tutoring
- Through CAC's Zezzo House and in collaboration with the Connecticut AIDS Residence Coalition, work to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and STD's through education, prevention, testing and counseling
- Participate in the HUD-funded "healthy homes" program in collaboration with Hartford Hospital and the City of Hartford
- Expand CAC's focus on teenage groups by establishing anti-violence and youth empowerment initiatives designed to promote hope and healthy choices

GOAL 2: Expand efforts to address disparities in and **remove systemic barriers** to housing, health care, education, and employment in the Greater Hartford region

Key Strategies

- *Engage faith-based organizations in regional, urban-suburban coalitions to address social justice issues of common concern*
- *Focus advocacy efforts each year on one or two priority areas to create a unifying agenda that mobilizes collective action by regional churches*
- *Continue efforts to increase access to affordable housing and health care*
- *Intensify focus on public policy advocacy efforts relating to meaningful employment and safe neighborhoods*
- *Inspire and equip more people for social justice ministries*

Initiatives

- Sustain and strengthen CAC's priority-focused collaborations with advocacy groups such as the Connecticut Housing Coalition, the Universal Health Care Foundation, the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits, ICEJ and CARC
- More intentionally and effectively leverage Metropolitan Training Institute (MTI) as a vehicle for promoting systemic change
- Strengthen relationships with area bankers, mortgage brokers and Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) in order to help community members gain increased access to affordable mortgages
- Create a community bank capitalized by parishioners of CAC member congregations
- Expand the CAC Ownership Training Program to reach all Hartford-area immigrant populations
- Sustain and, as appropriate, expand CAC's involvement in the *healthcare4every1* coalition in support of universal health care initiatives
- Enhance awareness of disparities in health care and promote greater cultural sensitivity among health professionals serving ethnic communities in the Hartford area
- Expand CAC's medical immersion program beyond St. Francis Family Practice to include personnel from Hartford Hospital, Charter Oak Health Center, and the Adult Drug and Recovery Center
- Advocate for disenfranchised youth seeking magnet school placements, school choice, and other educational opportunities
- Collaborate with organizations such as the new YMCA, Hartford Seminary, and Hartford Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs (HYPE) to offer an immersion program and catalytic leadership development initiative geared toward young adults and young professionals in the Hartford area

GOAL 3: Leverage existing and build new strategic alliances to advance goals relating to **community stabilization and neighborhood revitalization**

Key Strategies

- *Take a comprehensive approach to community stabilization*
- *Support and expand on CAC's investment in the Upper Albany neighborhood to promote long-term stability*
- *Encourage new investments in CAC's target area by highlighting success and impact of CAC initiatives*

- *More effectively empower neighborhood stakeholders -- homeowners, landlords and tenants, as well as business owners and merchants -- to advocate for positive change*
- *Encourage community organizing as proven, potent empowerment strategy*

Initiatives

- Promote ongoing dialogue to raise awareness, and make governmental and public policies more responsive to community needs relating to mortgage refinancing and foreclosure prevention
- Offer regional immersion experiences for policymakers, including both local and national housing and development officials
- Continue to add affordable housing stock and promote homeownership opportunities in the Upper Albany neighborhood by building on vacant lots and rehabilitating vacant buildings
- Expand CAC's target area to include all of Upper Albany, and integrate the Asylum Hill and Blue Hills neighborhoods as partners in CAC's neighborhood revitalization efforts
- Working with LISC and other partners, develop and implement a comprehensive community development initiative, to include expanded community organizing efforts, in CAC's new *tri-neighborhood* target area (Upper Albany, Asylum Hill, Blue Hills)
- Seek funding to support purchase of foreclosed properties and rehabilitate them for resale
- Encourage neighborhood stability by helping homeowners secure access to loans to fund moderate repairs to houses with deferred maintenance needs and by providing technical assistance specifically designed to help landlords maintain property value
- Strengthen supportive relationships between CAC and tenants in closely related properties
- Train homeowners in how to take advantage of "green" technologies
- Work with Hartford Public School officials and other city partners to implement the community school model city-wide, making secondary schools round-the-clock community resource centers for neighborhood residents
- Develop a block-by-block, faith-based community organizing program or curriculum to train future activists and community leaders
- Collaborate with member churches to develop and implement programs for youth, especially programs that engage young people in the city.
- Work more closely with other advocacy groups, residents, elected officials and the police department to reduce crime in North Hartford
- Promote and support efforts by Hartford residents to increase pride in their neighborhoods

GOAL 4: Expand and fortify the CAC's **reputation for leadership** in urban ministry as an advocate for the poor, a prophetic voice for social justice, and a builder of coalitions to address issues of common concern

Key Strategies

- *Be a visible and vocal advocate for systemic change benefiting the urban poor*
- *Anchor CAC's identity in its faith-based approach and bridge-building model of community engagement and empowerment*

- *Effectively differentiate CAC from other organizations with similar goals and programs*
- *Act as a convener and catalyst on issues relating to social justice*
- *Increase awareness and understanding of CAC's impact in the community*

Initiatives

- Provide regular opportunities for people of faith to gather for the purpose of promoting awareness and activism relating to social justice issues
- Become a “go-to” resource or information clearinghouse for faith-based organizations seeking to build or strengthen social justice ministries
- Seek opportunities to editorialize in the press or testify before the legislature on issues relating to social justice, urban poverty, and faith-based initiatives
- Convene and engage collaboratively with urban churches outside the UCC that share CAC's commitment to serving the very poor and marginalized in Hartford
- Reawaken the idea of urban ministry at Hartford Seminary by offering immersion experiences for faculty and administration and internship opportunities for students
- Give meaning and credibility to CAC's “breaking barriers, building communities” tag line through stories that make clear what CAC does and why it matters
- Bolster CAC's visibility and reputation in the areas of housing counseling and foreclosure prevention, community development and affordable housing, health care advocacy, immersions and urban advocacy
- More aggressively and routinely tout CAC's successes by highlighting community impact to current and prospective funders
- Launch and leverage new web site for strategic marketing value
- Increase the frequency of strategic communications with key constituents (member church delegates and moderators, city officials, funders, etc.)
- Develop materials and provide training for member church delegates to make them more effective advocates for partnership with CAC
- More effectively utilize communications to increase member church support for and participation in CAC programs and social justice ministry initiatives

GOAL 5: Build sustainable **organizational capacity** – human, financial, and physical resources – that supports attainment of the CAC's goals and enhances its value-adding impact in the community

Key Strategies

- *Stay focused on mission and on doing well what CAC does best*
- *Streamline operations, aligning staffing with programmatic priorities*
- *Ensure that programs are more integrated and in synergy with each other*
- *Pursue partnerships and collaborations to leverage resources and maximize impact*
- *Expand and diversify sources of funding and operating support*

Initiatives

- Develop succession plans for all key staff positions and prepare for smooth transition following planned retirement of executive director
- Achieve greater diversity, including intergenerational, in governance and leadership to better reflect diversity in the community CAC serves

- Adjust management-level staff and restructure summer program staffing in order to support programmatic objectives as effectively as possible
- Regularly encourage staff planning across program lines and review results of such efforts at monthly staff meetings
- Recruit and train volunteers to perform key responsibilities relating to church presentations, immersion programs, planned giving, and web site maintenance
- Collaborate with other organizations to expand CAC's role in the areas of youth education, housing counseling, and affordable housing without adding staff resources
- Establish staff task force to identify potential new funding sources for all programs
- Seek external grant funding to allow dramatic expansion of CAC's work with health care providers
- Significantly expand individual contributions through annual giving and also planned giving/bequests
- Strengthen relationships with current corporate and foundation supporters, and cultivate relationships with potential new funders
- Strengthen relationships with member churches in ways that demonstrate unique value-added and prompt churches to increase their financial support
- Generate incremental earned income by expanding CAC's housing counseling program and launching a fee-for-services technical assistance and consulting service for other non-profits seeking assistance with community development initiatives
- Reduce printing and postage expenses by more aggressively and creatively utilizing CAC's enhanced web site and other electronic media to communicate with key constituencies
- Faithfully assess and document the impact of CAC programs and initiatives

APPENDIX A

PROGRESS INDICATORS and SUCCESS MEASURES

GOAL 1: Be an empowering presence and a catalytic force committed to addressing the ravages of poverty and **improving the lives of the poor** and downtrodden in Greater Hartford

- Number of CAC member churches entering into covenant agreements with the CAC
- Number of mission-based strategic alliances with other organizations
- Growing number of partnerships with urban ministries in churches of denominations outside UCC
- Overall program enrollments in Adventures in the City and housing counseling programs
- Number of people from new immigrant groups participating in financial literacy, housing counseling, and summer programs
- Increasing programmatic focus on anti-violence and youth empowerment, with demonstrated progress toward intended outcomes
- Longitudinal data reflecting progress of summer program participants in years following their participation
- Number of interviews conducted by staff to assess needs in target and other nearby neighborhoods

GOAL 2: Expand efforts to address disparities in and **remove systemic barriers** to housing, health care, education, and employment in the Greater Hartford region

- Establishment and dissemination of a unifying public policy agenda each year
- Visibility (as measured by volume of communications and number of convenings) around established priority issue(s)
- Introduction (in the legislature) of public policies intended to make more educational opportunities and affordable housing available to poor or marginalized population groups
- Number of medical immersion participants
- Number of immersion program participants who become actively engaged in advocacy efforts
- Number of congregations connected with the city of Hartford as a result of immersion experiences
- Number of new immigrants participating in homeownership training program
- Number of CAC homeowner training participants who become homeowners

GOAL 3: Leverage existing and build new strategic alliances to advance goals relating to **community stabilization and neighborhood revitalization**

- Number immersion experiences for policymakers
- Homeownership rate in the target area
- Number of foreclosed properties rehabbed and sold
- Number of people participating in foreclosure prevention program
- Number of homeowners in the target area helped by CAC to gain access to home improvement loans
- Number of minority contractors CAC enables to become licensed and employed
- Number of CAC-supported, active resident (neighborhood) organizations
- Number of new trainings for community leaders/future activists

GOAL 4: Expand and fortify the CAC's **reputation for leadership** in urban ministry as an advocate for the poor, a prophetic voice for social justice, and a builder of coalitions to address issues of common concern

- Number of visits to CAC's web site
- Number of email addresses in CAC's email distribution list
- Quarterly emailings to member churches
- Coverage of CAC in local and regional press
- Publication of op-ed pieces on subjects relating to social justice issues and/or public policy advocacy priorities
- Testimony (before the legislature) and attendance at policy hearings by CAC staff or board members
- CAC-initiated discussions/meetings involving member churches as well as other organizations whose missions are focused on social justice

GOAL 5: Build sustainable **organizational capacity** – human, financial, and physical resources – that supports attainment of the CAC's goals and enhances its value-adding impact in the community

- Succession plan approved by board
- New programs/initiatives launched only with identified start-up and ongoing funding
- Number of volunteers engaged to perform key value-adding functions
- Number of partners and collaborators
- Number of new corporate and foundation supporters
- Earned income increasing as percentage of operating income
- Dollars raised through annual donations from individuals
- Financial support from member churches
- Number of bequests to CAC resulting from planned giving program

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