

Congregational Neighborhoods

Congregational Neighborhoods are groups of member households located geographically closest to each other. We are inviting our entire active membership to participate in this program. Participants will be grouped into geographic neighborhoods by household. All active member households will be included unless they opt out and choose not to participate.

The purpose of congregational neighborhoods is to create, strengthen, and deepen the relationships among members of the congregation who live geographically closest to each other.

Congregational Neighborhoods are modeled on activist communities of care and mutual aid, also known as Mutual Aid Networks. These are grassroots groups that provide direct support and resources to community members in need, often outside of traditional state, government, corporate, or capitalist structures. These networks focus on solidarity, support, interdependence, spiritual and social enrichment, meeting basic needs, and direct action.

In good times, congregational neighborhoods provide a deepened sense of connection, belonging, and community. **In times of disaster, trauma, political unrest, and other difficulties** congregational neighborhoods provide an added level of stability, support, and resources for navigating difficult times.

Solidarity in Covenant:

The core principle is solidarity, where members in covenant with each other recognize their interdependence and work together to provide social, spiritual, and material support to each other.

Neighborhoods strengthen covenant relationships by emphasizing in person, face-to-face gatherings and activities. We recommended that members of neighborhoods gather at least once every calendar month. Gatherings can be primarily for socializing at first, but over time the neighborhood can vary its gatherings to include spiritual enrichment, social action, educational opportunities, or working on common projects and mutual assistance. Gatherings should strive to be no or low cost, family friendly and inclusive, and sensitive to special needs such as food or other allergies, varying physical abilities and health needs, and other things to be as inclusive as possible. Gatherings should be at members' homes or public places.

These are only **some examples** of things neighborhoods can do when they gather:

Social events: potluck meals, game nights, movie nights, walks in the park, picnics, cookie making, craft nights, children's play dates.

Spiritual enrichment and personal growth events: Small group ministry or chalice circle format

gatherings to reflect on the monthly thematic resources or discuss recent services and sermons, group meditation, book groups, have Rev. Tony visit to lead service or teach a class.

Social Action: Attend a pledge walk or a clean up a local park event together, volunteer at Dorthoy Day or another organization together, attend protests together, visit your legislators or attend town meetings together, have a phone banking night or a postcard night to contact elected officials.

Practical Mutual Support: Help each other with spring cleaning, help each other do yard work, coordinate gardening to grow food that you share, give people rides to church or appointments, send meals or help members manage an illness or difficult event in their lives, visit each other for coffee or just to chat, attend school concerts or plays or musicals or youth sporting events. Members without children might provide a parents night out by providing child care for an evening.

Neighborhood Coordination and Administration

Every neighborhood will have co-captains who serve at contacts to communicate with Rev. Tony, the Staff, and congregational leaders. We recommend that members take turns being neighborhood captains and rotate every program year. We recommend that ministry team or committee chairpersons and members of the Board of Trustees do NOT serve as neighborhood captains.

Neighborhoods can self-organize. Captains will need help making sure everyone in the neighborhood is connected to other neighbors and informed about neighborhood events and gatherings.

When new members join the congregation, they will be connected with the neighborhood closest to where they live.

Membership, Pastoral Care and the Board of Trustees are all encouraged to communicate with neighborhoods, usually via the captains.

Name tags may be symbol or color coded so people can find their neighbors more easily.

The congregation will have lists of each neighborhood and its members with contact information that will be given to the members of each neighborhood.

Each neighborhood can develop things like a group text, a phone tree, a Facebook group, and other means to connect to members.

Rev. Tony will be available for pastoral care, crisis, emergencies, hospitalizations, etc.

Implementation

Congregational Leadership will brief staff and committee chairpersons about the program.

The program will be explained on a Sunday morning during announcements. Date TBD.

The program will be explained at a congregational conversation or town meeting - Date TBD - at which time a map showing all the congregation's households will be available. There will be time for questions, answers, and discussion. Adjustments will be made to the grouping of neighbors. At the end of the meeting, volunteers for initial neighborhood captains will be named. Neighborhoods can't form without a captain, co-captains preferred.

A letter will go out to every household explaining the program in brief and communicating to the household what neighborhood they are in, the identity of the neighborhood captain, and the names, addresses, and contact information of all the neighborhood's members.

Neighborhoods should have their first gathering - Date TBD.