



Press Statement
Linda Ketcham, Executive Director
Madison-area Urban Ministry

At 5:00 tonight Grace Episcopal Church will open its doors to serve as the men's shelter through Porchlight.

Every night of the year families from the Road Home program stay in area churches, including churches in Oregon and Stoughton.

Our food pantry network in Dane County has grown from 21 pantries in 2004, to over 50 in 2014, many of those pantries are housed in and supported by churches in Dane County

Every time anyone of us drives by a church in this county we should be reminded of how the richest country in the world still denies fundamental human rights to our poorest brothers and sisters.

MUM administers two eviction prevention funds, one with Allied Partners and one with First Unitarian Society. In addition we sometimes are able to help congregations find assistance for people with whom they are working. From 1/1/4 through today we have written over \$20,000 in checks for assistance, this is the highest amount at this time of year in 9 years. Every penny of that money came from churches in this community.

Not only is the hole getting deeper, more people are falling into it. We need truly affordable housing, we need jobs that pay living wages, we need to open our eyes to the struggling and we need to thank the faith communities of Dane County who undergird the safety net. That \$19,144.04 only includes the times we are asked to write the check, it doesn't include the literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions of

dollars in assistance, rent, security deposit, medication, gas cards, food vouchers, etc.... that clergy in our county hand out daily.

Ayesha was laid off from work and became homeless for five months, she has a new job now and found a landlord willing to rent to her, she needed \$200 to help her with the security deposit.

Victor lost his job in construction and had no income for two weeks, he fell behind on rent and needed \$200 to prevent being evicted. He has a new job now and income.

Margaret is elderly and single, her brother passed away and she had to pay for the funeral, for the first time in her life she fell behind on her utility bill and needed \$100 to keep her lights on.

Niki is raising her younger brother after their parents died, she works at a local agency but ran into some medical problems that prevented her from working, she doesn't have paid sick leave and fell behind on the rent. She is working again but needed \$200 to prevent an eviction notice.

Mario and his family were living in an apartment that was infested with roaches. When the landlord would not take action he contacted the building inspectors, the landlord became upset and refused to renew his lease. Mario works at a minimum wage job, he needed help coming up with the security deposit for a new apartment.

Diana had her social security benefits cut by \$400 per month and now she can't afford her bills. She got on a payment plan for everything else but was short \$50 to keep her utilities on.

Sarah has missed a lot of work because her son has had complications with his epilepsy, she does not have paid time off at her job and needed \$100 to help with rent.

Sheena relies on her wages and child support to pay her rent, last month her child support check did not come, she was short on the rent and received a five day notice for eviction, she needed \$187 to catch up on rent.

Writer Eli Khamarov that “poverty is like punishment for a crime you didn’t commit.”

Being laid off from ones job is not a crime

Getting sick and not having paid sick leave at your job is not a crime

Having a loved one die and being unable to afford the costs of a funeral is not a crime,

Advocating for the health of ones’ family is not a crime.

When you are living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet it feels like a punishment, when funding for vital services is cut or held stagnant, the services become fewer and the punishment increased.

We are here today as people of faith to call on the Dane County Board to do the right thing, to stop “robbing Peter to pay Paul” touting innovative programs that they fund by cutting existing services that fill a vital need in our community.

We are here today because as people of faith we appreciate the role we play in undergirding the safety net and have, year after year responded to increased need with increased giving. But the county also has a role to play. Asking the churches to do more without also being willing to increase revenue from a county wide perspective seems hypocritical. From 2000 through 2013 the County Human Services Budget ended in a surplus due to the increased outside revenue raised by provider agencies. At the end of those budget years the county quietly zeroed out the budget by pulling out GPR dollars. This even happened in 2009 when the County gave private non-profits a 3% funding increase and then in August cut it in half saying there was not enough money. In 2009 the budget had over a \$3 million surplus before they zeroed it out, that

surplus could have been used to restore the 1.5% of the 3% increase the county had budgeted for the private non-profits but they did not.

You will hear from several faith community leaders today, each with their own experience in struggling to meet the growing demand for assistance while congregational member resources are stretched thinner and thinner.

In your packet are some examples of what local churches are doing to support our neighbors in need. You will also find a couple of examples of how the county Human Services Budget as passed by the Health and Human Needs Committee proposes to cut funding for some services to fund new initiatives that are worthy projects to be sure, but so are those being cut.