

Essex Churches Together

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Our Mission: "Essex Churches Together is a Christian group united in partnership to provide and coordinate resources and services to assist all Essex County residents in need."

ECT is Growing

Representatives from these churches in Essex County attend *Essex Churches Together*. Tappahannock Memorial United Methodist, Upper Essex Baptist Church, Angel Visit Baptist Church, St. John's Episcopal, Lebanon Methodist, Trinity Methodist, First Baptist in Tappahannock, Grace Episcopal, First Baptist, Loretto, Good Hope Baptist, New Liberty Baptist, Vauter's Episcopal, Tappahannock Presbyterian, Antioch Baptist, Rappahannock Christian, and Zion Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, St. Timothy's Catholic. At large members are Tove Oster, The Rev. Ann Reeder Riggs, Mary Lynne Krusz, JoAnne Ruffa, and Art Irvin.

In addition to its accomplishments, the group sustains each others' desires for mission to the community. Different churches perform this outreach in different ways, and this has been a major strength of the organization. Each meeting is begun with a brief fellowship time and a devotional before the group gets down to work.

There are still some churches in Essex County who have not sent representatives. If your church is one of them please invite a layperson interested in community missions to attend the next meeting which will be Tuesday, April 25 at 7:30 PM at the Essex Public Library.

A Link with Social Services

An important addition to the group is Director of Social Services Art Irvine. At the November meeting Mr. Irvine spoke of his daily contact with families needing assistance and there not being enough time or money to accomplish all that is needed. He cited *Essex*

Churches Together as possibly being the greatest resource to the county beyond public agencies providing services. *Essex Churches Together* continues to add to its support base as

well as information base. Speakers come each month to tell of opportunities for volunteering in various areas. Church representatives tell of activities



their church is doing and often other churches sign on to help and support that effort.

Goal: Response to Disasters

In 2005 the main focus for ECT was disaster response. This took many forms and included both individuals and the community. After some discussion it was determined that this would continue to be the focus in 2006. A number of initiatives were begun which will be continued.

Among these is support of the establishment of the Red Cross in Essex County. Several representatives to ECT are active in the development of the Red Cross in Essex and they give monthly reports of progress made and where the emphasis is on recruiting volunteers.

The Red Cross has set up an office in the Beale Memorial Baptist Church, recently acquired by the county of Essex. Churches have been encouraged to invite the Rev. Ann Reeder Riggs to come to their church to answer questions and be more specific about the plans for the Red Cross and disaster response in Essex.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 18 at 7:00 at the Essex Public Library. People interested in finding out the status of the Red Cross and/or volunteering their services should attend this open meeting.



Resource Group Formed

Kathy Hughes serves as chair of a Resource Group who meets at intervals to discuss policy and procedure for the organization. Alice Roye handles

communications, Art Irvine is DSS representative, Mary Lynn Krusz has access to legal counsel advice, Ann Riggs is spiritual advisor, and JoAnne Ruffa is community liaison.

By-laws are being developed.

Short-term planning as well as long-term strategies for meeting the goals of ECT are being shaped.

At present the only means of financial support is through voluntary donations from churches and individuals. This is used for postage. If ECT embarks on a project that requires financial backing this Resource Group will implement ways of acquiring funds.

Churches Use Department of Social Services to Screen Requests for Assistance

Art Irvine, Director of Social Services, agrees that a practical and effective approach to churches responding to requests from members of the community would be if churches would ask the person to go through Social Services. It is not necessary for the person to be a client of Social Services. A social worker would then get back with the church representative with a recommendation about how best this person could be served- through special funds at Social Services, through an individual church response, or through organized requests of several churches.

The contact person from each church, whether pastor, outreach chairman, clerk, or church secretary, was identified by each ECT representative .

This procedure should help eliminate duplication of services from churches and will also bring to the attention of DSS residents who may be in need who have not yet been identified. Some people may feel it is a matter of pride and dignity when asking for help and they may be reluctant to seek public assistance. Churches will continue to handle these individual situations as before.

Community Services Center

Mrs. Tove Oster has reported an increase in donations to the Community Services Center since ECT and the churches have become more aware of this resource and its needs. Sponsored by the

Community Services Center (continued)

Seventh-day Adventist Church, this group depends entirely on volunteer staff.

There are only 2 or 3 regular staff and they are spread thin with handing out food and clothing. In addition they must prepare and organize donations of food, clothing and housewares. They make a monthly trip to Richmond to collect food from the Virginia Food Bank. There are "tons of paper work" to be completed, as some assistance is from the federal government. For example, FEMA makes a donation once a year, though the amount varies. Community Services also receives food stuffs from the USDA on a monthly basis.

USDA, Virginia Food Bank, Hunters for the Hungry, and donations from the community make up the supply of food that is given to close to 300 families a month. *Curves* has aided in the canned food area by offering an enticement to members in exchange for canned goods.

Volunteers Needed

Community Services is only able to operate on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, and one of those Tuesdays a month the Center is closed when the staff goes to the Food Bank in Richmond. There is a tremendous need for their hours to be extended. Mrs. Oster says she would like to be able to extend the Tuesday and Wednesday days longer so that people who work or who rely on others for transportation can take advantage of this important resource. Each church representative has been asked to see if there are people in their congregations who may be able to help in any way- record keeping, travel to Richmond, aid with ordering, stocking, shelving, distributing.

In order to receive tax exempt status certain requirements must be met. Mrs. Oster reported that the entrance road to Community Services is in the process of being repaired, which was one of the

requirements. Dr. Neils Oster and another helper are presently working on remodeling and updating the kitchen area.

Churches Respond With Gifts at Christmas



ECT representatives were told of the Salvation Army Christmas Toy Drive and requested to round up toys to be donated at the collection site at Beale Memorial Baptist Church.

Church representatives shared projects in their churches: presents for children of the incarcerated, gifts for Haven families, and Healthy Beginnings. Some used names given by the Department of Social Services, others were given names through the public school system. Angel Visit Baptist Church gifts went to children awaiting adoption and foster homes.

Requests for Aid from Social Services

In December Rappahannock Christian Church took care of getting a phone for one person who is ill and must have phone service to receive on-going medical support. Other churches were asked to pitch in to help for a few months more at \$35 a month.

Someone from Tappahannock Memorial Methodist responded to the call for trailer repairs and a ramp.

Other needs of home repair come in regularly, and if anyone in a church is willing to help in this area, ECT reps are asked to let it be known at the ECT meeting. Bay Aging assists those over 65 years of age but not younger.

Antioch Baptist installed a septic system for a county resident; ECT churches were told of the need for additional funds to complete the project.



Donations Support ECT

The Following churches have given checks to support ECT: Rappahannock Christian, United Methodist Women, St. Timothy's Catholic, First Baptist, Antioch Baptist. In addition some individuals have made donations. The Presbyterian Church has supplied office space and supplies and paper, and duplicating services.

www.connectnetwork.org/rappahannock

Connect Rappahannock

Leslie Franklin, coordinator for Connect Rappahannock, presented the new web-based information network designed to support the work of nonprofit organizations, churches, government agencies, business leaders and civic-minded citizens. Essex, Lancaster, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland are the counties in the Rappahannock area.

She suggested several uses that ECT might make of this website such as announcing church activities and collecting information from multiple reports and data in order to prepare grants. Churches could also find out funding sources available for special projects.

Prayer for Essex County

The Rev. Ann Reeder Riggs informed the group about the city-wide effort in Richmond to pray for different facets of life in that metropolitan area. Richmond Churches are asked to follow

the prayer schedule and join forces with the staff and participants at Richmond Hill.

Rev. Riggs suggested ECT might want to come up with a prayer for Essex County. This idea was enthusiastically supported. Many ECT representatives contributed suggestions about content and wording for the prayer.

The Rev. Riggs of St. John's Episcopal and Ms. Avis Miller of Grace Episcopal worked together to come up with the prayer featured below. Copies were given to representatives and they were encouraged to have their churches participate in the prayer at different times and in the ways most suited for that church. This prayer can also be found on the ECT website.

Prayer for Essex County

Dear God, we give you thanks for the beauty of our surroundings and for all of your people who live and work in our community. We ask your blessing for our highways and byways, that you would keep us safe and strong and prayerful as we go about our daily tasks. We pray that you will keep us ever mindful of your grace and that we will always look to you first in all that we undertake. We ask all this for Essex County, in the name of your son, Jesus, our Lord. Amen

Angel Visit Begins Mentoring Program

Learning of needs in the community from ECT meetings, Ms. Kay Beale took these needs back to her congregation. In response, Angel Visit has begun an after-school mentoring program. There are retired teachers and other professionals in that congregation who are willing to work with children who need special help or attention.

Ms. Beale described the many meetings with public school officials before such a program could begin. She shared the forms that had been developed and the success of the enterprise.

One of the major drawbacks seems to be the transportation issue since many of the parents work at a distance and they are responsible for getting the children there and back home. To find out more about the program or to enroll call Ms. Kay Beale, 443-4229.

Computer Classes

Mr. Cary reported that Computer Literacy Classes for adults are ongoing at First Baptist Church on Thursdays; Rev. Ken Wilbur, a guest, mentioned that Rappahannock Christian Church also offers computer lessons, usually in the fall.



Free Health Clinic

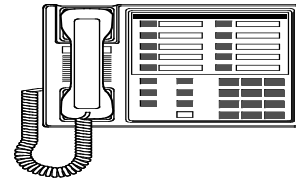
About a year ago Dr. James Ledwith began laying the groundwork for a free health clinic. Just before this became a reality Dr. Ledwith left the community for a teaching position at the University of Massachusetts.

The commitment to this public service was originated from a Sunday School study that had occurred at Tappahannock Memorial United Methodist Church. TMUMC has been the primary sponsor of this project. Many of their congregation serve as volunteers in various capacities.

Leading this phase of development are Colin and Carol Smith. They are letting the community know of the existence of the clinic and rounding up leadership for the effort. Mr. Smith addressed ECT saying that the most pressing immediate need is paying for telephone service. ECT members agreed that it is an

obtainable goal to have 12 months of phone service provided by donations from different churches. The cost is \$50 a month.

Tappahannock Presbyterian Church has donated installation costs and 3 months of service. The estimated cost is \$50.00 monthly, and area churches are encouraged to help in this manner. Donations should be made out to Tappahannock Memorial United Methodist Church and earmarked Free Health Clinic phone service.



Vacation Bible School

In early discussions of *Essex Churches Together* representatives the idea of having Essex County known as a "churched community" was favored by all. Several activities are on-going toward that end.

One is the possible coordination of Vacation Bible Schools in the summer time so that there is a church event going on every week of the summer with as little overlap as possible. Theoretically this would give opportunity for children in Essex County to attend Bible School much of the summer, going to different programs with their friends and inviting others to go with them.

ECT representatives are asked to bring VBS dates that have already been set to the April meeting. It will take several years to coordinate this, but this year the awareness of this effort can begin.

Another way of having the community known as "churched" is by publicizing the different churches and denominations in Essex County. An Essex Churches Together web page has been set up- http://www.essex-virginia.org/esx_ect. and this is linked to Essex County. Announcements, projects, and events relating to ECT may be found at this site.

Communication Among The Churches

One of many gratifying outcomes of ECT has been the increased communication and camaraderie among representatives from different churches in Essex County. There is free sharing of programs and events as each church rep tells what is coming up in the coming month. Representatives enthusiastically reported activities of their churches for the Lenten and Holy Week season.

There is also problem-solving and support as churches realize they all share many of the same problems, particularly in the area of growth and participation. And involvement of youth- this will be addressed more in the not too distant future.

Guided Meditation on Wednesdays



St. John's Episcopal Church on Duke Street in Tappahannock is open for Guided Meditation Wednesdays from 5-6:00 PM.

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