

Sharing & Caring

Working Hard for the Working Poor

Helping people become financially self-sufficient

Sustainability programs complete the mission

Vilma and Tanya donated clothes. Frank donated a car. Wayne was a volunteer who helped with landscaping. Mattie donated a van load of furniture. Each of them is doing well today, but not so long ago they came to The Cooperative Ministry in need of crisis assistance. Back on their feet, each has returned to give back as donors.

Success stories like these speak to the mission of The Cooperative Ministry - standing in the gap of crisis with people, who then become self-sufficient and perhaps return as donors or volunteers.

Wanda Pearson, The Cooperative Ministry's chief program officer, says the organizational goal is life-transformation - not simply transitioning people out of temporary financial crisis, but transforming lives into self-sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency begins with the budget counseling each crisis client receives when meeting with a crisis counselor. Through that counseling, there's the invitation to participate in much-needed sustainability programs.

A new Financial Empowerment Program will match interested crisis assistance clients with a certified financial health coach for up to six months of help. Successful outcomes will include financial goals, a manageable household budget, improved credit scores, and regular savings habits.

Through our Career Improvement service, funded by the City of Columbia, qualified clients in the Booker Washington Heights and Belvedere neighborhoods can receive financial help with fees related to a GED, state licensing and certification requirements, or criminal record expungement, any and all of which can lead to better jobs and higher

(The Cooperative Ministry exists) "To increase the economic self-sufficiency of people experiencing poverty in the Midlands through crisis assistance and **sustainability programs.**"

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- **Financial Empowerment**
 - **Career Improvement**
 - **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)**
 - **Cars & Transportation**

wages.

Ed Palekas is The Cooperative Ministry's sustainability director and already manages the successful, annual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. In 2020, despite COVID-19 restrictions, VITA volunteers completed more than 7,400 free tax returns for Midlands taxpayers. Those returns provided millions of dollars in earned income tax credits, refunds, and empowered self-sufficiency.

Through its Car Program, The Cooperative Ministry gives 7-10 cars per year to qualifying clients in need of transportation to work, and many report improved job placement as a result of improved transportation. (Please see Page 2).

Self-sufficiency, by definition, is about economic sustainability - independence, self-reliance, and the ability to be self-supportive. Sustainability completes the mission of The Cooperative Ministry.

The Cooperative Ministry's Car Program

Rosetta Carn can now reach work more easily

Rosetta Carn, a Middle School cafeteria cook, is the recipient of a 2013 Chrysler 200 donated to The Cooperative Ministry by Godwin Motors, of Columbia.

Rosetta has been on The Cooperative Ministry's waiting list for two years, and has completed all the qualifications to receive a car, including budget counseling.

"I am so thankful," she said. "Without family to help me, I've not had very much independence. This car will help me avoid 5:30 a.m. bus stops, and I can get to work, church, and shopping much easier.

Most of The Cooperative Ministry's car donations are sold at auction for much-needed cash to help the basic human needs of clients. Occasionally, a roadworthy car is donated and given to a client.

A roadworthy car is one that is fully operational when donated with no needed repairs, and that also won't create a financial hardship for the recipient.



Car recipient Rosetta Carn is pictured with Ed Palekas, The Cooperative Ministry's Director of Sustainability.

This donation is the second roadworthy car donated to clients this summer.

To donate a car, please visit www.coopmin.org/donate-a-car or call (803) 799-2428. We invite used car dealerships to join with us, donating used cars as a way to give back to the community and support people like Rosetta.



NEW BOARD CHAIRMAN - Robert Williams III, restaurant operations manager and third-generation owner at Lizard's Thicket, will serve as chairman of The Cooperative Ministry's board of directors through June 2022. Other board officers include past chairman Mike Farmer, of TD Bank; vice chairman Davis Buchanan, of Buchanan Construction; secretary Stephanie Yandle, of BlueCross BlueShield SC; and treasurer Steven Hicks, CPA, of TD Bank.

Clothing & Furniture Bank reopens for volunteerism

The Cooperative Ministry is welcoming volunteers to serve in its clothing and furniture bank.



- Volunteers must be as individuals or in groups of five or less. Scheduling is required in advance of service. Hours are Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please call Rhemie Gantz at (803) 799-0932.
- Face masks are required inside the building.
- Gloves are required, and are provided by The Cooperative Ministry.

The Cooperative Ministry building is sanitized each evening and sanitizer stations are located throughout the building.

Thank you. Even during COVID-19 we have served others

By Beth H. Irick
Chief Executive Officer



Since the worldwide pandemic was declared mid-March, The Cooperative Ministry has received more than 2,000 requests for crisis assistance and volunteers prepared more than 7,400 free income tax returns for our clients.

And, we are serving with your help. Your financial donations have increased. You have responded with carloads of food donations. Your clothing bank donations are arriving daily. Car donations, which we turn into cash for basic human needs, are at record levels.

I can't begin to express my gratitude. In the face of a global pandemic, about which so much is still uncertain, we have worked together and have not missed one day of serving "the least of these" in our community.

There is something in the human spirit that calls us to action during times of crisis. The Cooperative Ministry is the beneficiary of your love and care for others during this season of our lives.

Watch for our e-newsletter every three weeks and if you don't receive it, please let us know with an email to svaughan@coopmin.org. We want to keep you updated on a regular basis.

Thank you for believing in our mission. We can't wait until the day we can invite you all back within our building and visit with you again.

A partner's testimony

by Nicholas Beasley
Rector, St. John's Episcopal Church, Shandon

St. John's Episcopal Church is at the corner of Wheat and Holly in Shandon, a lovely stone church near the shops and restaurants of Devine Street. In that setting, our congregation can feel insulated from the economic challenges that our neighbors in the wider Columbia community face. In recent months, the congregation has fared well through the pandemic recession. Few church members have lost jobs, and many have likely seen their portfolios expand, as Wall Street and Main Street have been going in different directions.



I give thanks for the bracing dose of reality that our connection to The Cooperative Ministry gives to St. John's. Yes, the clergy of St. John's is glad to have a compassionate, well-informed agency to which we refer assistance seekers. The Cooperative Ministry staff and volunteers supply far more meaningful assistance than we might. Our congregation is thankful for a partner toward which we can direct

generosity when our concern for those living in poverty is piqued. But as important as any function of The Cooperative Ministry is its witness that all is not as well, for all of God's children, as it sometimes seems to be for most of us. A memorable organizational statement won't let us forget: *Working Hard for the Working Poor*. We live in times in which hard work does not guarantee a secure and comfortable life, in which many working people reach the end of their money before the end of the month. Our connection to The Cooperative Ministry won't let the disciples of Christ at St. John's forget.

So we have benefited greatly from events like the Faith and Poverty Conference, which drew us into conversations about housing, transportation, and the dignity and capability of the working poor. The Cooperative Ministry starts conversations we need to have about mission, justice, and healing. We need a place to donate clothes, a setting for crisis assistance, and volunteer opportunities, but all these are built on the foundation of the ministry's persistent directing of our attention to the broken world that God so loves and the Kingdom he promises.

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Working Hard for the Working Poor

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- **Knowledgeable guidance with Title Transfer.**
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