

## “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do”

The Lectionary lessons for the Fifth Sunday of Easter in 2023 emphasize the glory of God and how Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. As you develop your sermon for ECS Sunday, one connection you could make is that ECS is a means by which we come together as a Diocese to follow Christ’s mission and ministry of love and service (as said by Bishop Stokes in his letter in the 2022 ECS-NJ Impact Report). The work of ECS in the domains of education, advocacy, grantmaking, and prayer are all designed to point to the glory of God.



## “In my Father's house there are many dwelling places” "a castle to keep me safe"

If you wish to include specific examples, here are some stories related to **housing**:

### **Good Shepherd, Berlin: Building Lives Together**

The ECS-funded Building Lives Together program at Good Shepherd Berlin (in collaboration with local community partner Women of Hope) supported 8 women with individualized assistance and counseling.

*Before getting into the Building Lives Together program, Heather’s life was chaotic: she was living in a very toxic environment, she was not working, and she was not educated beyond high school. Heather wanted to get out of her environment and better her life, and the program was very willing to work with her to achieve that. Not only was Heather able to obtain better housing, but she also received the necessary assistance through the program to get better housing, become employed, and apply to the local community college to further her studies.*

*Although Heather had a plan to transform her life, the program was instrumental in getting her on that path to a better life. Heather knew what she wanted, she stuck with the program, and we were able to walk with beside her to give her the support she needed.*

## Trinity Asbury Park

A Fall 2021 ECS-NJ grant supported Trinity Asbury Park's Radical Well-being Program (RWbP), providing housing assistance, case management, and other social services for local Monmouth County residents. The Fall 2021 ECS-NJ grant helped ensure housing for 15 adults.

*Early in 2022 Trinity's RWbP was able to pay the first month's rent and security deposit for Rob and Kevin's new apartment. Rob and Kevin had only one month to find a new living situation before they would be experiencing homelessness. The Visiting Nurse Association Community Health Center of Asbury Park reached out to Social Justice at Trinity for help in finding the men housing. They told our caseworkers that they were concerned that if housing was not secured quickly that Rob and Kevin were at risk of experiencing a relapse after working hard on maintaining newly found sobriety. Social Justice at Trinity brought the men into the RWbP as clients and found them safe new housing away from the community that they used to struggle with their use disorder in. Almost a year later they are still in the housing we found them, safe, comfortable, and sober. Rob was also able to complete his court-mandated community service hours at Trinity's Saturday Soup Community Meal. Social Justice at Trinity's RWbP is still currently supporting Rob in his sobriety.*

## “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”

**St. John's in Elizabeth** (in collaboration with San Jose) opened an immigration clinic with their Fall 2021 grant. They helped hundreds of immigrants—and grew the church! St. John's went from under 50 on a Sunday to regularly seeing 125 -150 people in the pews, sometimes even 200. (And now they have a choir!)

*As followers of Jesus, we show love in our congregation and in our team, receiving the immigrants who come looking for help with open arms, giving them hope so that they do not give up.*

## Preparing a place

Jesus goes to prepare a place for us, and we also prepare places where we can follow Him by engaging in acts of service and love. **St. Mary's in Clementon** received an ECS-NJ grant of \$15,000 in the Fall 2021 grant cycle to enhance the offerings at their food pantry and the space itself. With the funds they were able to serve 15% more families and offer a wider range of nutritious and appealing foods, providing at least two complete breakfasts, one complete dinner and snacks for each family once a week. In addition:

*We upgraded to energy efficient equipment such as freezers, refrigerators, and lighting. Lighting in the parking lot was upgraded for night distributions & security. Equipment purchases included rolling shelving for additional storage and security equipment installed in the storage area.*

## Resurrection and new life

These stories show how addressing immediate human needs offers possibilities for new life, illustrating the Easter theme of resurrection. In addition to the accounts below, you may have other stories of individual or community change from your own congregation that you would like to lift up.

### St. Peter's in Freehold

*One participant in our Winter Overnight Program for homeless men was given a prepaid phone card so potential employers could reach him on his cell phone. He is a former heroin addict who spent time in jail, and is now trying to rebuild his life. The man said he didn't know where he'd be without (their program). He was grateful for the phone card because his new employer was able to reach him to offer the job as a roofer. He starts on Monday. The man will remain in the WOP so he can save money for an apartment.*

*One of our long term clients is a street homeless woman with addiction issues. We gave her a phone for safety reasons as life on the streets can be dangerous. She was able to call family, social services and the police, when needed. And she was able to reach us when she was ready to enter rehab, and we were able to call her to let her know when a bed opened up for her.*



*She has been in a residential program for several weeks now.*

**St. James Eatontown** used their ECS-NJ grant to start a [Medical Equipment ministry \(MEM\)](#):

*Donors and clients don't just share equipment - they also share their stories of what brought them to the MEM. Our volunteers see the relief of a client upon learning that equipment they couldn't afford is being offered to them for free. The grief of the loss of loved ones is tempered by the hope of helping a stranger through their donation of items no longer needed. The gratitude that both donors and clients express to our volunteers for their service to the community is spontaneous and heartfelt. The MEM is more than an equipment exchange. It brings healing and connection to others, inspiring a wish to participate and spread the love.*

**St. Mark's in Plainfield** just finished up offering an [8-week coding class](#):

*Ten children, ages 6-12, participated in this pilot program. The kids designed and created their own video games. They will have access to the platform they used for a year. This will allow them to further hone their coding skills. Some of the kids reported that they plan to 'publish their games' so that others can play. It was a delightful and enriching experience for the children.*

Food insecurity is a big concern in New Jersey. In New Brunswick respecting the dignity of every human being and seeking and serve Christ in all persons looks like taking several existing food pantries, including the food pantry at Christ Church New Brunswick, and combining them in a new location in Unity Square. The new Choice Food Resource Center, supported in part by ECS, allows guests to make appointments and choose the products they would like.

*Guests no longer have to line up outdoors (long) before we open because they know there will be enough food to go around. This is especially helpful to guests with mobility issues. The facility is fully accessible: no stairs anywhere, accessible restrooms available (guests did not have access to restrooms when Christ Church Food Pantry was operating on Covid precautions). Ramon, a long-time guest and former volunteer at Christ Church Food Pantry is now dealing with serious health issues and uses a walker and a portable oxygen system. He indicated how much easier his life is now that he can get an appointment for the food he needs and doesn't have to navigate the brick walkway and three patio-steps down to our former food pantry location. He summarized: 'It's so much easier here, and I can sit and wait for my appointment.' One woman saw me coming to open the door our first Saturday, and she clasped her hands to her chest, crying, 'You're here!' She was afraid her friends from Christ Church Food Pantry would no longer be serving her. She also has said several times, 'You are so kind. Everyone here is so kind.'*

Another story related to food insecurity is on page 7 of the [ECS-NJ 2022 Impact Report](#).

*Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human being?*

*I will, with God's help.*

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