

Bridge Builders Charlotte: An Interfaith Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

An Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)-Queens University Initiative

Funded by The Gambrell Foundation

What will it take for our Charlotte community to rise out of the pandemic crisis more deeply committed to the wellbeing of all? This initiative leverages the vast social capital latent in our religiously diverse landscape to strengthen our response to human need. By “building bridges” between higher educational institutions and the non-profit sector--bridges buttressed by diverse faith communities--this program establishes a sustainable model of robust interfaith cooperation. In this way, we lay claim to distinctive religious identities that inspire us to serve the common good.

What do we hope to achieve?

1. We will strengthen Charlotte’s support of vulnerable neighbors by forging partnerships among area campuses, non-profit organizations, and faith or philosophical communities.
2. We will tell the story of Charlotte’s religiously plural landscape in a compelling, inclusive way.
3. Students will be better equipped to integrate interfaith engagement as a vital part of their college experience and emerge as interfaith leaders on their campuses and beyond.
4. We will lay important groundwork for a sustainable model of interfaith engagement in Charlotte that can be replicated throughout North Carolina.
5. We will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis more deeply committed to the wellbeing of all and better positioned to deploy interfaith engagement as a catalyst for social change.

Who will be involved?

- Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC): a nationally acclaimed non-profit, based in Chicago, committed to promoting interfaith leadership on hundreds of college campuses across the country
- Suzanne Watts Henderson, Founder and Director of Bridge Builders Charlotte; Dean of Belk Chapel and Professor of Religion, Queens University
- Campus Teams: campus leader (in parentheses) and two student interns
 - o Central Piedmont Community College (Chris Brawley)
 - o Johnson C. Smith University (Kendal Mobley)
 - o Queens University (Joey Haynes)
 - o UNC Charlotte (Prea Persaud)
 - o Wingate University (Christy Cobb)
- Strategic Leadership Council: civic leaders representing a range of faith communities, as well as educational and philanthropic organizations

What’s the scope of the program?

- Funding total: \$250,000
- Organizations involved:
 - o Five area campuses
 - o Six non-profit organizations
 - o Ten faith or philosophical communities
- Project themes:
 - o Providing resources and training to organizations addressing learning loss
 - o Strengthening responses to food insecurity, with attention to dietary differences related to religious traditions
 - o Chronicling a range of faith- and interfaith-based COVID-relief initiatives
 - o Highlighting the value of bridged social capital in addressing community needs
 - o Extending the reach of deliberate interfaith engagement to a broader range of faith and philosophical communities

For more information, contact Suzanne Watts Henderson at hendersons@queens.edu or Nancy Falls at nancybfalls@gmail.com.