**Heart Room Mission Team – Activity Report 2024**

**Mission Team members:** Co-chairs Jennifer Walker and Bruce Olsen; member Megan Piper; member emerita Helene Nelson

**Mission Team Focus**: Heart Room, ORUCC’s six-year “faith in action” pilot project, started in 2018 to assist families with children to find and keep stable housing. The program provides up to 36 months of rent subsidies to allow families to make progress on their own goals, in collaboration with the professional support provided by ORUCC’s collaborative social service partners(The Road Home, Joining Forces for Families, and the Early Childhood Initiative). This program makes a special effort to engage families not well served by existing programs (including immigrant families).

Since 2018, ORUCC members have pledged and donated more than $250,000 to provide rent support for 25 families, comprising 30 adults and 90 children. In addition, Heart Room Mission Team members have assisted The Road Home to secure approximately another $250,000 in program support from individuals, faith communities, community organizations, and foundations.

Comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Heart Room model—long and flexible rent subsidies combined with professional support to aid the family in achieving their personal goals that support long-term stable housing—is an essential part of the Heart Room pilot.

**2024 Mission Team Activities:**

1. 12 families were served in 2024 through the Heart Room partnership. 6 single-female heads of household; 4 two-parent households; 5 families that are Spanish-speaking only; 5 adults did not have US citizenship.

2. 34 children were impacted in 2024 through the Heart Room partnership. 11 children under 5; 13 children ages 5-12; 10 children ages 13-17.

3. Regular meetings of Mission Team members and representatives of partnership agencies regarding fundraising opportunities, funding status, and information gathering in preparation for a comprehensive evaluation of the 6-year pilot in the first half of 2025.

**What we are celebrating/learning:** Heart Room was originally conceived as a program that would grow organically over time, building on what ORUCC and our collaborative partners learned during the two three-year pilot phases. The rigorous evaluations have demonstrated that Heart Room’s family-driven multi-year financial and professional support is an effective model for helping families with children find and maintain stable housing. The benefits of Heart Room’s model have helped many more families achieve stable housing and family success than the Mission Team initially anticipated it would during the course of the six-year pilot.

**Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond**: The COVID pandemic, Dane County’s increasing population, the changing economy, the deepening crisis in affordable housing, and changes in the political climate have placed strains on many working families that were not present in the same degree when Heart Room was first implemented. 2025 is the appropriate time for the Heart Room Mission Team to evaluate the program’s effectiveness in serving eligible families in today’s situations, and to ensure that currently-enrolled families are well-supported. The Mission Team will consider program modifications to respond to the changing environment and needs in the broader community, as they align with ORUCC’s commitment to justice work.