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Narrative Description of Activities for a Ministry

Overview

It is the mission of Mission at the Eastward to “love our neighbors” through volunteer home repairs and youth outreach to create lives of hope, security and dignity in Central Western Maine. Our vision is to “reach the last house on the last road”, envisioning a community of help, connection and community through the MATE Housing Ministry and MATE Youth Connection. We do this through our various existing programs, as well as continually evaluating the needs in the community and helping to establish programs that will address those needs.

This is clearly seen in the history of Mission at the Eastward, its development and the programs that it currently supports and address. Our hope is to continue to keep our fingers on the pulse of our community needs, and to find ways to address these needs through development of new programs.

History

Mission at the Eastward (MATE) was organized in 1954 by the National Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church to support the ministry of newly organized Presbyterian congregations serving small, rural communities in Maine. The main purpose at that time was to support these churches financially and form a support network for the clergy serving these churches through the Synod of the Northeast (Presbyterian Church, USA). Both congregations and pastors depended upon one another.

In 1960, out of the parish ministry of 10 churches grew a summer camp for children, called Camp at the Eastward. This summer camp, located in Starks, ME, still operates, and through funding assures that all children can afford to attend a summer camp. Young people from grades

K through 12 have come to our campground in Starks, Maine during the summer to enjoy the outdoors, spiritually grow, learn life skills and just plain have fun.

In the mid 1970's the housing ministry took root, using volunteers from throughout the Northeast USA, Pennsylvania, Maryland and even North Carolina, to repair homes for low income families and individuals to allow them to stay in their homes and improving their living conditions. In 1999, an outreach program to South Africa took root. Through this outreach, we support a presbytery in South Africa through building, the implementation of home gardens and the education to implement these throughout the community to realize self-sustainability for impoverished communities.

The financial support initially provided by the Presbyterian Church (USA) through Synod of the Northeast has steadily decreased, and the remaining churches have become self-sustaining. Currently, MATE does not receive any financial support from the Synod of the Northeast, and now has to rely on public support. This has led to focus on growth of the programs and ministries reaching out to the surrounding communities, which has become MATE's mainstay.

Through continued growth and innovation, MATE now serves locally and globally through its ministries and programs. Within the current community, lives have been changed, either by their experience at our youth camp, or by houses being restored to safe havens where people can live and grow in community. Our vision is to further develop new programs that will continue to address any new needs assessed in the community and to grow its reach.

MATE Housing Repair Ministry (MHM)

According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the right to adequate housing, is "the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity". It requires "adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities – all at a reasonable cost".

The Housing Ministry's goal and vision is to assist those in our community who struggle economically or physically to maintain adequate housing, which requires protection from the elements, safety and accessibility. Our services include painting, roof repairs, doors, windows, porches, steps, ramps and simple interior and exterior repairs, and minor plumbing and electrical repairs. These repairs are done at no charge to the clients we serve.

Our clients apply for our services through applications. These are available in all the local papers (both in print and on the internet), local town offices, social services offices, mental health and medical offices, other non-profit organizations and also spread by word of mouth. We service mainly the Franklin County area, some of Somerset County in Maine and we are planning to add parts of Androscoggin County to our list.

Most of the work is conducted through volunteers who come from all over the North East United States to provide services and outreach to our clients. They are mostly church groups who come to do a week of mission in Maine. These groups volunteer their time and their skills, building

relationships which last for a lifetime to provide these repairs. This also helps build the groundwork for volunteerism in the youth that come to serve here during the summer months between June and August.

These volunteers are led by employees (part time for the summer months) who have evaluated all the sites, know the work required at each site, and have construction skills and experience. They make sure that all materials are available for the work to be completed and guide the groups in the work required.

We fund this activity mainly through donations from the volunteer teams coming to work during the summer, through grants and other donations solicited through annual campaigns or fundraisers. We spend our time during “off-season” doing the logistical work of updating applications, getting them out to the public, fund raising, recruiting new volunteer groups and providing the logistical background to the work we do. We start in May to evaluate potential worksites. We then determine which work sites will have the highest priority in accordance with our available budget. All materials are ordered as needed to be on site when the volunteers arrive. The main bulk of the work takes place during the months of June to August, when we host the volunteer groups. During this time, we support them and lead them through the work required to complete the repairs to the house. This takes up about 75% of Mission at the Eastward’s time. At the end of August, we finish up the administrative and budget work required and clean up all sites.

Some of our clients offer to volunteer during the time our volunteers are on site with some of the work activities, and from time to time they will make small donations to the program (monetary or materials), although this is never expected, and the work is done without any expectation of payment.

We do know that we make a difference through our work – whether someone can access their home with increase ease, stay warmer during the cold winter months in Maine, or have access to water again – we improve their living conditions, or enable them to stay in a home that they might otherwise have had to leave.

Our hope is to expand on our current ministry to include the building of compact housing for those who live in conditions where the home can no longer be sustained. We are planning to talk with other nonprofit organizations who would like to expand their programs in the same direction.

MATE Youth Connection (MYC)

Camp at the Eastward (CATE) was the initial youth ministry established through MATE in 1960. It is a youth camp located in rural Starks, Maine, based on Christian values. The purpose of CATE is to reach out to youth and adults to provide them with opportunities to engage in camp programs with a focus on teaching Christian living correlating with the many challenging programs and activities CATE has to offer. We are focused on unplugging from the stress of everyday life, nurturing healthy relationships and deepening spiritual connections. CATE welcomes all and believe that anyone who wants to should be provided with an opportunity to attend a summer camp, regardless of their background or financial status.

We offer overnight camp experiences for a week for children from grade 3 to 12 and day camp for 5 days for K through grade 2. While at CATE, these children are able to spend time in nature and increase their awareness of environmental issues, build valuable relationships with peers and mentors, and some learn basic life skills. For many of these children, these relationships and skills carry them through their lives. We provide nutritious meals (sometimes more than what they would be able to have at home), physical exercise opportunities, and environmental exposure. We just were awarded accreditation by the American Camp Association (ACA), demonstrating its commitment toward the health and safety of its campers and staff. This will also allow us to begin to develop specialty programs for the camp, concentrating on much needed STEM enrichment, arts expression to promote creativity and social-emotional skills, and environmental conservation skills.

Many of our campers come from low-income families in surrounding towns, so while we work to keep our program costs low, we also aim to offer financial needs scholarships to any child in need. To this end, we heavily rely on donations and fundraising campaigns for a large portion of our camp budget. Some campaigns include an annual plant sale, work-a-thon or volunteer-a-thon event, chili/chowder cook-off contest, bequeaths, grants and annual appeals. While our summer months are a flurry of activity for campers, they have indicated their wish for more chances to socialize and connect throughout the year. To that end, we are reviving our Mission at the Eastward (MATE) Youth Connection for 2020-offering Junior High and High School campers a chance to connect at special events, weekend retreats and volunteer outreach activities.

Through these new activities, with contact with youth throughout the year, we provide an experience to prepare youth to assume roles as successful adults. Parents, youth, and staff will be able to report growth in areas such as self-confidence, independence, making friends, exploring and learning new activities, and spirituality. Indeed, our outreach provides growth experiences for youth that can benefit them through adulthood. No charge for any services.