

Creating Hope Together: Brenda Sargent

Soon after moving to Durham in 2003, I joined Community Church and became involved with its outreach ministries. Serving on the Mission Board, now known as the Justice and Witness Ministry, provided numerous ways to put my faith into action. This volunteer work educated me as to the unmet needs of individuals and families living on the margins in our seacoast communities. It also introduced me to many of the agencies that serve our struggling neighbors.

The casual observer sees prosperous communities in this area of New Hampshire. Scratch the surface and one finds that too many residents struggle to afford the basic necessities of life—housing, food, clothing and health care. Fortunately, we have local agencies who provide services to those in need. However, the need always outstrips the resources available. It is vitally important that our church budgets funds from our annual giving to support local safety net programs. This support also reflects a church that lives up to its name—**Community** Church of Durham.

I have lost track of the number of years that I have been part of organizing “The Giving Tree”. This beloved holiday tradition provides gifts to those individuals and families being served by our church’s community partners: Haven, My Friend’s Place, Cross Roads House, City Reach Boston, and the Pastor’s discretionary fund. Over the years, “The Giving Tree Team” has expanded its outreach to organize Mother’s Day gift bags for women being served by My Friend’s Place and Haven, created raised garden beds and a child friendly play space for a domestic violence shelter and raised funds for Wi’am, the Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center based in Bethlehem, that promotes peace, justice, and reconciliation in Palestine. Thanks to you, Pastor Dave was able to personally present his longtime friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Zoughbi Alzoughbi, a significant check and messages of peace from Community Church members and friends.

We are living in a world in crisis. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the scope and complexity of the problems facing this country and all those living on this fragile planet. Volunteering alongside loving, caring people, witnessing firsthand the generosity of those with whom I share Sunday worship, and working in small ways to improve our corner of the world, is a way to feel less helpless. Being a part of this beloved community is comforting, reassuring and encouraging. It inspires me to give of my time and treasure so the church can continue to be a beacon of hope in a troubled time.