

MOSAIC

A PUBLICATION OF
INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON
SUMMER 2020



IM RESPONDS TO COVID-19

During this global crisis, Interfaith Ministries remains committed to using innovative measures and observing the highest possible safety standards to continue our important work without interruption. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to our operations that we have addressed with innovation and the generous support of our community. IM is designated as an essential service. Our staff are working remotely, coming to our campus in smaller numbers and observing “stay home work safe” practices. All the while, our very important programmatic work continues, and all IM programs are responding to meet the challenge. The Message from the CEO and this entire edition of Mosaic highlights our initiatives in detail.

IM TAKES A STAND FOR RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY



Our hearts and souls are troubled and saddened in the death of George Floyd. To his name, though, we know we could add many more, recognizing that the trouble we feel in our hearts: the anger, the grief, the loss, the rage, is not only for the death

of a child of Houston, but we are also troubled, emboldened, and stirred as we wrestle and struggle for a more just society, a society that must come to terms with historic inequalities, and then must do something about them. We stand with our brothers and sisters in the Black community. We pray for substantive change for Black people. We commit to take action that will be constructive and relevant. We pray we can change policies, but we pray even more that we can change hearts and minds, that we do not turn a blind eye to suffering, that we truly see one another as the beloved people that we all are.



IM PIVOTS TO A VIRTUAL GALA

IM celebrated its Annual Tapestry Gala with a virtual event and Meals on Wheels experience on Wednesday, April 22. IM President and CEO Martin B. Cominsky made the call to quickly pivot the originally scheduled Tapestry Gala event from an in-person gala to a virtual event at the onset of the COVID-19 stay home/work safe order.

The “Dine in with IM” virtual gala, with many thanks to presenting sponsor Shell, hosted over 400 supporters online who raised more than \$525,000 for Interfaith Ministries’ four areas of service to the greater Houston community: Meals on Wheels/Animeals; Refugee Services; Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships; and Volunteer Houston.

Using its home-delivered meals expertise, IM’s team of Meals on Wheels drivers delivered a dining experience for guests to enjoy at home similar to what they do for homebound seniors in its Meals on Wheels program. Dinner was sponsored by Amegy Bank in partnership with Sysco and prepared by Chef John Guidmond of Yvonne’s Cafe located in the Amegy Bank Tower. Special thanks to our presenting sponsor, Shell.



FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO:

As we rang in a new year on January 1, few of us imagined that in a few weeks, our nation and our world would be gripped by a deadly pandemic. COVID-19 seemed far away when news of the outbreak first surfaced in China. By early March, it had already prompted changes in our city and beyond.

Martin B. Cominsky

Interfaith Ministries has weathered many storms, both literal and figurative- hurricanes, economic downturns, and more. Yet, we have never encountered a global pandemic in our 50-year history. Our work of bringing together diverse groups for dialogue, collaboration and service is uniquely suited to times of crisis and we knew our mission would be more relevant than ever. But how could we carry out that work safely, in an environment in which personal connection could pose a serious health risk?

Within a few short weeks, we pivoted. Every program adapted to the new reality, with a focus on serving our clients in a safe way. At the heart of it all has been our foundation of **Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships (IRCP)** - the thread that keeps the tapestry of IM strong and beautiful.

From the beginning, IRCP leveraged its vast network in the community to bring together faith leaders for weekly informational calls. They heard first-hand from Mayor Sylvester Turner, Judge Lina Hidalgo, Houston Methodist CEO Dr. Mark Boom, Greater Houston Partnership President Bob Harvey, and more- receiving accurate, current information to bring back to their congregants each week. IRCP turned its monthly lunch and learns on different religions into virtual learning experiences. The department hosted two online prayer vigils for hope and healing, and a weekly "Mindful Monday" moment of prayer. The June Dinner Dialogue went virtual, as well, with participants visiting via Zoom and cooking at home with a recipe we provided. It has been amazing to see the response of the faith community to the COVID-19 challenge, even as they themselves are affected.

All the while, **Volunteer Houston (VH)** stood at the ready as it opened a Virtual Volunteer Reception Center to manage disaster-response needs throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. In partnership with the City of Houston and Harris County, VH has been connecting thousands of volunteers with nonprofits across the community to meet urgent needs. We also hosted a webinar of Virtual Volunteering, teaching nonprofits how to creatively leverage volunteer help during these challenging times. The VH team also procured donations (100 thermometers, N-95 masks and latex-free gloves) from Project C.U.R.E. to support essential services still facilitated by our Meals on Wheels program.

As the number of new refugees coming to Houston has decreased due to the pandemic, our **Refugee Services** program has focused on providing comprehensive, longer-term services to refugee neighbors already in our community. Over 90% of the refugees we serve are self-sufficient within six months of arrival, though most still live very modestly as they start new lives and careers in Houston. Many work

in hourly jobs and have been affected by lost or reduced wages due to COVID-19. Thanks to generous community support, we were able to set up a Refugee Emergency Assistance Fund to cover rent during this precarious time, until our refugees could return to work. Maintaining their self-sufficiency and preventing homelessness has been our top priority. We have even been able to help our partner refugee services agencies with client assistance as well.

As the largest **Meals on Wheels** and **Animeals** provider in Texas, we knew early on that meal delivery in a pandemic would be a considerable challenge. Access to food and social support is essential for the over 5,300 homebound seniors we serve, over 1,000 added in the past five months, and they are at high risk for contracting the virus. In mid-March, we expedited our annual Operation IMPact to distribute a supply of emergency, shelf-stable food to each senior in case COVID-19 disrupted our deliveries. This project generally occurs in late May or early June in preparation for hurricane season. By late March, we had adapted our delivery model from a daily delivery of a hot meal to each senior, to a weekly delivery of a week's worth of frozen meals. This model reduces personal contact, and is augmented by phone calls between visits to check on our seniors and to offer them social support. Thanks to overwhelming community support, we have not only been able to maintain Meals on Wheels services throughout the crisis, but to expand the program by moving seniors off our waiting list onto delivery routes. We were able to partner with the YMCA of Greater Houston to provide home-delivered meals to hundreds of their senior members for a six-week period. And we forged a collaboration to feed an additional 200-300 seniors in Southwest Houston on a short-term basis thanks to our work with Chinese Community Center and we fed senior clients of Catholic Charities.

Animeals has been challenged throughout this ordeal by shortages of pet food, but generous donors have kept a steady supply of kibble coming in. And devoted volunteers have made social distanced deliveries, to make sure that our seniors' furry friends are fed at this critical time.

We have been very busy here at Interfaith Ministries. Each day, I feel immense gratitude for our hardworking staff, dedicated volunteers, forward-thinking Board of Directors, generous donors, the stalwart faith community- and for all those who make our work possible.

IM came to life over half a century ago as the results of a few Christian congregations who connected to make a difference. Today, we bring together thousands of people of various faiths- and of no particular faith tradition- who want to make a difference. These are challenging times, and will continue to be, but we are bolstered by the tenet at our core – the **Strength of Shared Beliefs**. Thank you for being part of that strength.

Martin B. Cominsky

Martin B. Cominsky
President & CEO

MEALS ON WHEELS & ANIMEALS

FEEDING OUR SENIORS NO MATTER WHAT

The first half of 2020 has been extremely challenging, as the entire world has grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. Seniors are at high risk for the virus, and as the largest Meals on Wheels provider in Texas, we had to adapt quickly to make sure the seniors we serve continued to receive meals in a safe way. In mid-March, we moved up our annual *Operation IMPact*, which usually occurs in May or June prior to hurricane season. This was done to ensure that each senior had a week's supply of emergency, shelf-stable food in case the virus disrupted our deliveries. Thank you to our major *IMPact* sponsors, who supported our decision to expedite the project:

When hurricane season started June 1, we wanted to be able to replenish the seniors' supply of emergency food in the event of a storm. This summer is supposed to be an unusually active hurricane season. Thanks to a grant from the W.T. and Louise J. Moran Foundation, we were able to do so.

In the midst of the pandemic, we have altered our service delivery model from a daily delivery of a hot meal to each senior, to a weekly delivery of a week's worth of frozen meals. Seniors receive phone calls in between visits to check on them and provide social support. This new model reduces personal contact to keep our seniors safe. Thanks to Ecclesia Church, we were even able to provide microwaves to seniors who did not have them.

Meals on Wheels has not only continued serving seniors during this challenging time, but has even grown from 4,300 seniors to 5,300! This was made possible thanks to strong community support in the wake of COVID-19, particularly from Mrs. Janice McNair and The Brown Foundation, Inc. We have been able to move seniors off our waiting list, and also add new seniors through a partnership with the YMCA of Houston and collaborations with the Chinese Community Center and Catholic Charities. We are so grateful to all our donors who make this work possible!



Meet Meals on Client, Ms. Rose from Texas City. She is very thankful for Meals on Wheels.



MEET RONALD AND TINKER... MEALS ON WHEELS AND ANIMEALS CLIENTS

Ronald has been a Meals on Wheels client and Tinker has been an Animeals client for four years. Ronald is a veteran who proudly served in the U.S. Army for 12 years. After he retired from the military, he worked for the Texas Department of Transportation. But at one low point in his life, he was actually homeless. He stayed in a shelter and eventually moved into an apartment in Alief after getting back on his feet. He has heart condition and is grateful to receive Meals on Wheels.

Tinker, a rescue poodle mix, was his friend's dog. When she was no longer able to care for the animal, Ronald rescued Tinker and they have been together for 11 years. "Tinker keeps me in good spirits," he says.

Ronald has one daughter and four grandchildren who live out of state. He looks forward to his daily visit or phone call from Meals on Wheels. "The visit makes my day and I appreciate being checked on," he shares.



ANIMEALS PANTRY FILLED THANKS TO STOCK THE SHELVES CAMPAIGN

A big thank you to all who supported our annual Stock the Shelves campaign, especially our challenge donor, Fred Marshall! This June e-campaign helps us fill the Animeals pantry for the summer. Fred again stepped up as our challenge donor, in memory of his beloved wife Linda, pledging to match every gift 2 to 1 up to \$10,000! The total raised was \$30,000! These funds are vital to keeping Animeals running over the summer months. Animeals serves over 1,300 dogs and cats of homebound seniors, and often makes the difference between the senior being able to keep their beloved pet or giving them away.

FUNDING OUR MISSION – CELEBRATING OUR DONORS

CHENIERE



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Cheniere Energy is a company that knows how to pivot. “Nimble” is even listed as a Cheniere corporate value. Cheniere’s history is filled with stories of transformation, overcoming challenges, capitalizing on opportunities and focusing on transforming the future of energy. Today, Cheniere is the largest producer of LNG in the country and second largest operator in the world.

When COVID-19 still seemed remote to most Americans, the folks at Cheniere- which has an office in Beijing, China- were aware of the virus, taking precautions with its employees and even deploying critical resources and supplies to Wuhan. In January, they sent 120,000 N-95 masks, and funded the purchase and transport of ventilator machines for hospitals in Wuhan. By March, COVID-19 had become a global pandemic and began impacting communities where their employees work and live. In response, the company pledged more than \$1 million to organizations in communities where the company has a presence, including Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Washington D.C., the United Kingdom, and China. With safety as a priority, the donations focused on reducing food insecurity and supplying provisions and equipment for first responders and frontline healthcare workers.

In early March, IM Chief Development Officer Maria Magee received a call from Cheniere’s Manager of Global Corporate Giving, Wendy Craven. Wendy and her team had researched community needs, created a COVID-19 response plan and sought out community partners who could help create a positive impact within these communities

“Cheniere chose Interfaith Ministries because the organization is uniquely positioned to help elderly, home-bound seniors with their Meals on Wheels program,” Craven explains.

The expedition of Operation IMpact, repurposed from hurricane meals to pandemic meals, impressed Cheniere. IM was able to alter its Meals on Wheels delivery model to safely serve seniors during the pandemic, while still providing much-needed social interaction by phone. Cheniere saw that IM, too, knew how to pivot.

“I was impressed with IM’s quick response to adapt the program without losing the personal touch, since COVID is affecting a population that already feels isolated,” Craven shares.

Cheniere made a generous grant to our Meals on Wheels program, while globally supporting over two dozen charities – specifically, food banks and hospitals. Even before the Novel Coronavirus made its appearance, the company had a history of giving back to the communities where the company operates.

“Ultimately these communities are *our* communities... where we work and live,” Craven explains.

Faced with a pandemic, Cheniere’s corporate giving became more tightly focused. In addition to grant making through the company’s foundation, Cheniere pivoted some of its budget to support local restaurants, by buying and delivering lunches to medical facilities or other first responders. Cheniere partnered with Houston’s Mayor and the city’s Office of Special Events, the Houston Astros Foundation and Project C.U.R.E. to host a PPE drive –and also initiated a public match campaign to benefit Project C.U.R.E. and their mission to find and deliver medical supplies in times of crisis. The company also offered its employees a 2:1 match for gifts made to charities responding to COVID. With offices empty as most employees were directed to work from home, Cheniere donated surplus food and other goods to local food banks, and also collaborated with the Houston Food Bank to host a mobile food pantry. And most recently, the company donated excess furniture to charities who have found themselves needing to expand operations as a result of the growing community needs associated with impacts of COVID-19. The company has cleaned two city parks in Corpus Christi and drop-shipped PPE to rural medical facilities near the Texas/Louisiana border. They also started a project to acknowledge Acts of Kindness performed by employees , such as one employee tutoring kids in her neighborhood to make sure kids don’t fall behind in their schooling.

IM is grateful for its nimble new friend, Cheniere. “We are not in a normal work environment,” says Craven. “We have to think about responding to these real-time needs in our communities. We have to look within our company to see how we can help. Every day is a new day.”

LEAD DONORS FEB-MAY 2020 (CASH GIFTS OF \$1,000+)

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- The Zandstra Family
- Dr. Ann Ziker
- Maxwell Zimmerman

REFUGEE SERVICES

REFUGEE YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FUNDED BY THE HEARST FOUNDATION

Thanks to a new grant from The Hearst Foundation, Inc., we will be able to pilot a Refugee Youth Mentorship program in 2020-2021. This is a need that has been expressed by the families we serve and will help refugee teens and young adults succeed academically and socially as they acculturate to American life. The program will focus on academics and mentorship for teens, and on vocational training for young adults. The Hearst Foundations identify and fund outstanding nonprofits to ensure that people of all backgrounds in the United States have the opportunity to build healthy, productive and inspiring lives.

A NEIGHBOR IN NEED

One of our clients who received rental assistance during COVID-19 is a Syrian refugee who arrived in the United States in November. He has a wife and two young children, and they had been working hard to adjust to their new lives here before the pandemic hit. He had found a job as a driver and had been working successfully for only two months when he lost his job in March. Due to his short work history, he was not able to obtain unemployment benefits, and his family was struggling without his income. The assistance he received through IM has helped the family make it until he was able to work again. We are greatful to our "Pass it on" program where people of faith contributed their stimulus check back to refugees in need.



The Medical Case Management team facilitated a car donation via Tehmina Masud to one of their intensive case management clients, a single refugee mother with two young daughters from Eritrea.



WORLD REFUGEE DAY HOUSTON

The Houston Refugee Consortium hosted a month-long World Refugee Day celebration in June to recognize the refugee experience and tell the stories of refugees who call Houston home. All events were held virtually through the World Refugee Day Houston social media accounts.



Volunteer Houston continues to help our community during COVID-19 times. Since mid-March, Volunteer Houston has connected 1,010 volunteers with 39 volunteer needs related to COVID-19 response with 21 nonprofit organizations.

CENSUS 2020

Volunteer Houston has been integral in building awareness and promoting the 2020 Census. Volunteer Houston has been recruiting and training volunteers to help support the Census. Our team participated in an educational video about the Census and a Census parade recently. Completing the Census helps secure the dollars our community needs to support our schools and infrastructure. Volunteer Houston was proud to be a partner in these activities with Harris County through Houston In Action.

GIF
GALLERY FURNITURE

**FACE MASK
DONATION DRIVE**

Volunteer Houston, in partnership with Gallery Furniture and Hilton Americas-Houston accepted face mask donations to be distributed to those in need. The drop off sites were located at three Gallery Furniture locations or at the Hilton Americas - Houston front drive. Once donated, the face masks were laundered by Hilton Americas - Houston to ensure the masks were not contaminated upon distribution to those in need.

volunteer HOU **IM** **Hilton**

MASK DRIVE

Volunteer Houston, in partnership with Gallery Furniture and Hilton Americas-Houston accepted face mask donations to be distributed to those in need. The drop off sites were located at three Gallery Furniture locations or at the Hilton Americas - Houston front drive. Once donated, the face masks were laundered by Hilton Americas - Houston to ensure the masks were not contaminated upon distribution to those in need.

INTERFAITH RELATIONS & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

WEEKLY FAITH LEADERS-COMMUNITY LEADERS CALL

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston is pleased to join with the City of Houston, Harris County, and the Greater Houston Partnership to host this call for faith leaders. Briefings are provided by key representatives from the medical field, public health department and office of emergency management every Thursday, via audio and video conference call.

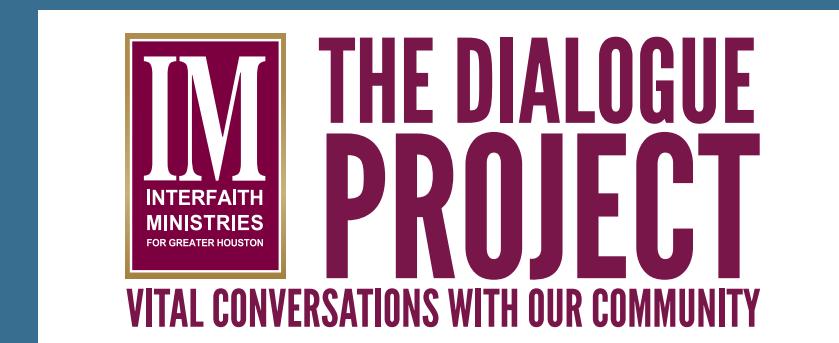


MINDFUL MONDAYS

To overcome the feelings of separation and anxiety caused by COVID-19, and the loss of our common ways of gathering, a group of faith and community leaders worked with IM to start Mindful Mondays. This short break for prayer and reflection Mondays throughout the spring and early summer served as a uniform time for connection, hope and healing. Thanks to the following for leading this time of prayer and reflection:

- Pastor Harvey Clemons, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church
- Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Archdiocese of Galveston Houston
- Shariq Ghani, Minaret Foundation
- Sr. Jane Meyer, St. Agnes Academy
- Rabbi Gideon Estes, Houston Rabbinic Association
- Rev. Greg Han and Kim Mabry, Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston

See these prayers at: imgh.org/prayer/



Juneteenth – June 19 – is a holiday commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States. To commemorate this special day IM partnered with the powerful faith and civil rights trio Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza, Rabbi Samuel Karff, and Reverend William Lawson by presenting The Dialogue Project: Vital Conversations with our Community – Fighting for Justice, Equality and Respect.

The conversation featured the three faith leaders together at Interfaith Ministries' Brigitte & Bashar Kalai Plaza of Respect, which was created as a multi-faith space for education, dialogue and community. The Plaza features three Pillars of Light, honoring each of the Three Amigos for their commitment to ecumenism and social justice.

The video is available online at www.YouTube.com/imghimgh.

The second offering in our Vital Conversations series took place on July 20 and addressed this question: 'How can people of faith really step out right now and help make real change for good?' The conversation was moderated by the Rev. Gregory Han and featured the Rev. Dr. Matthew Russell and the Rev. Dr. Cleve V. Tinsley, Co-Managing Directors of Project Curate.

PRAYER VIGILS

The community joined Interfaith Ministries for two special opportunities to gather virtually on April 30 and June 4 for prayers and reflections giving thanks, and for hope and healing and to remember those whose lives have been tragically lost because of COVID-19. The latter vigil included a call for racial justice and equality and recognized students, K-12 and college students, and paid tribute to graduating high school seniors. Prayers, reflections, music and readings by faith leaders and two high school seniors from Houston's diverse religious communities were included in these tributes.



SUMMER 2020 MOSAIC

**INTERFAITH
MINISTRIES**
FOR GREATER HOUSTON

3303 Main Street
Houston, TX 77002
713.533.4900

Franklin J. Harberg, Jr.
IM Board Chair



United Way of Greater Houston



HOUSTON
ENDOWMENT



UPCOMING 2020 EVENTS:

AUG. 11, 6:30PM

DINNER DIALOGUES
USING YOUR VOICE FOR GOOD

AUG. 13, 2PM

COVID-19 BRIEFING FOR NONPROFITS
HOSTED BY VOLUNTEER HOUSTON

AUG. 26

VITAL CONVERSATIONS III
HOSTED BY IMPULSE

OCT. 14, 2020

FOR ALL HUMANITY-
A CELEBRATION OF NEW AMERICANS

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON UPCOMING
EVENTS PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT

WWW.IMGH.ORG
OR CALL 713-533-4900

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