

MOSAIC

A PUBLICATION OF
INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON
SPRING 2021

IM

INTERFAITH
MINISTRIES
FOR GREATER HOUSTON



WARM HEARTS MELT WINTER'S WRATH



On Valentine's Day weekend, a record-breaking winter storm roared into Texas, plunging temperatures into the teens in Houston and causing widespread loss of power and water. Millions of people were without power and/or water for days. Tragically, some even froze to death in their own homes. Many more suffered damage to their homes and property.

We at Interfaith Ministries had prepared our Meals on Wheels seniors for winter weather, as we do each year, by providing them with a supply of shelf-stable food in December. These winter meals, generously supported by the community and lead sponsor CenterPoint Energy, were to be used in case ice kept our drivers from making their deliveries. Little did we know that ice would shut down our city for nearly a week!

From that Monday through Thursday, we could not make our normal deliveries. Our caring staff called our seniors during and

after the storm to check on them and to make sure they knew to consume their winter meals. On Friday morning, staff from all our departments resumed deliveries to serve our seniors. Thanks to generous community support, we raised enough funds to replenish those winter meals so our seniors have a supply to last through the spring.

After the storm passed, we learned that many of the refugees we serve were also affected. The icy days meant loss of wages, and many had property damage as well. Donors also stepped up to help our refugee neighbors, including the Houston Harris County Winter Storm Relief Fund. Thanks to their support, we were able to give emergency assistance funds to our refugees who needed help with rent, utilities, home repairs and other basic needs.

The Hearst Foundations stepped up in a major way, contributing \$500,000 toward our winter storm relief efforts and ongoing work. In addition to helping Meals on Wheels and Refugee Services, that grant enabled us to set up micro-grants for houses of worship and their congregants affected by the storm.

Many of our own staff were impacted by the storm. Our Board of Directors and our President and CEO gave toward an emergency assistance fund for our employees.

Winter Storm Uri will not soon be forgotten, but neither will the warmth of generosity and support shown by our friends. We are humbled to see how our neighbors, from both near and far, step up in times of trouble to help the most vulnerable among us.

FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO

In times of crisis, I like to think of Fred Rogers' famous words:

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"

As President and CEO of Interfaith Ministries, I get to see the helpers every day. They are not hard to find.

As we surpass one year of living with COVID-19, it is easy to overlook the helpers. News headlines are filled with dire predictions. The stories of illness and death are truly heartbreaking. Yet, there are so many helpers among us.

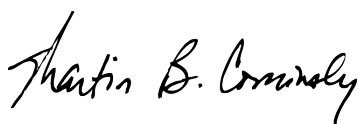
Since the arrival of the pandemic in Houston, we have hosted a weekly call for faith leaders with City, County and Texas Medical officials to share timely and accurate information about COVID-19. These officials know first-hand the suffering caused by the virus. Those who work in healthcare, first responders and faith leaders have been fighting to save lives, ease suffering, and console families.

Here at IM, I am surrounded by helpers- our dedicated staff and volunteers. When Winter Storm Uri hit, many of our own employees were impacted. Some had serious property damage and had to temporarily move out of their homes. Yet, they continued to call those we serve to check on them, to reach out to donors, and to carry on their work in very challenging conditions. Our own Board of Directors stepped up to establish an Emergency Assistance Fund for our own staff with their own donations. Our staff, in turn, were raising additional funds to provide emergency support for our seniors, refugees, and impacted houses of worship.

Houstonians step up in a crisis. As a native of this wonderful city, I have seen this time and time again. After hurricanes, floods, and now a pandemic and an ice storm, our neighbors' generosity knows no bounds. The Houston Harris County Winter Storm Relief Fund stepped up in a big way by granting \$75,000 for refugee emergency assistance.

Even faraway neighbors help, as we saw after Hurricane Harvey and again after this year's ice storm. One of the largest contributors to our winter storm relief effort was The Hearst Foundations. They reached out from their San Francisco office to make a \$500,000 gift.

Winter has passed for another season and the COVID-19 vaccines give us all hope that the worst of the pandemic may also be behind us. There will likely be new and unexpected "scary things" in our future, but I will continue to "look for the helpers." They are all around us.



Martin B. Cominsky
President & CEO



Martin B. Cominsky

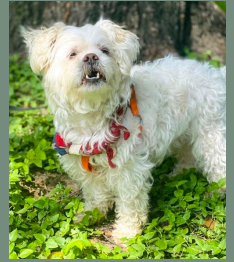
MEALS ON WHEELS & ANIMEALS

MEET MONROE, PEARL AND BUTTONS...

Monroe Woods was born on Galveston Island, but moved around a lot during his youth. His father, a Methodist minister, was often transferred around the state of Texas to serve different churches. Monroe moved to Houston as an adult and now lives in Fifth Ward.

At the age of 19, Monroe married his high school sweetheart and the couple enjoyed more than 50 years of marriage and raised four sons. His wife passed away a few years ago, and now Monroe lives alone. He is a devoted dad to his grown sons, and a proud pet parent to two rescue dogs- Shih Tzu Pearl and Pitbull Buttons.

Monroe was a hard-working man who started his career as an electrician at a Galveston shipyard, and eventually became a Pharmacy Technician working at area hospitals. When his sons were in high school and playing football, he volunteered on



the sidelines for two decades! He was affectionately known as “Coach” to the players, and still loves to watch football.

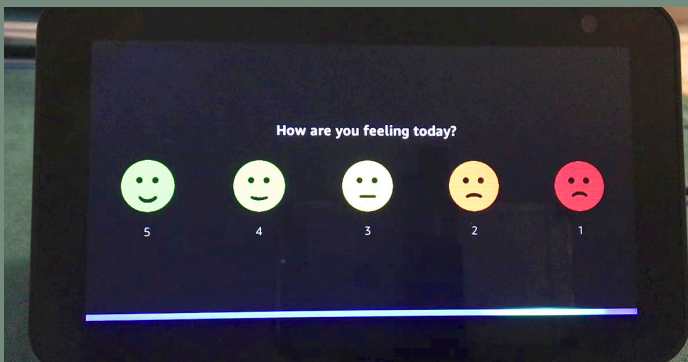
Meals on Wheels has been a great comfort to Monroe in his retirement, especially after his wife passed away. And Animeals ensures that Pearl and Buttons get the food and vet care they need, too. Monroe is very cautious during the COVID-19 pandemic and does all he can to stay safe.

We are honored to care for this loving family man in his golden years!

THANK YOU FOR HELPING TO STOCK THE SHELVES!

Thanks to community support, inspired by a generous challenge grant by an anonymous couple, our Stock the Shelves campaign raised over \$20,000 for Animeals! Proceeds from this annual appeal are vital to keeping our shelves stocked with pet food

throughout the difficult summer months. Animeals provides food and vet care for over 1,300 pets of our Meals on Wheels seniors, ensuring that our elderly neighbors can keep their beloved animal companions.



ALEXA, PLEASE CONNECT SENIORS TO CARE!

Our Meals on Wheels program is in the middle of an innovative study program – in partnership with The University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHSC) – called Connecting Seniors to Care. The project will collect and analyze data on the how the use of technology can improve the social determinants of health for our seniors. Measurements include both physical and mental health status by a UTHSC geriatrician and researcher.

The project is a formal scientific research study approved by a UTHSC internal review board. Our researcher and nurse (a study coordinator) are accepting new clients into the study to take measurements prior to receiving their first meals, as well as at intervals of six weeks where we introduce Alexa into their

homes. Seniors are shown simple ways to interact with Alexa, such as asking about the weather or requesting music. In the last phase of the study, a team of programmers have created a survey that Alexa conducts to interact with the seniors. In this survey, our study records the information, and the study team follows the results of the survey for analysis.

Connecting Seniors to Care lays the foundation for establishing improvements in seniors’ social determinants of health in order to find ways to address the problem of frailty, as well as expensive hospital re-admissions or emergency center visits in the geriatric population in Greater Houston, with an emphasis on low income, homebound seniors. Meal delivery combined with a daily check-in call from our staff and a regular wellness visit from a medical professional in the home will not only improve outcomes for the seniors but will also bring peace of mind to their caregivers/families. In the population we serve, many seniors have no close family members or caregivers in the same city. Often, our driver is the only regular visitor they receive.

At this stage of the pilot, Alexa devices have been programmed and are being installed in the homes of seniors. If this first study is successful, we see great potential in using Alexa to supplement social support for seniors. The study pilot was made possible thanks to a grant from the Administration for Community Living, which selected Interfaith Ministries as one of only nine grantees in the entire country.

FUNDING OUR MISSION – CELEBRATING OUR DONORS

JET SET PETS ARE READY FOR THE RUNWAY!

Please join us on Saturday, May 8 for a virtual Wags & Whiskers brunch benefiting Animeals. Your ticket will entitle you to a boarding pass for this video journey. Or reserve a row of passes for yourself and nine of your closest friends! Our theme this year is Jet Set Pets.

This interactive event will feature the always popular pet fashion show, filmed at the Heritage Hangar of Lone Star Flight Museum. Watch proud pet parents and their fur babies strut their stuff amidst vintage planes! We are all longing to travel once the pandemic has passed. In the meantime, indulge your wanderlust without leaving home... while supporting a very good cause!

Emcee Casey Curry will be our hostess. Event chair M.A. Shute and Public Relations Chair Kim Padgett invite you to reserve your seat or row today at <https://www.imgh.org/wwbrunch/>.



SAVE THE DATE- 2021 TAPESTRY GALA

Save the date this fall for our 2021 Tapestry Gala! This event is planned to be our first in-person gathering since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The Gala will take place on Wednesday, October 27 at the Hilton Americas- Houston.

Our honorees are Paula Sutton, Rev. Jim Bankston and Sysco. Chairs are Philamena Baird, Dr. Kathy Flanagan, Dr. Sushma and Devinder Mahajan, and Anuradha and Dr. Mani Subramanian.

This always enjoyable, inspiring event is IM's major fundraiser of the year. As the city emerges from the grip of the pandemic, plan to safely gather with friends to celebrate! This year's Gala promises to be a wonderful evening that supports a very fine cause.

For more information or to make reservations, visit <https://www.imgh.org/gala/>.



"Thanks to Meals on Wheels and loving neighbors, I knew she was getting balanced meals."

– Mary Godfrey

A GRATEFUL DAUGHTER GIVES BACK

Meals on Wheels means so much not only to the seniors we serve, but also to their grown children. Mary Godfrey is one of those grateful children, and we learned just how much the program meant to her when her mother passed away.

Amidst the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Godfrey lost her beloved mother Anne Pearl Watts, a long-time recipient of our Meals on Wheels



**HOUSTON
TOGETHER**
Be A Part of the Story

An annual celebration of volunteerism in the
Gulf Coast Region

HOUSTON TOGETHER

As part of National Volunteer Week in April, Volunteer Houston (VH) is participating in Houston Together – an annual celebration of volunteerism in the Gulf Coast region. Volunteers are the lifeblood of every community. They meet needs, bridge divides, build capacity, and share their talents. This celebration aims to recognize outstanding volunteers and increase awareness of service organizations that rely on volunteer service.

Volunteers connected with local nonprofits help meet the many needs of the Gulf Coast region. During the week of April 18, VH will co-host the virtual celebration and encourages those interested in finding new volunteer opportunities or simply making new friends to attend. The event promotes the kind of community connections that VH makes every day.

For more info, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/houston-together-registration-126960952627>.

VOLUNTEER HOUSTON STEPS UP AFTER WINTER STORM URI

In the wake of February's devastating winter storm, Volunteer Houston (VH) took on a leading role in our community's response. VH supported eighteen local nonprofits in promoting their own disaster response volunteer opportunities, which resulted in 400 volunteers responding!

VH was also asked to recruit, train and schedule virtual phone agent volunteers to staff the Crisis Cleanup hotline. This hotline was created for Southeast Texans to report immediate property damage needs. In turn, community organizations responded with teams of volunteers to repair broken pipes, muck and gut water damage, and move debris. To manage the hotline, VH recruited and trained 58 phone agents who staffed the hotline twelve hours per day from February 26 to March 19.

We are proud to lead in the area of disaster response and to help our neighbors in their time of need.

SERVICE PROJECTS 2 GO

Service Projects 2 Go are a perfect way for individuals and groups to give back to the community in a socially distanced way! Companies especially can meet their social responsibility goals while keeping employees safe. Each Service Project 2 Go consists of your chosen number of themed kits developed by Volunteer Houston in collaboration with our partner nonprofits. The completed kits will be given to those served by these agencies- children, families, the elderly, animals, the homeless, and other vulnerable populations.

Learn more by contacting **Gayla Wilson** at gwilson@imgh.org or visit www.volunteerhouston.org/sp2g.

program. Mrs. Watts was 95 years young, feisty, knew what she wanted and how to live life to the fullest. She had friends of all ages, all backgrounds, all ethnicities and was said to have never met a stranger. Meals on Wheels allowed Mrs. Watts to continue living in her home when she finally admitted she could no longer safely cook her meals. Living out of state, Ms. Godfrey was comforted knowing that when she could not be there, Meals on Wheels provided meals and more for her mother.

Ms. Godfrey mailed in a contribution that will allow more seniors like her beloved mother to "live their lives to the fullest" with balanced meals and wellness checks. We are humbled by the generous tribute of Ms. Godfrey to her loving mother and her commitment to helping us continue the legacy of the Meals on Wheels program for all our seniors.

REFUGEE SERVICES

IT'S A WRAP!

Albert Schweitzer Fellow Sukaina Mokzoumi is a pharmacy student at University of Houston. In addition to her studies, this caring young woman is spending her fellowship working with female refugees served through Interfaith Ministries. The project has been named WRAP – Women Refugees' Art Project and counts on the guidance from Dr. Narelle Sissons, Professor of Art & Humanities at Carnegie Mellon University who teaches fundamentals of painting.

Sukaina's project addresses mental health through art. It creates a space of self-expression, female empowerment, and mental health relief for adolescent refugee women who have faced traumatic experiences in addition to undergoing

major life changes as they adjust to a new life in Houston. The program uses acrylic painting and weekly journaling as a medium to help the young women express themselves and share thoughts within the small group. In addition, the program incorporates an educational element by bringing in female speakers from different professions and graduate programs to discuss their career paths.

Participants have created beautiful paintings, one of which recently sold at a showing! For more information, contact **Elena Korbut** at ekorbut@imgh.org.



REFUGEE YOUTH PAIRED WITH MENTORS

Thanks to a grant from The Hearst Foundations, we have started a Refugee Youth Mentorship Program (RYMP) in partnership with PAIR (Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees) and Momentum Education.

The RYMP program currently in its pilot phase, matches refugee teens (12-16) and young adults (17- 22) with mentors and provides educational workshops as well individualized case management. Mentorship has proven especially valuable to young refugees, who have often endured trauma and are now trying to acculturate to a new country and life. Teens receive academic support, while high school graduates receive job development. Currently, through the Levant

Foundation grant, RYMP is hosting 12 virtual workshops on Storytelling and photography that includes guest artists and collaborations with community partners like MFAH. The UW Out2Learn Barrier Busters grant provided the laptops that made it possible for the youth to participate in the workshops as well as cellphones (for photography).

The aim of the project is to help refugees do well in high school and beyond, so they are well equipped to pursue college or vocational training. Interfaith Ministries is proud that over 90% of the refugees we resettle are self-sufficient within six months of arrival. The RYM prepares the next generation for success!

INTERFAITH RELATIONS & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

ABRAHAM: OUT OF ONE, MANY



Interfaith Ministries is pleased to be the exclusive Texas host of the Abraham: Out of One, Many art exhibit. This unique display showcases visual representations of Abraham – a figure revered by the three faith traditions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The artwork will

be on display in a virtual setting starting April 20 through May 21.

We will host a variety of community programming during this time to complement the exhibit. The exhibit opens with a launch hosted by IM's women's initiative, IMpower, and features The Rev. Paul Gordon Chandler, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming and exhibit curator. The exhibit will close with IM's annual Gershenson Lecture, this year focused on world religions.

This timely exhibition, playing off the Latin motto "E pluribus unum" (Out of one, many) focuses on what can be learned from

Abraham's story about living together more harmoniously. Three celebrated Middle Eastern contemporary visual artists from the faith traditions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism have created five paintings that interpret Abraham's life and journey for us today, serving as a guide toward creating cultures of peace, harmony, justice and healing – all as descendants of a shared heritage. What can Abraham teach us today toward freeing our world from strife? This is the question this strategic exhibition attempts to answer.

Tickets and sponsorships are available at <https://www.imgh.org/events/abraham-out-of-one-many/>. Proceeds further Interfaith Ministries' mission of bringing together diverse groups for dialogue, collaboration and service as a demonstration of our shared beliefs. For more information, please contact **Brandi Ledet** at bledet@imgh.org or at **713-533-4925**.

IMPOWERED VOICES



Our women's initiative, IMpower, will host a virtual concert on Tuesday, June 8 from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. that will feature the voices of people representing Houston's rich tapestry of diverse backgrounds. The IMpowered Voices Unity Concert is an opportunity for artists to showcase their voices under the – focus of empowering self, the community, and the next generation. In addition to a diverse group of local artists, we will showcase Interfaith Ministries programs through brief vignettes of our work in each of our four core service areas – Refugee Services, Meals on Wheels/Animeals, Interfaith Relations & Community Partnerships, and Volunteer Houston.

Melanie Lawson is the emcee. The concert is our way of giving back to the community during the pandemic, to tell the IM story, and to share in an evening filled with uplifting music from an amazing group of local artists. Performers will include:

- **ROBYN TROUP** is an American singer who was the winner of the "My Grammy Moment" contest organized by NARAS and Yahoo! Music in 2007. She is the granddaughter of Rev. William A. Lawson.
- **AHI AJAYAN** is a high school senior who is classically trained in Indian music.
- **ARSHENOOR ANKLESHWARIA** is a classically trained singer and piano teacher.
- **DEE DEE DOCHEN & VICKI MERWIN** are two friends and vocalists who perform professionally with various groups in both public venues and at private events in addition to their careers in crisis management and financial planning, respectively.
- **INTERNATIONAL VOICES OF HOUSTON** is a multicultural choir in Houston that inspires, educates, and brings joy to its audiences through world music.

The concert will be open to the public free of charge on social media. We are seeking sponsors to help underwrite the costs of the event and to support IM's interfaith and community programming. For more info, contact **Brandi Ledet** at bledet@imgh.org.

KEEPING CONNECTED DURING COVID

Our IRCP team continues to host weekly Zoom calls with the Greater Houston Partnership that include officials from the City of Houston, Harris County, and the Texas Medical

Center. These calls provide faith leaders with timely, accurate information about COVID-19. The calls began over a year ago when the pandemic first appeared in Houston and will continue as long as needed. For information, contact **The Rev. Greg Han** at ghan@imgh.org.



SPRING 2021 MOSAIC

**INTERFAITH
MINISTRIES**
FOR GREATER HOUSTON

3303 Main Street
Houston, TX 77002
713.533.4900

Martin B. Cominsky
President & CEO
Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston



United Way of Greater Houston



HOUSTON
ENDOWMENT

DONATE ONLINE

MEALS ON WHEELS OR ANIMEALS:

[HTTPS://WWW.IMGH.ORG/DONATE/
MEALS/](https://www.imgh.org/donate/meals/)

REFUGEE SERVICES:

[HTTPS://WWW.IMGH.ORG/DONATE/
REFUGEES/](https://www.imgh.org/donate/refugees/)

INTERFAITH RELATIONS:

[IMGH.ORG/DONATE/INTERFAITH/](https://www.imgh.org/donate/interfaith/)

VOLUNTEER HOUSTON:

[HTTPS://WWW.IMGH.ORG/DONATE/
SUPPORT-VOLUNTEER-HOUSTON/](https://www.imgh.org/donate/support-volunteer-houston/)

*Thanks to our pro bono consulting partners who
are working with us on critical projects at no cost-
Chase Bank, Deloitte and PwC!*

2021 IM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Franklin J. Harberg,
Board Chair

Charlene Chuang,
Vice Chair

Randall Evans,
Vice Chair

Nizar Charania,
Treasurer

Dale Bodden,
Secretary

Shaukat Zakaria,
Past Board Chair

DIRECTORS

Saied Alavi

Swapnil Agarwal

Sanjay Ahuja

Dan Boggio

Rev. Mauricio Chacon

Jacques D'Rovencourt

Carlos Duarte

Marla Fielder

Dr. Kathy Flanagan

Henry Florsheim

Charles Foster

Dr. Vasant Garg

Rabbi Oren Hayon

Chris Hollins

Tyler Juergens

Brigitte Kalai

Rabbi David Lyon

Scott McMillian

Maureen Quirk

Aamir Shah

Dr. Kohur "Mani"

Subramanian

Paula Sutton

Dr. Shahin Tavackoli

Tamla Wilson