LYDIA'S HOUSE // SUMMER 2021 + 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

A Better Resurrection

BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

I have no wit, no words, no tears; My heart within me like a stone Is numb'd too much for hopes or fears; Look right, look left, I dwell alone; I lift mine eyes, but dimm'd with grief No everlasting hills I see; My life is in the falling leaf: O Jesus, quicken me.

My life is like a faded leaf,
My harvest dwindled to a husk:
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk;
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see:
Yet rise it shall—the sap of Spring;
O Jesus, rise in me.

My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold;
Cast in the fire the perish'd thing;
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him, my King:
O Jesus, drink of me.





SPRING/SUMMER 2021 HOUSE NOTES

By Mary Ellen Mitchell, Lydia's House co-director

As spring approached in 2021 we felt the most hopeful that we had in a year! Because Lydia's House was considered an essential service and congregate living facility, all our staff were vaccinated in the first round, as were our core volunteers. The day the Norwood Health Department came to offer vaccines at the office felt like Christmas morning for anxious adults. Thanks nurse **Donna Laake** for first class service. As a result of vaccinations, in early March we welcomed back house duty volunteers **Joan and Carol** and were so grateful for the help.

In late March we turned our attention to new endeavors in guest and former guest care. **Meridith and Amy Vennemeyer** prepared many tax returns and Laura began contacting all families to inform them of coming child tax credits as well as vaccine options. We offered transportation to vaccine sites and vaccine education. Meridith also helped several families get drivers licenses and cars with their tax returns—Thanks to our friends at **Highland Motors**, **Dave's Auto and Samaritan Car Clinic** for helping us with cars.







Spring also saw the birth of our first set of twins at the shelter and Catholic High School tours for our first aftercare kids heading into high school. Thanks so much to Cristo Rev and Purcell Marian for hosting us. Finally, we used this season to provide input to our national representatives the Housing Choice Voucher and possible



improvements as they launch new emergency housing assistance vouchers using Covid funding.

As Easter approached we taught the children in our Atrium religious education program about the Last Supper and the Empty Tomb; the message of death followed by new life seemed tangible in ways it hadn't

in years past. We hosted an outdoor Easter party and the guests brought potluck items. We had an egg hunt and the kids gathered for a silly group photo with baskets on heads. We were grateful for the help of Jill Stoxen, our donors at Thrivent Financial,













and many donors who contributed give away items. During April we also took full ownership our new building, 1801 Mills Avenue, and brought in volunteers to clear out the spaces in preparation for demolition and a remodel. We turned to capital campaign mode and raised funds for the renovation. We finished April with the announcement staff member Laura's engagement to Brendan and we hosted a festive outdoor party and blessing for the couple. We look forward to their August wedding!





In May we began planning in earnest for major changes at our shelter. We hired our first nonprofit leadership fellow, **Ebony Pratt and a summer intern**, **Samantha Mossing**. We held our Annual Mother's Day celebration combined with an end of Atrium Pentecost celebration. Come Holy Spirit, we prayed, fill our souls with new life! We cleaned our offices, created new work and living spaces for staff, ran several work days and cleaned up our yards and playscape. Our trusted maintenance volunteers, **Dennis and Georgia Bishop**, **Xavier Eigel Fellows: Jaime and Annabella**, **The Vineyard Central youth**

group, Christ the Savior Orthodox Church youth group, and The Nobbe family all helped with these tasks. With the support of Greater Cincinnati Foundation, we had a major sewer repair completed at the shelter, and were closed for a week. This gave us an opportunity to formally end pandemic suites and return to a more normal shelter environment. During the week closure, Mary Ellen took a silent retreat, for prayer and reflection on the difficult year that just passed. What seeds fell to the ground and died over the past year, and what new life might be growing?



Into June we welcomed new shelter guests, a new nest of baby birds on our front porch, and lots of new flowers in our backyard garden. We turned our attention to rebuilding our meal volunteer docket (Thanks Lou, Anne, Amy, Kathy, Alison, Marcia and many others for volunteering), training Ebony to coordinate volunteers and donations, and getting our guests on housing lists. We found a new partner for optical services and got new glasses for several guests in our shelter and aftercare program. We hosted two children's birthday parties complete with a "Blueie" cake and "Cocomelon" cake (thanks Anne). We also bought many zoo memberships for former quests and paid for aftercare kids birthday parties through our child enrichment program. We enrolled kids in camp and summer programs, and took a crew to Procter Episcopal Family Camp in early July.



¹ Guests were offered, but most declined citing vaccine fears; by late spring approximately 50% of our guests were choosing to be vaccinated in shelter.



THE HIDDEN SIDE OF VOLUNTEERING

By Joan Meyer, weekly house duty volunteer

I began volunteering at Lydia's House through the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC). How wonderful, I thought! A chance to give back in thanks for all the blessings I have received. Well, like so many times when reality does not exactly align with our expectations, this has turned out to be yet another blessing for me! I am the one who has so greatly benefited from this experience.

Lydia's House was the best option for my volunteer work through the IVC because I work full-time and Lydia's House, unlike the other places, had evening opportunities. This was a blessing not even disguised, as often in the evenings, the residents and children are home. There is a communal dinner, announced by the ringing of a large brass bell. When there are older children in the house, their enthusiasm for ringing the bell is only exceeded by the decibel level sounded throughout the house.

What I have received from volunteering at Lydia's House is the privilege of meeting amazing women. Let me start with the residents. These women have had experiences growing up that are so different from mine: bouncing through foster care homes, a parent in prison, endless moves, no home at all—the stories may differ but the constant is these women are amazing, survivors, and have not given up trying to make a better life for themselves and their children. It has been humbling to meet women who have faced such adversity, pushed right through it

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou 1928 - 2014

and have gone back to school, gotten housing, saved for a car. I think the most telling example of the generosity of spirit I have seen in some of the former residents is when one former resident hurt her foot, could not get around and was struggling to care for her 4 children. A sign-up sheet was posted online to bring dinner to the family and former residents of Lydia's House were right there,



signing up. It is like the bible story when the widow gives her few coins to the church, but this means more to God than all the money tithed by the rich men. These women are giving back in great measure.

But it does not stop there. A great reason for their success is the wonderful staff at Lydia's House. This is not a job for them, it is a commitment, a real life example of what it means to "Walk The Talk." These amazing women did not go into this for the fame, glory and especially not the money. They work so hard, any hour of the day or night needed, to help the women who have come to them. They support each other. They have an extensive network to align what the Lydia's House residents need with the right network or agency. They are selfless, they are committed, they are heroines in a time where we greatly need these role models.

And I could not end this without mentioning the children. They are darling! The best part of evening house duty is getting to play with them. They are curious, fun, bright, and have taught me many new games...and how to cheat at cards. And it is a testament to the Lydia's House Family that I still get to see former residents and their children at the many social events that occur throughout the year.

So if you needed a reason to consider supporting and volunteering at Lydia's House, I can confirm, you will get out of it more than they will and it is a true path to get closer to God.

If you're interested in volunteering, email ebony@stlydiashouse.org.

AN INTRODUCTION TO EBONY PRATT: OUR NEW NON PROFIT LEADERSHIP FELLOW

I am a native of North Carolina, and spent majority of my life in the Winston-Salem/Triad area. I believe that obligation can turn into doing something out of love. Growing up, I helped my mother take care of my younger brother who has autism and Tourette's Syndrome. What I did out of "obligation," turned into my desire to volunteer and support organizations that work with autism and special needs at a young age. Over time, it became more of an act of love and service versus a "duty." Since the fifth grade, I have volunteered with various organizations at school and in the community that aligned closely with my interests.

When I went to UNC Greensboro for undergrad, I continued to volunteer on campus and serve in the local Greensboro community. I participated in service trips including food insecurity, domestic violence prevention, veteran housing, and HIV/AIDS awareness. At UNCG, I was able to really begin thriving in community service and volunteerism. This has helped me to become a better volunteer and leader in the community today.

Before going to grad school, I worked in the nonprofit field for five years. First, at a not-for-profit financial institution, and then in community engagement and volunteer management at two well-known non-profit organizations in the Triad community. My goal right now is to work for a nonprofit organization, gaining as much knowledge, experience, and

training as possible, so that I can open my own nonprofit organization in the future; this has led me to Lydia's House. I am so excited about the opportunity to live and work at Lydia's House and to receive one-on-one mentorship from co-director, Mary Ellen.

My ultimate desire is that within the next 10 years, I will have my own foundation or non-profit organization which will encompass some of my many passions: mental health/Christian counseling, education, mentorship, homelessness, food insecurity, sex education, ministry, special needs, and trauma; essentially, a one-stop shop for residents in the community, specifically for Black people.



HELP US FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

In the enclosed envelope you'll find an opportunity to support Lydia's House. Funds raised this season will specifically go to support our new Dorothy Day Fellowship Program. Fellows not only provide needed services to Lydia's House families but are trained in the Lydia's House charism of faith centered personalism. Lydia's House also provides fellows with a grant to continue their education at nearby Xavier University or pay back existing student loans. Our hope is that those who complete our fellowship program will go on to make a difference in organizations and communities nationwide.

We're also still hiring for our fellowship program. If you're interested in our maternal care or early childhood position please reach out to maryellen@ stlydiashouse.org



TAX PREPARATION AS A WAY TO SHARE THE WEALTH

By Meridith Owensby, Lydia's House co-director

In my mid-twenties, I had a vague sense that there were certain skills I needed to learn to fully realize adulthood. One of those skills was how to prepare my taxes. As a college student I'd paid hundreds of dollars for H&R Block to tell me how much I owed to the IRS for my scholarships, and I felt certain I could do the calculations myself if someone taught me the basics.

It was on a spring day in DC that I saw the flyer advertising volunteer income tax assistance. I went to the tax clinic and had my return for the year prepared by a kindly IRS retiree, who explained each step as she did it. I asked how she had become a volunteer, and she told me about the free training offered every winter for interested parties.

The next year, I signed up for the training. I learned the difference between a deduction and a credit. I understood where withholding was listed on a W-2. The training required many hours, but after I passed the certification exam I knew I was ready to tackle simple returns for myself and others.

Over the next decade, I volunteered with the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) Program whenever I could manage. I enjoyed the comradery of the other nerdy folks who chose to prepare taxes in their spare time. I appreciated the vulnerability of the strangers who shared the financial story of their past year with me, and keeping them from paying large chunks of their anticipated refunds to for-profit tax preparers was a great feeling.

This past tax spring, with the pandemic still in full swing, we knew that tax preparation would be a need for our guests and former guests. The CARES Act added unprecedented options for parents claiming the EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit), so volunteer Amy Vennemeyer and I decided to team up to get trained on the new developments. We encouraged one another through the many hours of online training, and by mid-January we were both certified and ready to go.

Using both our training and online software options available to us, we managed to prepare 14 returns this season, insuring our guests and former guests received refunds upwards of \$60,000 (total for the group). Some plan to use that money to return to school, others to purchase more reliable vehicles, and still others to catch

up on back debts. One participant told me, "I want to learn to do this myself next year."

By filing tax returns, we have also insured there is a clear way for the additional child tax credits to come to these parents starting in July. The \$250 or \$300 per child monthly payments will be administered based on the payment methods and banking information from the 2020 income tax returns, so even if families didn't technically need to file, we made sure they did. In this manner we were able to clarify who was claiming whom and what their direct deposit account numbers were. We are hopeful these payments will go more smoothly because of the front-end efforts.

I can say, helping with taxes is one of the most concrete, positive financial programs we have ever offered. If you are detail-oriented and think you'd enjoy saving low income families hundreds of dollars, I encourage you to seek out a VITA opportunity near you, either with us or in your community. Signups begin in late 2021 for the 2022 tax season, and I promise they can use your help!





NEW PROJECT UPDATES

In late 2020 Lydia's House purchased 1801 Mills Avenue, across the street from Virginia Coffey Place. While we initially hoped to expand our preschool partnership to add an early childhood program in this space, Azalea decided they aren't ready for this expansion... so, after many iterations with our architect we've landed on a renovation that will turn it into 4 apartments: a 1 bedroom, Two 2 bedrooms, and a 3 bedroom. We hope to have one apartment for a building manager for all of our apartments, and use the other units to expand our affordable housing portfolio.

In the spring of 2021 Lydia's House volunteer crew began demo of the current interior. We're currently completing construction documents and taking bids for work. Construction is slowed due to supply chain interruptions and lumber costs but we hope to complete this by year end 2021.

Thanks to all who have given!

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Women for Women donors 2020 Dan and Kathy Aerni

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In June of 2021 Lydia's House

acquired the empty lot next door to our shelter. Per our strategic plan, we'd like to put on a dining room addition, create new staff suites for staff to live in and support the shelter and use the old staff housing as an expansion for our current shelter space. Stay tuned! If you're interested in funding this project, please email Maryellen@ stlydiashouse.org

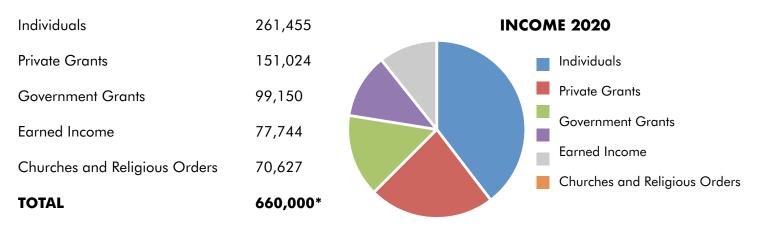






2020 ANNUAL REPORT

INCOME 2020



^{*}Additional funds raised in 2020 above operating costs were used for new projects and post as an asset rather than an expense.

EXPENSE 2020

Stabilization 41,612

(Includes utilities, food, bus passes, insurance, personal care spending.)

Support 157,813

(includes expenses related to guest support personnel)

Community 69,530

(includes worship, outings, support for other ministries, newsletter, aftercare)

Admin and Fundraising 68,443

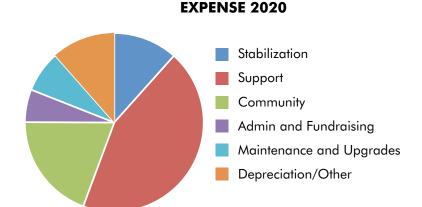
(includes office expenses and supplies, software and hardware, accounting professional expenses, admin professional expenses)

Maintenance and Upgrades 26,961

(Includes yards, furniture, building maintenance and maintenance staffing)

Depreciation/Other 41,191

TOTAL 358,300*



2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS







- Applying for and receiving a competitive county "CARES" grant to distribute funds for rental assistance, shelter adaptations, and home/virtual school support during the pandemic
- Working with Affordable
 Housing advocates and
 Hamilton County Community
 development to communicate
 the needs of poor families and
 help shape assistance programs
 for those impacted by the
 pandemic
- Retrofitting our shelter for temporary social distancing
- Partnering with Azalea
 Montessori to expand their
 space and student capacity
 for the fall of 2020, supporting
 them to offer full time in person
 instruction
- Completing our solar panel installation on 2005 Mills Ave and 4502 Carter Ave

- Improving our car training module and assisting families with understanding "car pitfalls" as well as offering zero interest loans to eligible applicants in our aftercare program to purchase a car
- Purchasing 1801 Mills Avenue to add 4 additional rental units to our property portfolio of affordable housing
- Receiving a county grant for Affordable Housing Capacity Building and partnering with Over the Rhine Community Housing to increase our scope and knowledge of affordable housing
- Continuing our partnership with Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority to utilize designated Housing Choice Vouchers to stabilize families who successfully complete their stay at Lydia's House; distributing eight vouchers to homeless families

- Creating the fellowship program to allow women of faith to join our community as two year fellows in the areas of non-profit management, maternal care, early childhood education or community ministry
- Sending two staff people through doula training
- Implementing a preschool religious education program using the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd curriculum; training two staff people and a volunteer as catechists
- Hosting the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company for "Bard in the Yard" at 2024 Mills
- Completing our nature play space and opening it to Azalea Montessori and Lydia's House families
- Hosting our first virtual Women For Women event, raising over \$50,000



- Implementing an "aftercare newsletter" and monthly family fun nights for current and former guest families
- Implementing a get out the vote drive, turning out 17 guests and former guests to vote in the fall 2020 election
- Partnering with Upspring for an on-site tutoring and child enrichment program at the shelter
- Presenting at the Beyond Housing national conference on the topic "Using Occupational Therapy in a Shelter Environment"
- Partnering with University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Occupational Therapy to develop the "Future Forward" program, encouraging tenants of Virginia Coffey Place to develop long term goals
- including home ownership, credit improvement and financial management
- Completing a five year strategic plan
- Updating our personnel and accounting policies
- Formalizing our sabbatical policy, with Meridith being our first sabbatical taker (February – April 2020)



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Lydia's House 2020 Outcomes

119 Individuals Served

Emergency Shelter at Lydia's House



19 Families were provided Emergency Shelter for stays between 14 - 30 days

84% Continued into Transitional Housing or Directly into Safe Stable Housing

Each Family Received:

- On-Site Staff Support
- 24/7 Shelter Access
- Private Rooms/Suites
- Case Management Services, including Applying to Housing and Benefits Navigation



Women Served:

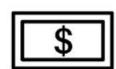
- Average Age = 25 Years
- Average ACE* Score = 5.3
- 53% Experienced Domestic Violence in the Past Year
- 53% Spent time in Foster Care as Children
- 47% Had a Mental Health Diagnosis
- 80% African American, 10% Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, 5% Biracial
- Shelter guests named an average of 1.3 people in their social support network **

Transitional Housing Program at Lydia's House



13 Families Continued onto Lydia's House On-Site Transitional Housing Program

Transitional housing is offered for those that stay in shelter longer than 30 days



67% Obtained and/or Maintained Employment



50%
Paid Back
Housing
Related Debt,
Including Utility
Debt/Evictions



67%
Obtained
Government
Benefits or
Needed Legal
Documents



92% Received Needed Mental Health or Medical Care



70% Cited Improvements in Coping Skills

"I have kinder self-talk and don't self-harm... I've learned there are people are out there who are willing to help...I've learned to get my mind organized... I've learned to be patient..."





60% Cited Improvements in Interpersonal Skills

"I've learned to interact more with others... I'm not alone, I have support!... I've learned to recognize the signs of abuse... I've learned women can be good friends... I'm more open to relationships."





On individual goals related to daily occupations, such as money management or parenting. Individuals had a 2.7/10 point increase in occupational performance and 2.9/10 point increase in occupational satisfaction as measured by the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure. (A 2 point change is clinically significant.)

Average Total Length of Stay: 74 Days

85% Moved into Permanent, Stable Housing





2 Women Supported in Pregnancy

25% Enrolled in a Education Program

80% Cited Improvements in Life Skills

"I got organized and keep a planner....I've learned how to budget and save more money...I have a bank account again... I am capable when I am given a chance."

30% Cited Improvements in Parenting

"I've learned strategies to be more patient with my child... My son has improved eating habits... I've learned discipline strategies."

Lydia's House Aftercare Program 41 Families Served

- 3 large social events and 2 drive through distributions serving 31 families
- Weekly child enrichment invitations, including autoring, religious education, and family funnights
- 17 individuals supported to vote, many for the first time
- 20 families received case management support
- 24 families received occupational therapy support
- 6 families supported with medical needs, including pregnancy

\$44,710 Spent on Aftercare Families

- \$18,000 Paid on rent, utilities, and other bills to maintain housing
- \$9,600 Spent on child enrichment, including outings, homeschool materials
- \$5,800 Provided in food to promote food security
- 2 individuals participated in car program to have affordable, reliable transportation with a 0% interest Lydia's House loan

Virginia Coffey Place Permanent Supportive Housing



14 Families Housed, including 23 kids

- \$20,350 Provided in Financial Grants while Awaiting Section 8
- 250 Hours Provided of Resident Support Services
- Tenants named an average of 2.4 people in social support network**

Expanding Local Affordable Housing

- 2 Apartments in Landlord Partnership Program
- 1801 Mills Avenue Purchased, including 2 apartments, to open early 2022

*ACE = Adverse Childhood Events, A tool used to assess traumatic events individuals experienced during childhood, higher scores correlated with negative health outcomes, Score 0-10

** As measured by the Sarason Social Support Questionnaire - Short Form

LIBERATION BY CALCULATION: THE STORY OF THE EGYPTIAN MIDWIVES

By Mary Ellen Mitchell, Lydia's House co-director

Mary Ellen offered the following reflection for one of our virtual Women for Women prayer services, Fall 2020

Exodus 1: 15-21

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt spoke to Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives who helped the Hebrew women. ¹⁶ "When you help the Hebrew women give birth," he said to them, "kill the baby if it is a boy; but if it is a girl, let it live." ¹⁷ But the midwives were God-fearing and so did not obey the king; instead, they let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king sent for the midwives and asked them, "Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the boys live?"

¹⁹ They answered, "The Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they give birth easily, and their babies are born before either of us gets there." ²⁰⁻²¹ Because the midwives were God-fearing, God was good to them and gave them families of their own. And the Israelites continued to increase and become strong.



We begin this Women for Women 2020 season of distanced prayer gatherings with a story from Exodus: Shiphrah and Puah, the subversive midwives, disobeying Pharaoh to save the Hebrew baby boys. There's so much in this short text: resistance, civil disobedience, feminine guile. The scene set is hella bleak, bleaker than even our deepest despair in 2020: The Israelites, enslaved but growing as a people group, threaten the power of the Egyptians. Out of fear of uprising, Pharaoh demands that the midwives begin secretly killing Israelite babies as they emerge from their mother's wombs. The midwives, in an act of conscience and out of reverence for God, lie to Pharaoh and proclaim that the physical strength of the Israelite women allows them to birth quickly, even before the midwives arrive. What's a slow midwife to do, they ask?

In less than a month we face a presidential election that I imagine brings fear to many of us, in the midst of a pandemic that feels like a biblical plague. Perhaps our own context of despair can, in some way, parallel that of the midwives. Perhaps our social position too, as mothers, helpers, nurses, doctors, social workers, also comes close to Shiphrah and Puah. We do not sit in high seats of power but we can influence those in our homes and work, albeit creatively. We might relate to Shiphrah and Puah, who themselves were Egyptians and thus privileged, but whose vocational call was to support marginalized women to birth healthy babies. In our own context we may wonder, what are we to do to

resist? Perhaps we fear for the less privileged around us, faced with deeper and darker threats than our own families have ever imagined. The forces that imprison, deport, make homeless, deny education, and even deny life are faceless, and these powers and principalities are difficult to confront. Like the midwives, we believe in a God of the universe, and approach God with both love and fear. We choose to side with God over the powers of this world. We believe that, given a chance to save the societal equivalent of a Hebrew baby boy today, we would. But how?

There are many ways of resistance or confronting the powers of this world. At one point, later in Exodus, Moses confronts an Egyptian abuser by murdering him. Rage and violence is an option. When money changers take over the temple, Jesus angrily turns over their tables. Direct confrontation and property destruction is an option. John the Baptist preaches out loud and proud, calling for those who are sinners to change their ways. Jesus calls Zacchaeus, a dishonest tax collector, to account and repentance. Prophetic words and attempts at verbal persuasion are an option. When confronted with intolerable injustice there are many paths we might follow.

Over the last years, Lydia's House has become more directly responsive to injustice in our midst. We've come to know those in elected places of power, begun inviting them into relationship with us, and made direct

asks on behalf of poor families for financial assistance, housing vouchers, changes in laws around food and childcare assistance. We've also made our fair share of protest signs, angry phone calls, post card campaigns, and banners and shown up at rallies to resist the killing of unarmed black people. Most recently our staff and my family attended protests and gatherings to demand the closing of the gun range that terrorizes Lincoln Heights residents. Catholic Workers are no strangers to making requests of those in power, civil disobedience and protest—to greater and lesser degrees of success.

What strikes me most about the particular methodology of Shiphrah and Puah is how simple and effective it is. By leaning into Pharaoh's own assumptions about the strength of Hebrew women, they trick him and save the babies. They do this at great risk to themselves, because "they fear God." As women in a patriarchal society, they seemingly have no options but obedience, and yet they use their understanding of power to outwit pharaoh, for the good of the innocent. Their resistance is both significant and cunning; for their faithfulness they are rewarded.

This year we pair biblical women of faith and courage with modern women of faith and courage, and Shiphrah and Puah are paired with Eleanor Roosevelt and Pauli Murray, in whose likeness they are portrayed on our prayer card. Roosevelt, the first lady and Murray, a brilliant civil rights lawyer and advisor to MLK Jr, paired up to outwit a number of institutions and policies that made life harder for Black Americans in the 1960s. Both Episcopalians, they found common ground in their faith and belief in human dignity, especially during the civil rights movement. Working together, they used their wit and wisdom to achieve goals, often outside of the limelight, to the good of those who had little or no voice. By each playing a role, they advanced the cause of Marian Anderson and all Black performers to have a public stage. And by pressing hard on their respective spheres of influence, they fought hard to save the life Odell Waller, a black sharecropper sentenced to death by an all white jury. Impassioned by what was right, but empowered by intellect and connections, these women together left a mark on the civil rights movement that few know about.

The temptation of this stressful time in our own world might be to be the loudest voice at a protest, the smuggest responder in a debate, or she that has the best and most thoughtful yard sign... and that work can be important in standing up to the wrongs around us. But the lesson of Shiphrah and Puah and Eleanor and Pauli is that women have many tools in our advocacy and action toolbox. If our goal is to literally save the lives of those facing death by an oppressive government, we must carefully consider how we might use our place at any given table, our professions and our spheres of influence to outwit pharaoh. Who do we know that we might call upon, as Eleanor and Pauli did? Where can we enter that might give direct access to save the lives of vulnerable people, as the midwives did? How might we use our sphere of influence to elevate the voice or cause of the voiceless? Our goal in this liberation journey is not to be safe, impress people, or come out with earthly power; it is to be effective in advancing the kin-dom of God and the beloved community.

By looking to these calculating midwives we see that they effectively did the work of God. It's likely their resistance to Pharaoh led to the Hebrew baby boy Moses being born alive, leading many years later to the liberation of the Israelites. Our piece of the current liberation puzzle is vital. In the weeks to come, who or what might we help birth to foment God's kin-dom vision for the here and now?

Let us end in prayer:

We give you thanks and praise, O God of compassion, for the heroic witness of Shiphrah and Puah, who withstood the power of death in their service of new life: Inspire in us a like love and commitment in the face of oppression, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.





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Sunday, September 26, 2021 from 5-8pm

1801 Mills Avenue and surrounding buildings, Norwood

Join us for a revamped Women for Women event showcasing the many projects that Lydia's House has underway. Tour our newest building, stop in to our playscape and peek at the preschool.

Enjoy dinner, drinks, live music, stories and good company.

A limited mobility option will be available for those who are not able to tour on foot.

We hope you'll come and invite others. There's no cost for the event but donations will be accepted.

RSVP: Ebony@stlydiashouse.org