

Long-lasting change in a community is more likely with partners who work together successfully over time. But how do Episcopal churches and community partners make those strong, lasting connections?

Make the Partnership Core to Your Mission

Parishes that make outreach central to their identity are well positioned for lasting community partnerships—and investment.

For example, St. Elizabeth’s Episcopal Church in Dahlonega consistently developed its long partnership with [Community Helping Place](#) (CHP) around the parish’s Jesus-centered mission. Through CHP, St. Elizabeth’s members constantly volunteer and give to those in need [like their namesake, St. Elizabeth of Hungary](#). Their small parish shows up more often and in larger numbers than many of the 20 congregations supporting CHP.

Though CHP is not a religious organization, its work mirrors an Episcopalian ethos by recognizing the inherent value of every person. “The folks at St Elizabeth get that,” CHP executive director Melissa Land said. “It’s like, ‘That’s what Christ calls us to do, and God compels us to do, so we should do it.’”

Their rector, the Rev. John Hamilton, said it only makes sense for his church of 90 members to “be yoked to” a trusted, accessible partner for fulfilling Jesus’ commands to love one another.

“A close working relationship signals that an ECF grant has a great chance to create even greater impact over the long run,” said ECF Executive Director Lindsey Hardegree. St. Elizabeth’s and CHP received a [2020 ECF capital grant of \\$15,800](#) to purchase and outfit a new mobile medical clinic and [2025 ECF grant for \\$23,000](#) for improvements to equipment and housing for CHP’s food pantry and thrift store.

ECF grants aim to encourage spiritual growth for Episcopalians through community service. A long-term community partnership offers continued opportunities for growth like that.

“Don’t make this an extra,” Hamilton said of community partnership for outreach. “Make it core to what you do.”

Unite in a Bold Shared Vision that Challenges Silos

Successful long-term collaborations can grow out of a bold shared vision that neither partner could achieve alone. Openness to growth helps too.

[St. Thomas Episcopal Church](#) in Columbus and [Chattahoochee Valley Episcopal Ministries](#) (CVEM) began working together in 1980 around the vision of [Beloved Community](#), to advance racial and cultural equity, further economic security for all, and provide for those who suffer. Over time, they came to realize that this vision necessitated reliance on one another because the church cannot do this work alone. Their consistent positive impact for neighbors in need attracted funding.

In successful lasting community partnerships like this one, ECF recognized a solid opportunity to fulfill its mission of investing in significant, long-lasting change for people facing poverty and oppression. St. Thomas and CVEM successfully proposed a specific means of expanding their Beloved Community vision: a [2024 ECF capital grant of \\$20,500](#) to purchase a van to transport program participants to direct CVEM services from CVEM caseworkers, and children to participate in an interfaith arts program.

Staying open to growth, the partnership saw new opportunities. As the van got rolling, the partnership became aware of—and began to solve—convocation transportation needs “that we did not originally foresee,” said Rev. Grace Burton-Edwards, rector at St. Thomas. She advises asking: “What is one dream we share that we can’t imagine achieving on our own?”

CVEM Executive Director Malinda Shamburger added, “This partnership predates both of us, but I feel the thing that keeps it going is St. Thomas’ call to outreach and their understanding that the church cannot do this work in a silo.”

[Learn more about ECF grants](#) and contact [Executive Director Dr. Lindsey Hardegree](#) to explore how your parish might partner with your local community.



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This entry is part 1 of 1 in the series [Tips for Community Partnerships](#)

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