

St. Luke's Episcopal Church (Scranton) to receive UTO Grant to respond to the Worldwide Incarceration Crisis

Cypress House Bakery at St. Luke's was recently awarded a \$50,000 grant from the United Thank Offering (UTO), a ministry of The Episcopal Church. The 2023 UTO grant focused on "innovative mission and ministry projects addressing all aspects regarding the worldwide incarceration crisis," including post-prison re-entry programs. The Rev'd Rebecca A. Barnes, Rector of St. Luke's in the Diocese of Bethlehem and Cypress House's CEO and President, has announced that the winning grant from the United Thank Offering will be used to develop a curriculum that teaches and reinforces marketable skills in the baking industry to previously incarcerated men and women.



Cypress House at St. Luke's

Those reentering the community face extreme biases and are largely shut out of the labor market. St. Luke's is committed to creating an important shift away from how society treats the previously incarcerated and will utilize space in their parish house to open Cypress House Bakery (CHB) to offer employment to those reentering their communities after release from prison.



Scranton is located in Lackawanna County which has one of the highest incarceration rates not only in the state of Pennsylvania but in the northeastern United States. Also prevalent is the alarming scale of racial and ethnic disparity of prisoners. Mass incarceration is one of the most egregious examples of racial discrimination in our country. Racially or ethnically identified individuals are jailed at more than twelve times the rate of white people. CHB will offer employment, vocational training,

educational opportunities, and a number of social services, with a special concern to hire individuals who identify as Black, Latino/a, Indigenous, or of another marginalized identity. It is hoped that Cypress House will serve as a catalyst for change in northeastern Pennsylvania, addressing the racial and social injustices to which we bear witness.



There is a significant need for reentry programs in the labor market. In 2022, there were less than one hundred supportive employment opportunities in Lackawanna county for individuals newly released from imprisonment. Statistics show that while the national unemployment rate in 2021 was less than 6%, that rate jumped to 27% for those previously incarcerated. Each year more than 650,000 people are released from prison and studies show that nearly two-thirds of them are likely be rearrested within three years.

Studies also show that those recently released with jobs are less likely to commit crimes. Cypress House Bakery (CHB) seeks to address the unemployment disparity and to decrease the recidivism rate in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The decision to open a bakery is bolstered by recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicating that employment opportunities for bakers are projected to grow by 8% from 2021 to 2031, surpassing the average growth rate for all occupations.

CHB will strive each day to be what is hoped the world will become—a community where people can heal and gain skills so they can be transformed and live a life infused with hope and dignity. The United Thank Offering Board reviewed forty-nine grant applications this year. Cypress House Bakery at St. Luke's is grateful that the UTO board has affirmed the mission and vision of the Cypress House ministry with the grant award of \$50,000. The UTO grant moves CHB one step closer to impacting the lives of those victimized by societal bias post-incarceration in our community with a return to life on the outside.

"The worldwide incarceration crisis affects us all, whether or not we know someone directly affected by incarceration. Jesus's words in Matthew 25 and the Way of Love encourage us to work for justice in the world and to respect the dignity of every human being, including prisoners and their families. The grants UTO funded this year will create that ministry in new places around the world. UTO would love to be able to fund every grant application we receive, so please spread the practice of gratitude in your parish and community, continue to be grateful for the blessings in your life, and make your thank offerings to UTO," shared Sherri Dietrich, UTO Board President.

The announcement of the UTO grant award comes on the heels of significant progress. Cypress House has contracted with a historic preservation architect to begin the design and reconstruction of St. Luke's kitchen so that it can be used both as a classroom and a functioning bakery. In addition,

members of the board have met with a culinary consultant who will lend his expertise to the board as to the best industry appliance and equipment choices to create a hands-on learning environment.

United Thank Offering Funding

Every penny given to the United Thank Offering is given away the following year to support innovative missions and ministries in the Episcopal Church. Through the gratitude and generosity of those who contributed through Blue Box donations, UTO awarded over one million dollars in grants to address the global incarceration crisis.

To learn more about the UTO, visit [United Thank Offering – The Episcopal Church](#). For more information on Cypress House Bakery and to follow its progress, [visit Cypress House at St. Luke's](#).