

INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH of Birmingham, Alabama

EARTH CARE TEAM 2023 RECERTIFICATION NARRATIVE REPORT

February 15, 2024

Education

Children

- Caring for God's gifts was part of Catechesis training for younger children
 1. 3-6 year olds cared for a plant in the Atrium, where they meet on Sundays, and help with arranging flowers.
 2. Elementary school children discussed all of God's gifts in nature and how to respond to these gifts.
 3. Plant parables were taught and wheat was grown in the Atrium as an allegory to the mystery of life and death. The children learned about the life cycle of the wheat plant.
- Elementary school children had a February retreat at the Children's Fresh Air Farm.

Youth

- During Fall 2023, IPC Youth Group focused on caring for Creation during Sunday night meetings.
- In September, IPC Youth participated in a service day at Living River Conference Center where they worked on trail maintenance.
- In January, thirty-four IPC youth attended a retreat in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee which included hiking and learning about what it means to be in Christian Community.
- The 9th and 10th grade Confirmation Class participated in a late August retreat at the Children's Fresh Air Farm.
- In October, IPC Youth had a retreat at Living River Conference Center.
- Youth and Middle School students attended conferences in Montreat, N.C.

Other

- The IPC Hiking Group welcomed new members and continued with monthly hikes to various parks and trails in middle and north Alabama. There were also two additional visits to North Carolina for hiking around the Great Smoky National Park.
- The IPC Earth Care team shared monthly Eco-Tips with the congregation via e-Newsletter.
- IPC organized many activities to celebrate the Children's Fresh Air Farm Centennial which culminated in a weekend of events at the farm on October 28-29. CFAF is owned and operated by IPC and is the site of our Summer Learning Program for underserved

Birmingham area children. This program is designed to close the gap on learning loss (reading and math) in a beautiful, safe outdoor environment along with air-conditioned classrooms, open air gym and pavilion, swimming pool, and hiking trails.

1. Campers in 2023 were able to enjoy the newly renovated garden space and continue to learn gardening of native plants and flowers.
2. The Clinton Taylor Aquatic Center, named after the son of George and Honey Taylor, was built in 2023 for campers to have the opportunity to learn to swim, water safety, and to cool off in the summer heat.

Outreach

- IPC volunteers welcomed runners with a water/powerade station during the 2023 Mercedes Marathon on February 12.
- A Free e-Recycling and document shredding Event was held on March 7 from 12-5 in the church parking lot. This event was open to IPC church members, IPC Day School families and the Highland Park neighborhood. The church partnered with Protec Recycling to provide secure shredding of financial and personal papers and responsible recycling and/or securely destroying end-of-life electronics including laptops, TVs, and cell phones. 1,300 pounds of paper was recycled, and 856 pounds of electronics were responsibly recycled.
- On March 11, IPC volunteers helped with The Living River Workday for clean-up, gardening and trail maintenance. The Living River, owned by the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, is a camp and conference center near the Cahaba River.
- IPC's Bread for the World hosted two opportunities in May for church members to write letters encouraging building healthy, equitable and sustainable food system via the Farm Bill.
- On June 24, a group of IPC volunteers travelled to Wilcox County in the Black Belt of Alabama for a day of worship, learning, service and fellowship with residents of that county. The people of Wilcox County have struggled with access to clean drinking water. There is currently a \$13 million dollar federal grant renovation to improve water and sanitation in that area of the state.
- During the summer of 2023, IPC gleaners, in partnership with the Society of Saint Andrews' Alabama Gleaning Network, rescued 1,155 lbs. of produce at Pepper Place Farmers Market to share with our neighbors who struggle with food security.
- IPC volunteers once again began work in September to build a home for a family through Habitat for Humanity, sponsored by the Presbytery.
- IPC sponsored the third annual Crop Drop on October 15, 2023. More than 100 IPC volunteers worked with volunteers from 30 agencies and congregations serving people across North Central Alabama in a collaborative effort to bag and distribute 33,000 pounds of sweet potatoes to more than 15,000 households in North Central Alabama.

- The annual Harvest for Hunger campaign was October 15 - November 19, 2023 with IPC members providing more than 285 bags of food and hygiene products along with financial donations to fill the church's Food Pantry, Blessing Boxes, and Weekend Buddy Bags through the winter months.
- The church continued its ministry of collecting #5 plastics and delivered them every four to six weeks to benefit the non-profit, Community on the Rise in downtown Birmingham. The response was overwhelming at times and super sacks of #5 plastics often had to be delivered earlier than scheduled. This is the only non-profit in the state of Alabama where #5 plastics can be recycled on site. Formerly homeless women are employed with a living wage to transform the plastics into usable items such as flower pots, Christmas ornaments, trivets and jewelry that can be sold to support the homeless community. They receive a living wage, housing, and support COR's WHOLE program.
- A few years ago, IPC sponsored the Highland Park Community Garden as it was organizing in the city park adjacent to the church. This support was instrumental in forming the Community Garden with 32 beds of flowers and vegetables and enabled it to recently become a stand-alone 501(c)3. Some IPC members currently serve on the board and others currently have garden beds that they care for.

Facilities

- IPC participates in paper recycling on-site by partnering with Gone for Good, a non-profit organization that provides meaningful employment for adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. Every eight weeks, they pick up two large bins of paper recycling from IPC's campus.
- Susan Haskell, of the Earth Care team, began discussions with Stephanie Heupel, the Executive Director of Operations and Administration about first steps towards purchasing and installing solar panels for the church. This will be ongoing in 2024.
- Water stations for water bottle refill in two locations in main building.

Worship

- The IPC Columbarium was expanded and extended to border the Labyrinth and Prayer Garden with new landscaping.
 1. The Labyrinth continues to be used by church members and neighbors.
- IPC repurposes flowers used in morning worship services for our 5:00 evening service and shares with residents at Kirkwood by the River, a retirement community supported by IPC.
- IPC continues to use locally grown and pesticide-free flowers in some flower arrangements.
- Earth-centered prayers and music are offered many times during worship and committee meetings.