OUR MISSION
Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry is a team of committed staff, volunteers, churches, and community partners working together to meet the crisis needs of our neighbors in the Swannanoa Valley. While this often takes the form of food, clothing, and direct financial assistance for things like rent, heating, or medical bills, perhaps the most important thing we offer our neighbors is a compassionate presence and a listening ear. Poverty is incredibly complex, emotionally draining, and often dominated by a narrative of shame. At SVCM we refuse to accept the lie that any person’s worth is dependent upon their social or economic lived experiences. Instead, every person has dignity and sacred worth, and we strive to communicate that dignity to all our neighbors, as we navigate together their most immediate and critical needs.

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.”
- Micah 6:8

TOGETHER WE CAN BUILD A STRONGER COMMUNITY ONE LIFE AT A TIME
On one occasion, an expert on the Law stood up to test Jesus. He asked him, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “Well, what does the Law say? The lawyer thinks for a moment and responds with the familiar words we hear straight from the mouth of Jesus in the other gospels, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus commends him on his interpretation. “Good. That’s the right answer. Now, do this and you will live.” But the lawyer is not satisfied with Jesus’s answer. If the Law compels him to love his neighbor, then he needs to know just who counted as his “neighbor.” So, he presses Jesus further. “And who is my neighbor?” As he understands it, “neighbor” is a definable category. It begins with his inner circle of family and kin, and from there extends to every other Jew and fellow countryman.

That’s when Jesus begins telling the familiar story we know today as the story of the Good Samaritan: One day, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.” We don’t know who this man is. We are given no clues about the man’s identity. We cannot hear him speak, listen to his dialect and discern where he is from or to what people he belongs. We cannot look at the way he is dressed and discover his ethnicity or socioeconomic standing in society. The man is literally stripped of everything except for his status as a human being in need.

The entire parable unfolds in such a way that we expect the neighbor to be the one who is violently robbed, with the Samaritan being the one who exemplifies the love of neighbor. But Jesus subverts the Lawyer’s question with a question of his own. “Which one was the neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” In Jesus’s question, he presses the expert of the Law into an uncomfortable answer. While the lawyer could imagine that his neighbor was his fellow kin or countryman - like the priest and Levite - or even the person next door, he cannot quite bring himself to say the word, “Samaritan.” As he understood it, Samaritans were the wrong religion, the wrong ethnicity, and the wrong nationality. They were the ones that had cheated, stolen, and left the family. Surely, they were not his neighbors.

But Jesus confronts him with an uncomfortable truth. As I once heard it said, “The real force of the parable is not a simple ’be good like the unlikely character the Samaritan,’ but that Samaritans [yes, even Samaritans!] are your neighbors. Show them mercy.”

For me, this is a daily reminder that there is no one within the category of “not neighbor.” Not a single person exists outside our obligation to love. Every person who walks through the doors of our ministry at SVCM is truly our neighbor. Each person, no matter how different from me in their background, ethnicity, race, religion, or life experience, is someone overflowing with sacred worth, someone worth getting to know, and a friend waiting to be made. This is what Jesus meant when he told us to love our neighbor, and it’s how we strive to live out the good news at SVCM. Because in the words of Jesus, this is how to truly live.

Rev. Dr. Kevin Bates
Executive Director
It’s March, and I am on the edge of my 31st spring season. It surprises me that I am still taken off guard and delighted every time this season inevitably rolls around. The first yellow pops up in the daffodils, there is some warmth in a breeze that would have been biting two weeks ago, and the birds at my window are starting to sing the songs they have been practicing. New life is here, and I can finally shake off the iciness of the winter months. I see the subtle changes of early Spring in the way that God is working at Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry too.

There are waves of newness and renewal happening here. One of the biggest shifts I am noticing is a move from seeing the work of SVCM as transactional to relational. Our “clients” are now our neighbors, dare I say, friends, and people worth really knowing and learning from. Around SVCM, I hear neighbors, volunteers, and other staff members comment on a feeling of joy and openness in the ministry. If we continue to allow it, there is space here for God to grow and change us. Like Spring, Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry is in a season full of potential, and I for one look back on the previous year with gratitude and toward the next with hope and excitement.

Savanna Craig
Assistant Director

Pictured from left to right: Harmony Lemerond, Savanna Craig, Mandy Haun, Kevin Bates, and DeShondra Glenn. Not pictured: Chuck Williams

SVCM STAFF

- Rev. Kevin Bates, Executive Director
- Savanna Craig, Assistant Director
- Chuck Williams, Food Pantry Supervisor
- Mandy Haun, Administrative Assistant
- DeShondra Glenn, Hope for Tomorrow Case Manager
- Harmony Lemerond, Residential and Property Manager
AROUND THE MINISTRY

HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Change and transition are inevitable parts of our lives. Seasons come and seasons go. This is especially true in the lives of the families participating in our Hope for Tomorrow program. That being said, in 2022, two of our families successfully graduated from the Hope for Tomorrow program and moved on to the newly completed, income-based Jasper Apartments in Swannanoa, NC. These two families made huge strides while with us, and are still working to grow and change for the better.

A particular memory stands out around this move for one of our moms, Melissa. Melissa is learning to read Arabic and taught me that the first word of her new address, Habibi Lane, is the English translation of the Arabic word for "Beloved." Standing in her new home, the smell of paint and the glow of big smiles in the air, I couldn’t help but see their new address, Habibi Lane, as a wink and a nod from God: a reminder for the two HFT families who will now be living there that they are deeply known and cherished, exactly as they are. Melissa later told me that she was able to share that definition for “habibi” with her landlord and that they have made a sign explaining it to be hung in the apartment offices! Families will cycle in and out of our care at Hope for Tomorrow, but the truth of all of our Beloved-ness will always be the same.

JOHNNY RAINES CHRISTMAS CHEER

Our Johnny Raines Christmas Cheer program brought Christmas cheer to many of our families here in the Valley. Thank you to our Sponsors and the many donations of toys, stockings and funds we received to help make this happen. These families are greatly impacted by the kind hearts and generosity shown to them through this program. As one family wrote:

“I cannot say thank you enough for all the gifts you chose to buy for my kids. I am beyond grateful for everything! It meant so much to me that you took the time to put together each stocking like you did. I’m trying to hold back tears as I write this. I am just so thankful that you did this for us. I really just wanted you to know how much this meant to me and my children. Thank you so much!! May God bless you, like you did us!”

We hope you will continue to partner with us to help bring Christmas joy to families all over the Swannanoa Valley.
MINISTRY NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

DIRECT SERVICE COSTS

1. Heating Assistance: $96,032.38 I 32.8%
2. Hope for Tomorrow: $85,323.66 I 29.1%
3. Rental Assistance: $40,579.70 I 13.9%
4. Misc. (including home repair, scholarships, and urgent needs): $19,481.67 I 6.7%
5. Food Costs: $17,256.23 I 5.9%
6. Transportation-Related Costs: $12,921.46 I 4.4%
7. Medical Expenses: $9,059.59 I 3.1%
8. Water Assistance: $8,455.97 I 2.9%
9. Currently Unhoused and Transient Populations: $3,629.08 I 1.2%

Total Neighbor Cash Expenses: $771,162.74
Neighbor Financial Assistance: $292,739.74
In-Kind Food: $302,093
In-Kind Clothing: $117,405
In-Kind Household: $58,925

FUNDING SOURCE BREAKDOWN
TOTAL INCOME: $665,520.88

1. Donations: $433,859.90 I 65.2%
2. Walk for Your Neighbor: $84,599.01 I 12.7%
3. Deck the Trees: $59,714.39* I 9.0%
4. Churches: $49,192.13 I 7.4%
5. Grants: $36,620 I 5.5%
6. Misc: $1534.75 I 0.2%

* Deck the Trees 2022 Raised $63,178.61 in total, with $3,464.22 being accounted for in Jan. 2023
HOUSEHOLDS SERVED

Our ministry served 899 households with 1958 members in 2022, with some coming just once and others coming multiple times for food, clothing, financial assistance, and more.

- Total number of services in 2022: 16,192
- New households served: 281 new households with a total of 571 members
- Household locations: Black Mountain 44.8%, Swannanoa 41.5%, East Asheville 5.8%, Unhoused/Transient 7.8%

FOOD DISTRIBUTED

We served an average of 175 households representing 362 neighbors with food assistance each month. We want to thank our community partner Manna Foodbank who provided us with 85,511 lbs of food and connected us with other community partners such as Aldi, Starbucks, Fresh Market, and Pizza Hut to provide another 57,499 lbs of food. Together, these food donations had an estimated retail value of $272,755!

HEATING ASSISTANCE

In 2022, heating and energy assistance was again the top need for neighbors coming to the ministry. With the rising cost of fuel oil and electricity, more of our neighbors struggled to stay warm this winter. To meet the growing need, SVCM distributed $96,032.38 in heating assistance to 284 households - an increase of 41% in direct financial assistance from the previous year. That’s 609 children, parents, and families that stayed warm this winter because people like you continue to faithfully support our ministry.

RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, rent in Buncombe County has increased by 41.7%, leaving more than 17,000 renter households cost-burdened (spending 30% or more of income on rent). With the rising cost of rent and an overall vacancy rate of less than 4%, we are seeing greater needs among our neighbors, with many becoming priced out of the area. To meet these rising needs, SVCM distributed $40,579.70 in rental and temporary housing assistance to 121 households with 272 members - an increase of 20% from the previous year.
Each year, SVCM organizes two large fundraising events through the help and support of so many dedicated volunteers, churches, and business partners. In October, SVCM hosted the Walk for Your Neighbor fundraiser which raises money to directly assist our neighbors with their most pressing needs. This might be help with rent or utility bills, gas vouchers for medical appointments, bus passes, prescriptions or heating assistance. This year, nearly 300 people walked between 1-3 miles in our community to raise money and awareness for the needs of our neighbors.
Later in the year, SVCM partnered with the Monte Vista Hotel and over forty community partners to host the 12th annual Deck the Trees event. All proceeds from Deck the Trees go directly to the SVCM Fuel Fund and is used to pay for the heating and energy needs of our neighbors throughout the winter season.

Thank you for being part of these fundraisers. They are critical to our work at SVCM and a beautiful example of the compassion, generosity, and care of this community for all its neighbors!

2023 THEME FOR DECK THE TREES:
ROCKIN' AROUND THE
CHRISTMAS TREE

DECK THE TREES

2019 - $33,949.41
2020 - $36,078.87
2021 - $41,330.18
2022 - $63,178.61
Volunteer Highlight

Last year more than 200 individuals volunteered at SVCM. They filled grocery carts for neighbors in the food pantry, served on our boards and committees, decorated Christmas trees, organized and managed events and donation drives, chopped and delivered wood for heating, and most of all they showed up for their community! Their combined efforts represent more than 10,000+ volunteer hours. We cannot thank our volunteers enough for helping us carry out our mission.

From the staff here at Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry we say THANK YOU to our wonderful volunteers.

This year we want to extend a special thank you to Jerry “Sparky” Bryson for being an incredible intake volunteer and filling the role of interim Assistant Director. Jerry is a passionate advocate for our neighbors, exemplifying the compassion, commitment, and kindness that makes SVCM the special place it is for our neighbors and volunteers. Thank you for your loving example, Jerry. SVCM is a better place because you are here.
Dear Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry,

I'm writing to thank you for the help you've given me over the past year. Words can't convey my gratitude. I appreciate certain things in particular about your ministry. First, the outstretched providing Hand of God and His Heart of compassion is evident in each of you. So, when my basic and urgent earthly needs are met through SVCM, I feel the love and comfort of my Lord, Jesus Christ enmeshed with it. Peace begins to subdue my distress as soon as I enter your property. Even after my overdue bill is paid and that worry is set aside, I sit in the afterglow of the goodness of God and His supernatural Spirit for hours. They're wonderful hours filled with thanksgiving and praise and comfort. I know that the provision I've received from SVCM not only comes from the Lord, who owns all but through his people who extend genuine respect, compassion, and a listening ear that is a ministry unto itself. Thank you. And again, thank you.

-Your neighbor