



Nov. 30, 2021

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Ashley Brunhoeber, Associate Communication Officer
Kansas Health Foundation
abrunhoeber@khf.org
(316) 491-8414

Todd Seifert, Communications Director
Great Plains United Methodists
tseifert@greatplainsumc.org
(785) 414-4224

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Partnership to enhance faith-based civic engagement in
Sedgwick, Wyandotte counties**

WICHITA, Kan. – A new project in partnership between the Great Plains Conference of The United Methodist Church (the Conference) and the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) will begin in January to enhance faith-based civic engagement in Sedgwick and Wyandotte counties.

The Conference is charging congregations to move from mercy to justice ministry – mercy ministry helps individuals, whereas justice ministry holds systems accountable. Justice work is viewed by the Conference as a mechanism to reduce racial and health disparities experienced by historically disadvantaged communities.

To contribute to justice ministry, the Conference created the Doing Justice initiative in 2019, coordinated by the Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART), which aims to expand Faith Based Community Organizing (FBCO) to every major city in Kansas by 2026. The initiative, which has been working in Douglas, Shawnee and Johnson counties, will create and deeply engage diverse, locally led, faith-based civic engagement organizations designed to address issues through a justice framework in Sedgwick and Wyandotte counties.

DART recruits and trains professional community organizers, conducts regional and national leadership training for clergy and lay leaders, and establishes new organizations. DART's 24 separate FBCOs work in nine states and engage more than 450 congregations each year to listen, analyze and act for justice in the public arena.

This upcoming project between KHF and the Conference will address social determinants that have negatively impacted Kansans for generations. Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. said it is work the Conference is excited about.

“This grant will enable our DART organizers and organizations to accelerate their

launch by hiring three highly competent community organizers to start work in Sedgwick County by January 2022. One additional staff member will work exclusively on clergy outreach among African-American and Hispanic clergy,” Bishop Saenz Jr said.

“Together, they will work ecumenically to engage community members who traditionally experience poor health outcomes to shape policies, express their needs and expectations, determine how resources are allocated, and participate in the election process for their representatives.”

As part of the partnership, KHF – a supporting organization of the Conference – is providing \$1.78 million and the Conference is offering \$2.1 million over the next three years. Partial funds will also be used to build capacity for existing FBCO’s already working through the Doing Justice Initiative in Douglas, Shawnee and Johnson counties to address disparities magnified by COVID-19.

“There are neighborhoods in Wichita/Sedgwick County and Kansas City, Kan./Wyandotte County that face significant racial and health disparities, and it’s exciting to see that through this initiative, residents in these areas will be empowered by trained clergy and lay leaders to come together to create community-based, systemic solutions,” said Teresa Miller, KHF president and CEO. “By focusing on system improvements, there’s great opportunity for broad-scale, sustained impact and we find that both exciting and rewarding.”

###

ABOUT THE GREAT PLAINS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Great Plains United Methodist Conference was formed in 2014 from the former Kansas East, Kansas West and Nebraska conferences. It serves nearly 1,000 churches in the two-state area, with a mission of "Great churches. Great leaders. Great disciples. Transformed world."

ABOUT THE KANSAS HEALTH FOUNDATION

The Kansas Health Foundation is based in Wichita, but statewide in its focus. With a mission to improve the health of all Kansans, KHF envisions a culture in which every Kansan can make healthy choices where they live, work and play. During the past 35 years, KHF has provided more than \$600 million in grants to improve health in Kansas communities.