

FAQs about Found House and St. John's

The board on Nov. 2 approved a proposal for St. John's to become a host congregation for Found House/IHN (<http://foundhouse.org>) in 2023. They want you to have an opportunity to share questions, concerns and ideas at an informal meeting **after church Sunday, Dec. 4**. Members of the board will be there, along with Wanda Crawford, our Found House coordinator.

Some Frequently Asked Questions:

What is Found House/Interfaith Housing Network?

Found House/IHN (former name – Interfaith Hospitality Network) is an agency that serves unhoused families. Found House (FH) has programs to assist families in danger of becoming homeless, programs to keep especially vulnerable families in housing, a pet shelter (because pets are part of families, too!), and an emergency shelter program for families who are unhoused. Sheltering happens at churches and synagogues, who host 4-5 families for 7 nights.

What does it mean to become a Host Congregation?

Host congregations make a deep commitment to practice hospitality: to not just go somewhere else to serve people in need, but to welcome those people into their space. Host congregations provide safety, shelter, and food so that guests get a break from the challenges they face.

On a practical level, host congregations allow 4-5 Found House families to sleep in their building for 7 nights in a row. Families arrive on the FH van at 5 p.m. and leave at 7 a.m. for school and work. Volunteers from the host congregation are on site the entire time. In addition to providing a place to sleep, host congregations also provide meals for the week: supper and breakfast on site with packed lunches.

Host congregations commit to host a minimum of 2 weeks in a year.* Most host 3-4 weeks, and some host 6 weeks per year.

What is St. John's history with Found House/IHN?

St. John's has been a support congregation for more than 15 years. During that time, at least 75 members have provided meals, played with FH/IHN kids, stayed overnight, set up cots, mopped floors, shopped for groceries, done laundry and other tasks involved in hosting at First Unitarian Church when it was an emergency shelter for 1 week at a time, 4-5 weeks a year. Our congregation also supports FH financially.

Do we have Enough Space to host Families?

The minimum requirements to host are: Fellowship hall, kitchen, sleeping space for each family (a separate room or curtained area), play area (which can be the fellowship hall or another space) and at least two bathrooms.

We can figure out how to share our current refrigerator and freezer during host weeks. We will also need to figure out storage space for cots and bedding when not in use.

What about a Shower and Washer/Dryer? And an Elevator?

It would be great to have a shower that guests could use, and a washer and dryer would be appreciated (and could also be used by us!). But these are not requirements of hosting. Guests have access to showers and laundry facilities at the Found House Day Center. An elevator is not required.

What about our Renters? How would they be affected?

Our Implementation Team would reach out to all of our renters months in advance of our first hosting week, explain the Found House program, why we are committing to it, and invite them to visit during the host week so they can see what it is. Each group would be offered another space to meet during the week, or they could decide to not meet that week.

If a group needed a particular space (for example, a choir needs Krolfifer), we could have all Found House activities downstairs that night.

What about our Internal Groups?

St. John's groups would be notified well in advance of a host week, and they could choose an alternative space or reschedule their meeting.

* The first year (2023), we would host only once, and then probably twice a year after that (unless we want to do more).

Do we really have Enough Volunteers?

While some large congregations have enough internal volunteers, most host congregations do not. That's where networking comes in. St. John's was in a network of 6 congregations that supported First Unitarian as a host site. First Unitarian provided volunteers on only 2 of 7 nights. At least 2 congregations in that network will probably support us. We can network with our neighboring Clifton congregations and get contacts from Found House to other congregations who want to help. Building a network is

something our Implementation Team will do, with support from Rev. Mitra and Rev. Alice.

We are a Safe Congregation. How will that be applied?

There will be at least 2 volunteers on site when the families are present. The Implementation Team will meet with the Safe Congregations Team to determine which volunteer roles need background checks and Safe Congregations training. Safe Congregation rules will apply to all guests and all volunteers (e.g. no one but a family member takes a child to the bathroom).

Can we Afford this? How much does Hosting Cost?

We will not have to buy cots. We can get cots, bedding, towels, etc. donated by a congregation that has discontinued hosting. Other set-up costs will be minimal (bins or storage units, diapers, cleaning supplies, first aid kits, etc.)

Weekly grocery costs are \$600-800 per week. We could ask our support congregations to share the cost. We could even provide everything by donation: I'll provide lunchmeat, you get the bread and chips, Jane will bring diapers, and Harvey will get the drinks.

How will hosting affect Staff?

Support from our staff is essential. Rev. Mitra and Rev. Alice support the program. Ashleigh supports the program and is willing to collaborate on space needs. The program should not require more work from our caretaker; volunteers should be responsible for daily cleaning checks, setup, take-down, and end-of-week cleaning. Guests are on-site 5 p.m. to 7 a.m., not during business hours.

What is the Timeline?

The earliest we would host is later summer or fall 2023. We would host twice in 2024. The Implementation Team will use the time before hosting to work with staff on spaces to use, storage, volunteer training, networking with other congregations, and building internal support/volunteers/funding.

Why Should We Do This?

The need in the community is great. The demand for affordable housing greatly exceeds the supply, and the demand is growing as inflation, stagnant wages, and high-end new housing continues throughout our region. 28% of Cincinnatians live below the poverty line and 10% of children in the public school system are unhoused.

We have the resources to help: a highly educated and fairly affluent population, a history of liberal faith, a reputation for social justice engagement, a safe and secure building that is empty most hours of the week.

We can practice what we say each week in our affirmation: “**This is the mission of our faith: to teach the fragile art of hospitality**” Doing this work will challenge us. We will be inviting people we don’t know—people we think are very different from us—into our beloved space. We may face suffering that we can’t fix. We won’t have all the answers. We will make mistakes. We will have our hearts broken. And we will grow, individually and collectively. Hospitality is a spiritual practice. Let us embrace it deeply.

What Else Should We Know?

Found House has been around for 30 years. Other congregations have had the same questions and concerns, and they have figured out how to host within their constraints. Coordinators at other host congregations are offering their wisdom and training materials; we can learn from their successes and problem-solving. At St. John’s, we already have depth of experience with Found House. **We can do this!**