

# URBAN ADVOCACY REVIEW 2021

To persevere through a longer than expected battle with the pandemic has challenged us all. In Buffalo we've seen perseverance firsthand in colleagues--healthcare providers, patients, teachers, ministers, and students—who have pushed forward through ongoing challenges. Here are **highlights**:



The **first four students graduated** in May from Houghton's Associate of Arts degree on Buffalo's East Side, where there is no other college. They continue their studies, one accepted to historic Morehouse College in Atlanta. **Dean Julian Cook** (above right) leads the program. This fall, **24 students at [Houghton College Buffalo: East Side](#)**, are working toward educational and vocational goals. A study released by University of Buffalo Urban Studies Department highlights ongoing economic inequities faced by Buffalo's East Side residents: **["The Harder We Run: The State of Black Buffalo in 1990 and the Present"](#)** shows **little change the past three decades in poverty level**, partly due to lack of educational opportunity on Buffalo's East Side. As **36% of Blacks aged 25 and older have some college but no degree**, they are **"structurally locked out of the highest paying jobs."** This limits economic development to arise from generational poverty. So, at the King Urban Life Center, home for Houghton College's east side site, students receive support for retention and success.

**The 35 students at [Houghton College Buffalo](#) on Buffalo's West Side** come from countries such as

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**JERICHO ROAD COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER** This last year, Jericho Road determined to create an equitable path to access to both COVID testing and vaccines. This required outreach efforts into the

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Congo, Myanmar, Syria, Tanzania, and Thailand. **In a course on Major Religious Faiths, I (Steve) teach Old Testament first semester and New Testament second semester.** About a third of the students are Muslim, some are Buddhist, and Christian students represent Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Protestant backgrounds. As this multi-faith group studies and interprets Scripture, it's gratifying to see students' interest in and familiarity with Biblical accounts. In an assignment to write a **personal story of faith in context**, a student from Tanzania shared how he didn't understand much about being a follower of Jesus until his family moved to Buffalo and attended **[Mission of Christ Church](#)**. A couple students in the class are from this church, planted in 2015 by **Pastor Yoshua Bashizi**. By June, Pastor Yoshua had completed courses to be licensed as a Wesleyan pastor. He works co-vocationally as pastor for Mission of Christ Church and leads **Global Bridge Impact** to offer English classes and tech help to families whose children study online. He just completed a Trauma Healing course to support persons from refugee backgrounds to grow in spiritual and emotional health.

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community. As stated in a recent JR mailing – "In mid-February, almost 92% of people in Erie County who had received at least one dose (of the vaccine) were white. By contrast, at Jericho Road, 33% were

Black or African American, 32% were Asian, and 19% were white...To date, we have vaccinated about 14,000 people.”

In the spring, I (Ruth) was able to resume face to face spiritual care with patients at the clinic. Once a week, there is a day set aside to care specifically for residents from Vive Shelter (a shelter for those seeking asylum in the US or Canada). In late June, I had the privilege of meeting a young man who had left the desperate poverty of Sierra Leone about 7 years ago, hoping for a better life for his family. He and his wife lived in Brazil for six years. Two little sons were born there. When COVID hit Brazil with a vengeance and neighbors were dying all around them, they made the difficult decision to leave Brazil and travel north. With their little sons, then three and one years old, they made their way north, by foot, by small boat, or however they could piece their way forward. Bridging the area between Colombia and Panama is a deep jungle, the Darien Gap. Notorious for its wild animals, gangs of robbers, and dangerous waterways, thousands of asylum seekers make their way through this dangerous pass in hopes of a better future. Here, tragedy struck this family - lost in the Darien Gap for 14 days, without access to food or clean water, their one-year-old son became sick and died. Heartbroken, they had no choice but to bury him in the jungle. Several times as I spoke with this father, he said, “only God” could have gotten them out of the jungle and through their difficult journey to Buffalo. His hope is that in God, life will be better for his family here.

I have continued to see this family at the clinic. Early in September, I saw the dad and son, both excited because they were starting school, the little son in pre-school and the father in construction. This week, I saw the mom. Joyfully, she told me she is pregnant - a gift from God, she affirmed, after the loss of their little son in the jungle. Thank you for your prayers for the dedicated staff who provide support for the families and individuals who come to Vive.

**Thank you for your prayers** for the residents at Vive. May God, and our legal systems, open doors for them to a better future. For so many of them, God is the center of their hope.

**NEEDS AT VIVE**--Currently the **Vive Shelter is at full capacity and much in need of sweatshirts, sweatpants, warm coats and boots for men, women, and children.** If you or your church would like to do a warm clothing drive, please let me know so we can coordinate that. For a **more complete Amazon wish list, click here:** <https://www.jrchc.org/vive/wishlist//>

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**SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR PASTOR BARBARA FARROW OF GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
In August, **Pastor Barbara Farrow** received [Pastor of the Year Award](#) from Houghton College. **She models service as a social worker and pastor.** Through the pandemic, the church has offered online as well as in-person services. To reach persons who’ve not attended services through this time, an October 30<sup>th</sup> celebration welcomed children and families with warm hospitality, good conversation and fun.



*Steve and Ruth Strand*

**OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE –**  
[Global Bridge Impact](#) – Grant Writer  
[Grace Community](#)--building friendships  
[Spiritual Care-Jericho Road CHC](#)

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