



Organization for Faith, Education, & Community (OFEC)

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OFEC Members:

President

Jerry Williams, PhD
 Osaro Airen, PhD
 Habiba Awan, MBA
 Veronica Beaver, MEd
 Kathleen Belanger, PhD
 Cindy Bertin, BA
 Jose Carbajal, PhD
 Kyle Childress, M.Rev.
 Robert Choate, EdD
 Barbara Cordell, PhD
 Wilma Cordova, MSW, LISW, LCSW
 Shari Ellsworth, PhD
 Dixie Groll, Assistant to Dean Liberal/Applied Arts
 Pat Harris, MA
 Aloma Marquis, MFA
 Jill Milem, MEd, LPC
 Mary Mocniak, CAM, NALP
 Nancy Niehaus, MSW
 Sharon Ninness, EdD
 George Patterson, BA
 Joe Richardson, PhD
 Marilyn Richardson, BS
 Kavita Vyas, MD
 JB Watson, PhD
 Shirley Watterston, MS
 Sue Whatley, PhD
 Michelle Williams, EdD

The Journal of Faith Education, and Community (JFEC) publishes articles that are related to the role of faith communities in personal and public well-being. For additional information about this journal, view the JFEC website at:
<https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/jfec/> .

A Message from Dr. Jerry Williams, President of the OFEC

The OFEC is excited to offer the upcoming forum "Housing in Nacogdoches." This is the third OFEC forum about basic human needs; the first two addressed needs related to hunger and healthcare in our community. The logic behind these forums requires some explanation. As an interfaith group of people from a variety of religious traditions, we are in one way or another committed to the importance of spiritual truth beyond our everyday experiences. It seems to me that this is the central point of religion. The members of OFEC believe the same religious truths that inform our religious practices also obligate us to work toward meeting the needs of people who suffer in this world. This is the reason why the OFEC was initially formed, and it is the purpose for organizing and holding these forums. If religious beliefs similarly obligate you to help those in need, we invite you to join us as we organize our future activities.

Upcoming Forum on Housing

On Tuesday, April 30, 2019, "A Place to Call Home" Forum on Housing in Nacogdoches will be held at the SFASU Early Childhood Research Center, located at 2428 Raguet, from 6:30 to 8:00 in Room 212. This forum is sponsored by the OFEC and co-sponsored by the SFASU School of Social Work and the Nacogdoches Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of this forum is to raise consciousness related to housing by identifying its strengths and needs. The forum will include a panel discussion followed by a question and answer session. The panelists will include Robert Crow, Executive Director for the Nacogdoches Housing Authority, Mary Mocniak, Associate Executive for the Piney Woods Apartment Association, Larissa Philpot, President and CEO for NEDCO and past Director of Planning and Zoning for the City of Nacogdoches, Patty Goodrum, Executive Director for Love INC, and Roy Bolton, City Councilman, who represents constituents in Nacogdoches' SE Ward.

Currently, a shortage of affordable housing exists in our community. The median gross rent in Nacogdoches during 2013-2017 was \$763 (US Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2018). This amount for rent would equal \$9156 annually. While a livable wage for one person in Texas is \$11.48 per hour (MA Institute of Technology, 2019), minimum wage is only \$7.25 per hour (US Dept. of Labor, 2019). Based on these statistics, if a person worked 40 hours a week at minimum wage, s/he would earn \$15,080 annually. If that same person paid the median gross rent amount of \$763 per month, s/he would pay \$9156 annually, leaving less than \$500 per month for all other expenses such as food, utilities, healthcare, medication, and transportation. Many of those in Texas who live in poverty are the "working poor." It is not uncommon for employers to hire workers on a part-time basis.

OFEC

Purpose:

- To promote research and the dissemination of Information about the role faith communities play in personal and public well-being.

About the OFEC:

- The OFEC was first organized in 2009 by a small group of persons who wanted to discuss projects to educate the community on child sexual abuse. Later, the organization's focus was expanded to include various social justice issues.
- In 2013, the OFEC was officially recognized and housed at Stephen F. Austin State University.
- This organization has hosted four regional conferences since 2010.
- The OFEC also has hosted two forums on issues related to hunger and healthcare in Nacogdoches; it will host a third one on issues related to housing this month.
- The current interests of this organization include community development, poverty, environmental sustainability, crime and incarceration, physical and emotional trauma, and others.
- The members of this organization practice major world religions and spiritual traditions—they believe that a Divine call to alleviate human suffering is one shared by all faith traditions.

- Visit our website at: <https://faitheducationcommunity.org/> .

- Contact us at: faithandouearth@gmail.com .

OFEC's Forums

On November 8, 2018, the OFEC held a **"Forum on Healthcare"** in Nacogdoches. The purpose of this forum was to raise consciousness related to healthcare and to identify strengths and needs of local healthcare services. This forum included a panel discussion with representatives from the Brown Family Health Center, Burke Center, East Texas Community Health Center, Nacogdoches Medical Center, and Nacogdoches Memorial Hospital as well as a private practice physician. Dr. Jerry Williams, SFASU Professor of Sociology, moderated the discussion.

During the panel discussion, Anita Humphries, CEO of East Texas Community Health Center, discussed the high incidence of diabetes in our community. This disease disproportionately impacts certain populations including older adults, racial/ethnic minorities, men, and those with lower levels of education. The prevalence of diabetes is greater in Texas than in the United States, and it is concentrated in East Texas although it is unevenly distributed across the State of Texas. In 2015, the prevalences of diabetes for the US, Texas, and Nacogdoches County were 9.4%, 11.2%, and 12.7%, respectively (CDC, 2017). Diabetes, which can lead to vision problems, amputation, an increased risk for cardiovascular diseases, and other complications, is one of the leading causes of death in Texas and the United States. Treatment of this disease is expensive and places additional financial stress on persons who already are experiencing stress because they live in poverty.

During the forum, presenters from the two hospitals in Nacogdoches discussed how those who are unable to afford visits to doctors depend on trips to hospital ER's for their medical care, causing great expense to hospitals and taxpayers. All panelists supported the need for nutrition education to help prevent diseases such as diabetes.

On November 1, 2017, the OFEC held a **"Forum on Hunger"** in Nacogdoches. The purpose of this forum was to raise consciousness related to food insecurity in this community and to identify strengths and needs of local food pantries. This forum involved a panel discussion with directors of five local food pantries, the executive director of Meals on Wheels, and a nutritional supervisor of the WIC Program. During the panel discussion, Denise Lee, President of Nacogdoches HOPE, a local food pantry that serves the greatest number of residents in Nacogdoches County, pointed out that one in four Nacogdoches County residents live in poverty, and many have to choose between paying for food and rent or medicine. Many in our community have food insecurity and malnutrition, and those numbers have been increasing during the past few years.

Residents of Nacogdoches County with low incomes can visit any local food pantry, such as Nacogdoches HOPE, once each month to obtain supplemental food. Almost half of the clients who HOPE serves are children and senior citizens. Most of the food pantries in our community are partner agencies with the East Texas Food Bank (ETFb) from which they can purchase food at a substantially reduced cost. Volunteers at these pantries distribute nutrition information sheets and healthy recipes, which are provided by the East Texas Food Bank. Some local food pantries participate in ETFb's Retail Food Program in which participating, local grocers donate thousands of pounds of food weekly, reducing waste and providing clients with fresh produce, dairy products, bread, and meat. All of our local food pantries need donations of food, money, and volunteer time from community members.

OFEC's Regional Conferences

The last regional conference sponsored by the OFEC, **Faith and Justice—Exploring the Crisis of Empathy**, was held on November 4, 2016. Its goal was to bring together educators, social scientists, health and social service professionals, faith leaders, public officials, civic leaders, artists, and researchers to discern justice and explore the role of empathy in facilitating actions and policies that are just and equitable. The two keynote speakers were Rev. Pat Delahanty, Chairman of the Kentucky Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, and Wen Stephenson, author of *What We're Fighting for Now Is Each Other: Dispatches From the Front Lines of Climate Justice*.

At this conference, 15 presenters held sessions during which they addressed issues related to the environment, end of life, traumatic events, physical and mental illness, race/ethnicity, gender, education, law enforcement, ageing, poverty, and substance abuse. There also was a panel discussion during which four panelists addressed some of these issues.

The OFEC also held three other regional conferences in 2010, 2011, and 2013, respectively.

Bags 2 Mats Project

Some members of OFEC recently began working on a project to help the homeless in this community. Bags 2 Mats Project participants are repurposing clean, used plastic bags from stores such as Kroger and Walmart to provide sleeping mats to the homeless. These mats are cushioned, moisture and temperature resistant, lightweight, portable, durable, bed-bug and bed-sore deterrent, and easily washable/dryable. In addition, they provide a way to recycle plastic bags and help the homeless at the same time.

Bags 2 Mats Project participants meet two times a week at the following locations: the Senior Citizen Center on Friday at 9:30 am and the Democratic Headquarters on Thursday at 1:00 pm. You are invited to join others in making sleeping mats for the homeless at these locations and times. Make sure to bring a pair of scissors if you are able to do so. You can bring clean, used plastic bags to the Senior Center located at 621 Harris Street or the Democratic Headquarters located at 507 East Main. This community project is well worth the effort!