

**WORKING
TOGETHER TO
MAKE CHANGE
THAT MATTERS**

**GREATER CLEVELAND CONGREGATIONS
2024 ANNUAL REPORT**



CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM: YOUTH BINDOVER

Justice for Our Youth

Imagine being a teenager caught up in a bad decision and suddenly facing decades in prison. More kids in Cuyahoga County are sent--or “bound over”--to adult court than anywhere else in Ohio. And more than 90% of them are Black.

Youth sent to adult prison face higher risks of abuse, suicide, and reoffending. Meanwhile, research tells us that most youth naturally grow out of impulsive and risky behaviors and are remarkably responsive to rehabilitation—if given the right support. Juvenile detention centers are designed to provide that support, yet our system isn’t keeping kids there.

We’re changing that. GCC has been fighting for criminal justice reform since day one. 2024 was no different. We honed our focus on the injustice in our juvenile “justice” system and uncovered a major flaw: only 20% of kids facing bindover were represented by public defenders—despite clear evidence that public defenders achieve better outcomes than court-appointed or privately retained lawyers.

So we took action. Working with partners like *The Marshall Project*, we pushed judges to follow the Ohio Administrative Code and significantly increase the number of cases assigned to public defenders. As a result, public defenders now represent 50% of bindover cases, and most private attorneys appointed by judges now meet state requirements.

But we didn’t stop there. We also launched *Court Watch*, mobilizing 30 GCC volunteers to attend over 100 hearings, tracking patterns of racial bias and overcharging. What we found was appalling: kids interrogated alone in the middle of the night, prosecutors piling charges on entire groups with weak evidence, and young people accepting plea deals out of fear of decades-long sentences. We’re bringing these injustices to light—turning our findings into stories that will demand change and provide **Change that Matters!**

We’re in the room. We’re holding power accountable. And we’re just getting started.



“**Children of color** represent a large percentage of juvenile inmates in Cuyahoga County not because they are bad, but because it is acceptable to the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court for Black children to have inadequate representation.

Rev. Otis Rodgers King, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church



“**GCC provides purpose** by offering the opportunity to participate in meaningful work toward system change. It’s demoralizing for the community to learn, as we have, that the very court judging our children is itself not following the law.

Ginger Van Wagenen, retired attorney,
Fairmont Presbyterian Church

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM: PRETRIAL JUSTICE

Justice for Our Communities

Imagine being jailed before trial—not because you’re guilty, but because the system is too slow. After 24 hours, you’re moved to jail, even without charges, increasing the odds of prosecution. Just three days in jail can upend a life, a person’s job, home, separation from their family, their mental health. And the harm often extends into broader communities, disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities caught in this cycle.

As of April of this year, 70% of county inmates were waiting for their trial. We’re working to change this.

Our pretrial justice work uncovered a key issue: Central Booking. This process should be efficient and supportive: charging people immediately, using validated risk assessments to ensure safe release, offering crucial support services—court reminder calls, transportation—to ensure that people return to court without being jailed unnecessarily. But here in Cuyahoga, we are lacking these processes. Other courts throughout the country are doing this. We believe Cuyahoga County can too.

Through our pretrial justice work and advocacy, we got community stakeholders on board for reform. And momentum is growing. At our May 7th forum, 400+ people joined us in demanding change. We recruited 10 new volunteers to our pretrial team, mobilized the community, and strengthened ties with decision-makers. With a federal grant application in progress, continued cooperation from community stakeholders, and growing public support, we’re determined to end unnecessary pretrial detention and make **Change that Matters!**



“Just 3 days can upend a person’s life and from that you see people are being held far longer than 3 days.”

Sharnell Woods, Antioch Baptist Church

YOUTH ORGANIZING

Adding New Voices

Youth organizing isn't just powerful—it's essential. Yet, too often, youth are shut out of decision-making spaces, leaving them disconnected from civic life and uncertain about their own power. This year, GCC refused to let that happen. Through direct action, leadership training, and bold voter engagement, we activated youth as organizers, changemakers, and the future institutional leaders who will shape our communities for generations.

In our canvassing trainings, youth didn't just learn the mechanics of canvassing—they mastered the fundamentals of power: how it flows through people, money, and institutions. Most importantly, they learned the foundation of all organizing: relational meetings. Then, they put that knowledge to work, knocking doors, engaging communities, and reflecting on their impact. Over 100 youth, ages 7 to 22, stepped up—so many that we often exceeded capacity at meetings. This wasn't just skill-building; it was movement-building, forging deep connections between neighborhoods, schools, and institutions.

Beyond canvassing, we ran two high-impact campaigns to drive youth voter turnout: Steppin' and Rollin' to the Polls in partnership with Cleveland Municipal School District and Voter VirginitY, a county wide campaign that broke new ground. The results? 200 first-time voters turned out through Steppin' and Rollin', and the unapologetic energy of Voter VirginitY doubled that, mobilizing 400 voters.

By building this pipeline of youth organizers and institutional leaders, we are not just strengthening today's movements—we are ensuring that the work continues for decades to come. This is how we create intergenerational meaning and power. This is how we work together to make **Change that Matters!**



“A lot of youth say, ‘I didn’t know that I could work in this meaningful way or I would do this all the time.’ They don’t really have a place where they can come together and organize themselves. We don’t tell them what to do...we ask them what they want to work on. And then they organize themselves and think about things like that.”

De'Mario Steele, GCC Intern, Lee Road Baptist Church



HEALTHY BLOCKS

Healing Communities

Imagine needing medical care, but the nearest clinic is gone and unreliable transit makes reaching the next closest clinic nearly impossible. Small unaddressed issues are ignored until an emergency room visit with staggering costs is warranted. Add to this our aging population who live in homes unfit for aging, who have to make the choice between a sense of community or a safe place to live, and it's easy to see how our current health system is missing in a big way.

Through the Healthy Blocks Initiative, we're changing this. We will create five community clinics and staff them with nurse practitioners who will deliver primary and preventive care, along with prescribing quality of life adjustments. Around these clinics, we will help build multi-generational communities where seniors can age in place and where youth from the neighborhood can be trained with skills and then hired to care for their community.

In 2024, we laid the groundwork for this effort, identifying the sites of the 5 clinics. We secured partnerships with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Cumberland Development, CAPGI, and Modern Day Health Care, and we are seeking partnerships with healthcare systems. Through these partnerships, we will secure homes, funding, launch workforce development programs, and ensure long-term sustainability to make **Change that Matters**.

And the fight isn't over. We're pushing for city support, tax increment, and more investment. Together, we will redefine the connection between health, housing, and economic stability—creating vibrant, walkable communities where everyone has access to the care and opportunities they deserve.



“GCC is creating the opportunity to help bring about the beloved community that Dr. King talked about, not just healthcare, but also housing for seniors and job opportunities, to empower neighborhoods to improve their own community's health. And what strikes me is GCC is becoming a layer on top of all the places working on these issues, offering the opportunity to connect and learn from each other, and ultimately accomplish bigger things than any congregation could do on their own.”

Rochele Beachy MD., Lee Heights Community Church

BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY

Giving Power to the People

From tackling key neighborhood issues to the general election, GCC is hands-on in the community through our Battle for Democracy Campaign. This year, we joined the Citizens Not Politicians campaign to end gerrymandering. We fought to add a constitutional amendment on the November 2024 ballot, ensuring politicians can no longer draw their own districts. Gerrymandering rigs the game before it starts—we refused to let that happen. Over a year, 50+ volunteers collected more than 12,000 signatures at churches, events, and wherever people would listen. We educated, organized, and made sure voters knew what was at stake.

By the August deadline, we had what we needed: enough signatures to put Issue 1 on the ballot. Then, we mobilized. More than 250 people attended our action—judges spoke, lawn signs went out, and a phone bank turned personal connections into votes. Because when people hear from someone they trust, they listen. And while we successfully got the issue on the ballot, we still have more work to do to end gerrymandering in Ohio.

Election time is when relationships matter most. A month ahead of the election, GCC launched a neighborhood canvassing campaign to get people registered, informed, and ready to vote. It wasn't just about making contact—it was about making connections. We recruited more than 75 Neighborhood Captains who knocked on doors, made calls, and reached nearly 6,000 low propensity voters in low-turnout neighborhoods through schools, congregations, and community spaces.

We ensured people weren't just registered, but engaged. Volunteers staffed phone banks, arranged rides to polling stations, and monitored for voter suppression. This wasn't just about votes—it was about building power, one conversation at a time.

In the coming year, we're launching Neighborhood Connectors to strengthen our relationships with voters and support them in identifying lasting solutions that enhance their communities-- creating **Change that Matters.**



“It’s always important that people come together, but I think this is a definitive moment in our nation’s history. It is a time for all of those who love justice and democracy and humanity to come together across lines that have been falsely drawn to keep us apart.

Rev. Dr. Lisa Goods, Battle for Democracy Chair, Shiloh Baptist Church



“We build relationships with people, so they are not just voices in the wind.

Denise Shurney, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church



How Do We Build Power?

We build power through broad-based organizing—multi-issue, community-driven, and rooted in collaboration. Real power comes from strong communities, connected locally and nationally, driving **Change that Matters.**

Nationally, GCC is part of **The Just Power Alliance**—founded by organizers who push for an organizing strategy that is deeply relational, inclusive, and democratic. We're not just pushing for change; we're building it by igniting agency, strengthening connections, and sharing power in ways that last. Across nine institutions nationwide, we're showing what's possible when power isn't hoarded, but shared. When leadership pipelines reflect those most impacted, movements don't just grow—they endure. When relationships are built with intention, organizing becomes strong enough to shift entire systems, not just win short-term fights. The question keeps coming up: What's the new way forward? This is it.

In 2024, GCC hosted The Just Power Alliance's national training, diving into organizing tools and imagining what we can build and win together as a national network. Simultaneously, we scheduled our May pre-trial action to give our affiliates the chance to witness our strategy firsthand and learn from us in action.

Locally, our work starts where it always has: with listening. While the Just Power Alliance builds collective power on a national scale, we keep our organizing deeply rooted in the voices and needs of our community. We don't assume what people need—we ask. Through listening sessions, we engage directly with residents, elevating real voices and real stories to shape our strategy. These conversations ensure that the community's priorities remain at the center of everything we do. And in our monthly meetings—**Engage GCC**—we equip our members with the skills to do the same.

Our monthly meeting is where organizing takes shape: where members connect, get updates, and build skills. They learn what broad-based organizing is, and also why it works and how we build power through relationships. Members commit to hosting listening sessions within their congregations, amplifying community voices, and making sure real needs drive real results.



“**I think it's so important that we educate our people,** especially low propensity voter voices. The knowledge is there but we don't try to obtain it or it's been taken from us. The scripture says 'my people perish from lack of knowledge.' We need to use our power.”

Evangelist Vikki Jackson, Neighborhood Captain Coordinator, Elizabeth Baptist Church



FINANCIALS

WHY DOES YOUR SUPPORT MATTER TO GCC?

GCC is funded by dues from our member organizations, donations from individuals and foundations. Our current budget of \$1,379,087 pays for our talented staff who guide and serve GCC. The budget also funds the training of over 100 volunteers each year and covers expenses associated with operating several issue campaigns. GCC does not accept government funds so that we can remain autonomous and politically independent.

REVENUE

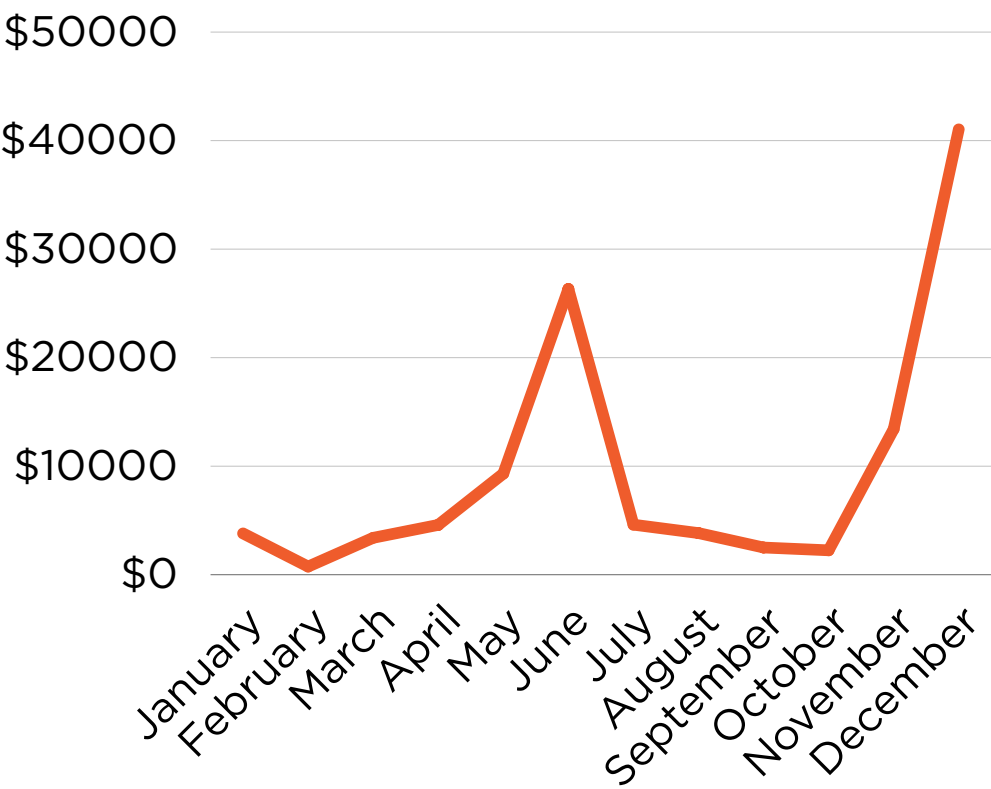
Grants	\$1,054,562
Membership Dues	\$140,000
Annual Campaign	\$110,000
Endowment Draw	\$67,500
Intrest Income	\$2000
Micellaneous Income	\$25
TOTAL	\$1,379,087

EXPENSES

Personnel	\$740,114
Administative	\$173,000
Issue Campaigns	\$343,816
Contract Services	\$122,000
TOTAL	\$1,378,930

DONOR GIVING

\$115,833.81
Raised 262
Donors



HOW CAN I GIVE?

Members of GCC have been working hard, but we have the potential and the power to do so much more.

Please consider joining or donating to GCC so that we can continue to **Make Change That Matters**. Your tax-deductible gift will support all the important work of GCC.

Consider a recurring gift in monthly or quarterly installments. You can mail your contribution. Or you can give online by scanning the QR code or navigating to:
<https://gcc-ohio.org>



Thank you for considering a contribution, so that GCC can continue to create **Change That Matters**.

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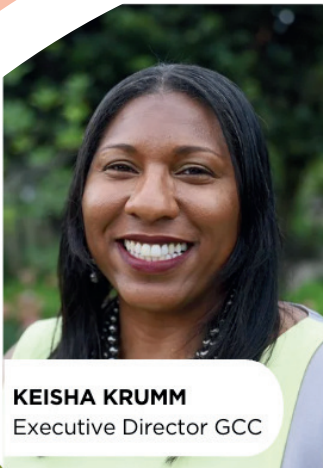
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Olivet Institutional Baptist



RABBI STEVE SEGAR
Kol HaLev



REV JAMES QUINCY III
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OUR MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Affinity Missionary Baptist Church
Antioch Baptist Church
B'nai Jeshurun Congregation
Beth El The Heights Synagogue
Catholics for GCC
Church of the Covenant
Church of the Redeemer UMC
Church of the Saviour UMC
Cleveland Friends
Congregation Mishkan Or
Disciples Christian Church
Divinity Lutheran Church
Dover Congregational UCC
Elizabeth Baptist Church
Fairmount Presbyterian Church
First Baptist Church
Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian
Imani UCC
Kol HaLev
Lakewood Congregational Church UCC
Lee Heights Community Church
Lee Road Baptist Church
Middleburg Heights Community UCC
National Council of Jewish Women
Neighborhood Family Practice
Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates
Olivet Institutional Baptist Church
Shiloh Baptist Church
South Euclid UCC
Southwest Unitarian Universalist Church
St. James A.M.E. Church
St. John A.M.E. Church
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Suburban Temple Kol Ami
The Centers for Family and Children
Trinity Cathedral
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Cleveland
West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church