

## Johnson Atkinson Spiritual Growth Fund Application

### Adult Literacy Program

Dorrie Roedner/Mission Team

The prevalence of adult illiteracy is often overlooked in our country today. Nationwide, 14% of adults read ***below the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level*** and 29% are at, or below, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. It is generally accepted in the business world that an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level is the minimum necessary for success in today's entry level positions. Further, 59% of federal prison inmates show skill levels falling into the "illiterate", or "low literacy", categories. This begs the question, did their lack of skill contribute to their incarceration?

Within the Biddeford/Saco/OOB area, recent years have seen changing demographics. We are witnessing an increased ethnic diversity with a subsequent broadening of educational needs, including literacy. For all learners, an inability to read has ramifications in all aspects of life and creates a ripple effect in the larger community.

Until recently, Saco hosted a chapter of Literacy Volunteers of America. Many local adults who wanted help learning to read in a private, low pressure environment sought services through LVA. Unfortunately, that office was forced to close- yet the need still exists. In the LVA model, volunteer tutors are paired with reading students and typically meet once each week for 1-2 hours. Instruction is individually tailored to the needs and goals of the student. Services are confidential and free of charge.

This summer, the UCC sent out a nationwide call to local churches, asking us to explore ways to address low literacy within our communities. Because I work in Adult Education and am familiar with the need that exists in the Biddeford-Saco area, I was immediately drawn to this call. I believe that First Parish is in a position to reach out to our neighbors and make a difference. Understand that "the difference" will occur not only for the students, but also for those who volunteer as tutors.

Most often, adults who cannot read, or cannot read well, have found ways to adapt in daily life. Some have led “successful” lives with jobs and families. Some, out of fear and shame, have kept their secret from their family members. Yet each time, when given a chance, these adults want to have the skills that many of us take for granted. Having access to free, private, one-on-one tutoring can truly mean the difference between being employed and unemployment, being able to read to children and help with homework, being able to understand and participate in medical care, maintaining ongoing contact with family in other parts of the world, or simply feeling like a competent, connected citizen.

We have discussed forming an Adult Literacy Program based at First Parish. There are approximately 8-10 people who are interested in being trained as literacy tutors. We have the ability to connect with adult education programs, churches, and other service agencies in the Saco-Biddeford-OOB area to arrange referrals. We are fortunate to have space in our building to allow tutors and students to meet in a convenient, safe location. However, we need to obtain some basic materials for use by the learning partners (on loan), reference manuals to assist in training the tutors, and basic supplies. Below is a preliminary budget which will only be used if our planning continues to indicate the level of interest described above. Further, this request has been prepared prior to receiving input from our Church Council due to the application deadline.

Financial support requested; to be used in the following ways:

*\$727 curriculum materials (ordered from ProLiteracy, uniquely designed for adult learners. Includes materials for a variety of educational needs and ability levels)*

*\$250 training manuals (to train tutors)*

*\$125 supplies*

We believe that First Parish should explore and address issues beyond our walls; meeting, when we are able, the needs of our greater community. We are blessed with talents, space, and financial resources that, when combined, can affect positive change in the lives of us all. This effort will invite new faces into our midst, including people of other faiths, nationalities, and language backgrounds .We will be able to provide long term assistance, creating lifelong results.

Please contact Dorrie Roedner (468-4669) with any questions you might have about this application.