

# BEACON

GROWING TOGETHER THROUGH ARTS, LEARNING, AND FAITH

Annual Report

2013-2014



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## Growth at Beacon 2013-2014:

Beacon continues to grow as it lives out its mission to invite people of all ages to grow together through arts, learning, and faith. From October 2013 through September 2014, we successfully crowd-funded an art installation called the Lights on Cumberland Street Project, welcomed over 100 children and over 200 volunteers through our after school and summer programming, and partnered with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Mural Arts Program, and Blackboard Labs. We began a monthly community dinner, moved our worship time to the evening, began to pilot the Mission Lab program as a creative resource to other churches, non-profits, and groups, offered Christian Education for the first time, and performed our first baptism. Our staff expanded to include a total of 4 interns; 2 for the academic year and 2 for the summer, and the community involved in Beacon grew in both numbers and investments of time, in-kind donations, financial support, and service.



## Faith Cultivation and Mission Partnerships:

In 2013-2014 we offered worship weekly on Sunday evenings at 5pm, with a community dinner on the first Sunday of every month, with great success. Our faith community remains somewhat transient, as is typical of faith communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but a core group of adults and children have emerged, regularly participating in worship and offering hospitality through helping with meals and offering a wide welcome to newcomers. Over the summer of 2014 our average attendance grew from 20-25 to 25-35, and the folks who worship together on Sunday continue to represent the beautiful diversity of demographics found in our neighborhood. To create an inviting and collaborative worship experience, we welcomed the incredibly talented music and worship leader, Taylor Telford, a student at Princeton Theological Seminary. Her skilled way of empowering others to sing and sing wholeheartedly has greatly deepened participation in and resonance of worship. She enriches our worship visioning and approach with a unique blend of musicianship and rigorous theological thinking. In addition to leadership growth, Beacon's congregation celebrated our first baptism on Easter Sunday, April 20, 2014, welcoming a 9 year old girl who has been a long time participant in our after school programs and in worship.



We offered our first Christian Education opportunity for children during Lent, which generated thoughtful and transformative conversations. On April 26, 2014, we celebrated the ordination of Co-Director Rebecca Blake, as well as the unveiling of the Lights on Cumberland Street Project art installation. It was a joyous and community-wide celebration, drawing over 150 folks from the neighborhood and beyond. The event was captured on film by a 1,001 New Worshipping Communities team documenting the growth and life at Beacon. This video was shared nationally and regionally with other churches and governing bodies as an example of the exciting things God is up to in Kensington.

This year also brought with it many deepened relationships with church partners, as several of these partners invested their time, energy, effort, and financial support in the mission and vision of Beacon. Relationships with Forest Grove Presbyterian Church, Calvary Presbyterian Church, Arch Street

Presbyterian Church, Wayne Presbyterian Church, and Grace Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, have yielded prayer support, a cadre of dedicated volunteers, financial support and in-kind donations, as well as improved building conditions as groups of volunteers have worked hard to paint, repair, and beautify our 144 year old building and grounds. We also began a collaboration with the organization Partners for Sacred Places, as a member of their Strategic Investment in Sacred Places (SISP) program. This is an exciting development as we continue to build relationships across the city, particularly with artists, via our connections to Partners for Sacred Spaces.



With support from the Synod of the Trinity, and the Eugene C. Bay Fund, we launched a pilot program called The Mission Lab, which offers faith communities, non-profits, groups, and committees day retreats that function as a creative catalyst for organizations discerning next programmatic, mission, and vision steps. Retreats are crafted and tailored to specific needs within the visiting group, and include context immersion practices, framed visioning conversations, brainstorming, and experimenting with new ideas, as well as Co-Director Rebecca's extensive experience blending visual arts, discernment, and community-building. Retreats may include service opportunities and other practices to aid in the efforts of community building and discernment if that is requested.

## Community Cultivation, Art, and Literacy:

The fall of 2013 brought with it a pilot collaboration with Blackboard Labs, a non-profit that utilizes hip-hop and creative writing to strengthen community and improve academic performance. Geared specifically to the youth that were aging out of our art and literacy programs, this program fostered deep conversations, creative writing, and community growth among participants. With our continued commitment to adapt to the needs of our context, the focus of the program shifted from music and hip-hop writing to encompass a radio-style recording process where youth wrote creative stories and recorded them, complete with sound effects and music. The



participants' work was creative and life-giving. After evaluating attendance trends and other neighborhood offerings, we decided to transition this program to a more free form drop-in style studio targeting the same age group (11+). We launched the Drop In Studio on Mondays in September, offering homework help, snacks, art projects, and our continued commitment to high volunteer to participant ratio to facilitate deep relationships with caring, invested adults.



The Story Studio after school program grew in depth and breadth of curriculum over the course of 2013-2014. Our weekly format consists of Co-Director Karen Rohrer teaching a short lesson, followed by all 10-13 students writing in their own writing stations throughout the room, assisted and guided by a team of creative, loving adult volunteers. In the past year we introduced the "Story Board," a mad-libs style random writing prompt generator using flashcards and participation from attendees. The results were creative, thoughtful, and hilarious, and garnered both laughter and engaging questions from listeners.

During our time with children ages 5-12, we noticed an increased facility with language as well as what is a still growing interest in writing and self-expression, both during our program, and in school (as per parental reports). Participants are then given the chance to share their stories with the group, and often do so with great enthusiasm and pride in their work.

Our afterschool art studio maintained the growth it experienced in 2012-2013, hosting between 15-25 children on any given Wednesday. Curriculum is developed and taught by our Co-Director, Rebecca Blake, who weaves her art education and pastoral skills to both build art skill development in participants and facilitate a group dynamic that fosters wholeness and healthy relationships. In the past year,





Rebecca created more diversity within the curriculum, including art history inspired projects as well as projects that encouraged writing and art-making.

Our volunteer base for all of our programs remains strong, consisting of church partners, neighbors, high school and college students, and regular worship attendees who join us on a regular basis to provide a safe, loving, and attentive environment for children who so desperately need the care and investment of their community. We deepened and formalized a partnership

with Eastern University as a service learning site as we welcomed students to Beacon to volunteer in our programs and provide organizational support.

We brokered partnerships with the Pennsylvania Academy for Fine Arts (PAFA), the Mural Arts Program, and Blackboard Labs, and offered special events and programs to our community that drew on the gifts and strengths of each organization. The outcomes not only included enriched art-making and creative writing, but also a sense of city-wide collaboration and participation.



We took a break from our Wednesday evening art studio program in the summer of 2014 to analyze and assess the strengths and benefits of the program. As we continued to be in conversation with those around us, we piloted a family movie night, and began to plan regular biweekly community events for the fall of 2014. These events are designed to widen our welcome to our neighbors, and include offerings like family volunteer nights where families of all ages can have a hand in making our building and yard more functional and beautiful and Ask A Pastor events where Karen and Rebecca will be on hand to answer all kinds of curious and engaging questions—sometimes even over s'mores and fire pits in the front yard.

We look forward to continuing to adapt and improve week night community programs in whatever way they takes shape.



In the summer of 2014 we adapted our summer program to be a twice weekly Open Yard program, where children and adults of all ages were invited to gather in the front yard for opportunities for play, conversation, community building, raised bed vegetable gardening, and healthy snacks. This program included a collaboration with Broad Street Ministry's Youth Initiative program, which brought anywhere from 8-10 volunteers 3 times a week to work on the building and yard, and facilitate games and conversations with Open Yard participants. Open Yard hours were a huge success in bringing in new folks and generating

energy for safe and creative free play. That success led to deepened relationships with new students, as well as many parents whose children have been longstanding program participants.

All of our programs are free and open to all, as we are aware that charging even a nominal fee could trigger shame and prevent very vulnerable individuals from experiencing and benefitting from voice-cultivation, creative expression, and time spent in a safe space with invested adults. Through our work with participants in the after school studios, as well as recruiting both volunteers for our after school programs and participants for the adult open studio, we have seen our mission fulfilled in neighbors from a variety of backgrounds. They have opened themselves up to knowing and being known by each other, and in that community building, begun realizing their own creative voices, inherent worth, and collaborative gifts.

## Community Celebrations:

Beacon celebrated many triumphs large and small over the course of 2013-2014. We continued to craft and grow our annual Gingerbread House studio, drawing over 35 participants, including regular program attendees as well as folks who were new to Beacon. We began and completed the Lights on Cumberland Street Project art installation, which now shines brightly out our windows and onto the surrounding streets. Completed, it houses 200 light bulbs hanging from the ceiling at different heights, illuminating the space with soft, warm light. The light bulbs themselves are industrial looking, a nod to our shared history of a neighborhood of industry and factories, and they honor and commemorate those who have been lights in the Beacon community, the Kensington neighborhood, and beyond. The project was successfully crowd-funded by just under 100 donors, friends of Beacon both near and far. We enlisted the expertise of local lighting designer Joshua Schulman to oversee the installation, and celebrated their unveiling as a part of an event called Beacon Empowered: A Celebration of Community Creativity. The event encompassed Co-Director Rebecca's ordination as a teaching elder in the PCUSA, the unveiling and commissioning of the installation, and a celebration of all those who call Beacon home.

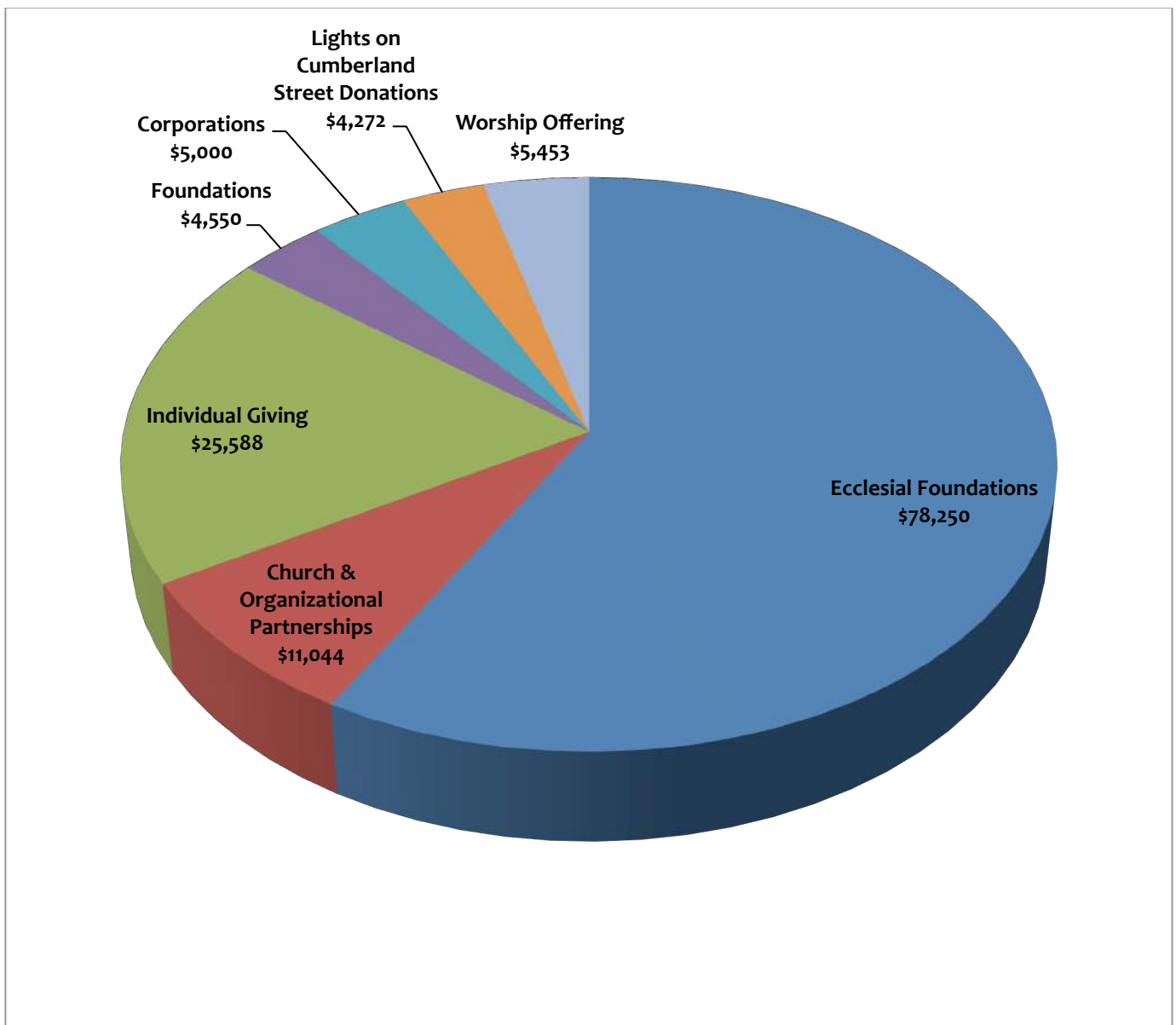




## Budget: Income & Expenses 2013-2014:

Beacon's fiscal year runs October to October, so the below information offers a picture of the budget for the 12 months in question.

**Total Income: \$134,156**



## Major Funding Partners:

### **Ecclesial Foundation Partners:**

- Covenant Fund
- 1,001 New Worshipping Communities
- General Assembly of the PCUSA
- Synod of the Trinity
- Presbytery of Philadelphia

### **Foundation Partners:**

- The Connelly Foundation
- Eugene C. Bay Fund
- Union Benevolence Association

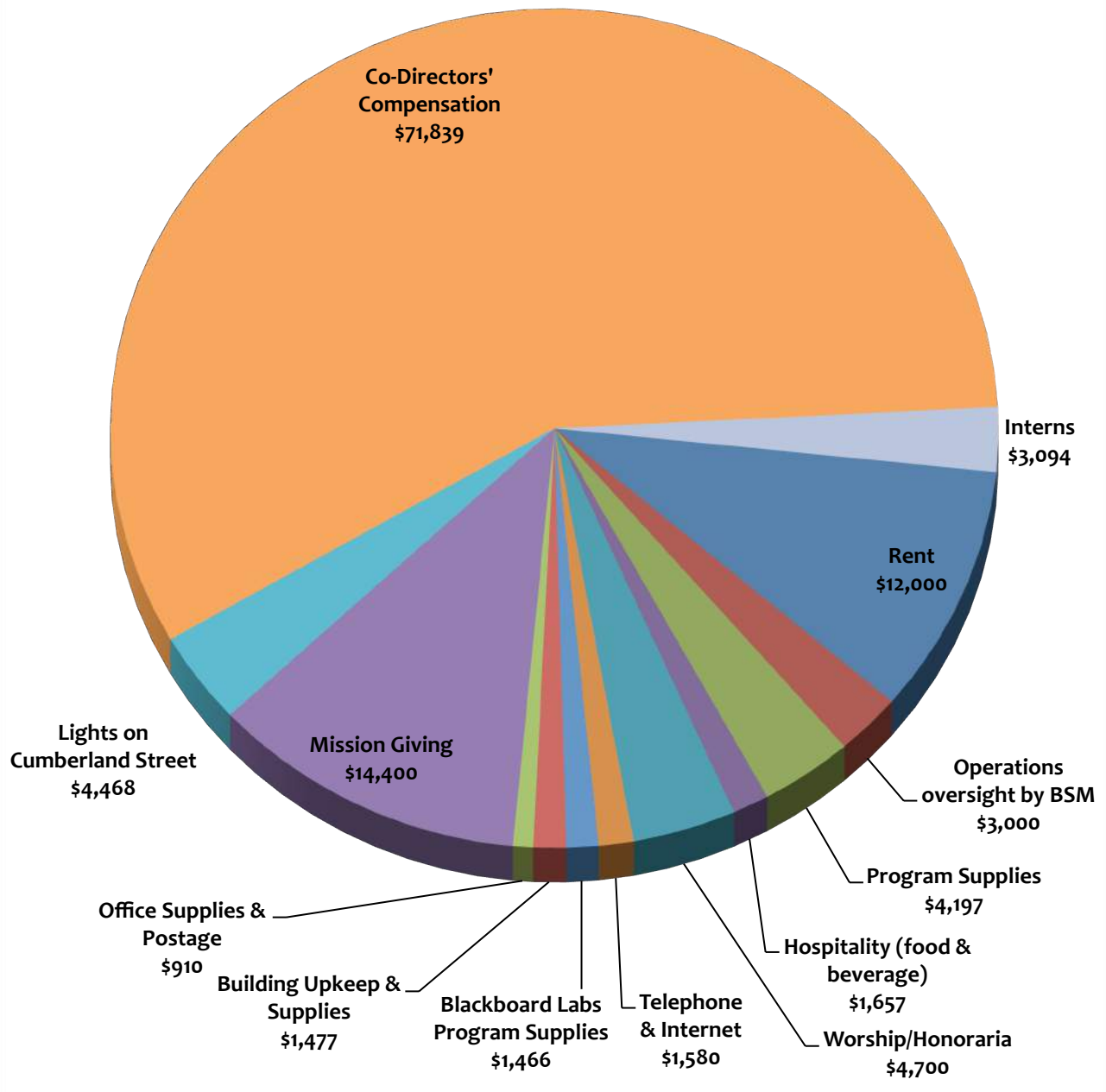
### **Corporations:**

- The Penn Treaty Special Services District

### **Church and Organizational Partners:**

- Grace Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown
- Forest Grove Presbyterian Church
- Arch Street Presbyterian Church
- Wayne Presbyterian Church
- Eastern University

### Total Expenses: \$124, 787



## Staffing:

Our 2 part time Co-Directors, Rev. Karen Rohrer and Rebecca Blake, have been hard at work to build a sustainable and impactful staffing structure at Beacon. The paid staff at Beacon this year consisted of 2 Co-Directors (both part time), a shifting Sunday musical team, one 10 hour a week work study student for office administration, two full time summer interns (one from Princeton Theological Seminary, one from 1,001 New Worshipping Communities), and one 10 hour a week intern from Princeton. As we build capacity, we are excited to participate in the training and formation of seminary students for creative and innovative ministry and to foster teaching and nonprofit management skills for a University of the Arts student. We continue to host several dedicated regular volunteers, including retired and active educators, Eastern University students, nonprofit workers, storytellers, artists, and more. Additionally, we look forward to bringing on Beacon's two co-directors in a full time capacity for 2014-2015.

## Looking Ahead:

We continue to conduct informal neighborhood assessments and evaluate our programs to best suit the needs of those living in the neighborhood. We will reconfigure our programming for youth this fall to a program with more space and opportunities for relationship building via conversation, homework help, art and creative writing projects, and more.

We have worked with a landscape architecture and urban design firm, the Locus Partners, to develop a preliminary plan for redeveloping the front yard as a space that more adequately communicates our mission of offering a wide welcome to everyone. The design incorporates spaces for play, contemplation, and an expansion of our current raised bed vegetable garden. We plan to seek out funding sources and begin the work of community conversation around the idea in the spring of 2015.

We have been able to raise sustainable funds to employ both co-directors in a full time capacity for the fiscal year of 2014-2015, and plan to continue to host interns from Princeton Theological Seminary and 1,001 New Worshipping Communities, as well as seek out connections to other seminaries. We are excited about the growing investment in our co-director's work, as well as the leadership and engagement that is bubbling up in the community itself.

We are experiencing a significant amount of growth, and are beginning the process of becoming independent from our current fiscal agent, Broad Street Ministry. Whether this means chartering as a PCUSA church, incorporating as a non-profit, or some combination of the two, we are excited about our journey toward sustainability and independence.

**We could not do this work without the support of communities and individuals like you.**

**Join us in the adventure that awaits us in 2014-2015.**

## For More Information:

Contact Rebecca or Karen at any time by emailing them at: [thewordatbeacon@gmail.com](mailto:thewordatbeacon@gmail.com)

Check out our website: [thewordatbeacon.org](http://thewordatbeacon.org) for more detailed information about our mission, programs, and staff.

Follow us on Facebook for weekly updates: [facebook.com/thewordatbeacon](https://facebook.com/thewordatbeacon)

To volunteer with us at the Drop In Studio, Story Studio or Art Studio, every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, from 4-6pm, contact Rebecca at 267 702 0804 or [rblake910@gmail.com](mailto:rblake910@gmail.com).

To support Beacon with in-kind donations or online financial giving, go to our website and click “Donate” for more information.

### **Join us:**

Every Monday for Drop In Studio from 4-6pm

Every Tuesday for Story Studio from 4-6pm

Every Wednesday for Art Studio from 4-6pm

Every Sunday for worship at 5:00pm

Dinner after worship on the first Sunday of the month

### **We are located at:**

2364 E Cumberland Street

Philadelphia, PA 19125