

## TEAM Belong \$1,000 Grants Recognize Efforts to Welcome Individuals of All Abilities into Faith Communities

CHICAGO, IL (December 31, 2019) —TEAM Belong: That Every Ability May Belong is recognizing one religious school and four congregations with \$1,000 TEAM Belong Award grants. The grants recognize outstanding efforts to welcome individuals of all abilities into houses of faith and religious schools and help fund specific projects that expand these efforts. For more information, application forms and deadline visit [www.teamBelong.org](http://www.teamBelong.org).

### 2019 TEAM Belong Award Winners

**St. Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic School, Chicago, IL**

**Christ the Servant Catholic Church, Woodridge, IL**

**Lake Harriet United Methodist Church, Minneapolis, MN**

**First United Methodist Church, Lodi, OH**

**Mishkan Chicago, Chicago, IL**

### 2019 TEAM Belong Award Winning Projects

**St. Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic School, Chicago, IL**



*St. Nicholas Catholic School will purchase text to speech assistive technology tools to support students' reading skills with a TEAM Belong grant.*

St. Nicholas of Tolentine School is an [All Are Welcome School](#), offering inclusive Catholic Education to four hundred students of all backgrounds, races and educational learning needs. The school provides screenings, evaluations and speech, occupational and physical therapy to students. A team of educators including the principal, director of inclusion, behavioral therapist, counselor, Title 1 Teacher, and a classroom teacher meet weekly to discuss ways to support students and teachers to meet the educational needs of the growing, diverse population. In addition, the director of inclusion consults with classroom teachers and

coordinates each child's classroom accommodations and modifications as needed. An annual *Inclusion Night* at the beginning of each school year

introduces service providers to parents and provides an opportunity for the director of inclusion to meet with each parent to discuss the service plan for their child. An Inclusion Committee of students, parents and school staff meets monthly to discuss what can be done to be a more welcoming and inclusive school as well as plan the annual *Inclusion Month* with activities that focus on diversity and welcoming all to the school. The Inclusion Committee also helps implement [Brave Kids](#) and [PBIS Day](#) (*Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support Day*).

The 2019 TEAM Belong grant will be used to purchase a C-Pen Reader and two licenses for the Kurzweil 3000 Firefly, both assistive technology items that support children's reading skills.

"The TEAM Belong Award allows St. Nicholas School to further its work of embracing all students and their diverse learning needs. It reaffirms our root belief in the inclusive Catholic school setting and that all children possess gifts and talents," said Dr. Mariagnes Menden, Principal.

### **Christ the Servant Catholic Church, Woodridge, IL**



*Christ the Servant Catholic Church will use the 2019 TEAM Belong Grant to help offset the cost of a new circular drive with an accessible drop off area.*

Christ the Servant Catholic Church is home to about 750 families. The accessible church has a ground level entrance, accessible meeting rooms, accessible washrooms and accessible offices. Free standing chairs rather than fixed pews provide flexible seating for individuals who use wheelchairs. An accessible prayer garden with accessible walkways is also available. As the parish population increased, it was evident that a larger parking lot with updated access features was needed. A circle drive with an accessible drop off area and

accessible parking spaces was added at the main entrance.

The 2019 TEAM Belong grant will be used to offset the cost of improving accessibility in the parking lot.

Father Bob Duda, pastor, stated, "We at Christ the Servant parish are truly blessed to be able to provide a house of worship that is both welcoming to all abilities and accessible. We truly appreciate the recognition of our efforts."

## Lake Harriet United Methodist Church, Minneapolis, MN



*A 2019 TEAM Belong Award will help fund a lift/elevator to the education wing at Lake Harriet UMC, Minneapolis, MN.*

Lake Harriet United Methodist Church (LHUMC) is a vibrant, welcoming congregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Since its organization in 1907, LHUMC has welcomed all, and felt a call to social action and outreach. The church parking lot features accessible parking spaces, sidewalks and entrances with curb-cuts and a drop-off area at the main entrance with an automatic door opener. The accessible church building has an elevator offering access to all three levels, ADA-accessible water fountains and bathrooms, an accessible seating area, pew cut outs as well as a ramp to the altar. A hearing loop, large print worship aides, live streamed worship services and a sermon podcast on the website are also available.

Funds received from the TEAM Belong Grant will be used to help defray the cost of removing a stairwell and installing a four stop lift/elevator to the education wing of the church building.

“Walking through the TEAM Belong Award application process was so helpful. Thank you so much for your mission and generous support of parochial schools and congregations that are making their facilities accessible for all,” stated Jane Weiers, Lake Harriet UMC TEAM Belong Award applicant.

## First United Methodist Church, Lodi, OH



*First United Methodist Church will use their TEAM Belong Award grant to construct an exterior ramp to the second floor sanctuary for safe exit in case of an emergency.*

Over the past ten years, the congregation of First United Methodist Church, Lodi, Ohio, has worked intentionally to improve the accessibility of the church building. Accessible parking spaces, a curb cut, accessible washrooms and an elevator have been installed.

The TEAM Belong grant will be used to install an exterior ramp from the second floor to allow for a safe, accessible exit from the sanctuary in the event of an emergency evacuation.

"We are humbled and blessed to receive this TEAM Belong Award. Thank you for joining us on our journey to have a church building that is safe and accessible to all," stated Rev. Dr. Diane Bell, pastor of First United Methodist Church of Lodi.

## **Mishkan Chicago, Chicago, IL**

Ancient Israelites carried a tent or *mishkan* with them in the desert, creating a holy space whenever they stopped. Mishkan Chicago is a Jewish spiritual community not bound by a particular location. The congregation meets for musical prayer, learning and holidays in venues and other religiously unconventional spaces all around the city of Chicago. In the past, grants from TEAM Belong helped the Mishkan community provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (High Holiday) services.



*A TEAM Belong Grant will allow Mishkan Chicago to expand sign language interpretation services.*

"This year our TEAM Belong grant will allow us to continue to provide sign language interpretation services and expand ASL interpreting once a month at Shabbat services and signature Holiday events," stated Ellie Spitz, Mishkan Chicago Director of Programs.

TEAM Belong Award winning parochial schools and congregations create welcoming and accessible environments where students and individuals of all abilities feel they truly Belong to their school or worshipping community. TEAM Belong publicizes the efforts of our winning schools and congregations so others can learn from our winners and expand efforts to welcome all abilities to worship and education. Since 1997 TEAM Belong has recognized more than 235 congregations, religious schools and ministries with grants totaling over \$190,000.

## **About the TEAM BELONG Awards**

*The TEAM Belong Awards for adult applicants and the Junior TEAM Belong Awards for applicants ages 5-18 are grants of up to \$1,000 that recognize houses of faith and religious schools for their efforts to create belonging for individuals of all abilities. Applications for the TEAM Belong Awards and Junior TEAM Belong Awards (nominated by children ages 5-18) are accepted annually. Watch [www.team-w.org](http://www.team-w.org) for application deadline.*

## **About TEAM Belong Month**

*Congregations and religious schools are invited to celebrate TEAM Belong Month. During TEAM Belong Month, houses of faith and religious schools use educational events, surveys, prayer and preaching to take stock of their current efforts to create belonging for worshippers and students of all abilities and renew their commitments to creating environments so that every ability may belong. Visit [www.teambelong.org](http://www.teambelong.org) for interfaith TEAM Belong Month Workbooks, prayer cards, bulletin items and more.*

## **About TEAM Belong**

*TEAM Belong is a ministry of Pathways.org, a Chicago based not for profit organization. The interfaith TEAM Belong ministry provides grants, videos and educational materials to help congregations and religious schools to convey a sense of belonging for worshipers and students of all abilities. Visit [www.teambelong.org](http://www.teambelong.org) for more information.*