

NOVEMBER 2025



LUMUNOS

Building Bridges of
Understanding, Trust & Cooperation

LUMUNOS BRIGHTER: OUR STORY IN 2025





David Fraccaro, Executive Director

Reflections from the Executive Director

Dear Lumunos friends,

2025 has been the most tumultuous year our nation has seen in a long time. Political division and culture wars have fueled significant distrust and animosity between people of difference across the United States. From small towns to large cities, tensions amongst neighbors are at an all-time high. We wholeheartedly believe Lumunos is called in this moment to restore understanding, trust, and cooperation across lines of difference in the US – to help strangers we fear become neighbors we embrace.

Facilitating meaningful conversations that break down barriers and build community is embedded in our history. For decades, we've empowered people of faith (as well as the spiritual, but not religious) to examine their lives and live out their most deeply held values...most notably, the value of loving our neighbors as ourselves. This is why we felt inspired to renew our mission last year and launch our new Becoming Neighbors programming – providing a space and process for people to come to know and care for one another across lines of difference.

I am happy to share that Becoming Neighbors has struck a chord and

taken off in several communities across the US this year. What we've learned is that it isn't the proximity of our homes, but the depth of our relationships that make us neighbors. The more we know one another, the more likely we are to care about one another, and the more we care about one another, the more likely we are to serve, love, and protect one another. *At this challenging time in our nation's history, Becoming Neighbors is helping everyday people widen their understanding of who their neighbors are, and providing hope that there is a better way forward together.*

In the following pages you will hear the stories and see the pictures of some remarkable people, most of whom are new to Lumunos, who have participated in these transformative gatherings. Given this tremendous impact, much of our immediate future will be focused on strengthening and growing our Becoming Neighbors programming.

In addition to this exciting progress, we also maintained our traditional LumZoom series this year, which focused on the themes of *Looking Back, Giving Forward* and *Lumunos and the 12 Steps: How Meaningful Conversations Lead to Meaningful Change*. These reflective, monthly online gatherings provided

participants with small group wisdom and encouragement to live differently. Meanwhile, we continued to provide invaluable *workplace wellbeing trainings* to help working professionals reconnect with their call, find balance, and avoid burnout. And....we held our inaugural *Bridge Builder Leadership Retreat* this summer, as well as a fall musical-themed fundraiser, *A Place for Us*, all which you can read more about inside.

In short, it has been a very exciting and meaningful year of growth for Lumunos, and we are thrilled to share our story of impact with you. These achievements would not have been possible without the incredibly kind and generous support of so many of you reading this. Thank you for believing in our work – we will get through these *challenging times* together – and please let me know if we can ever be there for you.

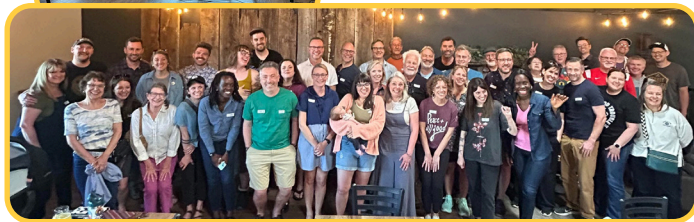
Peace.

David Fraccaro
Executive Director

Becoming Neighbors Batavia, Illinois

Becoming Neighbors all began in the western Chicago suburb of Batavia, IL, at a special and welcoming downtown brewery called Sturdy Shelter Brewing. The owners Diane and Frank shared a similar vision and found a natural partner in Lumunos to provide a space and process for diverse people (different in culture, faith, nationality, sexuality, age, gender...even politics) to come to know and care about one another – for strangers to become neighbors.

Through several Becoming Neighbors gatherings at Sturdy, we've managed to bring some unlikely people together to have some very meaningful community conversations this year on urgent issues like immigration and the LGBTQ experience. Personal stories of courage and hope from



our panelists helped bring new perspectives to those who were unfamiliar with the unique challenges and gifts of immigrant and queer communities. Hearts and minds were opened and even changed through vulnerable sharing and compassionate listening in small groups.

To summarize one participant's reflections:

This gathering really helped me understand my own bias and privilege in life. People here were willing to give me a chance, so I was much more willing to listen to them too. I am leaving with different ideas and feelings than I came in with.

It is always our goal to spark a few ideas that people can leave with as well and offer our support to turn these ideas into transformative realities. One great outcome of our recent community conversation on immigration has been the creation of a mutual aid listserve for participants to support their immigrant neighbors in need during this difficult time.

Our partnership with Sturdy Shelter Brewing in Batavia has provided an invaluable home base from which to learn and grow, expanding to five new cities this year. Our deepest thanks go out to Frank, Diane, and staff for their kindness and support...and for hosting our summer *A Place for Us* musical fundraiser as well!

Becoming Neighbors Aurora, Illinois

The first city we expanded Becoming Neighbors to was naturally the city next door to Batavia - Aurora, Illinois. Aurora is the state's second largest city and one of its most diverse. Lumunos partnered with a nonprofit called COFI, which seeks to build a movement for economic, racial, and social justice for families, for a Becoming Neighbors program called *No One Walks Alone*, focused on mental health.

This multicultural gathering united people from African, Latino, Southeast Asian cultures, as well as Christian and Muslim faiths, to destigmatize asking for mental health support. Panelists shared



encouraging stories about times when they've needed help, followed by small group conversations about community solidarity in troubling times. Another hallmark of Becoming Neighbors gatherings is having fun together, so the second half of the evening was spent eating, dancing, and getting temporary henna tattoos. Folks left feeling a renewed sense of belonging and pride in their community. As one panelist shared:

This is the first time in my life in Aurora these groups of people have come together like this, and it is very powerful when we do.

We are happy to share that our partnership with COFI was essential to the creation of the mutual aid listserve that is connecting citizen and immigrant communities between Batavia and Aurora, Illinois. Launching Becoming Neighbors in Aurora helped us realize that this model works both in small towns and large cities!

Becoming Neighbors

Waynesville and Brevard, North Carolina

Lumunos team members, Becca and Heather, led the effort to introduce Becoming Neighbors community conversations in the western North Carolina towns of Waynesville and Brevard, North Carolina this year. Gatherings lifted up small businesses, and were held at beloved downtown coffee shops, libraries, and cultural centers.



Themes focused on what it means to live shoulder to shoulder with our neighbors through changes and how to find hope in hard times together,

something the resilient folks in this region know well given the devastation of Hurricane Helene one year ago.

Attendees included people new to the region, as well as those whose families have been there for generations. As compelling stories were shared amongst panelists and participants, a vision of harmony amongst differences emerged. As one participant shared:

I've lived in Brevard for 18 years, and this is the best discussion I've had about these issues in our community.

It is important to note that Becoming Neighbors gatherings seek not only to build bridges across lines of difference in communities, but to help those who feel isolated find a sense of belonging. It was beautiful to see another participant, who had shared that she had really struggled to find community since moving to the area years ago, leaving the gathering side by side with a new friend.

Becoming Neighbors

Johnstown, Pennsylvania and Las Vegas, Nevada

One of our goals at Lumunos is to help people in our network learn from one another and feel inspired to bring Becoming Neighbors programs to their communities. Our Becoming Neighbors LumZooms this year provided space for folks in Illinois and North Carolina to share their experiences with people in other parts of the nation. This online sharing led to new in person gatherings in Johnstown, PA and Las Vegas, NV.



In Johnstown, a terrific group representing different schools, faith communities, families, nonprofits, and local businesses got to know each other better through a creatively designed game of Bingo. Afterwards they had a great community conversation about

how to build a more welcoming and inclusive Johnstown together. Thanks to our friend Kathy and the folks at FOR Johnstown for making this uplifting gathering happen.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, a wonderfully diverse group came together in Las Vegas for a unique Becoming Neighbors gathering entitled: *Tish, Tarot and Beats*. Participants were joined by Mexican, Irish,

Yiddish, and Filipino artists who used music and wordless melodies to create a much-needed sense of peace and belonging. As our talented friends Jason and Heather, who led this effort shared:

A lot of people out here have felt unsafe lately, like they aren't sure where they can be themselves. This gathering brought so much joy and belonging. We knew we had a good idea, but didn't know just how moving and meaningful it was going to be until it happened.

Lumunos was so happy to support all these inspiring Becoming Neighbors gatherings throughout the nation this year. Please contact Lumunos Executive Director – David Fraccaro at david@lumunos.org, if you are interested in bringing Becoming Neighbors to your community!



Becoming Neighbors Congregations

As many of you know, much of Lumunos/Faith at Work's history has been focused on engaging people within faith communities. While we do not promote any particular faith tradition, we recognize the shared values of many traditions and believe something deeply meaningful and important happens when people of different faith traditions come to know and care about one another.

It is for this reason we expanded our Becoming Neighbors programming this year to include unique partnerships between diverse congregations. Our Becoming Neighbors Congregations program provides a process for two different faith communities (different in culture, race, nationality, and/or faith) to partner and meet together quarterly over a year period of time using the following four steps as a guide: *meaningful conversations, fun exchange, faith at work in the world, and telling the story.*

We were thrilled to launch Becoming Neighbors Congregations this year alongside six Northern Illinois based congregations. Beautiful partnerships have been formed between Batavia Covenant and Logan Street Baptist in Batavia, First Congregational and New Hope Baptist in Dekalb, and Winnetka Covenant and Iglesia del Pacto in north Chicago. Dozens of members from each congregation have eaten, laughed, cried, shared stories, sang and danced together as a part of their year-long journey together...and soon they will be exploring ways they can put their shared values at work and serve their local community together. This may include marching together for human rights, collecting food and clothing for local pantries, cleaning up local parks, and much more.

Throughout this process Lumunos provides consultation, small seed grants, and connections to other congregations participating in the Becoming Neighbors Congregations program.

We also help partnering congregations tell the story of how they've come to widen their understanding of who their neighbors are, and why these unique partnerships are a promising example the world really needs right now.

This fall, we had the opportunity to bring representatives from all participating congregations together for a special LumZoom to share and learn from one another...and to inspire new congregations to join the program in the new year. It quickly became apparent that what these congregations are doing together holds a part of the cure to what ails us as a nation. As Rev. Angela from New Hope Baptist shared:

We are living in a time of fear, hate, division and intolerance. For two different congregations, with people from different walks of life, to become neighbors and experience and exhibit love with one another and then share that love with the larger community (through service and advocacy) - that is a big part of the answer to all the craziness. Faith communities mobilizing together in solidarity like this is key to promoting love instead of hate, courage instead of fear, and unity and diversity instead of division and intolerance.



Becoming Neighbors Bridge Builder Leadership Retreat

Another beautiful mountain town in North Carolina was the site of our inaugural Summer Bridge Builder Leadership Retreat. The fun and moving day-long retreat in Boone brought together folks from across the state working in schools, nonprofits, law enforcement, health and human services, local business, and faith communities to learn how to build understanding, trust, and cooperation across lines of difference in their own communities. Our time together included engaging and practical content, role-play, small group discussions, and a mini-Becoming Neighbors gathering. When asked whether they left the

retreat feeling inspired and empowered to build bridges in their own communities, surveyed participants rated the experience a 9.5 out of 10 overall and shared:

I now understand that it is less about how much diversity a community has, but more about what we do to proactively build bridges amongst that diversity that really matters. The topics and content made me check my own stubbornness/dismissiveness of those



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on the opposing side of my beliefs. Our discussion of 'centering common humanity over divisive beliefs' was especially important to reach new understanding and expand empathy to new groups.

We are deeply grateful to the Blue Cross Center for their wonderful hospitality and to our partners at Q'Pasa

Appalachia for helping us better understand the immigrant experience in western North Carolina through stories and dance. A special thanks goes out to the Bauer Family Foundation for their generous support in making this fun and impactful leadership retreat possible.

LumZooms - Lumunos and the 12 Steps



In a world dominated by a 24-hour news cycle that amplifies threats and division, Lumunos offers something different – a space to slow down, connect, and reflect on ideas like accountability, courage, surrender, grace, and integrity.

Inspired by the shared roots of Alcoholics Anonymous and Lumunos in our founder Sam Shoemaker, we launched a quarterly online Zoom series in 2025 called "Lumunos and the 12 Steps: How Meaningful Conversations Lead to Meaningful Change." Drawing inspiration from the spiritual and relational wisdom of the 12 Steps, we explored how practices like self-reflection, making amends, and living with integrity can foster healing and transformation in our lives and communities.

Over the past year, people from across the country – longtime Lumunos supporters and newcomers alike – have gathered to consider how changing our

own ways of thinking can build bridges across lines of difference. Each session invited reflection on a core principle. Together, we reflected on what Richard Rohr calls the "universal addiction" of *stinking thinking* – our ingrained assumptions, compulsions, and defenses. We also explored "redemptive listening" and an "economy of grace" – ways of reconnecting and rebuilding relationships strained by hurt or division.

One participant shared how she was inspired to knock on a new neighbor's door to welcome someone from a different cultural background. In a time of deepening division and isolation, it's small acts like this that strengthen the social fabric of our communities.

Lumunos continues to help people rediscover the courage and grace to build bridges – one meaningful conversation at a time.

Looking Back, Giving Forward



At the core of Lumunos' mission is a commitment to bringing people together, unifying diverse individuals through a universal language of compassion and understanding. As Lumunos re-imagined its programming in late 2024, there was a great reverence for its long history as part of this process. The organization made good on its commitment to taking the best of its history as it evolved, ensuring that programs were relevant and connected to the current time. One of the many outcomes of this process was an updated version of a program designed by Lumunos in 2007, called *Looking Back & Giving Forward*. It was described as "one of the many

portals that a new way of seeing can use to announce itself, to step from the shadows into our lived experience."

This year more than 30 people gathered to challenge attitudes about aging, offering a compelling vision of aging without denying its challenges. The idea of the program is simple - that our stories remind us that there is a deeper pattern within our lives and that as we share our stories and experiences with a retrospective lens on our lives, we become more whole. Coupled with introspection delivered in small groups and through engaging material delivered by facilitator Betsy Perry, we became "Legacy Explorers". One of the final questions was 'who will we be living into our legacies rather than just leaving them?'

Workplace Wellbeing

This year we continued to expand our workplace wellbeing and leadership trainings to new audiences working in health centers, schools, nonprofits, and faith communities across the nation. We had the honor of sharing with and learning from physicians at health centers in Vermont, clergy in Illinois, teachers in North Carolina, and many others. While participants worked in very different settings, the core theme of strengthening teamwork through greater emotional intelligence, empathy, and mindful communication resonated across sectors.

One particularly memorable training focused on how theories of pluralism (building bridges across lines of difference) can become realized in local communities with fellows at the Center for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University. Center Director and Professor Brad Burroughs remarked:

Our fellows are working to develop the skills and virtues to work constructively across lines of difference, and they benefited enormously from Lumunos offering them a rich mix of first-person stories, general principles, and case studies that helped them identify concrete ways in which they can bridge divides and become neighbors with those who are very different from themselves.

Speaking to our renewed mission and the importance of our trainings, former Lumunos Executive Director and Lumunos trainer, Doug Wysockey-Johnson recently shared:

I have watched with great excitement the growth of Lumunos Becoming Neighbors initiative. Not only do these programs feel like a faithful and relevant evolution of our historic mission, they resonate deeply with the wellbeing

and leadership trainings I continue to do for Lumunos in the workplace.



The workplace is a kind of neighborhood...and a messy one at that. Financial pressures, deadlines, disagreements and differing viewpoints can make it hard to get along. This is true whether you work in a bank, church, school, corporation or hospital and, for years, the workplace world wasn't willing to learn skills like how to get along, how to communicate, or what it means to be self-aware. These kinds of relational skills that Lumunos has always taught were considered 'soft' or 'too touchy feely', but not anymore.

Current research and literature are filled with studies and articles about the importance of building relationships and why that matters. Taking just one example from the world of health care, a physician leader once said to me "We cannot and will not take care of patients any better than we take care of each other." This is the sweet spot that Lumunos has found in the workplace environment—helping teams to know and trust one another more deeply across lines of difference, so the important mission of the organization can thrive.

I believe our programming in the workplace is more important than ever. In many cases, the workplace is the ONLY neighborhood where people encounter or engage with people different from them—politically, racially, generationally or any way. It is so gratifying to see the relationship fundamentals that I learned from the saints of Faith at Work and Lumunos, now applied in workplace settings. While these relationship skills stand the test of time, they are especially and desperately needed in our world today.

A Place for Us Musical Fundraiser

There's a place for us...somewhere a place for us. Hold my hand and we're halfway there, hold my hand and I'll take you there - somehow, someday, somewhere.

These lines come from West Side Story, perhaps the greatest musical about what it means to yearn for belonging and community – themes central to our mission at Lumunos. It was remarkably powerful and beautiful

to hear the standing-room only crowd sing this (and many other songs) together at our fall musical fundraiser, A Place for Us.



Lumunos Executive Director David Fraccaro (who once had a career in musical theater) gathered a terrific group of professional singers and musicians from the renowned St. Charles Singers for a moving evening of songs from Broadway musicals like *Les Misérables*, *Ragtime*, and *South Pacific*. The audience, many who were new to Lumunos, left uplifted with a great appreciation and eagerness to support our programs. The fun and meaningful evening was a great reminder of the power of music and stories to restore our shared humanity...and we can't wait to do it again next year!

Lumunos Brighter Thank-Yous and How You Can Support Lumunos

It is our hope that you enjoyed reading the story of our work and impact this year – it could not have happened without the kind support of so many of you. We want to share our deepest thanks with our monthly sustainers, and to those who've given so generously to the Lumunos Brighter campaign over the past few years. A special thanks goes out to Maggie, Dan, Tom, and Pete for their guidance on the

Stewardship Mission Committee, as well as to Norwell UCC, the GriffinHarte Foundation, the Peale Foundation, and the Bauer Family Foundation for believing in our work.

We also want to share our gratitude to Becca, Heather, and Doug for their passionate and creative work this year and to the Lumunos Board of Directors for their guidance and care of Lumunos.

If you feel positive about the impact we are making in the world, please consider supporting us in one of the following ways:

- Make a one-time gift online at lumunos.org, or by check (using the return envelope included with this newsletter).
- Become one of our special monthly sustainers.
- Connect your congregation or business to Lumunos and ask for their support.
- Make a gift of stock to Lumunos.
- Consider making an end-of-life legacy gift to Lumunos (we can provide the needed information).
- Finally, whether you are a donor or not, we hope you will participate in our programming when it's online or near to you in person...and partner with Lumunos to bring our programs to your community, congregation, or workplace!

*Please contact us at david@lumunos.org or 630-277-6030 with any questions.



LUMUNOS

Building Bridges of Understanding, Trust & Cooperation

Mission

Lumunos fosters meaningful conversations and relationships that ignite purpose in life, belonging in community, and well-being in the workplace.

Vision

Lumunos programs inspire participants to work across lines of difference to create meaningful change in their own lives and communities.

📍 100 E Shannon St., Elburn, IL 60119

🌐 www.lumunos.org

☎ 630-277-6030

✉ info@lumunos.org

facebook.com/lumunos.org

instagram.com/lumunos.calling

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THANK YOU FOR BELIEVING IN OUR WORK!

Be sure to check out our new website, follow us on social media, and join our monthly e-news listserv.