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First Presbyterian Church of Houston Awards \$240,000 to Advance Work of Social Entrepreneurs

From 80 entrants, Project Flourish judges select five inspiring gospel-minded startups; recipients aim to have positive impact on chronic social challenges

HOUSTON, March 20, 2018 – A panel of expert judges has selected five Houston-area social entrepreneurship ventures to receive funding totaling \$240,000 in First Presbyterian Church of Houston's (fpchouston.org) first ever Project Flourish. The award recipients address complex social challenges faced by the Houston community as well as at-risk communities in other parts of the world. They include:

- **Good Works Studio: Emergency Floor** – Helps refugee communities around the world through designing and deploying high-impact, low-cost shelter products. Awarded \$75,000.
- **ArtPark Moving Studios** – A mashup between a "Food Truck" and an "Art Studio" that hosts free arts enrichment events for children in need as well as a retail art truck rental service. Awarded \$55,000.
- **Rescue Houston** – Empowers victims of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation to exit the sex trade via a 24/7 hotline and exit program. Awarded \$45,000.
- **Renew All Ministries: Coffee and Cake Café** – This café will help formerly incarcerated adults with reentry support by providing part-time and transition employment opportunities. Awarded \$40,000.
- **Ananias House: Bread of Life** – This bakery in the war-ravaged city of Aleppo, Syria will provide employment opportunities, bread for citizens and opportunities for the church to engage. Awarded \$25,000.

"A great deal of creative energy and intellectual capital has gone into these initiatives, and each has the capacity to make a unique impact," said Rev. Dr. Jim Birchfield, Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. "Though a difficult decision, through the selection of these five organizations, the judges seek to create a representative portfolio of ventures that move the needle in addressing social challenges while also meeting the criteria of innovation, impact, gospel-minded inspiration, learning and capacity."

PAGE TWO

“For four years we have been responding to the needs of our clients, but the financial backing of Project Flourish has made it possible for Rescue Houston to develop an emergency assessment program, and fill the greatest need in Houston’s anti-sex trafficking landscape,” said Alison Meier Madrigal, founder and president of Rescue Houston. “We believe the combination of a centralized hotline, transport teams and an emergency assessment program is a triple threat to the sex trade.”

The five Project Flourish award recipients were selected from a field of 19 semi-finalists. In recent months, the semi-finalists were plugged into the social and intellectual capital of First Presbyterian Church of Houston. Each was paired with an accomplished business leader who helped to refine their business plan and pitch presentation. For at least one organization, the process prompted them to pivot.

“For Good Works Studio, Project Flourish marks the transition from a for-profit business model to a more flexible non-profit model, and that decision emerged out of Project Flourish discussions,” said Sam Brisendine, co-founder and chief product officer at Good Works Studio. “The funding will put floors beneath 250 refugee families and make it possible to start hiring people in areas such as Lebanon where the needs of refugee populations are greatest and our products can have the greatest positive impact.”

The competition culminated in "Shark Tank - style" pitches before the panel of judges – all members of the First Presbyterian congregation who have distinguished themselves as successful business and community leaders. The judges selected the award recipients and determined how much of the \$240,000 prize pool each will receive.

“The judges decided on fewer but larger awards so that each award amount could have a substantive impact and could ‘push-the-needle’ further,” said Austin Hermann, director of ministry empowerment at First Presbyterian Church of Houston.

To learn more please visit www.projectflourish.org.

About First Presbyterian Church Houston

Established in 1839, First Presbyterian Church of Houston was the first church to organize and build in Houston. Today its congregation continues to worship and serve from its location in the heart of the city’s museum district. Committed to providing opportunities to Gather, Grow and Go, the FPC Houston community continues to impact Houston and beyond through multiple worship styles, biblical teaching and strategic opportunities to serve through both local and global mission ministry opportunities. Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, FPC Houston is committed to carry the gospel to Houston and to the world. For more information visit <http://fpchouston.org>.

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