

Christian Mercy and Justice Network

Volume 2, Issue 2

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But let justice flow like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream.

Amos 5:24

How should the church respond to the economic crisis?

The following are excerpts from posts to the God's Politics blog at sojo.net, run by Sojourners, whose mission is to "articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world." May these thoughts and ideas be inspiring for us as we respond with faith and action to the economic crisis.



Finally...it might be helpful for us to run a series of programs for pastors on "preaching during the economic crisis." If we now know that our nation has suffered from a deficit of wisdom, and that greed and self-centeredness (individually and nationally) have led us into the mess we're in, we might want to help pastors shape a prophetic word for today...

tranquil

I see this time as an opportunity for the Christian community to return to the basics of all that we believe and reap the harvest that God has prepared for us. When life appears to be falling apart with little or no light at how it will get better, what are we to do? My world has crumbled before my eyes in the past and God brought me through every day just as he promised. The questions I believe pastors should ask themselves, when faced with the stewardship of their congregations, is how did Jesus care for his followers? Where did he find the resources and the strength for his people who faced much darker times than we could ever imagine? ... trust your people and their commitment to the love, faith, and charity that comes only from the Lord. The scriptures will unfold - today it is more important than ever to focus on the good news of Jesus Christ.

revitupchatsworth

... I believe that the church needs to get involved with what the community is already doing. Develop a ministry of presence. There are lots of good hearted people working in the non-profit world, working in the government and local civic groups who are already doing some wonderful things. The church needs to get on board, so that they know that we have a lot to offer...

vmuller

Some practical suggestions: Your Church can start a credit union. Make priorities for loans -- such as providing a loan to buy a used car to get to work. Provide temporary space in your

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CMJN meetings:

Join us the 3rd Thursday of every month at 7:00!

Meetings are held at New Covenant Fellowship (the corner of White and Randolph).

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I remember how, in the last recession, a local Presbyterian church had a weekly job search club. It helped the jobless consider how to apply for jobs and served as a way of extending/sharing information on where jobs were to be had, but even more important it brought lonely, frightened (mostly) men together to share their difficulties with one another and find affirmation. ... it may be time to find ways where the unemployed could learn new skills—carpentry and home repair, concrete work and masonry, etc. We probably have enough extra computers around that congregations could offer computer training. (The Rev. Sturgis Poorman of Welcoming the Stranger knows all about this.)

Continued from page 1 church and ask people to open up their homes on a temporary basis to people who have been forced to move out of their homes related to this mortgage crisis. Many are renters in mortgaged homes where the owners can't make their payments and the renters are dumped on the street.

The Church can also provide study groups where the members can learn about how the new globalized economy works. Knowledge is power. When we begin to understand what is going on and how we got where we are we can ask the right questions of our politicians and make the right demands in terms of restructuring. In the ministry of presence, some wonderful partnerships are created and doors are opened.

For the full posts, check out: <http://www.sojo.net/blog/godspolitics/?p=2767>

Ministry Spotlight — Austin's Place

By Cathy Koerber

Recall the winter days pummeled by ice, sleet, and snow. Now imagine a woman without a home trying to find shelter on one of those cold nights.



Until this past winter there was no shelter for a single, homeless woman anywhere in Champaign County. The city of Champaign, realizing the need for such a shelter, reached out to the community for help last fall. The Council of Service Providers to the Homeless (CSPH) responded to the city's plea for assistance and contacted local organizations and churches. Leadership at First United Methodist Church in downtown Champaign agreed to partner with CSPH, and planning began immediately to open a shelter on church premises to house six guests each evening, January 1 through April 15.

Last winter, Austin's Place was able to provide emergency, overnight

housing to six homeless women per night, totaling 166 women. This winter season, Austin's Place will increase capacity and offer emergency, overnight shelter for eight single, homeless women.

The Shelter is housed at First United Methodist Church in Downtown Champaign, but women apply each evening from 5:30-7:30PM at the Center for Women in Transition at 508 W. Church Street in Champaign. Women receive transportation from the Center for Women in Transition to our Shelter in the evening, and are then transported to the TIMES Center in the morning where they may receive breakfast and an opportunity to shower.

Associate Pastor Mary Brady explains why the First United Methodist Church got involved. "A major facet of Champaign First United Methodist Church's mission statement declares that we are about relieving suffering," Mary explained. "We take very seriously the biblical injunctions that we must: 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the **poor**, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (Luke 14:22) And, 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen...to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your

own flesh and blood?" (Isaiah 58:6-8).

Twelve or so years ago, the congregation voted to 'remain downtown,' rather than close our current quarters and build out in western Champaign; the rationale was that we needed to stay in the city in order to better serve the city's population. FUMC does that in a number of ways, but being encouraged by the City of Champaign, a year ago, to open an emergency shelter for women of this community seemed to very specifically fit our mission statement and decision to truly BE a downtown church. We are here to serve those in need in our midst."

Austin's Place operates solely on volunteer effort. Last year we had over 100 volunteers who stayed overnight at the Shelter, drove the van transporting women, doing laundry, soliciting and collecting donations. We currently have many committed volunteers from the congregation of First United Methodist Church, students from UIUC, and the community at-large. But we need many more volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Cathy Koerber at ckoerber@illinois.edu or 355-2589. Volunteer training sessions are scheduled for December 11 at 6:30PM and December 13 at 10AM, and are ongoing throughout the season.

Connecting Church and Community: John's Friends at New Horizon



By Donna
Battershell

The kids love it !!! Parent's love it !!!

John's Friend's is a caring and engaging ministry that reaches out to those with special needs, giving parents and caregivers a much needed break. The program began four years ago at **New Horizon UMC** and is coordinated by Barbara Tuck. Her inspiration came as she saw the need of a parent who was struggling with the 24/7 life of caring for a child with special needs. The vision of John's Friend's is: **To be the arms of Jesus reaching out to families who have members with special needs.**

John's Friend's meets **Thursdays from 6:30-9:00pm September through May** at the church located at 3002 W. Bloomington Rd, Campaign. Currently there are 15 children enrolled and a waiting list of

others wanting to get into the program. There is a trained staff of professionals and volunteers who work together to provide a safe and fun environment that uplifts those who participate.

Each week persons 5 years and older come together and spend their time in a variety of ways including Bible stories, prayer, music, videos, crafts, and other fun activities. Special events include a kick off party in the Fall, a Saturday event in December specially designed to give parent's time for Christmas shopping, and an end of the year family party in May.

The name for this ministry -- John's Friends -- was chosen to honor and remember John Matthews (February 14 1990 – April 7, 2006). He was one of the first and most faithful participants and was loved by all who knew him.

The ministry would like to expand and is in need of more volunteers to serve in a variety of ways, as their schedule permits. With more volunteers, more children can attend the program. You do not have to attend New Horizon to be a volunteer. For more information, contact Barbara Tuck at 359-1904 or

tuck601@comcast.net.

Family Resource Day Report

On August 9, the Christian Mercy and Justice Network again offered the Family Resource Day for the community. Here are the results of that day:

- Over 200 volunteers, donations, and funding from 23 churches
- FAMILIES SERVED: 216; 1,056 individuals, including 679 children.
- FOOD: 9,982 lbs.
- SCHOOL PHYSICALS: 30
- CLOTHING: 3,351 articles and over 600 non-clothing items like household goods and furniture.
- SCHOOL SUPPLIES: 819 fully loaded backpacks distributed
- PRAYER: Offered to all, accepted by most.

Prayer, fun, and food at Family Resource Day...



Christian Mercy and Justice Network

124 W. White St.

Champaign, IL 61820

Phone: (217) 355-2038

E-mail: cmjnetwork@gmail.com

www.cmjnetwork.org

God's Word on Mercy and Justice: Are you righteous?

By Jeff Trask

What Christian wouldn't want to be righteous? After all, righteousness is the breastplate in our Christian Armor and the word is mentioned as often in the Bible as the last name Smith is listed in the phonebook. It apparently is important to God to live a *righteous life, conduct righteous acts, and to fervently seek out righteousness*. Would you agree?

Well maybe we ought to look a bit closer to define righteousness. The Hebrew translation of righteousness or "tsedek" (tseh -dek) and the Greek translation of righteousness, *dikaio* or *dikaio*sune, both mean "just" and "equitable". God, for instance, chose Abraham (out of all the other possible people on the planet at the time) to birth a nation because God expected him to "...direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is **right and just**, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (Genesis 18:19)

When we look even closer at this definition and explore the word equitable, things get really interesting. After all, what is equity? Equity is not just equality, which means we should treat all of God's people equally (all with love,

Righteous
=
Just and Equitable

grace, mercy, forgiveness, etc.), an important practice no doubt. Equity, however, extends this practice to "making up for" injustice. For example, equality would be a world where *disparities* between racial groups, a persons' sex, socioeconomic status, educational achievement, and the like *would not exist* because everyone would have been treated equally.

However, equity is a world that not only exemplifies equality, but also "replenishes" those who were treated wrongly so they can return to their original state of being. So it's not only treating African-Americans equally in society today, for instance, but also making up for the psychological, economical, sociological, and other deficits accrued throughout history, which were created by hatred, prejudice, and discrimination. Now of course, any reasonable

person might be thinking that is impossible, and I would completely agree – there are bad things that happen to people, both individually and collectively, that can never be "made up". However, that is why I am thankful I serve a God that is beyond reason.

To be righteous, to be equitable, goes well beyond any political, theoretical, philosophical solutions human kind has ever invented. It takes the Holy Spirit to bridge the hearts of those oppressed and the oppressors, the guilty and the victims, the starving and the overfed, the wronged and the innocent. What might an equitable world look like? It certainly did not look like Sodom and Gomorrah. Interestingly, the scripture in Genesis concerning Abraham was in the context of Abraham pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah to be spared. According to Ezekiel 16:49, "... the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy".

As Christians, let's avoid the sins of the past and strive for righteousness. And when we use the word righteous, let's think of equity - to live the equitable life, do equitable acts, and fervently seek after equity.

Then we'll be righteous.