

# Christian Mercy and Justice Network

Volume 1, Issue 1

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

**Amos 5:24**

## CMJN meetings:

Join us at our monthly meetings every 2nd Thursday at 7:00!

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

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## What is CMJN?

A person will see well over 100 churches listed in the phonebook for the Urbana-Champaign community. These 100+ churches represent thousands of people who possess all kinds of gifts and are diverse, generous, and compassionate. What might happen if thousands of church members collaborated on a common cause? What could the resources, manpower, and experience of 100+ churches on the same page accomplish? As you ponder those questions,

you get to the heart of what the Christian Mercy & Justice Network (CMJN) is all about. CMJN promotes unity in the body of Christ by



bringing churches together to jointly address issues of mercy and justice through information gathering and sharing, regular meeting times, and community service

events. Founded by Vern Fein and Jeff Trask, CMJN reveals the power of collaboration among churches. The Network also provides spiritual support and encouragement for those in the trenches, trying to allow God's will to be done on Earth as it is in heaven. When so many people with so strong a heart for God work together, the question is not what can we do, it's what *can't* we do.

~Jeff Trask

## Participating Churches

Church of the Living God  
Community Evangelical Free Church  
First Presbyterian Church (Champaign)  
Grace Community Church  
Hessel Park Reformed Church  
Liberty Temple  
Mattis Avenue Free Methodist Church  
New Covenant Fellowship

New Horizon  
Prince of Peace Lutheran  
St. Patrick's Catholic Church  
Stratford Park Bible Chapel  
Twin City Bible Church  
Vineyard Christian Fellowship  
Windsor Road Christian Church  
Unity Baptist  
Urbana Assembly of God



### Family Resource Day

CMJN members from area churches distribute school supplies, medical care, backpacks and prayer to over 600 families at Salt and Light during the 2006 annual Family Resource Day.

This year's event will be held on August 11, 2007.

### Ministry Spotlight — Salt & Light

*Salt & Light* is one of the largest emergency food programs in East Central Illinois and the largest emergency food program in Champaign County. The organization also distributes 1500-2000 clothing items for every four hours they're open! They also host special events, like their Christmas program where 250-300 families are provided with Christmas gifts. Every August in collaboration with the Christian Mercy & Justice Network, they have hosted Family Resource Day providing backpacks full of school supplies to hundreds of children in need, as well as many other necessities.

However, Executive Director Nathan Montgomery says *Salt & Light's* practical works aren't what it's all about. At first glance *Salt & Light* looks like all of the other food and clothing

distribution agencies in the area. However, they're not around simply to feed and clothe. Their core mission is to share the love of Christ. With 29,000 Champaign County residents living at or below the poverty line, providing the essentials was a clear avenue for showing God's love to C-U in 2003.

Amazingly, *Salt & Light* is able to provide these services with just three staff members. According to Montgomery, volunteers drive everything they do. Last October, small groups and volunteers from Windsor Road Christian Church served every week of the month and the organization distributed twice their normal volume. They offer many flexible, short-term and ongoing service opportunities. You can come once, once a month or everyday. They're open Monday

through Friday, 9-5, the first Tuesday of every month from 6-8 p.m. and the first Saturday of each month from 8 to noon.

Because *Salt & Light* is a relatively new ministry, finances are among the most pressing needs. Once the ministry is able to sustain its current operating budget, their vision is to expand and offer additional programming focused on teaching others to help themselves. They would like to launch computer classes that will equip their clients with job skills. A financial counseling program is already in the works. Your prayers, time and finances will help *Salt & Light* implement their vision for the future.

For more information, email [nathan@saltandlightministry.org](mailto:nathan@saltandlightministry.org) or call 355-5654.

~Stephanie Davenport

*"With 29,000 Champaign County residents living at or below the poverty line, providing the essentials was a clear avenue for showing God's love to C-U."*

*- Nathan Montgomery,  
Salt & Light Director*

## Connecting Church and Community — Mattis Ave. Free Methodist

Josh Dorf began a youth bus ministry at the Mattis Avenue Free Methodist Church in Champaign through vision and dedication. Dorf was hired as the youth pastor in June 2003, and soon began to pursue ways the church could minister to area youth. “At the time a ministry called King’s Club met at our church on Saturdays and ministered to 100 poor children,” Dorf recalls. “In January of 2004 this ministry closed because of lack of funding.”

Dorf then began praying and looking for other outreach opportunities in the area. He was motivated because he “knew there were many children without any place to hear the love of Jesus. I didn’t know any of the kids personally so I was praying that some how I could make contact with some children.”

Then, Dorf became a lunch supervisor at Franklin Middle School, where was able to meet and begin building relationships with students there. According to Dorf, it was a thankless job with few visible results the first few months, but a turning point arrived later in the spring.

“I had scheduled [Illinois football player] Jon Buetjer to come and share his testimony with the youth in May. I passed out postcards to some of the Franklin students. They asked for a ride to the event and the bus ministry was born. I picked up six students that night

and the next week there were enough kids waiting to fill our 15-passenger church van. I kept youth group going for the summer of 2004, and eventually many younger brothers and sisters of the middle school kids were asking if they could also join us.”

Since that summer, the bus ministry has become a regular part of church life at Mattis Avenue. Church member Bill Goran said, “during a normal week, the bus picks up the kids for Wednesday night youth group and children’s activities, and then again for Sunday School and Church services on Sunday morning. He explained, “All the kids in the ministry have ‘families’ that sponsor them in church. The kids sit with these families during services, and sometimes do activities with the families.”

Goran and his wife sponsor three young women: Christina, Sharon and Raisha. Opportunities for supporting and interacting with these youth stretch beyond Sunday services and youth group. “The last two summers, we’ve helped Sharon and Christina attend a church camp in Indiana,” Goran stated.

The bus ministry program has successfully helped people build ongoing relationships in the Champaign-Urbana community. Goran said, “For the past couple years, many of the parents of the kids in the ministry

have attended our church Christmas dinners and some other occasions. The church members and the kids have had to stretch to adjust to one another, but the kids have sustained an interest in church activities, and some have made decisions to accept Christ.”

Youth attendance numbers have fluctuated, but Dorf and many church members have pressed through setbacks to create a steady program that provides opportunities to build relationships, serve others, and participate in church life.

~Kristiana Burtness

*“I was praying that some how I could make contact with some children.”*

*- Josh Dorf*

*Youth Pastor*



Backyard games with a few of the youth served by the bus ministry program at Mattis Avenue Free Methodist Church. From left to right: Christina Coleman, Tikyra Banks, Sharon Ford and Jennifer Goran



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## **God's Word on Mercy and Justice**

*"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,  
whose confidence is in him.  
He will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.  
It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.  
It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit."*

Jeremiah 17:7-8

The beautiful imagery in Scripture never fails to capture the imagination. If those who trust in the LORD are "oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor" as Isaiah 61:3b indicates, what does that image conjure for those being described?

"...blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD... He will be like a tree..." reminds us of strength, stability, and steadfastness. Oak trees are large and stately; they wait patiently for the streams and the soil to replenish them each and every day. I often forget that I am to be an oak and instead, I feel like a tumbleweed rolling past the landscape feeling unrooted and distracted. I am blessed when I allow the Lord to ground me in Him-

self and stabilize me.

"...planted by the water..." As trees, we rely on the stream, the Spirit of God, who washes through our bank watering us with God's presence and residing in each cell of our being. When the stream is happy and gurgling, we rejoice in the presence of God. According to Jeremiah 17, when we experience a drought, we wait and trust that the stream will come again. It is a wondrous thing to feel dry and to suddenly be washed over by a wave of God's presence, who satisfies our eternal thirst, just as He did for the woman at the well.

"...that sends out its roots by the stream." The rich soil we have been planted in represents God's Word. As our roots stretch down into truth, we absorb what we need to grow in our faith. As our tree matures, we dig deeper, gleaning nutrients necessary for the work God has called us to.

"It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green." When our roots reach deep enough, we are able to rely

on the stream and the solid soil below us, despite difficulties that occur on the surface. Our leaves are able to stay green because of the growth occurring inside and under the surface, hidden from view. Often, as we consider the devastating effects of sin on our world, we fear the heat. Each person is damaged by sin and the entire structure of our world groans for the restoration only the Creator can provide. As trees, we are able to store up reserves for the hard times and offer shade and safety to those around us from the overflow within us.

"It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." The Fruit of the Spirit grows when we drink of the Spirit inwardly and speak the truth in love, just as we receive it. In John 4, Jesus says that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." As the streams of the Spirit and the truth of the Word fill our hearts and minds with Christ Jesus, our worship is apparent from our fruit.

How can you offer restoration from the reserve the Lord has given you?

~Jaime Olson