

# Christian Mercy and Justice Network

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

**Amos 5:24**

## It's Tough to Be a Teen

By Kim Fairley

Like many teenagers, thirteen year old Markus, an African American living in subsidized housing, was unsure of himself and struggled to fit in with his peers. Markus had no father at home and his mother was on the brink of eviction. Mom worked long hours in a fast food restaurant and received no child support. Markus has three siblings, all plagued with the same uncertainties of safety, stability and shelter. Markus is teased daily by his classmates about his dated clothing and worn down tennis shoes.

One day at school, Markus decided to take matters into his own hands and start fighting the kids who teased him. After several months of school suspensions, detentions and lack of motivation from Markus, he stopped attending school.

**“Someone could have cared.”**

When asked what someone could have done to help him, Markus replied “Someone could have cared.” Markus’ experience as a youth here in our community is not unique. Markus is like many who are looking for someone to reach out of their comfort zone and care.

Just as alarming is the rate in which youth are becoming involved in prison systems. In Illinois, there is an overrepresentation of minorities, primarily African Americans, in the Illinois Department of Corrections Juvenile Division. In 2004, minorities accounted for 63 percent of all juveniles being detained in the IDOC Juvenile Division despite representing only 42 percent of the general population. African American

youth, who make up only 18 percent of the general population, comprise 52 percent of the IDOC Juvenile Justice Division population. African American youth were found to be 4.27 times more likely than white youth to be committed to a youth center in IDOC’s Juvenile Division.

Local studies show that in 2004 there were 597 juvenile arrests in Champaign County and 45,731 in the state of Illinois. Of those imprisoned, 52% were African American, 3% White, 10% Hispanic and less than 1 percent were Asian or American Indian.

Our youth are not only entangled in the juvenile justice system, but they are also suffering at high numbers from mental health issues. Unfortunately, minorities in the United States face a social and economic environment of inequality that includes greater exposure to racism, discrimination, violence, and poverty. Living in poverty has the most measurable effect on the rates of mental illness. People in the lowest strata of income, education, and occupation are about two to three times more likely than those in the highest strata to have a mental disorder.

The statistics related to all of our youth are heartbreaking. But they do not have to be the end of the story. Your church body, and you as an individual, can make a difference. In Champaign County alone there are a large number of agencies that are tackling these very statistics, one youth at a time. These agencies include Best Interest of Children, Mission 180, Mental Health Center, and more. These programs are in need of volunteers, financial support, and mentors. Try getting involved with a school in your neighborhood or helping to support community events and programs that target our

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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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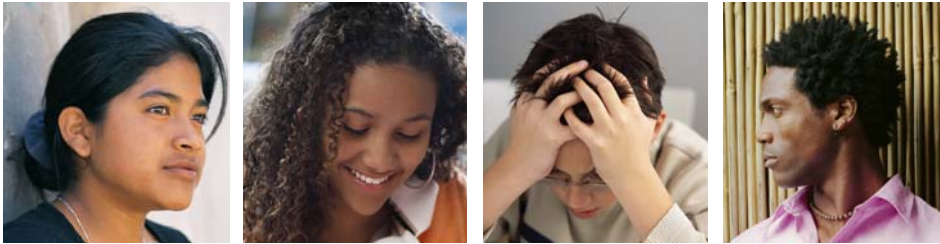
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Whatever you do, I urge you to seriously think about how you can help save our next generation. We can't afford to pretend the problems are not there and hope they will go away. Our kids, our future, and the love of God won't allow us to.



## Ministry Spotlight — Mission 180: Being Part of the Solution

By Kristiana Burtness

Mission 180 is a local nonprofit organization that “Helps at-risk youth break free from destructive lifestyles through faith-based mentoring and counseling,” according to the group’s Web site. “It’s all about kids believing in themselves and challenging them to become better in all areas of their life: spiritually, physically, socially and mentally,” explained Jeff Hunt. If you’re aware of the problems youth face, but aren’t sure how to help, volunteering or mentoring with Mission 180 are ways to facilitate change on a local level.

Jeff (and Shannon) Hunt founded Mission 180 in early 2006. “We started the organization after realizing we couldn’t quite do what we felt like needed to be done working through other organizations,” Hunt describes. “Having started Mission 180, we have been able to really focus on key areas we believe are important and can have the most

impact. We just want to be part of the solution...we just want to do our part for the kids and our community.”

Mission 180 offers a variety of programming and events for youth. “There are several

things that go hand in hand with one another,” explained Hunt. They offer:

- Mentoring and monthly activities for youth ages 10-17
- Late Night basketball on Friday nights at Douglass Center
- Family Events/Dinners for all the youth, mentors, and their families
- Summer activities including Grand Canyon Hike, camping, and basketball league
- God-centered discussion group at the Juvenile Detention Center
- Young men group facilitation at Pavilion School

Through these events, Mission 180 has the opportunity to connect with each young person, invest in his or her life, and create an environment where life changes are happening. But when there aren’t enough volunteers, this beneficial experience is available to fewer youths. “The number of youth asking to get involved continues to grow,” Hunt said. “However, it is stunted somewhat due to our lack of volunteers. Mentoring, basketball and family events are our biggest needs for people to get involved.”

Volunteering at one of these activities could be the first step to investing in local at-risk youth’s lives.

Individuals often start volunteering with Mission 180 through word-of-mouth connections, but Hunt emphasized that the people-power of churches getting involved on a greater scale would provide an even stronger support network for Mission 180’s efforts.

Creating change through an organization such as Mission 180 never occurs overnight, but there are things Hunt would like to see happen in the next few years. “I hope that we see youth who have been involved with M180 turn their lives around and come back to help the effort,” Hunt explains, “and that in some way the people who volunteer will have made a significant and noticeable difference in the lives of youth, which in turn makes a significant difference in families and neighborhoods. I also hope to see our neighborhood outreach expand to different areas and become a staple. I hope to see our follow up program for youth coming out of the JDC be in place.” These plans are inspiring, and quite possible to accomplish with a committed volunteer and staff base.

Mission 180 wants to be a part of the solution in Champaign County. If you want to be a part of the solution too, you can find out more about getting involved by visiting their Web site at [www.mission180.com](http://www.mission180.com) or by contacting Jeff Hunt at [jeff@mission180.com](mailto:jeff@mission180.com).



## Right Relationship in Alleviating Global Suffering: TCBC's Approach



By Jaime Olson

In August, 2006, Twin City Bible Church (TCBC) committed to following God's call for the body of Christ to do our part to alleviate the global suffering caused by HIV/AIDS. In order to determine the direction God had for us to take and to learn more about this important issue, we created a task force of individuals from a cross-section of our church demographic: students, community members, church staff, and members of various committees. We met regularly for several months to pray and to consider what "right relationship" looks like within the body of Christ.

This idea of right relationship is often lacking in cross-cultural endeavors, both within the church and outside of it. So many cross-cultural attempts to offer help end poorly due to an unnecessary power struggle. The helping party often views their culture as a goal to be attained by all other cultures, and perceives needs in the receiving party. Without conferring with those they intend to help, they begin meeting those perceived needs! The receiving party is expected to just be grateful that someone wants to help them and accept whatever they can get, even if it's not what they actually need. This creates a "wealthy helper" vs. "helpless recipient" relationship that is often focused on money. Instead, right relationship has two equal parties, both helping and receiving from one another.

As we developed our cross-cultural ministries, TCBC wanted to avoid a power dynamic by slowly building a relationship with an identified group overseas. We wanted to work through an organization whose staff included culturally sensitive nationals from the community who could serve as cultural mediators.

Through the organization, we could identify gifts and needs, and the recipients could identify their gifts and needs. The organization could determine whether our offers and needs matched and help us focus on relationship rather than power.

Our task force identified twelve key principles to guide us, allowing us to predetermine a "best fit" for TCBC's unique values and gifts before considering individual options. (See side.)

There are many organizations doing excellent work to alleviate the effect of HIV/AIDS! By establishing our principles first, we were able to focus our search to Africa then to a specific organization, African nation, and community. For churches who are interested in learning more, staff workers with World Relief published an excellent resource: **The AIDS Crisis: What We Can Do** by Deborah Dortzbach & W. Meredith Long. InterVarsity Press, 2006.



### Right Relationship Principles:

1. Emphasis on Prayer
2. Accountable relationship with an organization
3. Partnership and Reciprocity: acknowledging that the people group we reach out to has much to offer and teach us
4. Mindset of humility as we serve (rather than a "we can fix you and make you like us" mentality)
5. Opportunities for the TCBC church body to be educated about HIV/AIDS, which would change our hearts and compel responsibility
6. Opportunities to send people from TCBC toward service in this area
7. Emphasis on the Gospel – a holistic approach with Gospel opportunities (both in the Global South and in our local community)
8. Engagement and participation of our entire church body in some way
9. Partnership with an organization who has already identified culturally sensitive nationals
10. Opportunities for Advocacy
11. Opportunity to work with a ministry that has both a community and a campus focus like ours
12. Establish a time limit to reassess how the partnership is going and to allow for change (3-4 years)

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## **Isaiah 58: A Call to Mercy and Justice**

By Jennifer Knapp

My heart skips a beat every time I read Isaiah 58. Sometimes I struggle with whether the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. But this passage alleviates my fears. God has consistently asked us to love Him and love each other.

Isaiah 58 does more than relieve my fears about the character of God, though. It tells me how I am supposed to be in this world. It also confirms that there is, in fact, oppression and injustice. In the “land of opportunity” where everyone is supposed to be able to pursue their “American dream,” we don’t spend much time thinking about oppression and injustice. But these stirring words are still relevant for us today – both personally and corporately.

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?...

“Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
You will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,  
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness,  
and your night will become like the noonday.”

Isaiah 58: 6, 9-10

It is not enough to shake our heads when we hear about another daughter who has been raped, another black man who has been denied a job by a white employer, another addict who can see nothing but the next high. When will we decide to rise up against this oppression? When will our religious beliefs intersect with our social reality?

There are all kinds of oppression, some obvious, others much more subtle. Some we seek because of our own selfishness. Others are thrust upon us by those in power over us. Into a world full of violence, hatred, pride, and darkness comes a God who offers love, forgiveness, humility, and light.

The only catch is that he offers these through us.

It is my prayer that each of us as individuals and a church body will prayerfully consider the oppression and injustice that exist in the world around us, and obediently follow God’s call to address it. And if we do, our “light will rise in the darkness,” and our “night will become like the noonday.”

Oh, that it would be so.