

HOW CAN WE MINISTER TO OUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Contributed by June Habeck Holler

150 years ago, God inspired His people to build a church here on Randolph Avenue.

Today, God's Spirit has kept and led a growing faithful remnant at Trinity to respond to Jesus' example of being inclusive, diverse and welcoming. He has blessed our 4 programs of outreach to the hungry, those without basic clothing and supplies, school children's weekend food needs, and veterans who struggle to regain their lives.

We have begun to show that we do believe that hearing and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ isn't just for the comfortably wealthy, well educated middle class. We are beginning to understand that Christian success is defined as going where the people are - not where the money is. Congregational growth in low income areas has echoes of God's enduring, eternal, unconditional love; it proves that the church is there ultimately because of who God is, not because we have maintained the status quo and everything is as we had wished it would be. (Scudder)

We have begun a new mission where we are. Many of us no longer are expecting old members to return or legions of disgruntled members of other Hagerstown churches to join ours. Part of that journey is learning about our "3rd congregation", as Pastor Bettye called the neighborhood poor that frequent our outreach programs.

Pastor Derick Scudder of the North Philadelphia Bethel Chapel Church reveals that the first step in learning about our neighborhood is not oversimplifying poverty. Remember back in the 1980s when crack cocaine became epidemic in cities and towns? The popular sentiment was that "crack babies" would grow up with serious health and mental problems. Resulting research statistics show, however, that babies exposed to cocaine had no long term effects in physical development or brain function. Research showed that what did have a profound effect on them was living in poverty, where 81% of those 7 yr. old children had seen someone arrested, 74% had heard gunshots, 35% had seen someone get shot and 19% had seen a dead body outside. We need to understand that poverty is deeper than the amount of money in a person's bank account.

We need to view POVERTY as CULTURE. We know that the culture of the poor is a different way of life than middle class living **with different values, experiences and resources**. The poor's culture also has different ways of thinking when it comes to **time, money, relationships and language**. Urban churches are never going to reach low income neighborhoods until we see poverty as a culture. That will greatly adjust our interactions in helpful and productive ways.

It was in the culture of poverty where Jesus was born, raised, spent his ministry, selected and taught his followers. Are we called to less than this? The church has a long tradition of sending missionaries into foreign countries and cultures. If ministry in poor neighborhoods is just ministry to a different culture, then any Christian with a passion for God's glory and a love for people can do it. God has placed us where we are - in a mission field that includes the culture of poverty.

Unfortunately in America we've been trained to pity and shun the poor while nursing some resentment that they are getting things for free. Understanding that we are embarking on a cultural mission helps us see the value of the image of God in people that are different from us. And every culture has strengths from which we can learn; the poor show strength in **relationships, enduring hardships and generosity**. Their world is different from ours, but adapting to their culture can also help us to continue to celebrate the diversity we have begun to embrace at Trinity.

We are being called to share the beauty of our worship spaces, our abilities to offer quality musical praise in varied styles, our historical skills for incredible food events, our devoted and joyous fellowship opportunities, our outstanding staff and our joy in living lives full of God's Grace. We are here to be missionaries both inside and outside our building.

[Part I of ideas from Why the Church isn't Growing in Urban Neighborhoods by Rev. Derick Scudder and The Framework for Understanding Poverty by Ruby K. Payne PHD.]

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The Clothing Bank needs men's' undershirts and T shirts, men's' boxer shorts (*not briefs*), all sized bed sheets, towels and washcloths, women's' underpants sizes 11-12, blankets and gloves.

The Food Pantry needs can openers for the homeless (Dollar Store sells ones that don't break easily), wrapped saltine crackers, jelly or jam and boxed mixes for cakes or cookies.

Social Ministry asks for Lent: combs, brushes, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, lotion, Chapstick, shampoo, soap, feminine hygiene products. Leave in the basket in the church narthex.

Thank you for your continued support!!

PONDER THIS

"All I know is that this is good food and good food helps you with the energy you need to play and to do things with your friends and to grow up big."

Janille W. Age 9 about the HEART (Healthy Eats Are Really Tasty) Markets Program that helps families shop for healthy foods and teaches them how to transform them into meals they can enjoy together.