



# Ecumenical Encounters

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## I Have People

*“Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mar’a, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty...” Ruth 1:20-21*

**By the Rev. Dr. Christine L. Nelson, Executive Director**

May is a time of great anticipation in the world and in people’s lives. Budding flowers turn to full bloom, seeds planted burst through the ground, and young lives fresh from graduation rush out into the world ready to become all they can be. The planet seems full of possibilities.

We pick up the story of Ruth and Naomi when the bloom is off the rose so to speak. Famine pushes a young family from their native Bethlehem to Moab. A generation later, that happy family experiences tragedy as the father and sons die. As is often the case when catastrophe hits, people look to return home. Naomi returns to Bethlehem bitter, because *“I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty.”*

Naomi’s story is relived today over and over. In our country, most often it is the availability of jobs that causes families to move, to leave family and friends, their social and nurturing network in order to support their families. Sometimes in new locations those support systems are not able to be rebuilt, jobs do not pan out, and people are left in even more desperate straights.

Connection to people and places are so important to our lives. In a community I am familiar with, I know how, where, and with whom to connect, and should I have trouble, “my people” will assist me. What happens to people who have lost or broken their connections? The opposite of the fruit of the Spirit, the sweet taste of the fullness of life, what J. Mor-

ris Smith calls the fruit of poverty: “uncleanness promoting bad health; weakness that is physical, mental, social, and spiritual; and anger which couches itself in abuse, indulgence, immortality, and often crime. Sometimes poverty produces these aberrations and sometimes the aberrations produce the poverty.”

How can we address this emptiness and assist Mar’a’s (meaning bitter) to regain their identities and home as Naomi’s (meaning pleasant)? By helping people rebuild connections. The Lehigh County Conference of Churches Homeless Supportive Services Program recruits and trains persons to form teams of 4-6 people to become a support system to a formerly homeless person. They make the connection happen!

Boaz served as a relational sponsor for Naomi and Ruth. He provided a listening ear to Naomi’s plight. He problem solved and “connected” with the community resources and networks on their behalf. Together they did what we would call goal planning, financial counseling and job searches. Boaz provided practical assistance that met the everyday needs of Ruth and Naomi. Access to gleaning in the fields can equate to nutrition/meal planning, finding furniture and other basic needs.

What can be the end result? For Naomi her family name was restored in Bethlehem through Ruth and Boaz who are counted among the descendents of

*(Continued on page 3)*



**LCCC  
CALENDAR  
OF EVENTS**

**May 9**  
Benefit Fashion Show

**May 20**  
LCCC Annual Meeting

**June 8**  
LCCC Sunday

## Meet the Board Candidates

On May 20th five people will be voted on as potential new Board Members for the Lehigh County Conference of Churches. Each brings varied and rich experiences and skills to our organization. Please welcome Mary Ann, Bruce, Renee, Steven and Charles.

### Mary Ann Gibbons

Mary Ann Gibbons is a licensed professional nurse recently retired from Sacred Heart Hospital in Allentown following twenty years of full-time employment. She is a Lehigh Valley native, a graduate of Central Catholic High School, the Sacred Heart Hospital School of Nursing and DeSales University.

Mary Ann developed the Parish Nursing Program in the Greater Lehigh Valley and educated over four hundred nurses in parish nursing. She created the Parish Nurse Coalition of the Greater Lehigh Valley and held the Executive Director position for six years. She also developed the Parish Nursing / Community Outreach Department for Sacred Heart Hospital and was instrumental in forging the partnership between the Parish Nurses and Daybreak and the Soup Kitchen.

### Bruce Keller



Bruce Keller is a Lehigh Valley native who grew up on the family farm in Lower Nazareth Township. A graduate of Nazareth Area Senior High School and Bloomsburg University, Bruce passed his CPA exam in 1992. He is a member of the current class at Leadership Lehigh Valley.

For the past nine years, Bruce has worked for Mack Trucks, currently serving as Director of Finance Reporting and Business Control. At Mack, he graduated from the in-house executive MBA course arranged by the Stockholm School of Economics and specifically designed for the Volvo Group, Mack's parent company. Bruce is an active member of the Episcopal Church of the Mediator where he is Assistant Treasurer of the Vestry and Lay Rep to the LCCC.

### Renee Saleh

Natives of Jordan, Renee Saleh and her husband came to the US in 1961 and moved to the Lehigh Valley in 1967. Renee is a graduate from Kutz-

town University and earned her M.Ed. from Lehigh. Her work experience includes nine years as Director of Financial and Student Aid at the 'other' L-Tri-C, twelve years as Director of Financial Aid at Kutztown, and seven years as Director of Financial Aid at Northampton Community College.

In addition to her on-campus service, Renee has worked in leadership positions for both the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency in Harrisburg and the New Jersey Department of Higher Education's Office of Student Assistance in Trenton. Her extensive background in student financial aid has made her a valuable member of the Aspires Support Committee. She is a member of First Presbyterian Church, Allentown.

### Steven Lozado



A Lehigh Valley resident for six years, Steven Lozado serves as Associate Pastor at Calvary Temple, with a specific focus on Calvary's inner-city ministry, working to form relationships with gang members in Allentown

to influence a change toward a way of life other than drugs and violence. Steven and his wife, Keren, also initiated Calvary's Spanish ministry. He is a Licensed Minister with the Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches & Ministers, holds a degree in Business Management from DeSales University, and is currently completing a Masters in Divinity at Moravian Theological Seminary.

Steven spearheaded Calvary Temple's partnership with the Relational Sponsorship initiative Homeless Supportive Services program of the LCCC as part of Calvary Temple's outreach. Steven also oversees a team of individuals assembled into a ministry called "The Forgotten-people Ministry" who have various skills, experiences and talents to begin their Relational Sponsorship efforts. He is also active in the Faith-Based Initiative of the City of Allentown. In his professional life, Steven is employed by Xerox Corporation for the Public Sector in PA.

### Rev. Charles Olmeda

Rev. Olmeda is pastor of the Third Day Worship Center—Assembly of God. His biography will appear in an upcoming issue.

## There is No Good Reason in This World To Be...



*Hungry  
Homeless  
Struggling Alone with Mental Health  
Lacking Education  
Divided in Faith*

The theme of the 2008 LCCC Annual Meeting underscores the power of Faith in Action to solve the seemingly insurmountable social problems of our community—one person, one family at a time. Join us on May 20 and discover how the LCCC and your support make miracles happen.

- **Hear** Susan Gilmore speak about United Way's 4 Community Goals to impact the Valley.
- **See** "A Human Budget," stories from each program that illustrate the impact LCCC has on people in the community.
- **Participate** in "Elections Live,"—Board of Directors members present and future talk about what the LCCC mission means to them.
- **Touch** afghans crocheted by our own Day-break members
- **Taste** a delectable, healthy lunch

**Hurry, the deadline to register is May 14th!**

For more information or to register, call the LCCC at 610-433-6421 \$15.00 per person.

May 20, 2008  
 First Presbyterian Church, Allentown  
 Registration: 11:30 AM  
 Speaker: Susan Gilmore, President & CEO  
 United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley

## I Have People, Cont'd

*(Continued from page 1)*

David. Local congregational team members say: "it has opened doors for ministry that could easily have been overlooked by my church." For the formerly homeless it means "I have people!" Call Holly Brennan at 484-664-7320 to inquire about Relational Sponsorship.

## Well Done Good and Faithful Servant: Rev. Gordon Sommers

How do you adequately thank someone who founded a unique ministry, grew it significantly over the years, and built it in such a way that it seamlessly moves forward as he retires?

Rev. Gordon Sommers could rightly be called, "Mr. Christian Unity." One of the founders of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches' Campbell Lectures, Gordon helped conceive the idea of an annual lectureship focused on ecumenism, raised the funding and served with excellence as its first and only chair for 16 years.

Gordon not only brought internationally known ecumenical leaders to speak in the Lehigh Valley, he knew them personally—Dr. Michael Kinamon, Dr. Joan Campbell, William Cardinal Keeler and His Eminences Edward Cardinal Cassidy and Walter Cardinal Kasper.

We thank you, Gordon, for bringing us together in Christ's name to be one! We promise to keep building on the wonderful legacy you have bestowed upon us.



### Best Wishes, Virgil Palmer

We extend our best wishes and thanks to Board of Directors' member Virgil Palmer who moves to Atlanta. As chair of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches' Information Technology Committee—our own "geek squad"—Virgil led the effort to continuously upgrade our technological abilities.

Virgil not only connected to the Conference with the resources and support of his place of employment, Air Products, but also with AT&T, Computer Aid, LV Hospital and other major industries in the Valley. God be with you, Virgil, as you move on to new adventures!



# Justice and Advocacy

## J&A Network Update

### Planting Seeds of Faith to Reap a Harvest of Justice

Sign on now to the Justice and Advocacy Network to be a voice for the poor in the Lehigh Valley. The developing J&A Network will serve as instrument of change in the church and in society. Those joining the network will be busy sowing seeds of information about current legislation such as the Farm Bill. Network participants will receive email action alerts and occasional phone calls prompting them to contact their elected officials.

The LCCC understands the influence of collective advocacy and believes that the Network will yield a community of socially responsible Christian witnesses. The goal is to empower local advocates to call on lawmakers to support responsible humanitarian legislation. The Conference is committed to advocating for affordable housing, a living wage, adequate healthcare benefits, and quality education for children and youth. WE NEED YOUR VOICE. If you are interested in helping J&A fight for the dignity of all human beings – sign up today!

Contact Bob Walden at [rwaldenpa@entermail.net](mailto:rwaldenpa@entermail.net) or email [j-a@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:j-a@lccconfchurch.org).



### What Does Eating Tacos Have To Do with Peak Oil?

This question was raised at the Bread For The World Offering of Letters Workshop on March 29th. Concerned Christian advocates gathered to learn about poverty-focused development assistance and local hunger. There were various workshops offered by local experts and BFW organizer Larry Hollar. LCCC Executive Director Rev. Chris Nelson and LCCC Daybreak Director Christine Morrison conducted a workshop entitled, "Who's Hungry in Lehigh County?" They endeavored to put a face on the issue of hunger and poverty through the ministry of Daybreak and other Conference programs.

LCCC Justice and Advocacy Committee chair Bob Walden presented information regarding the production of ethanol as an alternative fuel source and its effect on the price of commonly used food products. The day was highlighted by a conversation between local advocates and Congressman Charlie Dent who was praised for voting favorably on Farm Bill legislation.

The LCCC and BFW partner annually to educate people about the problems of poverty and hunger in the U. S. and abroad. The LCCC is happy to provide advocacy education to the community through the efforts of its Justice and Advocacy Committee.

## J&A Network Mobilizes for Legislative Action and Ecumenical Education

Members of the Justice and Advocacy Network of the LCCC are already sharing information regarding important legislation that affects families in the state of Pennsylvania. The network is:

Contacting elected officials to support HR 2634 — which lays out basic principles for extending debt relief to the world's poorest nations. For more information about the Jubilee Act, HR 2634, see <http://www.jubileeusa.org/jubilee-act.html> or general information about the Jubilee campaign at <http://www.jubileeusa.org/>. If you have further questions or would like to receive email updates on Jubilee legislation, contact Monet Cooper,

[monet@jubileeusa.org](mailto:monet@jubileeusa.org), or 202-783-3566.

Developing a Justice and Advocacy web page with resources and links to issues that LCCC supports.

To join the network, contact Rev. Debra Hepburn at [j-a@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:j-a@lccconfchurch.org) or email Bob Walden at [rwaldenpa@entermail.net](mailto:rwaldenpa@entermail.net)



## LCCC Interfaith in Action Committee

Last fall the Lehigh County Conference of Churches, as part of our Long Range Plan, invited a broad base of interfaith community leaders to discuss how together we could be more effective in encouraging service in our community. There has been a phenomenal response and the following is a summary of our actions and plans to date:

### MISSION STATEMENT Adopted February 21, 2008

The Interfaith in Action Committee (IAC) of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches, in recognition that people of all faiths are created in God's image and in keeping with the Conference's mission to "*further encourage service to the community,*" calls upon people of all faiths to increase understanding and cooperation among the diverse faith communities in our midst. As part of fulfilling the Divine injunction to love God and love your neighbor which expresses the core spiritual value of empathy, the IAC shall:

1. Promote greater awareness of and mutual respect among diverse religious communities
2. Further interfaith dialogue among the numerous faith communities in the Lehigh Valley;
3. Provide leadership in bringing all people of faith and congregations to work together to help those in need, and
4. Lead community actions to address the most critical physical and humanitarian needs of people in our community.

### PROPOSED PROGRAM

Following are proposed action items to achieve the above mentioned goals during 2008. Please watch for these landmark events in the next few months:

- Publications in the media and newspaper from the IAC platform to introduce and promote the initiative
- Formal announcement and launching of a community-wide Food Drive around July 4th
- An Interfaith Dialogue during the period from Independence Day to Thanksgiving Day
- A celebration of our community actions to address hunger around Thanksgiving

### ACTION REQUESTED

1. Support this initiative to make it functional and successful
2. Participation in the Food Drive to improve the supplies for the needy throughout the year
3. Participation in the Interfaith Dialogue to better the understanding
4. Promote and invite others to join this initiative

For any questions and suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact the Conference of Churches at 610-433-6421 or [lccc@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:lccc@lccconfchurch.org).

### Interfaith In Action Committee Members

- ~Rev. Steven Shussett, Lehigh Presbytery
- ~Rev. Thomas Thomas, Union UCC, Neffs
- ~Rabbi Dr. Robert Lennick, Congregation Keneseth Israel
- ~Rev. Dr. Bruce Irwin, Emmanuel UCC - Allentown
- ~Rabbi Moshe Re'em, Temple Beth El
- ~Ms. Kathi Maciolek, Lehigh Valley Women's Interfaith Group
- ~Rev. Sharon Joseph, Church of the Manger UCC
- ~Mr. Waseem Akhter, Muslim Association of Lehigh Valley
- ~Rabbi Barbara Goldman-Wartell, Jewish Federation of Lehigh Valley
- ~Msgr. John S. Mraz, Ecumenical Officer of the Roman Catholic Diocese
- ~Mr. Mohamed Rajmohamed, Al Ahad Islamic Center
- ~Rev. Dr. Christine L. Nelson, Conference of Churches
- ~Rev. Debra Hepburn, Conference of Churches
- ~Lehigh Dialogue Center

### Support a Daybreak Picnic!

Spring is here! At Daybreak we are planning a picnic for the latter end of May. We could use the following picnic items:

- Hamburgers and hot dogs
- Sodas
- Chips, pretzels and condiments.



Please call 610-820-5049 to contribute.



## Conference Bulletin Board



### LCCC Staff Are Winners!

Two employees of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches were recently recognized for their service.

On April 21<sup>st</sup>, LCCC Operations Director Thomas Smith was recognized for his years of dedicated service as Chair of the Advisory Council to the Northampton County Human Relations Commission.

Gigi Pacheco, LCCC Administrative Associate/Development Assistant, received the Administrative Excellence Award of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce 2008 on Administrative Professionals Day, April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Congratulations to both for their dedication to community and service.

### Interfaith in Action Works in Allentown

On Sunday, April 6th, close to 400 people from diverse religious traditions worked side by side to help change their community. Volunteers from churches, mosques, and synagogues worked on more than 25 projects to help needy families and beautify the city. This interfaith community service day was the first of its kind in the city of Allentown.

Collaboration and determination was seen throughout the city. At the LCCC, Life Church's pastor and church members painted designated areas in the Daybreak cafeteria and recreation room. They also held a toiletry drive for Pathways and donated various personal care items for needy people to pick up during walk-in hours.

Keneseth Israel held a health fair, while the Muslim Association conducted a blood drive for the Miller Blood Bank. Volunteers gathered at the LCCC Soup Kitchen to donate paper products, food donations, and do some painting.

The day ended with a potluck dinner hosted by Rabbi Rob Lennick and the congregants of Keneseth Israel. Mayor Ed. Pawlowski expressed his gratitude to Jane Trotter of the Volunteer Center and the members of the Interfaith Coalition for bringing the community together. The Coalition invites others to join the effort and help plan a 2009 Community Service Day.



### ASPIRES MENTORING

#### ASSISTANT FULL-TIME

The Aspires Assistant will assist the Aspires Coordinator in identifying students who are candidates for mentoring and tutoring; inform families about students' opportunity for participation; recruit students; recruit and train mentors; match students with mentors; and provide student/parent orientation. The Assistant will coordinate monthly educational and socialization events with mentors and protégés, make necessary preparations for events, and assist in transporting students as needed to and from events.

A BA or appropriate work experience, a valid driver's license, and the ability to pass background checks are required. Bi-lingual preferred. Send resume to Lehigh County Conference of Churches, 534 Chew Street, Allentown 18102 or email [tsmith@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:tsmith@lccconfchurch.org). EOE.

### TRANSITIONAL WORK CASE MANAGER —FULL-TIME

Provide job readiness assessment, coaching, placement and case management to the chronically unemployed. Minimum of 2 years of counseling and job training experience. BA degree required. Send resume, 3 references to Lehigh County Conference of Churches, 534 Chew Street, Allentown 18102 or email [tsmith@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:tsmith@lccconfchurch.org). EOE.

### Volunteer Coordinator Needed

The Lehigh County Conference of Churches, a faith based non-profit dedicated to feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and mentoring youth, is seeking a candidate to fill the 20 hour/week position of Volunteer Coordinator. Working with appropriate staff, the person selected would be responsible for the coordination, recruitment, orientation, retention and recognition of the Conference's 800 volunteers. Must have volunteer, computer and public speaking experience. Interested persons should send resume to LCCC, 534 Chew St., Allentown, PA 18102 or e-mail [tsmith@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:tsmith@lccconfchurch.org).

## Community Bulletin Board

### Fashion Show to Benefit LCCC



At 7pm on May 9, 2008, at Emmaus High School Cafeteria, view a benefit fashion show with designs by Emmaus High School Students. See the latest styles and support the LCCC. Tickets are available at the door. For more information, call Jessi Highet at 610-435-5054.

### Your Spiritual Sense Can Heal! Free Lecture

*Explore how healing is possible through an understanding of God's love*

International speaker, Michael Pabst, is a practitioner and teacher of Christian Science healing and a member of the Christian Science Board of Lectureship

**Sunday, June 8, 2008, 3pm**  
The Hamilton Community Center  
1941 Hamilton Blvd.  
Allentown, PA 18104

For more information, call 610-282-2313

### MEMBER CHURCH JOB OPPORTUNITY

West-end Allentown church needs a part-time Parish Life Coordinator to work with volunteers, develop and coordinate programs, and assist with membership. Resumes to Dick Cipoletti: [dick@rccassoc.com](mailto:dick@rccassoc.com).

### SUSAN WERNER IS COMING TO HOPE CHURCH!

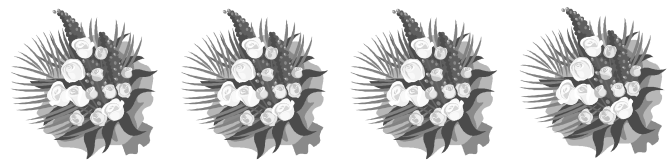
As part of Hope Church's 50th anniversary celebration, Susan Werner, who is an accomplished artist appealing to all audiences will be performing at Hope United Church of Christ at 1031 Flexer Ave., Allentown on **Saturday, June 7 at 7:00 PM**. Her recent CD "Gospel Truth" especially speaks to spiritual seekers and mainline Christians. Here is what people are saying about her:

- "Susan Werner, a clever songwriter and an engaging performer, brings literacy and wit back to popular song." -*The New Yorker*
- "The classically trained and jazz inspired singer is redefining the genre and winning admirers around the country..." -*Philadelphia Inquirer*

Check her and her music out at  
[www.susanwerner.com](http://www.susanwerner.com).

Come celebrate with us! No charge for admission, but seating is limited. Please call 610-439-8118 to reserve a seat.

There will be a free will offering that evening, and we are accepting sponsorships. Please contact Jean Andes at 610-432-8089 or the Hope Church office at 610-439-8118 if you would like to contribute to this



## Aspires Students Explore Washington DC.

Twenty-one Aspire students and fourteen adult mentors, parents, Aspires Support Committee members and staff traveled to Washington, D.C. in April to see the sights with the cherry blossoms in full bloom.

A cold wind and passing showers didn't deter the students from hiking to the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial to stand where Martin Luther King, Jr. stood to deliver his "I Have A Dream" speech, and all the monuments and memorials in between. Some explored museums, taking in space capsules and the moon lan-

der, the Hope Diamond, African art and natural history. Others spent the afternoon in the Holocaust Museum. One student, whose mentor works for a Senator, had a special tour of the Capital Building.

Thanks to the large group of adult volunteers, Aspires students were able to tailor their Washington experience to their personal interests. A special thanks to corporate sponsors PPL and Buzzi Unichem as well as all of Aspires' donors and friends for making the trip possible.

Lehigh County Conference of  
Churches  
534 Chew Street  
Allentown, PA 18102

May 2008

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#### Ecumenical Encounters

May, 2008

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*The Rev. Dr. Christine L. Nelson,  
Executive Director*

*Ira Faro,  
Development Senior Director*

*Tom Smith,  
Operations Director*

*Tom Walker,  
Human Services Director*

*The Rev. Debra Hepburn,  
Ecumenical Director*

*Carol Closson,  
The Rev. William Seaman,  
Executive Directors Emeritus*

United Way of the  
Greater Lehigh Valley



## Conference Tours

You are invited to take a tour of the LCCC ministries on the third Thursday of each month at 534 Chew Street, Allentown. Enjoy a free meal at the Daybreak drop-in center and consider how you may volunteer to do ministry with like-minded folk.

**May 15, 11:30 am-1:00 pm**

To register for the tour, please call the main office at 610-433-6421.

RSVP: One week prior to each event.



Lehigh County Conference  
of Churches

Email: [lccc@lccconfchurch.org](mailto:lccc@lccconfchurch.org)

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Fax: 610-439-8039

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