



JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

Another Piece of the Puzzle

Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness.

Thomas Carlyle

Faith in Action

When outreach workers of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches first encountered John living under the Linden Street Bridge in Allentown, they asked him a simple question.

“How can we help?”

John’s answer was equally simple. “I want to work.”

Men, women and families who are hungry, homeless or threatened with homelessness come to the Conference in ever increasing numbers. Our LCCC Soup Kitchen and Daybreak drop-in center feeds them, serving 61,507 meals last year. Our Pathways housing and referral service refers those who are homeless to local emergency shelters, making 258 such referrals in 2007.

Of the nearly 1,600 men and women who spent at least one night in an area shelter last year, nearly 80% were unemployed.

Pathways can even provide cash assistance in the form of a security deposit or a month’s rent to those who can demonstrate that they have the necessary income to maintain their housing through the creation of a comprehensive budget. 186 families qualified for and received cash assistance through Pathways last year.

What is the underlying cause of the problems these families confront day after day?

Poverty.

Of the nearly 1,600 men and women who spent at least one night in an area shelter last year, nearly 80% were unemployed. One-third had given up seeking work entirely. Finding a job and supporting themselves through meaningful work is especially difficult for low-income mothers unable to succeed in staying employed; prisoners returning to their communities after incarceration; young adults who have aged out of the child welfare system and are suddenly on their own; low-income youth; the disabled; and the homeless. Yet, according to the National Association of Planning Councils, individuals and families need consistent employment to remain strong and self-sufficient.

So we asked ourselves that same, simple question.

How can we help?

In partnership with our friends at the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, we believe that we have found the answer.

Jobs.

Read more on next page.



Mission Statement

Responding to the call of Jesus Christ, the mission of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches is to unite communities of faith as ecumenical partners. Putting our faith into action, we minister to and advocate for those in need and encourage all to reach their full potential.

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Vision Statement

Lehigh County Conference of Churches...Striving to be the face, feet, hands and heart of God’s grace in the Lehigh Valley. Leading the faith community in feeding, clothing, healing, housing and uniting God’s children.

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Jobs, Jobs, Jobs Transitional Work Program



Is your business willing to join us in helping chronically unemployed men and women learn the value and rewards of meaningful work?

With significant funding from the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, the Transitional Work Program (TWP) that the LCCC will institute this summer is a national best-practices model, a practical approach that cuts through the complex reasons for a person's unemployment and starts with the desired outcome – employment.

The TWP focuses on three areas:

Assessment: Services during the Assessment phase will include participant criminal background checks, basic and job skill tests, screens for barriers to employment, and interest inventories.

Job Training and Support Services: Services and skill-building will include hands-on job training; resume and cover-letter writing, filling out applications, and

interviewing skills; workplace culture; and life skills classes. Program participants will earn a stipend during the training phase in one of three major groupings: Office Administration, Grounds Maintenance/Custodial Services, or Foodhandling. Program participants will keep existing entitlements such as childcare and TANF benefits while in training.

Transition Services During Employment: The TWP participant will be matched in a real job in the business community and will meet regularly with the TWP case manager for job coaching and/or other job retention services. Coaching will be available to independent employers to resolve problems as TWP participants complete the transition to meaningful, full-time employment and financial self-sufficiency.

Help us help people get real jobs. Learn more about the Transitional Work Program by calling Daybreak Director Christine Morrison at 610-433-6421.

Weigh in Against Hunger

Today I was really, really hungry. I had been out all morning hacking through the jungle otherwise known as my rhododendron bushes and I was famished. It was that deep, gnawing kind of hunger where you feel it all through your body from your feet to the top of your head.

I don't ordinarily get that hungry. But as I was ravenously eating my chicken salad, it made me think about the people and the places in the world where insidious hunger is commonplace. The homes of the poor elderly who either can't get out or can't afford both food and medicine; families whose monthly grocery shopping amounts to getting a few bags of groceries from a food bank; individuals who have no home, who roam and eat wherever and whenever they can find food.

But hunger is not only a physical ache. As Elie Wiesel says, "Hunger is isolating; it may not and cannot be experienced vicariously. He who never felt hunger can never know its real effects, both tangible and intangible. Hunger defies imagination; it even defies memory. Hunger is felt only in the present."

Having felt hunger, we and our friends of all faiths want

to *Weigh in Against Hunger*. The newly formed LCCC Interfaith in Action Committee as its first project challenges all congregations and individuals to a six-month action campaign for the entire community. The goal? Individually to contribute 1/10 of our weight in food or cash to local emergency food pantries, soup kitchens or the Second Harvest Food Bank. That will be literally "weighing in against hunger." As a community, we seek to raise 250,000 pounds of food - eight semi truck loads. Working together we can have a huge impact with our hungry neighbors.

We are asking that more be done than pooling our weight to end hunger. We are asking people to **E.A.T.**— to do three things:

- **E**ducate your community and others about the hunger and hunger needs;
- **A**ct: collect and deliver food and other items to local emergency food pantries, soup kitchens or Second Harvest – you choose who and when; and
- **T**ell: about what you've done by reporting back to the Lehigh Country Conference of Churches the weight of your donations and dollars.

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With Justice All Things Are Possible

When the LCCC Justice and Advocacy Committee met last month to discuss ways to empower

more people to speak out for the poor, one thing was certain. There are many issues that impact the lives of people living in poverty in our community. These concerns led Betsy Ragan and Claire Miller of Hope UCC Allentown to join J&A to work for change in Lehigh County.

Both Betsy and Claire are active advocates in their church and believe that educating people on social issues is key to positive change in the community. They express a desire to help J&A build a network of socially responsible religious advocates who would take on the task of informing

others and calling for action from elected officials and voters.

Together the group identified hunger, homelessness, mental health awareness, at-risk youth, and health care reform as priorities for advocacy and education.

The Justice and Advocacy Network website is up and running, though still under construction. Committee Chair Bob Walden built the website to support the Network by providing links to the LCCC website (www.lcconfchurch.org) as well as to the sites of other organizations that are engaged in similar advocacy initiatives. The Network will serve the community by linking up individuals, congregations and community organizations with the Conference to work on legislation in five major focus areas.

Together the group identified hunger, homelessness, mental health awareness, at-risk youth, and health care reform as priorities for advocacy and education. A date was set for a **Healthcare Reform Workshop on September 27th**. The LCCC welcomes everyone in the community to participate.

Help us lift the standard of living for all citizens. Justice can make it possible. Sign up today to join the J&A Network and keep yourself and your local congregation informed. To begin receiving information, email j-a@lcconfchurch.org.

If you have questions contact Rev. Debra Hepburn at dhepburn@lcconfchurch.org or 484-664-7320.

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Independence Day is the kickoff of the campaign because of our duty as Americans to help those in need. Summer is when area contributions are usually the lowest and, with school breakfasts and lunches not available to low income families with children, the needs increase. Unity can turn to community, as we E.A.T. So that when we reach Thanksgiving Day, the time of our national thanks giving and the end of this drive, people will be filled body and soul by the power of unified faithful action.

For more information about either the LCCC Interfaith in Action Committee or the **Weigh in Against Hunger** campaign go to www.lcconfchurch.org or call 484-664-7320.

When you are asked in the world to come, "What was your work?" and you answer, "I fed the hungry," you will be told, "This is the gate of the Lord, enter into it, you who have fed the hungry."

Midrash Psalms 118:17

Ecumenical/Interfaith Events

July 4th: "Weigh In Against Hunger" - Interfaith food drive begins.

September 27th: J&A Fall Workshop on Health Care and Public Policy – Congregations explore the realities of the healthcare crisis in America and in Lehigh County.

October 23rd: Beyond The Yellow Ribbon: Faith Communities Ministering to Our Veterans and Their Families.

The Lehigh County Conference of Churches
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Make Good Use of Your Stimulus Check \$50 Represents the Food Costs for 200 Meals



The response has been gratifying. In mid June the LCCC was challenged by our friend Gary Millsbaugh of the Allentown Rescue Mission – raise \$4,000 to help feed the hungry at the LCCC Soup Kitchen and Daybreak drop-in center and a generous donor would provide a dollar-for-dollar match. As of today, we've received nearly \$2,000 toward that \$4,000 goal.

What better way to spend a portion of your stimulus check than to feed our hungry neighbors, particularly in the summer when school is out and families struggle to replace the meals that their children receive in school.

When hunger gets inside you, nothing else can.

African Proverb

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