



LIFT EVERY VOICE IN CHANGING ECONOMIC SEASONS

"She lifted up her voice and wept" Genesis 21:16

Faith in Action

Every time I read the story of Hagar, the Egyptian hand maiden who bore Abraham and Sarah a child, I can't stop thinking about the hundreds of single mothers who walk through the doors of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches every year. Children in tow, they come fearful about the fate of their families as they face an unknown future.

Sue's ten-year marriage collapsed. She got a job paying just above minimum wage with no benefits. She found an apartment but within three months was in arrears. Her pay could not cover utilities, medicine, food, and clothing for her and her children. Desperate, she visited with our Pathways staff, weeping as she told her story.

We helped her make a budget, sign her children up for SCHIP insurance, obtain Food Stamps, find food banks, soup kitchens and childcare, and locate a less expensive apartment. Sue had to make some hard choices like a different school, moving to a tough neighborhood, no car, and no cable. But slowly Sue lifted up her head. She was feeling she had found a road in the midst of the wilderness that had overtaken her life.

Sue exemplifies many families in our community and nation. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported in August of 2008 that 12 million renter and homeowner families nationwide were

cost burdened, paying more than 50% of their income for housing. In fact HUD says a family with one full-time worker earning minimum wage cannot afford the local fair market rent (FMR) anywhere in this country.

In our own 15th U.S. Congressional District, the National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that 15.6% of renter households are severely cost burdened and there is a deficit of 8,507 low income housing units. It also reports that mortgage foreclosures disproportionately affect renters and are concentrated in neighborhoods already considered high-poverty and disadvantaged.

It will take all of us working shoulder to shoulder to turn our community around.

Why is this important? 37% of Pathways "customers" needing housing are

children 15 years of age and under, a percentage paralleled in area shelters (38.5%). One in four families with children under 18 are living below the poverty line. We should be lifting up our voices and weeping as we realize the dire predicament of families in our Lehigh Valley and nation.

We should be lifting up our voices and crying for help. Help from our government to provide more housing assistance, affordable healthcare, and to at least keep mental health and drug and alcohol treatment and food programs at the level of funding they are now. Help from our businesses to build new and repair existing low in-

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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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come housing and pay a livable wage. We need our schools and day care centers to nurture and teach our children, to not allow kids to fall behind on the reading and math skills they will need to succeed in life. We need the voice and the hands of our faith communities to show and tell our community of the core values and actions necessary for all of us to not just survive, but thrive.

You and I have opportunities everyday to lift our voices at home, school, and work, in social networks, congregations, via media, legislation, and yes water cooler talk, to declare what we know to be true. It will take all of us working shoulder to shoulder to turn our community around.

The key to turn things around in every generation is the same. It is what we see in Hagar. Can we get past lifting our own voices in despair and see the well of water God has prepared to lead us through? Will we lift up our children, hold them fast with our hands, and walk with them through the wilderness into a new way of life?

HOW ARE WE DOING IN THESE TOUGH TIMES?

We are being asked more and more often, "How is the Conference doing these days?" All that we can say is that we are holding our own.

In some areas, our fundraising efforts have lagged behind. In some, we are doing well. As always, we have tried to be good stewards of the resources that our friends have provided. Our staff is constantly looking for ways to keep costs under control as more and more people in need come to our door. So far, we have not had to curtail programming. So far.

We already know that unless United Way can reach their fundraising goal by extending their campaign, the Conference stands to lose several thousand dollars. We are concerned that in 2009 the foundations that provide over \$200,000 in grant funding annually will have less to disperse, that businesses that have been generous in the past will not have the resources to continue their charitable giving programs at the same level.

How you can help?

- **Keep those cards and letters coming.** We thank you for enabling us to continue to provide the basics of life to our neighbors in need.
- **Join our next Third Thursday tour** of the Conference offices on **February 19**, 11:30 AM to 12:45 PM.
- **Visit our website** for current program needs!
- **Cook for the Conference.**

COOKING FOR THE CONFERENCE

Cooking for the Conference is easy as pie...or spaghetti or scrambled eggs. Your congregation, school or community group already holds bake sales, breakfasts, or spaghetti dinners. Hold one more, for the Conference, between now and April. We've heard from several congregations, large and small. We'd like to hear from you.

You decide when to hold your event. We'll promote your event in our print and email newsletters that reach 1,500 individuals, congregations, and community groups.



Call Development Director Ira Faro at 610-433-6421 or email ifaro@lccconfchurch.org for information on how you can help the LCCC serve over 60,000 meals in our LCCC Soup Kitchen and Daybreak drop-in center to our hungry neighbors this year.



HAVE YOU NOTICED OUR NEW WEB ADDRESS?

To make our web address easier to remember and easier to give out to your fellow congregants, friends, and coworkers, we've changed our domain name. Now you can go to **www.lehighchurches.org** for Conference news and information. The old address - www.lccconfchurch.org - will work for a while longer, but why not bookmark the new address now? We are in the process of migrating staff email addresses to the new domain and we'll announce when that conversion is complete.



CHAT ROOM

Voices of People Making a Difference

*The voice of our new **Volunteer Coordinator Christine Durner** who wants to make a difference.*

Q. When and why did you join the LCCC as the new Volunteer Coordinator?

A. I've been on the job since October. I've spent years in business management, years as a volunteer, so matching the two seemed natural.

Q. What motivates people to volunteer?

A. There are so many reasons, many very individual. Some simply feel a call. I've been surprised at the number of people who say that they want to volunteer because they've been helped in the past. Volunteering is a way to thank us, to give something back.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your work?

A. I enjoy talking to young people, up and coming college students, encouraging them to participate in civic life. Adding their enthusiasm to our current volunteer base at the Conference would be a big plus.

Q. What are the greatest volunteer needs at the LCCC right now?

A. Right now, I would say that adult mentors for the at-risk youth in our Aspires Mentoring program and people who enjoy working on special events are two critical needs. But there are so many opportunities to become involved, on committees that deal with personnel issues, ecumenism, and fundraising, not to mention hands-on service. There's something for everyone.

***John Sapia** is a retired environmental engineer from Bethlehem Steel who has volunteered one morning a week for the past five years as a Pathways resource counselor.*

Q. What are your responsibilities as a volunteer resource counselor in Pathways?

A. Our first priority is to determine the housing needs of homeless or potentially homeless families, doing the initial screening for the staff housing case managers. After that, we distribute the toiletries, disposable diapers and such that people donate to Pathways.

Q. Why did you decide to volunteer?

A. My goal as a volunteer was to be in a position to help people in dire need.

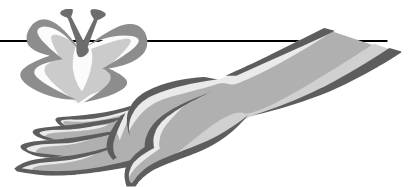
Q. Has Pathways satisfied your desire to be of service?

A. I see about a dozen people a day, all with problems that you just can't imagine. But almost without fail, every day there's at least one person in desperate need that touches my heart. Whether it's a single mother with children who has nowhere else to turn or a man who has lost his job and can't provide for his family, they often have tears in their eyes as they tell me their stories.

Q. Can you give them the help that they need?

A. They may come in desperate, but they don't leave that way if they are willing to take advantage of the help that the Conference can provide. More often than not, as they leave, they smile and thank me. That's what keeps me coming back.

How You Can Help



A WILL IS NOT AN ESTATE PLAN

You may be a Baby Boomer, but now AARP is calling. Do you have an updated durable power-of-attorney? Does your will reflect your current economic and family status? If life has been good to you, help to make life better for others. Contact your financial planner and your attorney. Have them contact LCCC Executive Director Rev. Christine Nelson or Development Director Ira Faro at 610.433.6421 for information.

Visit our Website at:
www.lehighchurches.org

Click the **"Donate Now"** button.
Donations may be made as a one-time gift or monthly.

The Lehigh County Conference of Churches
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**Non-Profit Organization
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Allentown, PA**

Events

Beginning February 25: Noontime Lenten Gospel Concert Series

Beginning Ash Wednesday, February 25, and weekly thereafter, favorite African American hymns will be performed by local vocalists in both contemporary and classic styles. Bring a friend with you to **Zion's Reformed UCC, 620 Hamilton St., Allentown, at 11:55 AM every Wednesday during Lent.** Each concert will feature a Lenten reflection by an LCCC Program Director. Lite lunch available for \$3.50. Visit www.lehighchurches.org or call 610-433-6421 for more information.

March 2: Faithful Reform in Healthcare - A Community Meeting

Attend this community meeting for the 15th Congressional District at **Christ Lutheran Church, 1245 Hamilton Street, Allentown, on Monday, March 2nd, at 7 PM.** Sponsors include the Lehigh County Conference of Churches Justice & Advocacy Committee and Congregations United for Neighborhood Action.

March 21: Bread for the World Workshop - Hungry at Home: Food for our Neighbors

Registration at 8:30 AM, Saturday, March 21, at First Presbyterian Church, Cedar Crest Boulevard and Tilghman Street, Allentown. Workshops are from 9 AM to 3 PM. LCCC and Bread For The World partner to educate congregations as to what they can do to advocate for people who experience hunger and poverty. Workshops are free. All are invited to attend. Visit the Justice & Advocacy website - <http://ja.ppjr.org> - or call the LCCC at 610-433-6421 for information.

March 26: Campbell Lectures on Christian Unity

Missionologist The Rev. Ian T. Douglas, Ph.D., will deliver the LCCC Campbell Lectures on Christian Unity Churches on **Thursday, March 26, at Moravian Theological Seminary, 60 W. Locust Street, Bethlehem, from 4 to 9 PM.** The program includes two lectures and dinner. The cost for each lecture is \$5.00. The full package, including two lectures and repast, is \$30.00. Reservations due by March 16. Visit www.lehighchurches.org or call 610-433-6421 to register.

MAY 19: LCCC Annual Meeting Luncheon at America on Wheels Museum. SAVE THE DATE !