



Lehigh County Conference of Churches

Ecumenical Encounters

Volume 23, Number 5

June 2009

FROM FUTILITY TO TRANSFORMATION

What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?...Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in the ages before us. Ecclesiastes 1:3, 10

Inside this issue:	
Transformation Part 2	2
Annual Meeting Wrap Up	2
New Board	2
Stimulus Award	3
Homeless Count	3
Scoot for Food	4
Farewell Friend	4
Moravian Open	4
Kids Summer Camp	4
Flag Day	4
Conference Needs	4
Healthcare Update	5
Here to Help Day	5

Remember the movie "Groundhog Day?" The main character played by Bill Murray kept reliving the same day over and over again. Frustration ensued. One of my colleagues refers to working with the chronically homeless as parallel to that "Groundhog Day" experience. Until the person has an "ah, hah!" experience they keep reliving the same scenario over and over.

Jane, like many people suffering from chronic mental illness and with a history of non-compliance with medications, actually lives "Groundhog Day." Over and over again she has received enormous volumes of help but the same result ensues: homelessness. She has utilized every mental health residential program in the LV, all the area shelters, multiple therapists and case managers, burned her bridges with her family, and lost her Section 8 housing voucher due to missing payments.

Tom was abandoned by his biological parents and spent his developmental years in group homes, residential treatment programs, hospitals, foster

families, and now shelters.

At the ripe old age of 19 he has been through the whole social service system and demonstrates poor self care skills, institutionalized behaviors and few social graces. Is he doomed to repeat this heartbreaking scenario all his life?

Why do we keep trying to fix persons who appear to be unfixable?

Sometimes as people of faith and compassion we feel defeated as we try to assist such children of God. We

feel the futility of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes: *What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted (1:15)*. Sometimes I echo the words: *What gain has the workers from their toil (3:9)*? Why do we keep trying to fix persons who appear to be unfixable?

But then the light bulb goes on. Like Bill Murray I think of something else to try, some new opportunity to provide or another place for care and counsel to which to refer them. I talk with my colleagues and we brainstorm new approaches, possibilities, and actions. Most importantly, we agree that we will not let this one go. We will shore up the community safety net, keep in communication about their needs, let

(Continued on page 2)

<p>VISIT LEHIGHCHURCHES.ORG</p> <p>DONATE NOW THROUGH </p>	<p></p> <p>CALENDAR OF EVENTS</p> <p></p>	<p>June 17</p> <p>Here to Help 10 am to 5 pm Agricultural Hall Allentown Fairgrounds</p>	<p>June 18</p> <p>Conference of Churches Tour <i>Come and see us in action.</i></p>	<p>July 6</p> <p>Health Care Reform with US Rep. Charlie Dent 3pm Zion's Reformed Church, Allentown</p>
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FROM FUTILITY TO TRANSFORMATION Cont'd

the person know we will be here for them and rebuild the belief they need to have in themselves as well as trust in others.

Working together with colleagues from the Salvation Army, Allentown Rescue Mission, Halfway House, CACLV, County and City services, congregations of all kinds, and many others, we have seen people transform before our eyes and truly find a new, more meaningful path for their lives. Some call this the Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, and it is working in Lehigh County and the United States as the number of chronically homeless persons, people who have lived long term on the streets, has concretely declined. Others of us also call it the work of God.

Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back... Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything (Ecc 11:1, 5). Selah. Amen.

Newly Elected Board of Directors

July 1, 2009—June 30, 2010

First Term:

Timothy Bingham, retired lawyer, volunteer member of Episcopal Church of the Mediator, Allentown

Henry Moore, Project Manager, COPS in Schools Training Program PA Regional Community Policing Institute, and member of St. James AME Zion, Allentown

Renee Saleh, retired former Director of Financial Aid at both Kutztown University and Northampton Community College, member of First Presbyterian, Allentown

Second Term:

Bishop Blair Couch, pastor of Calvary Moravian Church, Allentown

Richard Focht, attorney with Schoffstall & Focht, P.C., member of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, Allentown

Sonya Siegfried, General Manager of J.S. Burkholder Funeral Home, member of First Presbyterian Church, Allentown

Officers:

President – Mr. Rick Focht

VP - Ms. Eunice Schermerhorn

Secretary – Mr. Ken Mohr

Treasurer - Ms. Theresa Racek

ANNUAL MEETING 2009—RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

On May 19 at the America On Wheels Museum, representatives of Lehigh County Conference of Churches member churches and community partners joined with Board, staff, and volunteers to review the past year and look forward to the next.



All in all, FY 2008/2009 was a good one for the Conference even given the difficult economic climate. We ended the past fiscal year with a slight surplus and we project that we will 'break even' this fiscal year. More importantly, the Conference addressed the problems facing our neighbors in need in a caring, comprehensive way as they struggled to meet their shelter, nutritional, and healthcare needs.

One by one, staff and volunteers from each of the programs of the Conference discussed how the men, women, and youth that they serve have been impacted by the recession and how the LCCC has responded. Kind hearts and enthusiasm was apparent all round.

J. S. Burkholder Funeral Home received the Ecumenical Service Award for a group for their sponsorship of the annual Christmas meal and party at the LCCC Soup Kitchen. Mrs. **Mildred Scrak** was honored with the Individual **Ecumenical Service Award** for her work as Kitchen Coordinator for the Catholic Charities' Soup Kitchen. Although unable to attend due to illness, Milly wrote to us saying, "I am honored to accept the award and feel that I should share it with the many people that stand behind me and support me in my ministry of helping people."

Other highlights of the Annual Meeting included:

- * Election of and installation of the LCCC Board of Directors,
- * Passage of the FY 2009/2010 budget,
- * Recognition of staff who had achieved five and ten years of service,
- * The Museum itself, an interesting and inviting new venue.

STIMULUS FUND RENTAL ASSISTANCE AWARDED LOCALLY: *Conference of Churches to distribute \$661,063 over 3 years*



At last there is help for the little guy!!! Federal stimulus dollars for rental assistance will arrive in the Lehigh Valley this fall to help ordinary individuals and families who are homeless or about to be homeless. Persons who can demonstrate the ability to maintain stability in housing given short-term or medium-term cash assistance with rent or utility payments but who otherwise would become homeless without such assistance qualify. This includes person in emergency shelters, on the street, transitional housing, and people in arrears in rent. Persons needing mortgage assistance are not applicable and should contact CACLV for mortgage assistance.

The City of Allentown is distributing \$1,072,597 and the County of Lehigh \$574,614 with the majority of the funds going directly to rental and utility assistance. The Lehigh County Conference of Churches is one of 6 entities to receive City dollars and one of five to receive County dollars. We are the only agency to receive rental assistance dollars for both Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing.

The Conference of Churches appreciates the trust the City and County are expressing in its ability to help people obtain housing. These dollars coupled with our regular allocation of County and FEMA rental assistance dollars will enable us to assist nearly double the number of people for the next three years or a projected average of 280 to 300/year. ***Please note funds will not be available until the fall!***

The Conference also values its partnership with local congregations and asks that you continue to dialogue with us about the people in need of housing who come to your doors. Together we can answer affirmatively the gospel question, "When did I see you a stranger and welcome you" as we share these blessings with the "least of these" who are members of God's family.

21ST LEHIGH VALLEY SHELTER CENSUS (2008) & 2009 POINT-IN-TIME SURVEY

This year, the point-in-time (PIT) homeless count occurred across Pennsylvania on January 28th, 2009. For the first time, this PIT Count was incorporated with the annual Lehigh Valley Shelter Census of the Lehigh Valley Coalition on Affordable Housing. The information these reports contain serves as a baseline to measure the region's success in reducing homelessness. PIT counts are critical to understanding the needs and make up of homeless persons who are living on the street. Data gathered from PIT counts over the years has enabled the local Regional Homeless Advisory Board to bring nearly \$5 million homeless assistance dollars to our region annually.

Twelve counties stretching from the Lehigh Valley to Tioga and Bradford Counties to the north comprise the Allentown/ Northeast Pennsylvania Continuum of Care. **738 persons were counted as homeless on the night of January 28th.** Of those: 570 (77%) were in Lehigh and Northampton Counties—62% were in families, 41% were children, 15% of single adults spent the night unsheltered. As regards heads of families and single adults: 22% were fleeing domestic violence, 20% reported a substance abuse disorder, 13% were chronically homeless, 11% reported a serious mental illness, 7% were veterans, and <1% were unaccompanied youth. **Significant findings of the Shelter Census specific to the Lehigh Valley include: 2,451 men, women, and children were housed in the Valley's nine emergency and short-term transitional shelters. 36.4% were children.** Children spent an average of 40.4 nights in a shelter. Adults spent an average of 29.3 nights. Because shelter residents are staying longer, fewer people can be sheltered. 16.4% of all shelter residents and 21% of shelter residents who were heads of households were working to support their families. Domestic violence was the primary reason for unemployment among heads of households.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development lists the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in our region at \$853. The income needed to comfortably afford that rent is \$34,120 or \$16.40 an hour. The lack of affordable housing in the Lehigh Valley, coupled with the factors that create homelessness, are being addressed every day at the Conference. Your generous support is needed to bring our homeless neighbors in from the cold.



Conference Bulletin Board



Vroom . . . Scoot for Food



On Saturday, May 30th, over 30 riders, some from as far as Philadelphia, scooted their way from Allentown to Bath for two good causes. The riders met at the America on Wheels Museum where they

were treated to a viewing of beautiful classic cars and a 1930's Harley Davidson. At Keystone Park in Bath, the riders enjoyed a picnic and live music. Proceeds from the ride were shared between LCCC Soup Kitchen and the Bath Food Bank. Plans for another ride are already underway.

Farewell, Friend

This past month we said goodbye to Rev. Debra Hepburn. Rev. Hepburn served for three years as our Ecumenical Director. Through her work we received more members and increased church involvement in our programs. We are grateful for her work here with us and pray for a great blessing on her new endeavors.



Anyone **interested in the part-time Ecumenism Director position**, please send your resume to Tom Smith at tsmith@lehighchurches.org. Focus will be: developing relationships with churches and staffing Ecumenism and Justice & Advocacy Committees.

Moravian Open House

Saturday June 27, 10am

Preparing Lay leaders for ministry in established congregations and emerging communities of faith. To register call, Jill Peters at 610-861-1616

Young People Making Peace

Summer camp for children ages 5-12, activities related to the broad topic of peace and justice. Limited space. Call 610-691-8730 for information.

Dates: July 27-31, 9am—Noon

Location: First Presbyterian Church, Allentown,
Sliding Scale Fee: \$5-\$35 per child
Scholarships available

FLAG DAY CELEBRATION



St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 8th & Walnut Streets, Allentown, invites friends, neighbors and the community to a

commemoration of Flag Day, Sunday, June 14, 2009, 2:30 p.m. Flags that have flown over Allentown and St. Paul's since their mutual founding in 1762 will be displayed. Veterans will be recognized and honored. A program of patriotic music will be performed by the Hill to Hill Brass Quintet and St. Paul's organist, David Macbeth. For more information call the church at 610-435-9065.

Daybreak Needs:

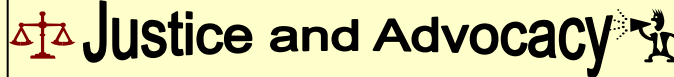
- * **Coffee**
- * **Cereal**
- * **Juice**
- * **Paper products**
- * **Bingo prizes**
- * **Groups to cook and serve a meal**

HELP!



Pathways Needs:

- * **Soap**
- * **Shampoo**
- * **Toothpaste**
- * **Toothbrushes**
- * **Razors**
- * **Diapers – sizes 4 & 5**



Justice and Advocacy

HEALTHCARE UPDATE

Please mark your calendars for a **meeting with Representative Dent**. It will be held at Zions Reformed Church 620 West Hamilton Street, Allentown PA 18101 at **3 pm on Monday July 6th**. The purpose of the meeting is to present Representative Dent with the affordability data gathered and analyzed by National PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) from 1,700 surveys. We will also present him with local stories about health care gathered by Congregations United for Neighborhood Action (CUNA) leaders. The Lehigh County Conference of Churches has been working with CUNA, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA (LAMP) and CACLV on health care issues. Our goal is to continue to unlock the power of people in the Lehigh Valley so we can help to shape the discussion about health care reform. We want it to be affordable, to cover all people and to be sustainable.

To Learn More On The Subject of Health Care Go To:

- * LCCC Justice & Advocacy website at <http://ja.pppj.org/issues/health.htm>
- * PA Health Access Network <http://www.pahealthaccess.org/>
- * Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA <http://www.lamp.org/>
- * People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) <http://www.piconetwork.org/>

Rep. Dent has co-sponsored an alternative healthcare proposal. U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk (IL-10) and Charlie Dent (PA-15), co-chairs of the centrist GOP Tuesday Group, unveiled legislation May 20th to guarantee the rights of patients to control their own health care decisions. The Medical Rights Act, authored by Congressmen Kirk and Dent, guarantees that private (non-government) health care cannot be denied by government restrictions. The legislation bans government interference into the doctor-patient relationship by protecting the right of Americans to get the care they need when they need it. Congressmen Kirk and Dent were joined by fellow Tuesday Group members U.S. Reps. Leonard Lance (NJ-07) and Erik Paulsen (MN-03). To see the alternative healthcare proposal visit http://www.house.gov/list/press/il10_kirk/healthcare_release.html

Among the issues is the fear that having a public plan option competing alongside private plans will eventually lead to single payer system or put private plans out of business. Another fear is personal choice will be taken away or limited, and long waits, rationing and denied care will increase. We must make the point that in our current system all of those things exist now in large quantities—for people with no or insufficient insurance. The difference is provision of health care in the current system is based on ability to pay, i.e. the more money or insurance one has the more quickly one can receive both necessary and optional health care, whereas an appropriate public plan option would be based on a person's need.

Here to Help Day

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

10 am to 5pm

Agricultural Hall, Allentown Fairgrounds

Come and learn of services and programs available to help you and your neighbors get through the economic downturn. Get information on: health care coverage, financial planning, re-employment, resume review, training programs, and mortgage/rent information. For additional information, visit www.heretohelp.pa.gov

Lehigh County Conference of Churches
534 Chew Street
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June 2009

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The Rev. William Seaman,
Executive Directors Emeritus

JUNE EVENTS

HERE TO HELP

Wednesday, June 17, 10 am—5 pm
Agricultural Hall, Allentown Fairgrounds
Come and learn of services and programs available to help you
and your neighbors get through the economic downturn.

Conference Tour

June 18
11:30AM – 12:45 PM
Conference of Churches

Healthcare Forum with US Rep. Dent

July 6
3 pm Zion's Reformed UCC
620 W Hamilton Street, Allentown

United Way of the
Greater Lehigh Valley



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