

Ecumenical Encounters

News from Lehigh County Conference of Churches

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

June 2010

ECONOMY OF GRACE: GETTING BACK YOUR LIFE

What is your servant that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?

2 Samuel 9:8

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Mephibosheth. What a name. Maybe they called him Meph for short. This little known son of Jonathan, friend of King David, apparently got little respect in life. This all changed when King David, wanting to show kindness for the sake of his father Jonathan, offered to restore to Meph all of the land of his grandfather Saul and a seat at the King’s dinner table always.

Meph had experienced the death of his father and grandfather, the loss of their lands, his inheritance, and the fall from social grace which accompanies such. Along with these tragedies, all his life Meph suffered an indignity that had come to define him and most likely limit him: “he was crippled in his feet.” To be disabled in that day, to lose one’s ancestral land, both identified a person to be as valuable as a dead dog.

It isn’t too hard for me to imagine how incredulous Meph must have felt as he stood before King David. I have watched grown men cry when they are given a free prescription to help their sick child, or handed the keys to an apartment or a voucher for a month’s rent. To be given back everything you had lost and asked nothing in return is beyond belief especially when you have been told all your life you are worthless. It is transformative, it’s resurrection, it’s like being born again.

There is another side of the story. When this news rippled through the town, when Meph was out there guiding his father’s servants in their working of his land, when the townspeople saw him dining with the King, do you think it changed the public order as well? Do you think they looked at Meph with new respect?

This story shows the power of THE STORY. God’s divine economy, the way God orders

things, is often the unexpected, to shock and startle, to change the terms of life for individuals and society. And God always seems predisposed to take the most unlikely candidates and pour on them the blessings of both the divine and the world economy. Through these actions could God be calling us to arm wrestle with our society as to what the fundamental assumptions of life should be?

The Conference of Churches has been given yet another opportunity to watch God’s economy of grace in action. Within the next two months we will be given new tools to transform the lives of our time’s “Mephibosheths,” four disrespected special needs populations, all with behavioral health issues: 18-23 year old young adults in transition out of foster care, adults who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, leaving prison or transitioning from group homes. These will hear the unexpected: “let me restore to you your home (today’s equivalent of land) and come and sit at the King’s table.” Through the kind auspices of Lehigh County Clearinghouse, using Health Choices dollars, some of the most abandoned in our culture will be invited to experience an economy of grace as they receive housing, furnishings, and yes, the kindness of support.

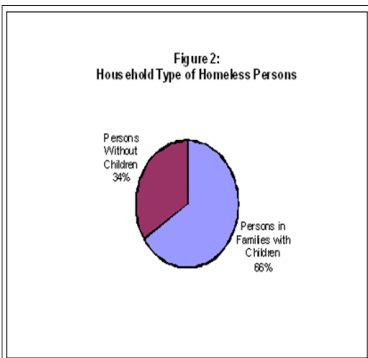
I know what their reaction will be. Wonder, disbelief, much like Meph: Why a dead dog like me? What I am curious about is will this create any stir in our social order? When our townspeople see these formerly homeless, former convicts, young adults struggling to find their way, will they have more respect for them? Will their change of fortune be celebrated? Will getting back their life mean they will be welcomed at our local tables, or even welcomed in their new home and neighborhood? Will the dead dog Meph have his day once again?

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Area Homelessness Bucks National Trend

In reverse of the national trend of the majority of unsheltered homeless being persons without children, children and their families comprise 66% of the unsheltered homeless locally. On January 27, 2010, working through the Regional Homeless Advisory Board, the Lehigh County Conference of Churches, in cooperation with over 64 homeless assistance projects across the 12-county region, completed its sixth Point in Time Count of the homeless. 728 persons who were homeless were identified as not having a fixed nighttime residence, or were living in publically funded shelters, or other places not meant for human habitation on the night of January 27, 2010. This number is slightly down from 738, the number of homeless identified the previous year.



Of the 728 homeless identified across the 12-county region, according to Thomas Walker, Co-Chair of the Allentown/ Northeast PA Regional Homeless Advisory Board and Human Services Director of Lehigh County Conference of Churches: 75% of all homeless persons were in Lehigh and Northampton counties, specifically in the central cities of Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton, 480 (66% of Total) were people in homeless families, 248 (34% of Total) were without children, 49 (7% of Total) were unsheltered, including 9 Persons in Households with Children, 317 children (44% of Total) are estimated to be among the homeless counted in this census.

Lehigh County identified 227 persons living in shelters or on the streets the night of January 27, 2010. Nationally, persons in families with children account for 37 percent of the total homeless population and non-family individuals account for the other 63 percent of homeless persons

(National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009). In the Allentown/ Northeast PA CoC, 66% are homeless persons in families with children and 34% are non family individuals, a reverse of the national trend.

Locally, in response to the current economy and possible changes in the demographic population of the homeless here in our community, 64 homeless assistance programs across the region were polled for the reasons for homelessness in their county. Jobs lost due to the economy and homeless persons and families having been “doubled up” but no longer able to stay with their family member or friend were ranked #1 and #2. Ironically and according to some shelter assistance providers, the many which were doubled up were doing so in someone else’s HUD-funded “Section 8” affordable housing voucher certificate.

When asked to give the three main causes of family homelessness in their cities, twenty cities (74 percent) identified a lack of affordable housing, 14 cities (52 percent) cited poverty, 12 cities (44 percent) cited unemployment and 12 cities cited domestic violence (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2009). Domestic violence is the leading “cause” of entry into homeless assistance, yet it is the lack of support, jobs and affordable housing which keeps families in a cycle of victimization. This means that national policies designed to impact one kind of homelessness, such as chronic homelessness, will not have an immediate effect on families.

A link is established between homelessness and untreated disabilities. In total there were 157 homeless persons with disabilities identified on the night of the count. Without housing and supportive services to transition these 157 persons, the recurring annual cost to our communities is estimated to be between \$1.9 and \$7.9 million dollars.

The Point-in-Time survey only points to one night; there remains 364 more nights each year. The “actual” amount in dollars to provide for these untold persons in need of homeless assistance amasses a staggering dollar figure. This financial cost becomes “absorbed” by our hospitals, public institutions, the courts, emergency services, the prison system, and ultimately by each and every taxpayer. Where once this story was largely a problem faced in our urban areas, increasingly it is one faced across the region by all communities large or small; homelessness is found in our cities, in our suburbs, and in our rural areas. And in Eastern PA and the Lehigh Valley, the faces of people who have nowhere to lay their head increasingly are children and their families.

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.

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.



**Interfaith in
Action at
Daybreak**

Approximately two months ago, I was approached by a Muhlenberg student regarding fundraising opportunities for Daybreak. This student was aware of the fact that Daybreak lost a significant amount of revenue and she wanted to help us raise money to supplement the loss. Each fundraising idea we discussed was viable, however, each would take much preparation and would probably generate little revenue.

Eventually, she contacted another student, Maetal Rozenberg, who is very involved with her Temple and raising hunger awareness in the community. Previously, Maetal had been involved with "Challah for Hunger". "Challah for Hunger" is a National Fundraiser that recognizes hunger around the world. After touring Daybreak and spending time with the members, she decided she wanted to help out.

I knew very little about this fundraiser and when I was first informed of it, did not realize how successful it would be. I was told that the students would be selling a braided loaf of bread for approximately \$4.00-\$5.00. After 6 short weeks, I was surprised by the results!

The Muhlenberg students prepare the bread in a Koche kitchen on Thursday evening. They sell the bread in a variety of flavors on campus every Friday. So far, the students have had six bread sales and have raised close to \$700.00 for the Daybreak program. We are so grateful for their efforts and continuous support.

Christine Morrison

EVENTS AND UPDATES

2 WHEELS 4 MEALS

Scooter/Motorcycle Riders
Feeding our hungry neighbors

Saturday, June 12, 2010
Keystone Park, Rt. 329 & Green St.
Bath, PA

Check-in time 9-11am

Rider & Registration Fee \$20

For more information call:
Scootdude at 610-433-6421 or
Email: scootdude@rcn.com

**LCCC
ECUMENICAL DIRECTOR
WANTED**

We are now accepting resumes of candidates for the full time position of Ecumenical Director.

Send resumes to
tsmith@lehighchurches.org.

A full job description is available on request.

Major job responsibilities are:

1. Build relationships with congregations, pastors, and lay leaders which enhance their motivation and ability to do community mission.
2. Equip the LCCC staff, Board of Directors, and key lay leaders for mission interpretation to the congregations and community.
3. Financial and volunteer development.

Qualifications include: A call to ecumenical ministry and sufficient congregational experience and theological training to work effectively with culturally and spiritually diverse congregations.

**Permanent Employment
Gives Back**

This past month, Jose, one of our PEP graduates came into the office to say hello. About 6 months ago, Jose had found employment in the kitchen area of a popular restaurant in the area. He has worked hard and excelled at his job in such a way that he has received two pay raises during that time. But as we soon found out, this wasn't just a friendly visit.



Jose worked in the Daybreak program during his training. He learned the member's names, built bonds with the staff, and even learned what everybody liked in their coffee. He made a special visit to Daybreak that day to inform them that he was interested in bringing in a catered meal for the entire program. When we asked if this was a donation from his restaurant, he said no, that he was paying for it as a way to give back to the program that gave him another chance and helped him excel and to be where he is today.

This is just one of the ways in which PEP is bringing back positive revenue to the community. Over the past year we have helped 12 chronically unemployed individuals find work in the community. Not only have we helped them find work, 80% are still employed and bringing money into the community rather than using money from it. They are finding ways to live successfully and self-sufficiently in the community. We are proud to help our trainees get the tools they need to find work and live self-sufficiently. We are even prouder when they are able to help those who are following them out of poverty.

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

JUNE 2010

Non-Profit Organization

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Allentown, PA

Ecumenical Encounters

June 2010

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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

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

JUNE EVENTS

JUNE 9, 2010

CONGREGATIONS IN MISSION:
FINDING COMMON CAUSES
ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
1533 SPRINGHOUSE ROAD
ALLENTOWN PA
6:30PM—9:00 PM

JUNE 12, 2010

2 WHEELS 4 MEALS
KEYSTONE PARK
RT. 329 & GREEN STREET
BATH, PA
REGISTRATION 9:00 AM—11:00 AM

United Way of the
Greater Lehigh Valley



Lehigh County Conference of Churches

Email: info@lehighchurches.org

Telephone: 610-433-6421

Fax: 610-439-8039

www.lehighchurches.org

COMMUNITY NEWS

House Passes National Housing Trust Fund

Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill (H.R. 4213) that includes \$1.065 billion for the National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF). This was a hard fought victory that was only possible because you made sure that Members of the House knew how important the National Housing Trust Fund is to your communities. Thank you.

The bill would provide a one-time capitalization of the NHTF, which will provide communities with funds to build, preserve, and rehabilitate rental homes that are affordable for very low income households. These homes will help address the serious shortage of affordable housing for lowest income families, including people who are unemployed or employed in the low wage work force, veterans, and elderly and disabled people on fixed incomes. It is estimated that an infusion of \$1 billion in capital funds into the NHTF and \$65 million for project-based vouchers to couple with NHTF capital grants will support the immediate production of 10,000 rental homes, creating 15,000 new construction jobs and 4,000 new jobs in ongoing operations. This provision is estimated to cost \$1.065 billion over 10 years.

Now onto the Senate. Please continue your advocacy so ordinary people may have a home.

DON QUIXOTE!

La Aventura Comienza

FREE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC
Sponsored by Touchstone Theatre, Bethlehem PA

Friday, July 2, 12:30 pm @ The Fowler Recreation Center
Thursday, July 8, 11 am @ Broughal Middle School
Friday, July 9, 2pm @ Saucon Pool
Friday, July 16, 3 pm @ Yosko Park
Friday, July 23, 11 am @ Southside Boys & Girls Club

TALES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST
A NEW PLAY FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

FREE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC
Sponsored by Touchstone Theatre, Bethlehem PA

Monday, June 28, 1pm @ The Fowler Recreation Center
Tuesday, June 29, 2pm @ Saucon Pool
Thursday, July 1, 11 am @ Broughal Middle School
Friday, July 2, 3 pm @ Yosko Park
Wednesday, July 14, 11 am @ Southside Boys & Girls Club

YOUTH-FOCUSED VOLUNTEER NEEDED

ASPIRES Mentoring: Youth Succeeding

ASPIRES Mentoring matches caring adults with youth at risk of not graduating from the Allentown School District. There is no better way to make a difference in a young person's life than to provide the support that he or she needs to graduate and go on to technical school or college.

There are a variety of mentoring opportunities available. The commitment is for no less than two hours per week for at least one year. Call Volunteer Coordinator Abby Goldfarb at 610-439-8653 or email agoldfarb@lehighchurches.org.

CHURCH NEWS

The Parish Nurse Coalition of the Greater Lehigh Valley
Presents

**PARISH NURSE BASIC PREPARATION
CURRICULUM**

Saturday, June 26, 8:00 am—5:00 pm

Wholistic Health: 8 CEU's

Health Promotion

Transforming Life Issues:

Family Violence

Suffering/Grief/Loss

Support Groups

Saturday, July 24, 8:00 am—4:00 pm

Community: 7 CEU's

Accessing Resources

Advocacy/Transience/Undocumented

Care Coordination

Compassion Fatigue

For more information contact:

Deborah Gilbert, RN, FCN, Parish Nurse Coordinator, Sacred Heart Hospital, 610-871-5888

Peace Camp 2010

Will be held from July 26-30th at First Presbyterian Church in Allentown. We welcome elementary-school aged children as campers and adults and teens as volunteers. You can call LEPOCO at 610-691-8730, if you have any questions.

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT
ECUMENICAL ENCOUNTERS
JUNE 20, 2010**

PROGRAM NEEDS

SOUP KITCHEN PROGRAM

Paper Products
Spaghetti Sauce
Crushed Tomatoes
Onions
Fresh Basil
Fresh Garlic
Fennel
Oregano
Canning Jars and Lids

PATHWAYS, HPRP & HUD 2 PROGRAM

Air Conditioners in good working condition
Diapers size 3, 4, and 5

DAYBREAK PROGRAM

Drawing Tablets
Small Art kits (models, sun catchers for example)
Beads with letters
String for Beads
A basting brush
Cheese Grater
Garlic press
Egg slicer
Egg peeler

ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM

Binders
Copy Paper
Laser Fax Machine
Locking Filing Cabinets
Gift Cards to Staples
Color Laser Printer
Brita Water Filters
Computer Training Programs

HOMELESSNES PREVENTION PROGRAM

Gift Cards to Staples
Window Check Envelopes

PHARMACEUTICAL PROGRAM

Gift Cards to local pharmacies to cover medications
and equipment not covered under our program

Bus Passes

PEP PROGRAM

Calendar/Planners
Working Wrist Watches
USB Flash Drives (any size)

OPERATIONS

Monetary Donations to cover the cost of Chair
Replacements for Reception Room at our Chew
Street location.



**Thank you to all the businesses,
congregations organizations and
individuals that generously give to our
various programs.**