



Lehigh County Conference of Churches

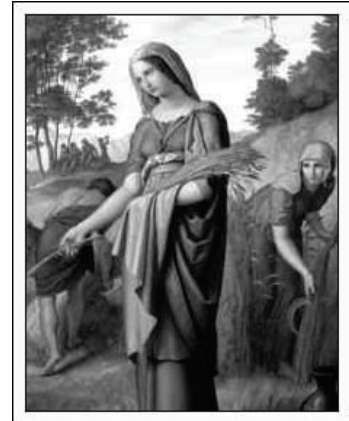
July 2010

THE STRANGER

Can you recall a time you felt like a stranger? I recall many. First day of school, moving to a new town, interviewing in all kinds of places trying to land a job, joining new groups, being the lone female clergy person in countless meetings early in my career, having a view that is opposite of the majority present in the room...the list can go on and on.

At the core when we are “the stranger” we are worried about how we will be received. Most of the time it is a small anxiety that is soon relieved, but sometimes it can be life threatening. Ruth of the Hebrew Scriptures, finding her family and her existence threatened by famine, flees to another country not knowing if she will be welcomed or assisted. When a distant relative makes it possible for her to glean the fields and provides protection, Ruth moves along the journey from stranger to resident.

Ruth was the traditional stranger, an immigrant, a stranger in a foreign land, but there are many types of “strangers” in our society today. The recession has forced many people to leave their homes in search of work; countless have had to radically change their skill set and job expectations causing a feeling of being someone other than themselves.



Kids and young adults often feel “strange” as they move from school to school, town to town, or change groups of friends. One of the hardest transitions I think is when young adults graduate and must move out into the world to make their own way. It is especially difficult when you have been left to fend for yourself earlier in life such as young people in the social service system. When you become 18, and reach the end of the system’s help, where do you turn?

And then there are those who are so often called “strange” by society: folks who struggle with mental illness or physical illnesses that make them look or talk or act differently from the norm. Many live their life feeling like a stranger even in their hometown and neighborhood.

The work of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches is to embody hospitality to “strangers.” We are the bridge between groups that are wary of each other. We are the interpreters of people in need to people who may be able to help or at least understand. We welcome the strangers to our town and those who simply feel strange, whatever may have been the cause. We try to make people feel comfortable enough that they can share their story, and many times, in that sharing people find the solutions themselves or at least recover enough hope to keep on the journey to wholeness.

We thank you for working with us to extend hospitality in our community. One of the formerly homeless persons we work with puts it this way:

It is the empathy that the stranger showed that can teach us all to try and end stereotypes. When we put ourselves in the shoes of the homeless and try to understand the various situations that lead them to their current state, we will be one step closer to letting go of our stereotypes and make a real difference.

Or in the words of another great thinker:

Gratitude is born in hearts that take time to count up past mercies.

Charles E. Jefferson

RECESSION!

WHICH DO YOU WANT TO HEAR FIRST: THE GOOD NEWS OR THE BAD NEWS?

GOOD NEWS: The Lehigh County Conference of Churches has mobilized every resource available to meet the growing needs created by the recent deep recession.

BAD NEWS: The recession is still with us. The unemployment rate in the Lehigh Valley this April was 9.7%, only one-tenth of a percent below its 27-year high. During the past fiscal year, 145 households who came to Pathways that were homeless or threatened with homelessness did not qualify for assistance.

GOOD NEWS: Thanks to rental assistance funding available from FEMA, Lehigh County, HUD and American Recovery Act stimulus monies, Pathways helped 226 households that were either homeless or threatened with eviction find or maintain their housing this fiscal year.

BAD NEWS: Pathways was forced to institute a waiting list for rental assistance funding as families already receiving assistance struggled to find meaningful work and get back on their feet. There were 98 families on the waiting list this fiscal year.

GOOD NEWS: FEMA funding for the second half of the year will be received shortly and five of the thirty-five families that received stimulus-funded rental assistance since the first of this year have graduated from the program and are living independently.

BAD NEWS: The Soup Kitchen served 300 or more meals in one day four times in one month for the first time this past April.

GOOD NEWS: Everyone, every day, receives a hot, nutritious meal at the LCCC Soup Kitchen. No one is turned away. Thanks to donations from food purveyors, churches, community groups, and individuals, the cash cost of the food on the plate is 25¢ per meal.



MORE GOOD NEWS

Continuing Education for an Aspires Graduate



Tina is a student in the Aspires Year Round program who struggled throughout her academic career and was in jeopardy of not graduating high school. However, with the support of Aspires, Tina was able to successfully finish high school and happily reports that she graduated at the beginning of June!

This is a huge accomplishment for Tina as she is the first one in her family to graduate high school.

After graduation, Tina decided that she wanted to further her education and looked into the Medical Assistant Program at Lincoln Tech. In order to be accepted into this program, Tina first had to pass an exam, which she did with flying colors!! She began the program in June and is looking forward to beginning her new chapter in life.

To make a difference in the life of a young person like Tina, call Aspires Coordinator Gema Carvalho at 610-439-8653.



WEEK OF PRAYER CHOIR RECRUITMENT BEGINS

The 2011 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service will be held at Christ Lutheran Church in Allentown on January 30, 2011. Always a highlight of the service, this year there are special plans for the Youth Choir.

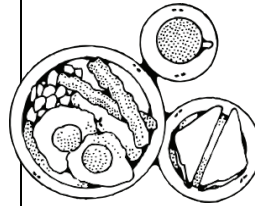
For more information contact Rick Focht:
610-439-0182.

Visit our redesigned website:
www.lehighchurches.org.

We'll be adding graphics and pictures and more in the days ahead. Tell us what you think.

BREAKFAST at APPLEBEE'S

Benefitting LCCC Linkage



Saturday, July 24, 8 - 10 AM
1510 N. Cedar Crest Blvd.,
Allentown

All-You-Can-Eat
Sausage, Pancakes and Drinks:
\$5.00

Bake Sale with Homemade Goodies

Sponsored by Jordan UCC
Missions Committee

CONFERENCE NEEDS

Daybreak

Dehumidifier for food storage area.

Soup Kitchen

Herbs - basil, garlic, fennel, oregano

Administrative Office

Brita water filters

Permanent Employment Program:

Working wrist watches

LCCC EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Conference is in the process of hiring for several new staff positions:

- **Bookkeeper:** 10 hours/week to assist with accounts payable, light filing, and book-keeping.
- Several new staff with work experience in mental illness and homelessness: Full-time **Housing Case Manager**; Full-time **Homeless Services Director**

All applications or inquires should be sent to tsmith@lehighchurches.org.

IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE

Catholic Charities' Diocese of Allentown Immigration Program assists with legalization of status, family reunification, and citizenship.

Please call for service in English or Spanish, 610-435-1541.

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

July 2010

Non-Profit Organization
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Permit #1409
Allentown, PA

UPCOMING EVENTS

CROP WALK RECRUITER RALLY

Sunday, August 29, 7:00 PM

CROP WALK

Sunday, October 10, 1:30 PM

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, Allentown

JOBS, JUSTICE, AND ECONOMICS

Justice & Advocacy Fall Gathering

Saturday, September 25, 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Allentown

TOGETHER WE CAN BENEFIT LUNCHEON

Wednesday, October 13, Noon

Asbury United Methodist Church, Allentown

Lehigh County Conference of Churches

Email: info@lehighchurches.org

Telephone: 610-433-6421

Fax: 610-439-8039

www.lehighchurches.org