

Community Compassion Fund Advisory Board Formed

An advisory committee has been formed for the Community Compassion Fund. Members are: Ron Pittman, Candace Keillor, Lyle Pehan, Sandi DeMaster and Terry Hall. They will help to set CCF policies, review services provided or to provide, review proposals from outside agencies that want to partner with us, and help find volunteers to coordinate various other volunteers. New policies or proposals will still need approval from appropriate church leadership or committees. Have a new idea or concern? Now you have five more folks with whom you will be able to connect!

What is it like to be homeless?

by Joyce Wolcott

What would it be like to be homeless? This Spring Break, I had the opportunity to read and view two excellent works that each open a window on this world and give human souls to the homeless. These stories are not unlike many who come in for assistance from our Community Compassion Fund.

The first is a 1992 documentary film (available at the public library) entitled, "It Was A Wonderful Life." The film (by Michele Ohayon) "presents a riveting and powerful account of six women who are members of America's growing 'hidden homeless population' (from the DVD jacket). These women graciously and transparently let us into their lives. "Now homeless after an ugly divorce or loss of a job, these women do not show up in shelters or receive public assistance; they do not sleep in doorways or ask for handouts. Too proud to be counted, they prefer to exist under the radar, sleeping out of their cars or in cheap motels.... (This film) cuts through the stereotypes and clichés to give a human face to this undeniable tragedy. And, with fresh insight into the plight of the homeless, Ohayon shows how these women have managed to make a life for themselves, using only their ingenuity and perseverance to get by."

As one homeless woman put it, "why can't someone help us before we become homeless?" This, in conjunction with our community partners and the county, is what the CCF endeavors to do.

The second is a 2005 book (available at the public library or from the library of Joyce) entitled "Under the Overpass: A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America," by Mike Yankoski. This is a first person account of a young Christian college student and his friend who decide to set their life plans aside for five months and live as homeless people on the streets of six cities, including Portland, OR – just to better understand the homeless. Confession time – when I first got this book I thought the idea was a bit 'out there' and so set the book on the shelf for awhile. Perhaps it was for just a time as this that I finally picked it up and read it. Imagine trying to convince your parents that this is a good thing to do. Imagine sleeping with rats, eating out of garbage cans and being kicked out of churches and off of church property. Some of Mike's harshest criticism is for the Church, and some of it is well-deserved. "We don't go to church, we *are* the church. The church isn't a physical building or a doctrinal statement or a perfectly produced program. It is us – we are the living expression of Christ's presence in the world, His body."

The chapter on Portland opens with a quote from Deitrich Bonhoeffer: "The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people from everyday Christian life in community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ, for in the poor sister or brother, Christ is knocking at the door."

A challenging portion was when Mike and his friend Sam have just been with some of the mentally ill homeless folks. "But here's the thing: Jesus expects us to reach out to Henrys, too – and He draws the expectation in the clearest of terms. How we treat people in this life will determine whether we hear 'whatever you did for one of the least of these . . . you did for me.' (Matt 25:40) . . . Ultimately, it doesn't matter whether Henry or the others are diagnosed as mentally ill or described as demon possessed. Neither label gets us off the hook of what we are called to do and be in their lives." Now that's challenging! What am I called to do and be in their lives? See Candace's article in this newsletter for suggestions. One main point that Mike says is, "I think the most meaningful gift might be your genuine attention and caring. [One homeless guy they encountered walked around with a cardboard sign that said, 'Ignore me for \$1.'] It was amazing how much a smile or quick hello did for Sam and me on the streets, partly because such kindnesses were so rare. When someone stopped to talk, even for a minute, the powerful underlying message was, 'I notice you, you're a human being, and you're worth my time.'

Amen. This is a challenging and convicting read if ever there was one!

Living With Compassion

by Candace Keillor

As I approach the freeway onramp, the traffic slows. Rush hour, at this hour? A reckless new sports car shoves in ahead of me, and I resentfully lean on my horn. Then off to my left I see a young couple standing on the median, dirty and disheveled; the girl stares fixedly at the ground, while the boy glares at the cars. In his hands he holds a cardboard sign: **Homeless – Anything Helps.**

Most of us cannot help feeling some strong emotion at a sight like this. We may feel angry, believing such people are nothing more than con artists. We may feel guilty at being inside a warm car while they are out in the rain. We may feel compassion, seeing in the dirty faces someone's precious child whose life has somehow gone wrong. Or we may just feel awkward as we try to avoid making eye contact, wanting to do something but not knowing what is best.

It was after one such encounter that I went to Joyce, our Community Compassion Fund Coordinator. "I want to do something," I explained, "But I don't want to do the wrong thing."

She understood. "You want to do something beneficial," she said, "But not enabling."

"That's right! Can you give me some advice?"

We discussed the matter for awhile, and here is what she had to say:

DO...

- Keep nonperishable foods such as granola bars or pop-top cans of soup or stew in your car to give away. Hygiene items may also be appreciated.
- Consider giving gift cards in the amount of \$5.00 or so to Burger King, McDonald's, Carl's Jr., etc. These will provide a meal and are easy to carry in your car, wallet or purse.
- Carry copies of the COOP's Resource Directory with you to give to people in Yamhill County. Make sure they know that other help is available. The directory may be picked up at the church office or printed from the church website (www.mac-coop.org).
- When you give, be respectful. Ask, "Can you use this?" rather than just thrusting something at the person and expecting them to be grateful. Treat others as you would want to be treated.
- If you feel safe doing so, consider trying to engage the person in conversation. Listening to the story of someone who wishes to share it can be a huge gift to that person.

DON'T...

- Don't ever give cash. While many of the people holding signs are sincerely in need, others are not, and it is impossible to tell them apart just by looking.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION...

The following are some things you might want to do, but only after praying and giving the matter careful thought. Use your common sense and intuition. Decide how involved you want to become:

- You might offer to accompany the person to a restaurant to buy them a meal.
- You might offer to let the person use your phone.
- It is very risky to give someone a ride. If you decide to do this, make sure there's someone with you.

Watch for this column next month for information about the issue of transportation and bus passes for the less fortunate. I've also heard of a small group in the COOP who are assembling kits for the homeless, so watch for information about that as well. Let's be supportive of each other as we all struggle to live up to Jesus' words:

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

– Matthew 25:40

*A publication of McMinnville Cooperative Ministries
McMinnville United Methodist ~ Trinity Lutheran*

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Homeless Connects Event

February 18th was a wonderful day in our community – one that we all have been praying for for many years. It was a day when the homeless could come to one location (New Horizons Church) to receive an array of services they might not otherwise be able to get. It included the VA, Legal Aid, Employment office, DHS, Youth and Family services, Church on the Hill, Housing Authority, Social Security, WIC, Pregnancy Counseling and Info service, Preventive Drug, The COOP, YCAP, Yamhill Co. Gospel Rescue Mission, Rainbow Family Services, and Henderson House. There was a free pizza lunch, free haircuts, free clothing, pet care, mental health services, vaccinations, HIV screening, stop smoking aids, vision checks, diabetes screenings and bicycle repair. Students from George Fox had a station for washing feet, applying lotion and giving a new pair of socks. Linfield students had a children's reading room. It was a blessing indeed to see and be a part of all of this community connectedness.

Many important connections were also made among agencies. For example, YCAP and a couple of others are working on putting together and promoting a recipe booklet to go with food boxes. In the past it wasn't a big hit with pantry clients, but in today's economy and with the new wave of pantry clients, they feel it is worth trying again.

The COOP's team of 8 volunteers handed out hygiene kits, snacks, resource directories and listened to people's life stories from 9 am—3:30 pm. Many thanks to all of you who donated to this worthy cause and special thanks to the following volunteers who setup, took down and personed the booth: Mona Clark, Sandi DeMaster, Hanna DeMaster, Cathy Long, Pam Stewart, Terry Hall, Sarah Frazier and Karen Hartsock. If you would be interested in joining the team next year, or in assisting with similar types of events, let joyce know: joyce@mac-coop.org.

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Community Compassion Fund: Update

- We have served 480 families and individuals through the CCF in 2008. If one includes all folks to whom we also gave resource directories or offered advice to over the phone, I am certain the number goes well beyond 500! Many thanks to you all for your continued financial and prayer support of this vital ministry.
- God continues to bring us new Community Partners – check the CCF section of the website for an up to the moment list.
- Our community resource directory is now available in Spanish! Many thanks to CCF volunteer Hanna DeMaster for providing the translation!
- Lives are being changed – both those who receive our support and those who volunteer with the CCF.

Homelessness Update

- One chilly morning before sunrise in January, about 30 slightly frozen (but warm hearted) folks huddled together with steaming cups of coffee to receive instructions and maps prior to fanning out across Yamhill County to count the homeless. They took with them snacks, clothing items for adults & children, hygiene kits and bus passes to the upcoming Connects Event (below). The COOP was also a drop-in site all morning for folks who wanted to come in and be counted. Our lobby has never been so busy! Linfield College students were on hand to assist the homeless in filling out the surveys. Lee Means-Director of YCAP, Kathy George-County Commissioner, and Jessica Wade – Linfield Community Service Coordinator all came by to personally thank the COOP for hosting this critical first step toward ending homelessness.
- The COOP has been invited by the county to have a CCF booth at their Homeless Connects Event on Feb. 18th. This is a one day event where the homeless in our county can come to receive medical, dental, food and other services. The CCF booth will be handing out our community resource directories (English and Spanish) as well as snacks and hygiene items. If you have small unopened shampoos, soaps and such, please bring them to the office by Feb. 9.
- Our Winter Day Shelter is open on a very limited basis. If you would like to coordinate and expand this ministry through the chilly months, please let Steve (steve@mac-coop.org or 971-237-2040) know.

To join an ever growing group of fun-to-serve-with folks and/or to be placed on a call list when an exciting Homelessness Event or CCF opportunity comes up, just send an email to Joyce (joyce@mac-coop.org) and she will help you get plugged in.