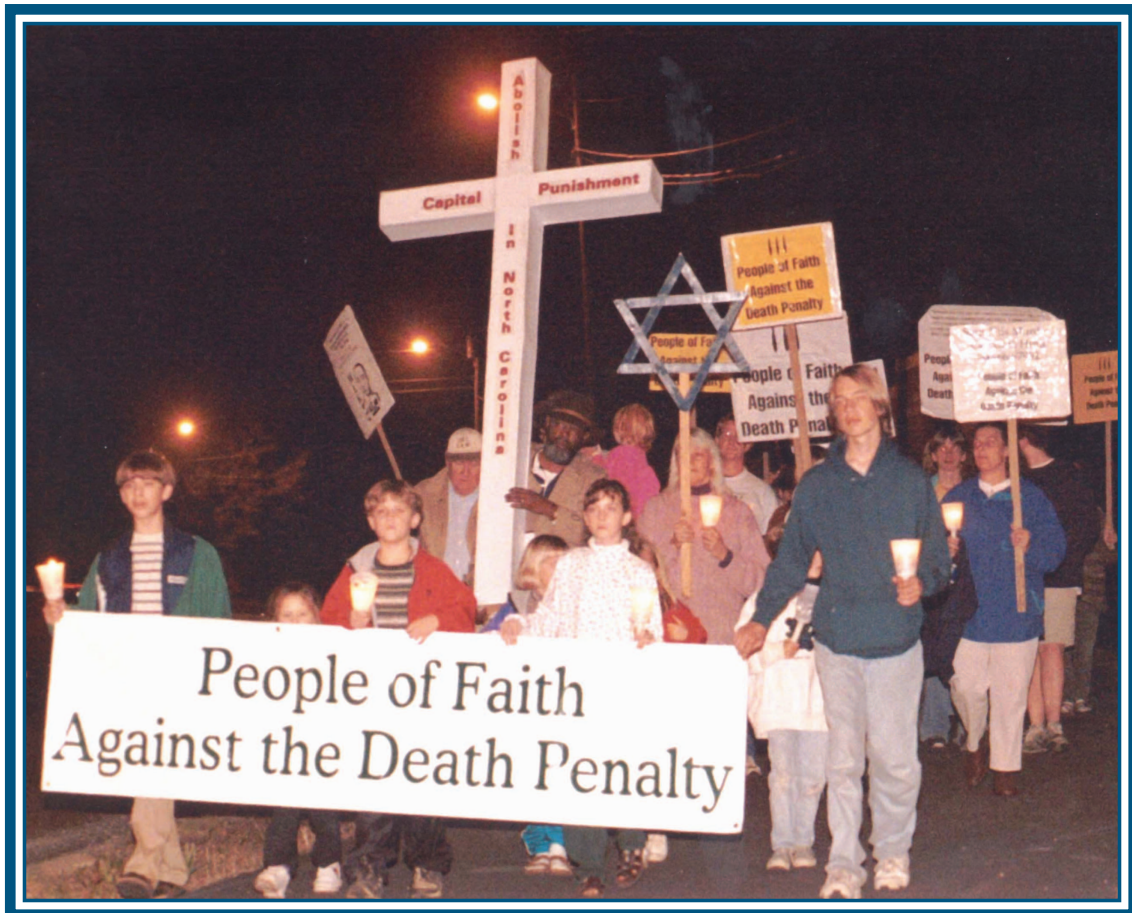


Thy Kingdom Come

A Call to Prophetic Ministry

A Small-Group Study Guide



Produced by

The Office of Missions, NC Conference, United Methodist Church
in partnership with the North Carolina Council of Churches

**The *Thy Kingdom Come* workshops and guidebooks
are an initiative of the Office of Missions, NC Conference,
United Methodist Church, Raleigh, NC,
in cooperation with
The North Carolina Council of Churches.
Spring 2004**

Director of Missions Development, Steve Taylor

**Consulting writer and workshop co-leader, Barbara Zelter,
Program Associate, NC Council of Churches**

**A parallel series of workshops and accompanying guidebooks,
Street Smarts,
was offered in the Fall of 2003.
That series focused on building community ministries.**

**NC Conference, UMC website: www.nccumc.org
NC Council of Churches website: www.nccouncilofchurches.org**

**This book will be available on these websites
by Summer of 2004.**

Cover photo is from People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, Carrboro, NC.

Acknowledgments

This guidebook speaks in many voices. In addition to the primary writer, others have had a hand in every chapter.

We thank the writers of the biblical portions for chapters 1-10:

- Chapter 1: The Rev. Mac Legerton, Executive Director, Center for Community Action, Lumberton
- Chapter 2: The Rev. Susan Harrison, United Methodist Missionary, Soapstone UMC, Raleigh
- Chapter 3: The Rev. Bruce Bjork, Director, Congregations in Community, Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches
- Chapter 4: The Rev. Jocleen McCall, Minister for Young Adults, Union Baptist Church, Durham
- Chapter 5: The Rev. Dr. Jesse Brunson, Director, Multicultural and Social Ministry, NC Conference, UMC
- Chapter 6: Vickie B. Sigmon, Church and Community Worker, Open Arms Community, UMC, Winston-Salem
- Chapter 7: Robin Britt, Sr., Executive Director, United Child Development Services, Guilford County
- Chapter 8: Susan Carlyle, Barnardsville; Susan also wrote the entire chapter on The Earth
- Chapter 9: Robin Britt, Sr., Executive Director, United Child Development Services, Guilford County
- Chapter 10: The Rev. Mac Legerton, Executive Director, Center for Community Action, Lumberton
- Chapter 11: The Rev. Dr. Charles Smith, Director, Connectional Ministries, NC Conference, UMC.

We are also grateful for the assistance of:

- Corporate Press, Raleigh, our designer and printer
- John Parker, Good Work, Durham, NC, for consultation and resources
- Laura Bailey, Director, Media Center, NC Conference, UMC, for selecting resources for all chapters
- Roberta Mothershead, Raleigh, for consultation and personal support

And, thanks go to those who assisted with facts or materials for the text:

- Adam Searing, Pete MacDowell, Julie Insley, Martha Are, Elizabeth Jordan, Chris Estes, Bev Kelly, Mark Sills, Denise Cumbee Long, Delilah Summers, Gerda Stein, Tom Fewel, Steve Dear, Mike Ward, George Reed, Bob Hall, Caroline Jennette, and Chris Breu.

Finally, we appreciate those who are profiled, for allowing us to highlight their living into their sense of God's call:

- Chapter 2: Lynice Williams, Executive Director, North Carolina Fair Share, Raleigh
- Chapter 3: Kate Rumely, Executive Director, Brick Community Development Corporation, Sanford
- Chapter 4: Stanley Lee, AFY Workers Committee and Black Workers for Justice, Rocky Mount
- Chapter 5: Dr. Micheline Ridley Malson, independent consultant, Durham
- Chapter 6: Vickie B. Sigmon, UMC Church & Community Worker, Open Arms Community, Winston-Salem
- Chapter 7: William Cloe, middle school student, Junior Senate group of All God's Children UMC, Aulander
- Chapter 8: Susan and Kim Carlyle, living on the land, Barnardsville
- Chapter 9: Paula Wolf, formerly lobbyist for the coalition, Covenant with North Carolina's Children
- Chapter 10: Gary Locklear, UMC Church & Community Worker, Rockingham Native American Cooperative Ministries, Robeson County.

Steve Taylor, Project Director

Barbara Zelter, Writer

Note: We decided not to fill this guidebook with footnotes. Some citations are included, and sources for all data can be obtained from the author.

Contents

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------|
| Chapter 1: | Thy Kingdom Come | 1 |
| Chapter 2: | Health Care | 3 |
| Chapter 3: | Housing | 9 |
| Chapter 4: | Jobs and Wages | 15 |
| Chapter 5: | Race | 21 |
| Chapter 6: | Criminal Justice | 27 |
| Chapter 7: | Education | 33 |
| Chapter 8: | The Earth | 39 |
| Chapter 9: | Government and Citizenship | 45 |
| Chapter 10: | Sustainable Communities | 51 |
| Chapter 11: | Next Steps | 57 |

Chapter 1: Thy Kingdom Come

The Lord's Prayer conveys to all who would follow Jesus some key teachings on how we, as humans, are to approach and act toward God and toward one another. Jesus taught us to pray for the kingdom of God to come and for God's will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven. We are to ask God to give us our daily bread--in order that we may live according to our basic needs, not our shaped desires. Having our daily bread, we are then free to pay attention to issues weightier than only our own hunger and survival. Jesus in this prayer also teaches us to ask for forgiveness. We are to develop a discipline of receiving our forgiveness from God, then of forgiving others for the harm they have done to us. Jesus adds that we should ask God not to lead us into temptation. Other spirits and pressures do that very well (thank you) and we have had enough of that already (like Jesus had). Finally, we are to end the prayer by affirming God's eternal power and glory.

In his life and mission, Jesus saw himself as actively preparing and serving the kingdom of God on earth, to be as it is in heaven. He saw all of his disciples in the same light and as having the same purpose. Nowhere in the prayer instructions of Jesus is the focus on getting the earth--or ourselves--to heaven. The heart of the Lord's Prayer is a request for heaven on earth. While this difference may seem subtle, its truth is at the very center of the call and practice of prayer and discipleship.

Many Christians interpret the Lord's Prayer as a call for heaven to come, once and for all, in all its glory. This interpretation misses Jesus' point. The Kingdom of God comes to earth, and is both within us and among us whenever our hearts and minds, our loving and just words and deeds, our forgiven and forgiving ways, exude and express the love of God. The kingdom of God is like that mustard seed of love that grows when it is watered and withers when it is neglected or dies. Like the mustard seed, the kingdom of God is an "annual," not a "perennial." It is not permanently established; it comes and goes with the presence of love and justice in our lives and in the habits of our communities and societies. If we fail to understand that the very purpose of salvation is to do good works (Ephesians 2:10), our faith quickly becomes other-worldly, individualistic, self-righteous, and void of responsibility in and to society.

Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbor (Luke 10:27). For many of us, it is easier to love God than to love our neighbor. The attitudes and behavior of our neighbors can make it tough for us to love them! But we also face a second challenge: if we don't love ourselves, then it is also hard for us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We're sent back again to the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' emphasis on forgiving ourselves and others, as the primary indicator of the presence of God's kingdom in both our lives and society.

Loving our neighbor involves changes in our own attitudes and behavior. It means moving past individual care, to determining how the kingdom of God can be structured on earth according to the principles of loving "thy neighbor as thyself." It means promoting social systems that are righteous and just--that truly "do right" by and for our neighbors, as well as by and for ourselves. Naturally, we are involved most with our own families and the people in our local circles of concern. Jesus asks us to enlarge those circles, and strive for what is right and just for distant others as much as we strive for what is right and just for ourselves.

The reason the biblical requirement to do justice (Micah 6:8) is so difficult is that it requires much more than mere affection. Justice requires a sacrifice of one's own self-interest to meet the needs of others. This is the practical consequence of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Justice involves the balancing and rebalancing of human interests in order to better serve the fulfillment of all people.

The symbol for justice in our society is the scale of weights and balances. When injustice burdens individuals and groups of people, we can rebalance the scales and tip them the other way. An injustice done can never be taken back, but it can be redressed and balanced. We can remove the weight of opportunities denied and shift it to the side with excessive privilege. While this may seem unfair from the perspective of self-interest and the loss of heightened status, it is fair from the perspective of self-sacrifice and increased privilege for those once denied. Again, knowing that God forgives us, frees us to forgive ourselves and others. This opens the door so we can live freely, do justly, love mercifully, and walk humbly with God.

Justice involves promoting human responsibility and protecting human rights among all people. It also involves being good stewards of the earth and protecting our environment from human abuse and neglect. Through love, we can achieve justice voluntarily. However, as humans we often resist sacrificial love. Further, we hold differing opinions about justice; so we resort to legal decrees to administer it according to our state and national laws. As Christians, our first call is to follow God's love and justice as we discern it together. We are called to deny ourselves, follow Jesus, and take up our crosses daily (Luke 9:23). We are called to constantly let go of our self-interest and prejudices. We are to enter into human community and conflict with mercy and humility, seeking to protect and promote what is right and just for all people.

When speaking of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says: "You have shut the kingdom of heaven against people; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in" (Matt. 23:13-14). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for nit-picking about their status, food cleanliness, temples rituals, and such; instead, he called them to "weightier" matters of "law, justice, mercy, and faith" (Matt. 23:23). Jesus clearly implies that the doorway to the kingdom of God is open to us at every moment, here and now. We neither create nor initiate God's kingdom. Our choice each moment is to either enter its door or shut it against others and ourselves.

The miracle of the Gospel is this: That when we give ourselves away, when our energy, our creative spirit, our very existence is lived for the other, it is then, and only then, that we too are healed, that we too can have life abundantly. It is not a magical occurrence; rather, it is because we make God's kingdom our first priority, a kingdom where the sojourner is welcomed, the oppressed are lifted up, the blind have sight, the imprisoned are liberated, where all know that this is the year of God's favor. This is good news, indeed. If we seek justice, if we love kindness, if we walk humbly with God, if we give ourselves over to the love of Christ that refuses to exclude, we will enter the kingdom, on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

This Thy Kingdom Come study guide addresses the presence and practice of love and justice in nine domains within our life together in North Carolina. They are: health care, housing, jobs and wages, race, criminal justice, education, the earth, government and citizenship, and sustainable communities. Each chapter gives a UMC Social Principle for that topic. These biblically based standards remind us of the responsibility to seriously apply our faith in the world of laws, policies, and economic and social systems. In order to better understand these systems, each chapter has biblical reflections, facts, personal profiles, resources, and questions for your consideration. The publishers and authors of this guidebook hope and pray that it will provide spiritual inspiration and insight, leading to an even greater sense of social responsibility and action throughout the NC Conference of the United Methodist Church and beyond.

The Rev. Mac Legerton, Executive Director, Center For Community Action, Lumberton, NC.

**God help us to change. To
change ourselves and to change
our world. To know the need
for it. To deal with the pain of
it. To feel the joy of it. To
undertake the journey without
understanding the destination.
The art of gentle revolution.
Amen.**

Michael Leunig

Chapter 2: Health Care

Scripture and Reflection

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Cor. 6:19-20

We need only to look at television and magazines, to listen to our commercials, or consider the distribution of our income and time to realize that we live in a world that values mental acuity, power, military might, athletic and sexual prowess, and narrowly defined images of beauty.

Illness, aging, disability, and death are hidden away from sight in hospital rooms and nursing homes, as if by hiding them away, we can forget the truth that we, too, will face a similar fate one day. In this world, it may be hard for us to imagine the love God has for our physical bodies in all ages, stages, health, illness, and abilities. As much as many of us would like to deny our own bodies and the bodies of those who are disabled or sick, our God cares about the incarnational aspects of our lives--our flesh, our bodies.

Our God is One who creates us as embodied beings and cares about the flesh of a brother who is killed. Our God brings floods upon the earth because of sin but restores creation and gives a promise not to destroy all flesh. Our God hears the cries of a woman and child, cast off and wandering in the wilderness, giving them water and proclaiming a promise to them. Our God cares about women whose wombs are barren and makes them fruitful. Our God provides for fleshly needs of hunger and thirst in the wilderness. Our God answers the deathbed plea of a king and heals him for God's own glory (2 Kings: 20). The biblical witness testifies that God's judgment, testing, mercy, and grace are experienced through human flesh.

If the salvation history contained in the Old Testament is not enough to convince us that God chooses fleshliness for God's creatures, and God cares about and works in and through human flesh, God made this even more clear by coming in the flesh to dwell among us and make God's self known to us. God could have

chosen any way to come to us, but chose the human flesh. In that flesh, God healed those who were blind and lame. God fed the pangs of hunger and told us that we will be judged by how we care for the bodies of others (Matthew 25). God used the flesh of a man, Paul, to turn him from persecutor to apostle. And God makes our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This stuff of which we are made, our physical bodies, clearly matters to God. Our body is the form we have been given to live in this world, and it matters how we take care of it. It matters because this body is God's creation, God's handiwork, and it reflects God's signature and love. It matters because this body is needed for God's work in the world. It matters because God's Spirit chooses to dwell within our bodies and our bodies are the means through which we and others experience God. Our own flesh is one of the ways that we experience God's call to us to be transformed, to be rid of those things that are harmful to our lives.

Our hands and feet, as well as the hands and feet of those who cannot afford medical care, may be the only way that someone will know God. The hands and feet of the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the sick, those who have experienced the limits of their own humanity, are often the very best hands and feet to bring the good news of God's steadfast love and mercy to those who are "healthy, wealthy, and wise," as they can truly witness to what God can and will do in the face of our weakness and limitations.

Can we honestly say that the bodies of the insured, the bodies of the wealthy, are more worthy of healing and care than the bodies of the poor or uninsured? Can we say that it is right for those who are insured to have access to all of the medications that they need, while others with treatable illnesses go without medication and medical treatment because they cannot afford the

Chapter 2: **Health Care**

cost? Is it right for insurance companies to negotiate \$2-6 lab fees while those who are uninsured are billed \$40-50 for the same tests? Should a woman have to choose between heart medication and food or rent? One woman I met recently had \$800 a month in medications. What kinds of choices would each of us have to make if we were faced with costs such as these in addition to our regular living expenses?and medical treatment because they cannot afford the cost?

Is it right for insurance companies to negotiate \$2-6 lab fees while those who are uninsured are billed \$40-50 for the same tests? Should a woman have to choose between heart medication and food or rent? One woman I met recently had \$800 a month in medications. What kinds of choices would each of us have to make if we were faced with costs such as these in addition to our regular living expenses?

While the world may value persons differently based on income, earning capacity, education, experience, race, physical ability, appearance, or socioeconomic background, there are none of these distinctions in Christ. All flesh and bones, all bodies, are God's creation. Christ lived and died for all because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God--rich and poor, insured or not.

We are all temples of the Holy Spirit. We have all been gifted by God for God's work in the world. The person who happens to be insured or who can afford the cost of medical care is no more or less important to God than the person who is uninsured or underinsured, no more or less important than the barren woman, the dying king, the wandering and hungry Israelites, the suffering Job, the blind and leprous men, the bleeding woman, the child on her deathbed.

As the church, we have a responsibility and call to witness to the incarnational love of God by the way we care for the bodies of those who may not be able to care for themselves in our world, those whom the world casts aside as unimportant or of less value.

We have a call and responsibility to listen to the stories of those who visit the doors of our clinics and crisis programs or who sit in the rooms and halls of our nursing homes, to open our eyes to the ways that our systems and society are leaving some without adequate health care, and to begin to make changes, through the

way we care for those in our midst and through legislation and political advocacy. When we open our eyes and hearts to hear, we will hear the voice of God calling us to care.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me (Matthew 25:34-36).

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you...Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them (John 14:20,23).

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor. 12:12-14, 26-27).

**Susan H. Harrison, NCCUMC Missionary, Raleigh
Director of Adult Ministries, Soapstone UMC**

Did You Know?

- ❑ 44 million Americans are uninsured--the same number as the population of 24 states plus Washington, D.C. The National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine estimates that about 18,000 Americans die each year because they do not have health insurance. The United States spends \$1.6 trillion on health care each year, but the World Health Organization ranks us as only 37th in terms of overall health care performance.
- ❑ In NC, 1.3 million of us are uninsured: 12% of whites, 20% of blacks, 46% of Hispanics, and 19% of other groups were not covered, as of the latest 2001 data. In 2001 (latest data) 43% of private-sector employers did not cover health insurance for employees. In 2004, with rising costs, that rate is likely to be even higher. If covered, employees are paying larger co-pays.
- ❑ "Communities of color suffer disproportionately from diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cancer, stroke and infant mortality." (U.S. DHHS Secretary Thompson, National Health Disparities Report, 2003.)
- ❑ For the 2000 and 2002 election cycles, the pharmaceutical/health products industries donated \$56 million to the Presidential and Congressional races; health professionals donated \$89.7 million to these races.
- ❑ NC is one of only two states where counties must pay part of the cost of Medicaid care (5% in NC), which for most states is split between federal and state dollars. This is causing a crushing blow on county budgets in NC.
- ❑ The Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP, or NC Health Choice) is a federal program to help working families who earn up to 200% of the federal poverty level (\$31,240 for a family of three) get affordable health insurance for their children under 18. It covers medical, dental, emergency care, and more--just like Medicaid. In NC, around 100,000 children are covered, and there is no waiting list.

UMC Social Principle: Our Right to Health Care

Health is a condition of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being, and we view it as a responsibility--public and private. Health care is a basic human right. Psalm 146 speaks of the God "who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind." It is unjust to construct or perpetuate barriers to physical wholeness or full participation in community. We encourage individuals to pursue a healthy lifestyle and affirm the importance of preventive health care, health education, environmental and occupational safety, good nutrition, and secure housing in achieving health. We also recognize the role of governments in ensuring that each individual has access to those elements necessary to good health.

To Learn More...

Citizens for Healthcare Freedom. Sponsoring a bill in the NC House to protect our access to alternative health care. chf@nc.rr.com, www.citizensforhealthcarefreedom.org.

NC Committee to Defend Health Care. Sponsoring NC House bill to make health care a "right" in NC. Call 919-402-0133, pres@ncdefendhealthcare.org; www.ncdefendhealthcare.org.

NC Health Access Coalition. Citizens and consumer organizations working since 1991 toward the goal of all North Carolinians having affordable, accessible health care. Call Adam Searing, 919-856-2568; adam@ncjustice.org; www.ncjustice.org.

NC Fair Share. Grassroots citizens for access to health care, and environmental justice related to health (e.g., clean water, fairness in siting waste dumps). Call Lynice Williams, 919-786-7474, ncfslrw@aol.com; www.ncaej.org/MEMBERS/Fair_Share.htm. Ask for new booklet: *Free and Low-Cost Health Clinics in North Carolina*.

Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN). Working for a national universal health care system. The Faith Project helps churches participate in health care reform. 800-634-4442, faithproject@uhcan.org; www.uhcan.org.

Profile: **Lynice Williams**



Lynice Williams is the Executive Director of NC Fair Share, a grassroots-led statewide multi-issue organization. She is the recipient of numerous awards for bringing the needs and voice of neglected persons to the health care debate and for helping community residents win local improvements—for example, mammograms for low-income women, water and sewer service in a by-passed zone, and a new health clinic in eastern NC.

How my faith calls me to be a health care organizer:

*My faith brings me to this work because I deeply feel that the God I serve is about "liberation" of the oppressed, poor, and those who are without a voice. I believe there are **no hands** but ours to put progressive information into the hands of those who need it to move into action for change. There are **no feet** but ours to go ye into all the neighborhoods, communities, and towns and provide a listening ear to work together with people to solve their own problems of poverty, lack of health care, and all the injustices done to people on a consistent basis. And there are **no mouths** but ours to speak truth about justice, fairness, and liberation to people who feel like there is no hope. My faith also keeps me with an inner peace to know that: blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God.*

Walk To Justice

How high is YOUR health insurance premium? Here is one North Carolina family's story.

"Mary (age 63) and I (age 61) applied for the Blue Cross Advantage Plan, individual health insurance, when our group insurance extension from (nonprofit employer) terminated. Neither of us has major health issues...(he names a few of the conditions). In short, we're getting older. The good news about this plan is that they would not reject you, just adjust the price according to the underwriting. So yesterday we got the quote: For a standard \$500 deductible plan, no dental or glasses, for both of us, \$4,189/mo. or \$50,268/yr. For a stripped down \$5,000 deductible plan, \$2,934/mo. or \$35,208/yr. Time to riot."

(Note: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina's annual net profits rose from \$76.1 million in 2002 to \$196 million in 2003. Raleigh News & Observer, 2/4/04, and Common Sense Foundation.)

Pete, who wrote this note, says it would take a "velvet revolution" to win a sane health care system here.

Common sense as well as our faith values tell us that a sane health care system would cover all Americans for at least basic preventive, acute and chronic care needs. We spend more on health care than any other country in the world, yet are the only industrialized nation without a universal health care system. Our nation's

annual health care bill amounts to \$5,000 for each and every man, woman, and child, yet some get Cadillac health care, and some get none at all.

A new study by the National Academy of Sciences calls for a universal health care system in America by 2010. They note the following reasons why we must:

Uninsured Americans get about half the medical care of those with health insurance. As a result, they tend to be sicker and to die sooner.

About 18,000 unnecessary deaths occur each year because of lack of health insurance.

Only half of uninsured children visited a physician during 2001, compared with three-quarters of insured children.

Lack of regular care can result in more expensive care for preventable or treatable conditions, and disruptions in learning and development.

When even one family member is uninsured, the entire family is at risk for the financial consequences of a catastrophic illness or injury.

Tax dollars paid for an estimated 85 percent of the roughly \$35 billion in unreimbursed medical care for the uninsured in 2001.

The burden of uncompensated care has been a factor in the closure of some hospitals and the unavailability of services in others. Disruptions in service can affect all who are served by a facility, even those who have health insurance.

The United States loses the equivalent of \$65 billion to \$130 billion annually as a result of the poor health and early deaths of uninsured adults.

The Academy names several ways we could cover all Americans in six years. Actually achieving this is completely a matter of political will.

Check yourself. As you read this, do you believe that having health care for all in America is a pipe dream, an impossibility? It is in fact difficult to imagine, given that we are so used to having policies determined not by need or by moral imperatives, but by the dollars of those whose campaign contributions drive our electoral system.

What it will take to achieve health care for all by 2010 is your participation in the public debate on this subject. It will take enough people saying that it is unfair and immoral that we allow about 15% of Americans to live in fear of medical bankruptcy and to go without care, and for others to pay insurance premiums that lack all proportion. The United Methodist Social Principles call Methodists to actively work for health care for all, as do the principles of all of our main religions, and the Declaration of Human Rights.

What would it look like if the religious bodies all over America took a front and forward position demanding health care for all Americans by 2010? What if we stood on scripture and on our respective documents of faith, and called our government and health care industry leaders to accountability? This is our prophetic role, and we are now more than ever needed to step up to that call.

Here is one opportunity we have in North Carolina. A group called the NC Committee to Defend Health Care, led by medical professionals, has worked with Orange County NC General Assembly Representative Verla Insko to bring forth a bill that would make health care a right granted by the NC Constitution. Her bill would mandate the state to come up with some form of health coverage for all NC citizens. Verla wanted to convey a message to you:

I urge every person reading this guide to contact their state representatives and state senators. Let them know you support universal health care. Ask them to vote for legislation to ensure that every North Carolinian has access to appropriate health care on a regular basis. When it comes to health care, taxpayers would rather pay for prevention and early intervention rather than waiting for more expensive treatments. State legislators listen to the folks back home.

On the topic of prevention, people are awakening to the benefits of non-conventional health remedies. Demand for these “alternative” practices is skyrocketing, as people experience their effectiveness and come to resent the high cost and risky side-effects of so many pharmaceutical drugs and surgical procedures.

In our state, Citizens for Healthcare Freedom is a group bringing information about alternative health care to the public, and seeking passage of a bill in our General Assembly to guarantee access to practitioners who are not licensed as medical doctors, but who show patients their credentials in their particular fields of healing. Most people do not know that many of these effective practices, ranging from Chinese medicine to herbal treatments, homeopathy, nutritional therapies, traditional Native healing, etc., may be considered misdemeanor offenses by NC law, and that practitioners can be brought on criminal charges for “practicing medicine without a license”—despite the fact that they do not claim to be medical doctors. Think of how much better it would be for all of us if the full range of these practices were able to be offered without this threat. Once again, we are dealing with established lobbies of medical/pharmaceutical groups that want to retain and expand their power (e.g., relabel vitamins as drugs, to be regulated). For financial reasons as well as having access to all methods that can lead to health, we need all options to be available.

Where to start? The Universal Health Care Action Network listed in the resources block has easy studies and action ideas for faith groups. You can ask speakers on this topic to denominational or community events. The NC Council of Churches can help you meet with your NC and Congressional representatives to support the bills and initiatives mentioned in this chapter. But first and foremost, we need to heed and hold God’s vision for justice and health, and decide not to merely give in to the broken system we have now.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** What is your health care situation? Do you think you have a fair and affordable kind of health care coverage?
- 2.** Canada, Europe, and most all industrialized nations have public or other systems that guarantee basic health care coverage to all their citizens--generally with very simple kinds of administration, versus our complex system of private insurance plans supplemented with Medicare, Medicaid, and other public programs. Why do you think we do not have the kind of entitlement to health care coverage that other modern countries do?
- 3.** Since Scripture calls us to health and wholeness and the UMC Social Principles state that all persons deserve adequate health care, what is the responsibility of people of faith as our country struggles with high medical costs and great disparities in health care coverage? Jesus says he is found in the sick. Does that inform your answer to this question? Why or why not?
- 4.** What do you think would be a fair system for health care coverage in the United States? How do you see your personal role, if any, in helping achieve that kind of system?

Notes:

The fact that in almost
any of the rich
developed
societies people lower
down the social scale
may have death rates
two to four times
higher than those
nearer the top, seems to
give us a fairly blunt
message about the
nature of
modern society.

Richard Wilkinson

Chapter 3: Housing

Scripture and Reflection

Isaiah 65:17-22a

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat...

Isaiah 65: 21-22

Through the prophet Isaiah, God is revealing a wonderful plan to create something new, a new heaven and a new earth. God is sharing with the people of Israel that he has a special plan for them, a plan that will bring them into the kind of relationship with him, and with each other, that is both a joy and a delight. Through the prophet, God lets his chosen people know that the time is coming when peace and abundance will rule, when sorrow will be replaced with joy, and weeping will fade into laughter. God is offering a glimpse of what a just kingdom, ruled by love and compassion, might look like.

That God chooses to highlight the importance of housing in this vision of the new heaven and the new earth should not be surprising to us. Where we live and what we live in are indeed important questions of faith, and important questions of justice. The answers we give to these questions are reflections of the moral priorities that we make as a community. If God's new creation is to be a place where children, families and seniors are to live abundant lives, then how they will be housed is indeed a critical question for us to address.

It is indeed tempting for us to come at this issue from a conventional supply-side approach. After all, if there were simply more units of housing in our communities, then the issue of affordable housing might not be relevant anymore. Imagine what our neighborhoods would be like if city councils would just approve more shelter beds for the homeless, if neighborhoods would just embrace the construction of more transitional and supportive housing units, if more landlords would welcome tenants with Section Eight vouchers, if more apartments and townhouses were constructed that could be leased to lower-income working families. Everyone might have a place to stay, but an inventory of affordable housing stock does not necessarily equate

to a community where everyone is housed justly.

Housing justice means more than putting a roof over everyone's head. A commitment to housing justice also means that we must examine how we live together in community, and what those communities ultimately look like.

Isaiah proclaims in his message from God that the time is coming when the people will inhabit the homes that they build, and reap the benefits of the fields they have planted. In the new heaven, which will be foreshadowed by the new earth, justice will prevail, and all people will participate fully in the abundance that God promises to provide. In too many of our communities, the poor among us do not share in the promise of God's new earth. They may be able to look forward to the new heaven, but until that time arrives, they live lives that reflect little joy and too much weeping. They build houses that others inhabit, and plant so that others may eat. Or, too often, they find that they are excluded from even building or planting at all.

Christ came preaching the good news of God's kingdom, and in a very real way, the decisions that we make about housing reveal how we understand what God's kingdom is supposed to look like, and shows the depth of our commitment to following Jesus on his journey to and through the kingdom he came to establish.

It had been an interesting afternoon. As someone with a longtime commitment to housing justice, I was always interested in hearing about new ways to provide safe, appropriate, and affordable homes for families and individuals who were struggling to get by. And my host for the afternoon, an enthusiastic entrepreneur, seemed to have a solution for at least part of the problem. By combining new building technologies and a high-volume production process, he envisioned

producing a hybrid manufactured home that would be virtually indistinguishable from a site-built house, at a significantly lower cost. He was proposing that we work together to introduce his concept to the community, which he was sure would go a long way toward eliminating the housing crunch in our urban neighborhoods. I promised to check back with him later, after I had spent some time thinking about his ideas.

As I walked to my car, one of the line workers approached me, and asked for a ride back into Minneapolis. The facility I had just toured was located in one of the suburban communities that surround the core neighborhoods of the city, about sixteen miles from where I worked. As it turned out, he lived about a half mile from my office, so I agreed to give him a lift, saving him from a two-hour bus trip home.

As we drove back into town, I commented that he ought to find a place to live that was a little closer to work. He smiled a bit, before replying, "Not on what they pay me. No way I could afford to live around here."

Thinking back on the afternoon's tour, and hoping to redeem myself a bit, I suggested that maybe he could purchase one of the homes that they built at the plant, and set it up on one of the vacant lots that the city was offering at a very low price. After all, the homes were supposed to be affordable for working families.

He responded, without a smile this time, 'They might be affordable for some people, but not for me. My wife and I would each have to work two jobs in order to be able to pay for one.'

We exchanged small talk for the rest of the trip, before I dropped him off in front of the small bungalow he was renting. He gathered up his tools and headed up the sidewalk to his house--a carpenter who couldn't live in the community where he worked, or afford the houses he built.

The Rev. Bruce Bjork, Director, Congregations in Community, Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches



Substandard housing in Robeson County
Robeson County Church and Community Center



A subsidized rental housing development in Boone, NC
NC Housing Coalition

Did You Know?

- ❑ The standard for measuring “affordable housing” is that people should not pay more than 30% of their household take-home pay for rent or home purchase. By this standard, 41% of NC renters do not live in “affordable” housing. Statewide, the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment is \$603, and the statewide average “housing wage” needed to afford that 2-bedroom apartment is \$11.60/hour.
- ❑ From 1990-2000, average household income grew 47%, while the average housing price rose by 65%.
- ❑ Manufactured housing is growing; 16.4% of NC households are of this type. However, these are difficult to re-sell, and often the loans for manufactured housing are kinds known as “predatory lending.” (Predatory lending is: Making unaffordable loans based on the assets of the borrower rather than the borrower's ability to repay. Inducing a borrower to refinance a loan repeatedly in order to charge high points and fees each time the loan is refinanced--"loan flipping." Engaging in fraud or deception to conceal the true nature of the obligation from an unsuspecting or unsophisticated borrower.)
- ❑ Of the 100 NC counties, 49 have homeless shelters funded by Emergency Shelter Grants. There are 131 of these shelters in NC. A December 2003 count of about 10,000 homeless persons is the first scientific, unduplicated count as we begin to track this population more rigorously. Former anecdotal accounts by shelter workers pointed to over 40,000 who were homeless.
- ❑ Rural homelessness is almost invisible, with people moving often to live with friends and extended family. Rural homelessness is especially difficult as the homeless have little access to the civic and faith-based resources found in more urbanized areas.

UMC Social Principle: Housing

The Scriptures look ahead to that ideal day when all persons will enjoy pleasant, peaceful, and secure shelter under their own vines and fig trees and "no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4 NRSV). In many portions of the Gospel, we find Jesus seeking out homes for retreat and renewal, for fellowship and hospitality. Similarly, all persons are entitled to dwelling places that provide for safety, privacy and recreation. The Social Principles statement of The United Methodist Church declares: "We hold governments responsible for . . . guarantee of the rights to adequate . . . shelter" (164A). We reaffirm this right as well as the assertion of the 1972 General Conference that "housing for low income persons should be given top priority."

To Learn More...

Martha Are. Homeless Policy Specialist for the State of North Carolina, 2001 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-2001
919-733-4534; martha.are@ncmail.net.

North Carolina Housing Coalition. Expanding affordable housing in NC. 3948 Browning Place, Suite 210, Raleigh, NC 27609. Call Chris Estes at 919-881-0707; cestes@nclihc.org; www.nclihc.org.

Center for Responsible Lending. Education and advocacy to end predatory lending. Ansel Brown offers information for faith groups. Call 919-313-8512.

NC Association of Community Development Corporations. Call Sue Perry Cole, 919-831-9710; www.ncacdc.org.

National Coalition for the Homeless. www.nationalhomeless.org.

Self-Help Credit Union. A community development lender. P.O. Box 3619, Durham, NC 27702; 800-476-7428; www.self-help.org (in Spanish and English).

Profile: **Kate Rumely**

Kate Rumely is Executive Director of Brick Capital Community Development Corporation, Sanford, NC. "We assist low- and moderate- income families (some disabled, mentally ill, victims of domestic violence) become homeowners, since owning one's own home helps families gain wealth and stability."



What is the spiritual motivation for the work you do? *Faith, but what is faith to me? For most of my life, I did not know what faith was. Now I know faith is a gift of God. God gives it to me along with spiritual guidance. When I was 33, working in a wholesale flower market, many things came together for me. I traveled to Costa Rica and saw flower vendors on the streets. They had the confidence and endurance to sell their wares in this third-world country; it amazed me. When I returned to home to Boston, I quit my job and opened a flower business from a pushcart. Those 13 years I learned so much from the street. I learn to greet each person with a smile. During this flower vendor time, knowing that physically I could not push a pushcart for the rest of my life, I continued my education, enrolled in the Kennedy School at Harvard and received a MPA in 1996. The year I completed my graduate work, my mother had become too frail to live alone. She left her/our home in Indiana to spend time with my brother, Jim, in North Carolina. I went there also. I did not have a job. Faith! I knew that I would work in affordable housing. My job at Brick Capital CDC is one in which everyday I have to learn new skills and have to have faith. My job is a gift.*

Walk To Justice

Home Sweet Home. Home is a word that strikes to our core. All God's creatures need a home. But a combination of factors has led to a growing number of us who are homeless, paying too much for housing, or in fear of losing our homes.

Martha Are is a Homeless Policy Specialist with state government. As of December 2003, she says, the best approximation is that around 10,000 NC persons (1,200 being children) were without homes. However, informal counts indicate that actual numbers are much higher. Ms. Are says that the homeless population in the 1970's used to be mostly older white males. The trend since then has been: 1980's, more people of color and younger persons; 1990's, more families; now, young people aged 18-24 comprise the growing group, partially because 25% of young people aging out of foster care at 18 become homeless.

Ms. Are offered some reasons for rising homelessness. (1) In the late '70s, the federal government began to cut the HUD budget by 50-60%. (2) At the same time, hospitals poured thousands of mentally ill individuals into communities, in a policy called "deinstitutionalization." Most communities were not prepared to house and care for these neighbors. (3) Finally, the rise in local control over zoning led many neighbors to protest

the location of affordable housing nearby.

North Carolinians are losing homes as factories close and our jobs move overseas. According to Elizabeth Jordan of the NC Justice Center in Raleigh, foreclosures in NC have about tripled since 1998. That year, there were 15,295 foreclosures; in 2003, 44,479 families lost their homes. Ms. Louise Mack, Director of the Cabarrus County Community Development Corporation (CDC), recently told a NC General Assembly committee about the plight of newly jobless former Pillowtex workers. Her group was helping about 200 families who were trying to avoid mortgage foreclosures. Ms. Mack's CDC ended up sending 1/5 of those families to Legal Services, she said, to deal with the fact that they had unwittingly entered into exploitative, "predatory" loans for their mortgages. Some of the people were paying annual home interest rates as high as 17%, as their first mortgage company sold their mortgage to another, and then another, each sale incurring new, higher rates. The crisis of foreclosures after the plant closings uncovered the scandal of these mortgage arrangements, which can capture unwary buyers.

Ansel Brown says we can help. Through the Center for Responsible Lending at Self-Help Credit Union

(see To Learn More), he works with congregations on ways to avoid the pitfalls unscrupulous lenders lay out for those who may not qualify for standard mortgages.

Deceptive mortgage lending is one of the housing threats to hard-working families. Low wages are another reason for the lack of ability to afford a decent place to live. Chapter 4 reveals how one-third of North Carolina families earn at levels below the Living Income Standard--that is, below what it takes for a bare-bones budget in their county. With wages dropping in value while the cost of housing escalates, the gap of affordability grows. Finally, there is the sheer lack of dwellings with low enough rent or mortgage.

Why isn't there enough low-cost housing? One reason is that good people fight efforts to build such housing in their neighborhoods: the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) syndrome. Chris Estes of the NC Housing Coalition says this is based on a mistaken notion that having such housing nearby will lower property values. Instead, he says, "numerous research studies show that affordable housing initiatives do not lower surrounding property values, but rather bring economic stability to the community by helping low- and moderate-income families stabilize their finances and begin saving money that can lead to positive investments in homeownership or higher education."

Homebuilders find it hard to make profits on lower-cost homes, so they often build high-end housing for the affluent. Federal low-income tax credits give developers an incentive to build affordable homes, and this is a successful method to increase the stock of such homes. However, this kind of tax incentive contributes far less than what is needed. Another highly efficient and successful way to develop more affordable housing is through the NC Housing Trust Fund. This is the annual appropriation from the NC General Assembly for supportive housing, which includes emergency, transitional and permanent housing for those with developmental disabilities, substance abuse or mental health issues. It does this through interest-free loans up to \$400,000 per development. The interest from the fund supplies a statewide emergency repair program designed to make homes safe so people, especially the rural elderly, can stay in them. The Trust Fund also provides interest-free second mortgages up to \$20,000 per home for permanent financing of newly built homes using homebuyer sweat equity.

To meet critical needs, the Fund requires \$30 million; it now has around \$3 million.

So what can we in congregations do? (1) Don't be a NIMBY crusader. (2) Find out more from the NC Housing Coalition, and learn what your local housing coalition or Community Development Corporations are doing. (3) Ask your state House representative and state Senator to allocate funds for the NC Housing Trust Fund. (4) Let your U.S. Congressional Representative and Senators know that you want to reverse the 30-year divestment of tax dollars in housing. You can be sure that big business will ask for what it wants from the government in the form of tax breaks and subsidies. If we want more affordable housing, we must also be loud and clear in demand for greater investment in housing subsidies, Section 8 vouchers that enable landlords to charge less rent, and other means to adjust the way the free market leaves too many of us without an affordable home.

Here's how some people of faith are beginning to tackle the shortage of affordable housing in their area, Hendersonville, NC. This is a county with many relatively wealthy retirees and people with second homes in the mountains, and then a large proportion of people who work jobs in the restaurants, shops, and services catering to both tourists and more privileged residents. Bev Kelly, the Faith Community Coordinator at Interfaith Assistance Ministry, describes a gathering of awareness and commitment over time in her area:

Faith Link is a program that partners with low-income families needing social and emotional support in their fight to survive and rise out of poverty. Since its inception in 1998, it has had an active advocacy group because we realized that most of the barriers these families face are not so much individual but systemic in nature. The advocacy group sponsors a bi-annual Faith Summit to develop awareness within the community of the issues identified by the families as the major barriers standing in the way of their success. During the Summit in June 2003, a strong concern was the problem of decent affordable housing in our community. The outcome was the decision to create an affordable housing coalition, which has in fact started. It has a mission statement, a set of by-laws, a draft of articles of incorporation, an advisory board, and a board of directors. Faith community members serve on both the advisory board and board of directors. Two Faith Link family members are on the advisory board. The faith community has brought the sense of economic and social justice to the coalition that acts as the moral principle that binds this community endeavor together.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your housing situation and that of your extended family members?
2. Do you think that your community has enough affordable housing? Where would you go to find that out?
3. God is always concerned about a home for God's people, so much so that God overwhelms a great Egyptian leader to deliver them to a place of home. How might God bring about such delivery in our contemporary world?
4. How is God calling your congregation to a ministry of housing, if at all? How might a response for housing advocacy be a witness to God's love? In what ways is this different from driving nails?

Notes:



Greenville family finds affordable home to buy.
NC Housing Coalition

Chapter 4: Jobs and Wages

Scripture and Reflection

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workman who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

James 5:4-6, NIV

These condemning words from the book of James give us a reason to pause and think about how James can begin with the failure to pay wages and end with condemnation and murder. It hardly seems reasonable that the failure to pay wages would equate to murder. We might have to admit that luxury and self-indulgence have served to literally fatten us up a bit. However, this can hardly be tantamount to condemnation and murder! Or can it be?

The book of James could easily be subtitled, "How to Live A Christian Life," because it is primarily concerned with the actions of the Christian community. It is in the book of James that we find advice on persevering under trial and temptations, warning against favoritism, and the bond between faith and works. We also find wise counsel regarding the power of the tongue and guidance relating to worldly wisdom versus spiritual wisdom. Chapter 4 speaks briefly about our motives for action (4:3). This ties nicely into the beginning of Chapter 5, where James targets a group--rich people--with some very bad news. Life as they have known it will come to an end. All of the wealth they have accumulated and stored up for themselves will waste away because they have gained their wealth on the backs of the poor.

In the Roman world, wealth was concentrated in the hands of the few. In their stratified society, moving from being a member of the working poor to middle-class was a dream, and membership in the small wealthy community was nearly impossible. This is very similar to our society, with our own bonds of stratification. Wealth and the power that accompanies it are concentrated in the hands of a few. The rich get richer, the poor poorer, and the gaps between the two are ever widening. The working poor continue to suffer at the mercy of the rich and there is very little upward mobility.

As a Christian community, are we comparing what we see to what we believe? Are we, as members of a rich Christian community, doing what we can to decrease the gap between the rich and the poor? As you read this, perhaps you are thinking that you are not rich. If you question the wealth and power that we have as a Christian community, consider the fact that our community helped a recent film about our beloved Jesus the Christ earn \$212 million in less than two weeks.

Additionally, in the Old Testament, the terms "wealth" and "riches" are relatively synonymous. Wealth is the term used to translate two Hebrew words that mean "ability" or "power." Using these definitions, many of us are rich. We have the ability to acquire good jobs, health insurance. We have the ability to work one job that allows us the luxury to pay all our bills. We have the ability to access information that will then give us the power to make the best decisions for our families. We are rich! However, before we bask in the security that we believe our riches give us, James warns us that we are to weep and wail over the misery that is coming to us (James 5:1). Why? Not because we are rich but because we are hoarding our wealth, in direct conflict with biblical teaching and this will lead to murder!

Against the advice of James it appears that we, as 21st century Christians, have bought into worldly wisdom, a wisdom that leads us to individualism and the thought that my desires and needs are most important. This wisdom leads us to believe that "I" must acquire more and more in order to be safe. It is not important that "I" have more than "I" could ever need or use, "I" have to keep pushing, keep working so that "I" will not come up short. I have got to have a bigger house, a bigger car and a bigger bank account so that "my" future is secure. Additionally, "I" have to be sure to guard my wealth. "I" want all the tax cuts I can get even if I make a high income. "I" don't worry about

Chapter 4: **Jobs and Wages**

those loopholes corporations get so they avoid their fair share of taxes. "I" don't bother about raising the minimum wage because I don't earn that, and "I" don't want to pay my farmworkers or hired workers more, and don't want to know if people work everyday but still cannot afford a decent home or enough to eat. "I" must be concerned with my needs and the needs of my family. We are living "on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence" (5:5), continuing to fatten ourselves in the midst of the cries of "the workmen who mowed (my) fields."

There is no doubt that we hear the cries, now more than ever before. Our state has suffered immeasurably because of factory closings and record unemployment. The workmen are crying out! Where are our jobs? Where are the retraining programs? Where is our spiritual wisdom? Where are the saints? What are we doing? Most of us are simply talking about the problems "others" in our society are facing. As Christians living in this society, talk is cheap. James, not to mention Jesus, calls us to action.

Admittedly it is difficult to know what to do. There are so many different options from so many different "experts." Yet, for Christians, there is but one expert. Jesus Christ has already given us the answer. Instead of hoarding our wealth and fattening ourselves up during the current crisis, we are advised in Luke 12:33 to sell our possessions and give to the poor. The early church has already served as the example. Acts 4:32-35 tells us what a community of believers can do to help to meet the needs of those who are less fortunate. Is this a call to sell everything that you own and give it to the needy? No, only through sincere prayer and with a heart that is open to the prompting power of the Holy Spirit can any of us know what our reasonable service should be. We who are rich have the power of options. We can live a life of sharing and generosity as our faith teaches us. We can demand that the leaders who claim Christianity enact policies that demonstrate our beliefs. We can use our power as a Christian community to ensure that the poor, the needy and those who cry out to us are comforted, and live in a society that is fair and just.

We do have the other option--keeping the status quo. We can continue to fail to hold our friends, neighbors and leaders accountable to the poor and needy among us. We can continue to ignore those "invisible" work-

ers who clean our homes and offices, cook our food in restaurants, pick up our trash and perform the many tasks that we take for granted. We can continue to ignore the fact that many of them are suffering because of the wages our society chooses to pay. Choosing this option has its consequences. The Message, a contemporary language translation of the Bible, states the situation quite clearly. "All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the Master Avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it."

If we lived in another time and place, we might have to concern ourselves with a revolution, because even the poor have a limit as to how long they will "stand there and take it." Thankfully, we live in a society that allows us to participate somewhat in governance. We, as a Christian community, can make a difference in the lives of the working poor in our nation. We can insist that our leaders enact policies that bring jobs back to our cities and towns. We can insist that these jobs pay enough for families to live decently. We have the ability to stop the slow and painful death, the murders that result from the lack of jobs that pays a fair wage. We have the ability to act on our Christian beliefs. Or we can continue to talk. But remember, talk is cheap. Living the Christian life is not.

The Rev. Jocleen McCall, Minister for Young Adults, Union Baptist Church, Durham, NC.

Did You Know?

- ❑ The federal and NC minimum wages are both \$5.15 hour. If minimum wage were adjusted for inflation, it would be \$6.75.
- ❑ The Living Income Standard (LIS) is the measure of the hourly pay it takes to meet a bare-bones budget--basic necessities but no savings, loans, college tuition, vacations, or other common needs. For NC, the statewide average urban/rural “living wage” is \$10.60/hour. About 1/3 of NC families earn below the LIS for their county.
- ❑ The Living Income Standard generally runs over twice the “poverty level” for various family sizes. But our need-based government programs, like school lunches, child care subsidies, Medicaid, Work First welfare, etc., are calculated based on the outmoded and inaccurate poverty level. If the programs were based on the more accurate LIS, about twice the number of families would qualify.
- ❑ North Carolina is the least unionized state in the country. Our economic development strategies have sold NC based in part on the low wages our workers have demanded. Most religious denominations have statements supporting the right for workers to organize and bargain collectively for fair wages and working conditions.
- ❑ In our General Assembly, corporate/professional lobbyists outnumber labor/public interest lobbyists 14.8 to 1, according to a new study by Democracy-NC. Of those registered with the Secretary of State, there are 38 lobbyists for workers and the public interest (22 of these are for state employees), and 562 for business interests.

UMC Social Principles: Collective Bargaining, and Work and Leisure

We support the right of public and private (including farm, government, institutional, and domestic) employees and employers to organize for collective bargaining into unions and other groups of their own choosing. Every person has the right to a job at a living wage. Where the private sector cannot or does not provide jobs for all who seek and need them, it is the responsibility of government to provide for the creation of such jobs. We support social measures that ensure the physical and mental safety of workers, that provide for the equitable division of products and services, and that encourage an increasing freedom in the way individuals may use their leisure time. We believe that persons come before profits. We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life. We support policies that encourage the sharing of ideas in the workplace, cooperative and collective work arrangements. We support rights of workers to refuse to work in situations that endanger health and/or life without jeopardy to their jobs. We support policies that would reverse the increasing concentration of business and industry into monopolies.

To Learn More...

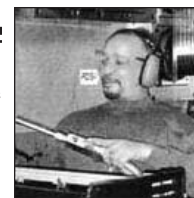
UE #150 Workers Fairness Campaign. Lowest-paid state and local public service workers seek congregations to sign a resolution of support for Workers Fairness Principles. Call Barbara Zelter, NCCC, 919-828-6501.

Witness: Justice at Smithfield Campaign. Workers and union representatives bring a video and discussion program to congregations, to show how mistreated hog factory workers need religious group support; sign a resolution. Call Barbara Zelter, NC Council of Churches, 919-828-6501, to learn more.

United for a Fair Economy. Easy educational materials to understand trends in pay, taxes, the economy in general, and advocate for fair policies for average workers. E-mail newsletters. 37 Temple Place 2nd Floor, Boston, MA 02111; 617-423-2148; info@faireconomy.org; www.FairEconomy.org.

Working Hard Is Still Not Enough. Sorien Schmidt and Elizabeth Jordan, NC Justice and Community Development Center, Raleigh, NC, May 2003. Call Sorien at 919-856-2151 for a free copy, or download from the website, www.ncjustice.org.

Profile: Stanley Lee



Stanley Lee worked for an Eastern North Carolina manufacturing plant for 20 years. He was able to save money toward his child's college education and have an occasional family vacation--hard-earned benefits from steady dedicated labor. After exposing dangerous conditions in the workplace and protesting layoffs with no notice, he was fired. Stanley says that his faith gave him the strength to tell the truth about his changing workplace, despite an atmosphere of intimidation and fear. It gives him the strength and hope to persist as he is unemployed.

I learned in everyday life, bringing children up--I try not to lie; then we have no reason to mistrust each other. Life to me is in your heart. Set a good example, then the people behind you will continue like that. If we see wrong, then we need to speak of it, we need to let it be known that it is wrong. Growing up Baptist, if something was wrong, we talked about it and prayed about it. But you can't wait 'til a Messiah comes down to save you. He made a way for us, allowed us to be raised up and cared for as children. He put us here for a reason. You gotta take control of the situation, do what's needed--that's prayer answered. We have to do our part. Sometimes we don't believe reality that's in our face. We get caught up in TV, music. We get relaxed in our ways, settled with what we got. We get to worshipping the dollar, get to be hostage to the dollar bill. I want to be of service. I tell the truth. If you don't have faith, what are you gonna turn to? Being fired for speaking out, faith helps that go down a little better. There is a God.

Walk To Justice

How is it with you and your employment? Here's how it is for your Congressional representative.

Since 1989, members of Congress have granted themselves a total of \$60,500 in raises. This is much more than keeping up with inflation, in addition to their very generous pensions, health and life insurance, housing deduction and assorted perks. The federal minimum wage, by contrast, is lagging severely behind inflation. (2002, Ralph Nader)

The last time Congress hiked the minimum wage was in 1997. Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted the minimum wage in 1938, when he signed the Fair Labor Standards Act to "assure a fair day's pay for a fair day's work." In 2004, working a 40-hour week at the national and state minimum wage of \$5.15/hour or \$10,712/year puts the employee below poverty level for a family of two, which is \$5.83/hour or \$12,120/year. And the poverty level is in fact about one-half to one-third of what is real-life scraping by.

A more realistic gauge of what it takes to meet a bare bones budget in North Carolina is called the Living Income Standard (LIS). Using 2002 data, the NC Justice Center in Raleigh computed for each of our 100 NC counties the average costs of housing and utilities, health care, taxes, food, child care, clothing and transportation. They determined for each locality their own

Living Income Standard for various family sizes. The LIS does not include money for loans, savings, vacations, gifts, college costs. It is a conservative assessment, which many people find unrealistically low. Still, the statewide average LIS for North Carolina is \$10.60/hour. According to the NC Housing Coalition, the statewide "housing wage," what the average NC worker needs to afford a two-bedroom apartment, is \$11.60/hour. Of course, in urban areas, the LIS and needed housing wages are far higher.

As you can see, the wages required for a bare bones budget for a small NC family are over twice the minimum wage. About one-third of NC families fall below the Living Income Standard. This makes intuitive sense, as we see how many of us fall behind with bills, go bankrupt, live off credit cards, visit payday lenders, and otherwise rob Peter to pay Paul.

Meanwhile, the gap between rich and poor is larger now than at any time since the Great Depression. Many executives win bonuses and high salaries as they close factories and lay off workers in record numbers.

CEO pay has shot up...from 40 times the average worker's pay in 1970 to more than 100 times in 1990 to some 500 times today. (PBS NewsHour, 12/3/02)

Something is not right in the world of work and wages. It appears that the ground is shifting under our very feet, as our country rapidly shifts from a manufacturing and family farm economy to a service, knowledge industry, and agribusiness economy.

“Free trade” agreements often enrich global financiers and owners as companies move jobs to where wages are least—a race to the bottom. In NC, we have lost over 121,000 manufacturing jobs just in the past two years.

To stay in business, many companies rely on the willingness of immigrant labor to accept wages and conditions American workers find unacceptable. We speak out of both sides of our mouth, as we rail against illegal immigration, yet lure in and rely on these workers to suppress wages and the price of goods and services here.

On the farm, the healthy community patchwork of independent small enterprises is becoming a thing of the past. The demise of the tobacco industry has left great numbers of small farmers with a shattered income base. Contract farming, where farmers sign on to provide chickens, turkeys, and pigs to meat packers, has kept some small farms alive, but has also decimated others as the corporations demand investment in expensive equipment and change rules midstream.

In the technical professional world, the new buzz word is “outsourcing.” Computer programmers, who thought their education and expertise gave them job protection, now are losing jobs to similarly trained professionals in India, China, and Latin America, where the pay for programming may be six times less. Labor unions, long involved with manufacturing, industrial and service workers, now are making inroads with professional and technical employees who see their livelihoods disappearing.

How do we as people of faith reckon with this new world of work and wages that feels out of our control? The Methodist Social Principles as well as the policy statements of most all major religious groups declare that hard work deserves fair pay, and that healthy communities are more important than the right of individuals to amass wealth through profiteering. Here are a few ideas that fit with our faith values of enough for all, of human dignity. The NC Council of Churches

can assist you with any of these:

- (1) Form a group to discuss how the NC employment situation is affecting people in your congregation and in your neighborhood, and to find out what people want to happen to change how things are.
- (2) Support labor unions. The UMC Social Principles and most other religious groups' statements support the right of workers to form unions and bargain collectively for fair pay and working conditions. Right now in North Carolina, many workers at the Smithfield Packing, the world's largest hog plant at Tar Heel, NC, are asking for church and community support. NC state and local government workers who are at the bottom of the pay range are organizing through the UE #150 union for *Workers Fairness Principles*, and they also seek the support of denominations and congregations.
- (3) Join the effort to raise the NC minimum wage from \$5.15/hour to \$8.50/hour.
- (4) Interact with your elected representatives to tell them your stories and needs regarding work and wages.

All over the state, people of faith are already actively engaged in upholding the prophetic vision of justice in the land for those who toil for daily bread. Childcare workers in Greensboro are meeting with those who attempted to pass a living wage ordinance there, at the Beloved Community Center aligned with Faith Community Church. They are discussing how quality, affordable childcare can be combined with fair wages and benefits for the dedicated providers of childcare services. Thousands of union members are also church-going community members, who are helping others understand the need to stand together for basic rights. Some NC legislators submit a minimum wage hike bill every year, despite the tidal wave of business lobby opposition. Brave individuals like the profiled Stanley Lee tell the truth about their workplace, and pay the price. We are called to lift up the standard amidst all the confusion of workplace change. It starts with knowing that the world of work and wages is part and parcel of building the kingdom.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Does your congregation talk about work and wages? Where--in sermons, in study groups, through assistance for those who lost work, through community action for better jobs? Only in personal conversations?
- 2.** Were you aware of your denomination's positions regarding wages, labor unions, and worker rights? Do you know where to find out about them, and about materials your denomination provides to learn more about these topics?
- 3.** Have you or someone you know lost a job and had a hard time finding work that pays enough? What is the employment situation where you live?
- 4.** Do you think your congregation might be interested in learning more about the quest for a minimum wage hike, about economic development in North Carolina, about how international trade agreements affect us and workers around the world? Why or why not? How do you see your role in all this, and how does your faith inform this path?

Notes:



Chapter 5: Race

Scripture and Reflection

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Galatians 3:28

EQUALITY IN CHRIST

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the church of Galatia offers clarity on the nature of the church's mission to the world. He assures them that Jesus' mission was to abolish social distinction and ethnic bias. For him, one of the key works of Christ's mission was the tearing down of walls that separated Greeks from Jews, males from females, slaves from the free, and lifting up the oneness of Christ.

Paul needed to remind the faithful in Galatia that the misappropriation of the Mosaic Law had erected a barrier separating God's people. But Christ had come to tear that misplaced barrier down. According to Paul, faith in Jesus Christ reestablishes the brotherhood and sisterhood of all humankind. Therefore, if one belongs to the "body of Christ," the old person has passed away and the new person has arrived.

If we would follow the theology of Paul, we cannot ignore this truth. The church is the body of Christ and we are all connected to the head and Lord of the church, Jesus Christ. If we are to follow Paul's theology even closer, he is telling the church that we can not discriminate against anyone in the "body" because we are connected and we need each other. He reminds us that we are sons and daughters of God, and if we are sons and daughters then we must be brothers and sisters. We are siblings with the same parent.

Now we can amuse ourselves like some of us did as children and think our parents might love us more than other siblings. If God is indeed a just God, then we know he has no respect of persons. Therefore we can be assured that if we find ourselves blessed more than our brothers or sisters, it is not because God loves us more. It could be we are willing to acknowledge his love more than others. Or could it be some other fac-

tors at work? Therefore if we are blessed with much in this life, it might be our opportunity to help someone less fortunate. The person might be of another ethnicity, class, or gender.

DIVERSITY

As United Methodists we do not have to look far to see the examples of John Wesley as he reached out to the American Indians, Africans, and women to offer them a place at the table of Christ in the Methodist family. The North Carolina Conference is a living testament to the legacy of John and Charles Wesley and the early Methodists who came here to spread scriptural holiness across the landscape of the then New World. It is a conference committed to inclusiveness of people regardless of race or gender.

As people of Methodism we must continue to make inclusiveness a reality in the life of the church. For as the population grows across the conference, more people of various ethnicities will make North Carolina home. We must not take their presence for granted and our mission should be to strengthen our outreach efforts to Blacks/African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos/Hispanics and Native Americans. Euro American churches located in community of large populations of African Americans or Hispanics must intentionally adopt methods to reach out through vacation bible school, youth ministries, English as Second Language or through other creative avenues. This effort should be intentional with the aim of recruiting these persons into the "Body of Christ" and into the Methodist family. John Wesley's effort to reach out to the Native Americans as a young preacher and his witness to Africans in the new world should serve as a challenge to all United Methodist to go and do likewise.

Chapter 5: **Race**

In the Body of Christ there must be an appreciation for diversity and a love for uniqueness. We cannot afford to devalue the worth of any of God's people. Jesus gave his life for the world to redeem it of sin. The world is made up of every tribe, nation, and language of all people that occupy planet earth; therefore all must be offered Christ. When offering Christ to people, regardless of race, culture or gender, one must offer appreciation for the experiences that characterize that person's life story. Every person has a story and each story is shaped in part by the culture, economic status, and the environment in which that person's life was developed. As the church we are called to care for needs of the whole person, and that is inclusive of his or her culture. The church must strive to be reflective of the diversity of community, and community is reflective of all of God's people.

Diversity is descriptive of the race, cultural, and gender makeup of a church or society. It refers to inclusion, recognizing race and gender in all aspects of life. The church is a very important part of life, thus, it cannot ignore the tremendous opportunities of meeting the needs of all people.

Traveling across the state of North Carolina we find communities that are very diverse and diversity is a good thing, as it adds cultural experiences to the communities. Religion plays a vital role in the cultures of the people of North Carolina. The United Methodist Church in North Carolina has experienced significant growth because of the diversity of its population. Reaching out to individuals and families brings together God's people and creates the spirit of mission to all people as men and women of all ethnic backgrounds work together to bring people to Christ and share in mission.

CONCLUSION

The church cannot be a church without the beautiful diverse races of people. As people of all races and ages work together in harmony, they reflect the face of the church that pleases God. When the church reaches out to families and individuals, it will touch the lives of people of all ages, whether young or old. The church with a diverse ethnic, gender, and age population is the church that is growing in the right direction. The church with a multicultural diverse ministry is the church that will survive. In other words, the church

must be inclusive of the population of the community it serves in order to be vital to that community.

The church must be about praising and serving God and being his witness among all people. In the scriptures we find, "Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47) Notice here a very important key phrase "with all the people." How often do you see Christians picking and choosing people to minister to based upon race, gender, or status? God has no respect of persons and all need to hear the word of the Lord...men, women, boys and girls, all races, the prisoner, the homeless, the drug addict, the alcoholic, the young, the old, the rich, the poor--everyone. For whether red, or yellow, black or white, all God's people are precious on his sight.

Our mission as a conference is to provide resources and encourage local churches to embrace the diversity of its community. Then the local church must find ways to minister to the community it serves and all people therein. For when the church fails to provide viable ministry to the community, it fails to be the church. All people of the church and community must work together in order to be effective. This means United Methodists must work in partnership with other Christians in order for the church to reach those yearning for understanding and inner peace. We must be faithful disciples of Christ regardless of race or gender.

The Reverend Dr. Jesse Brunson, Director of Multicultural and Social Ministry, North Carolina Conference, United Methodist Church.

If the gospel is not concerned with reconciling us across the most stubborn ethnic and racial, indeed all man-made, barriers, then it is no gospel at all. Reconciliation is not optional, it is not a specialized calling for a few, it is not a trivial concern, it is central to the heart of the gospel.

John Perkins

Did You Know?

- ❑ Not one trait, characteristic, or gene distinguishes all members of one so-called race from all members or another so-called race; we share about 35,000 genes, with mutations for specific diseases, etc.
- ❑ In 1776, the naturalist Johann Blumenbach created a hierarchy of five races, placing Caucasians on top, as he believed the skulls of those in the Caucasus Mountains to be more beautiful than others. This pseudo science was used to promote the idea of the superiority of “whiteness.”
- ❑ In the U.S. Constitution, slaves were considered to be 3/5 of a person. Slaves had no rights, but were given 3/5 status in the eyes of the Census counters, for purposes of taxation and representation--determining the population count for elections, and determining what taxes the property owners owed.
- ❑ NC has the largest Indian population east of the Mississippi River, with over 80,000 Native Americans. We have seven recognized tribes: Eastern Band of Cherokee (the only federally recognized NC group), Coharie, Haliwa-Saponi, Indians of Person County, Lumbee, Meherrin and Waccamaw-Siouan.

UMC Social Principle: Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons

Racism is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others. Racism includes both personal and institutional racism... Institutional racism is the established social pattern that supports implicitly or explicitly the racist value system. Racism plagues and cripples our growth in Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. White people are unfairly granted privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color. Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society. We assert the obligation of society and groups within the society to implement compensatory programs that redress long-standing, systemic social deprivation of racial and ethnic people. We further assert the right of members of racial and ethnic groups to equal opportunities in employment and promotion; to education and training of the highest quality; to nondiscrimination in voting, in access to public accommodations, and in housing purchase or rental; to credit, financial loans, venture capital, and insurance policies; and to positions of leadership and power in all elements of our life together. We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within our Church and society.

To Learn More...

For quizzes, easy facts, information about race and racism, try this Public Broadcasting website, www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm.

FaithAction International House. The Rev. Dr. Mark R. Sills, 705 North Greene Street, Greensboro, North Carolina 27401; 336-379-0037; faithaction@earthlink.net. Building Bridges workshops on race and racism; many cultural exchanges; information on Latinos in NC and Spanish language immersion training, etc.

NC Commission of Indian Affairs. Information and resources. www.doa.state.nc.us/doa/cia/indian.htm.

NC Latino/Hispanic organizations, by county. www.ayudate.org/ayudate/oragencies.html.

Race, Culture, and Privilege Committee, NC Council of Churches. Call Denise Cumbee Long, 919-828-6501.

Visions, 17 Spring Valley Road, Arlington, MA 02476; 781-643-5190; office@visions-inc.com. NC consultants can lead workshops, and retreats on cultural understanding, anti-racism, etc.

Profile: **Dr. Micheline Ridley Malson**

A Durham-based activist and "social entrepreneur," Dr. Malson is an "independent consultant. I provide program and organizational development for faith- and community-based organizations. Currently I focus on nurturing leadership among welfare and working-poor African American women."



What is the spiritual motivation for the work you do? *I grew up in the inner-city urban North but was born in the rural South, Oxford, NC. My faith ("if it had not been for God on our side...") grew through my life experience and through caring relationships with spiritual people. I often witness this spirit among poor African American women as an ever-present fuel, often revealed through a bone-deep longing to make things right. But I think I learned most about social justice, and caring for others as a basic form of social justice, from my mother, who grew up on a farm outside Oxford. Two tapes of her voice play in my head. The first is a made-plain sense of re-distributive justice, a version of love thy neighbor, learned and practiced in the "country": You have to share what you have with people who have less than you. The second are the Oxford stories, her memories of an agricultural life "working someone else's farm" in the 30's and 40's, where you worked around the clock, but never seemed to get ahead. She gained a vision of justice through attendance at The Mary Potter School, established by Presbyterians because there was no public high school for black children in Oxford. In doing social justice work, I am just doing what my mother told me to do.*

Walk To Justice

According to the United Methodist Rev. James Lawson, noted civil rights leader and peace and justice champion: "The heart of racism is that a man is not a man." These days, most of us have tried hard to eradicate racism from our lives. Still, wholeness is a continuing quest, and this chapter offers some history and reality checks for people of good will.

Race is America's most explosive issue. We are a country founded on principles of democracy, liberty, and rights (for white male landowners from Europe), yet formed with the taking of Native lands, and on the forced energy of slave labor. While many of us wish to put this touchy history behind, a legacy of privilege and disadvantage remains. Julian Bond, Chair of the NAACP, told an Asheville group in February of 2004 that African Americans are still battling the legacy of 246 years of slavery followed by 100 years of state-sanctioned discrimination, "reinforced by private and public terror." On top of this legacy, America is rapidly becoming less European in ethnicity and culture, less "white" as we welcome refugees and immigrants from the Southern hemisphere, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Others come undocumented, often resented, but lured by businesses that seek cheap labor and ask no questions. This complex mix brings its blessings of cultural enrichment, and also an ocean of

unspoken questions, resentments, fears, hatred, and pain.

What are caring people of faith to do with this dilemma of race and racism? Certainly here we can only scratch the surface, and name ways to further explore. And this text will focus on the deep American divide between groups we label "black" and "white," although our increasing Latino presence and other ethnic shifts also merit attention. First, here is some history from the Rev. Dr. Mark Sills of FaithAction in Greensboro. FaithAction provides, among other things, workshops on cultural understanding and racism. One of Dr. Sills' handouts explains how America absorbed racism from our colonial forebears. Some brief summaries are:

The "one drop" rule. The "one drop" rule, which made anyone with 1/16 black ancestry classify as black, came from 15th century Spain. Jews and Muslims owned most of the land and resources, and the Spanish (Christian) crown wanted them. Royalty invented the blood rule to run off those whose riches they desired. The Spanish Inquisitors performed blood tests on Jews and Muslims while wearing white robes with pointed hoods. They supposedly determined race from blood--a fiction. This rule came with the colonialists to America. Until recently, in South Carolina

with 1/16 black ancestry, you were considered black; in Louisiana, the definition was 1/32. The "one drop" rule has always defined someone as less worthy, able to be restricted by law from a variety of rights and privileges.

Christian privilege. To theologically justify taking lands from indigenous people, 16th and 17th century Popes and religious leaders said it was a favor to conquer "infidels," to bring them the gifts of "civilization." This excuse was also made for slavery; slaveholders and traders could justify themselves as lifting lesser humans out of their so-called primitive cultures, which were deemed sinful. In early America, colonialists were called "Christians," to distinguish themselves from indigenous and African "heathens" or "savages."

Whiteness invented. In 1691, colonial legislators invented the term "white." Before this, people were identified by nationality. "Whosoever English or other white man or woman, bond or free, shall intermarry with a Negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman, he shall within three months be banished from this domain forever." In 1790, after the American Revolution, the first Congress banned all non-white immigrants from becoming citizens of the republic. Again, we see how these pseudo-racial definitions created groups with entitlements, and groups banned from equal citizenship rights.

We often relegate to the past the long trail of slavery, Jim Crow, red-lining by banks to prevent loans for homes or businesses to people of color, restrictive housing covenants, and workplace discrimination that existed before our hard-won civil rights laws were passed. However, current realities show that old patterns persist.

1. Buying a car. A recent study by Vanderbilt University showed that black Americans were three times as likely as other buyers to be charged "markups" (higher interest rates) on car loans. General Motors Assistance Corp. and Nissan Motor Acceptance Corp. settled class-action lawsuits for this discrimination.

2. Black/white disparities. United for a Fair Economy has a new study, "The State of the Dream: Enduring Disparities in Black and White." Historic lack of access to equal education, health care, housing, and jobs has produced lingering status differentials, including: Black unemployment is more than twice that of whites, and the gap is wider now than in

1972. Black infants are 2-1/2 times as likely to die before age one than are white infants, a greater gap than in 1970. White households had an average net worth more than six times that of black families, and this gap is widening. And the "achievement gap" in education is now well-known.

3. Lived experience. "Driving while black" is a common notion, reflecting the way motorists of color are often considered suspicious without any grounds. Shoppers of color can fall under the wary gaze of shopkeepers. Realtors often direct homebuyers to different sides of town, by ethnicity. And on and on.

The Rev. Pebbles Lindsay-Lucas is co-pastor of First Chronicles Community Church in Durham. She is Durham County's Faith Community Coordinator and an African American mother who worked hard to move from receiving welfare to completing Duke Divinity School. She is beloved by people from all walks of life, for her energy, good cheer, and her rising above circumstance. She never plays "the race card." Still, she thinks religious people and particularly pastors have often dropped the ball on dealing with race.

It is my opinion that many clergy have buried their heads in the sand. I believe we fail our parishioners when we fail to mention hot topics such as race. It seems to me that we preach sweet sermons instead of sermons that challenge us to move to the next level. When I was younger the senior clergy had no fear of dealing with these issues. Now it seems to me that we have a fear of losing members who purchased the first brick or those who contribute the most. We have to talk about race. Yes, it's difficult. But black and white pastors must sit down and talk honestly about race relations, and what we are experiencing in 2004. Then we must take this same message back to our congregations. If we fail to talk honestly, our parishioners will be stuck in the same place, not dealing with reality. I believe God has charged clergy to be a voice among our people. Clergy, we must sound the alarm. We have to take leadership here.

Congregations and denominations all over North Carolina are indeed finding ways to build bridges of understanding across old fault lines. More and more people are coming to know the concept of "white privilege," what Peggy McIntosh calls the "invisible systems conferring dominance on my group." Study guides, models for relational groups, and workshops abound, for those willing to move out of our normal comfort zones into a kingdom world. It is easy to pretend we do not need to provide time and space for this work. We are all enriched when we do.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** When did you first experience the notion of race, or racism?
- 2.** Paul says, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. If we believe this, what does it mean to us in practical terms? How does it affect the choices we make in our worship decisions? What does it mean to us in economic terms, and in choices of where we live and where we send our children to school?
- 3.** What racial composition does your congregation have? Is it fine as it is, or do you think changes need to be made regarding the ethnic composition and cultural practices of your congregation?

Notes:

It has been said that "love without truth lies, and truth without love kills." A shallow relationship that gushes superficial love will not survive the harsh realities of race. And a budding relationship that only focuses on cold hard truth with little concern for the emotional well-being of the other party will not get off the ground. The biblical principle of speaking the truth in love, whether in a group or as individuals, offers us the best foundation on which to build and maintain relationships.

John Perkins

Chapter 6: Criminal Justice

Scripture and Reflection

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah 6:8

Most Christians love these words spoken by the prophet Micah. This list of behaviors that God requires of us is actually very short, and adherence seems simple. We consider the list, and most likely give ourselves passing marks on each. Kindness: "I am generally nice to most everyone, give money and volunteer time to charities, and sometimes help people who are in trouble." Walk humbly with God: "I acknowledge my temporal, human fragility in the presence of the power of God, the sole creator of all that is, has been, and ever will be." Do justice: "I haven't treated anyone unjustly...haven't stolen from anyone, haven't cheated anyone." Those with a broader understanding of the word "justice" might add, "I don't treat people differently because of their social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religious creed."

Notice, however, the way that the above frames the response to God's requirement that we do justice. The admonition to do justice is interpreted as refraining from doing injustice. "Not doing" is a passive role, rather than a proactive "doing." Refraining from doing something that is wrong is not exactly the same as doing something that is right. Refraining from doing injustice does not fulfill God's mandate that we are to do justice.

By command and example, the Bible defines justice and tells us how to do it. Biblical justice reveals to us the heart of God, and demands that all people must be treated fairly and correctly, resources must be distributed equitably, oppression and exploitation of the weak will not be tolerated.

Through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, we are given the perfect example of how to do justice. He admonished the rich to give all to the poor, rebuked the powerful, favored the weak with his blessings, sought out the despised and drew them near, promised that the

last would be first. Jesus proclaimed that salvation had come to the house of the tax collector who turned from his wicked ways. He freed the condemned adulteress from her accusers, exhorting her to sin no more. Because Jesus chose merciful kindness, took on the humble mantle of servant rather than king, and DID justice, society crucified him.

Adherence to that short list of requirements placed upon us by God is not simple at all. Most of the time, we fail.

Perhaps we fall short because we really do not want to remember what the word justice truly means to the people of God. We do not want to follow Jesus all the way to our own cross. We want to believe that what we don't do is more important to God than what we do. We reject Jesus' teachings of justice that tell us that we must give up our comfort, luxury, and prominence; and that we--the affluent, the comfortable--are going to be brought low, seated at the very end of the table far away from our Host. We abandon the biblical meaning and context of justice; allow the word to be appropriated, shaped and manipulated according to the will of society rather than by the will of God. And to comfort ourselves, to get ourselves off the hook for our own unwillingness to do justice as Jesus did, we accept a very narrow societal definition of justice that is most commonly associated with crime and punishment.

The greatest contemporary perversion of biblical justice is equating the attainment of justice with the imposition of punishment on criminal offenders. Rather than representing biblical justice that can redeem and restore all of creation, this cry for justice is too often reduced to the seeking of revenge.

Our criminal justice process allocates almost all of the available resources toward determination of guilt and

Chapter 6: **Criminal Justice**

then assigning punishment. Attention to victims is minimal; their needs are eclipsed by the retributive focus on the offenders. As offenders and their advocates try to deflect blame, deny personal responsibility, and manipulate the legal system, the end result is often a show of smoke and mirrors that does little to bind up the wounds of the broken-hearted, and offers nothing that proclaims the Good News.

But biblical justice mandates that different ends be sought by different means. Biblical justice does not go easy on offenders. Rather, it requires that offenders admit guilt, be held accountable and charged with righting the wrong they have perpetrated, to the fullest extent possible. The end result is redemption, restitution, and reconciliation.

Do you grow frustrated reading these words? Do you want to remind this writer that there are criminals in every town and every city who will do intentional harm to my loved ones and me? Crime is real and terrifying. Every 16 hours someone is murdered in North Carolina; rape is committed every 4 hours, robbery every 44 minutes, aggravated assault every 22 minutes, car theft every 21 minutes, burglary every 5 minutes, larceny every 2 minutes. Every day, the lives of many, many people are broken, destroyed, and forever changed by someone who does them personal and malicious harm. Yes, there are criminal offenders who will not or cannot accept responsibility for the hurt they have caused. They have not turned away from wrong doing, and given the opportunity they will harm again. And the question begs: How can a criminal offender offer restitution to a murder victim?

We all yearn for deliverance from the devastating impact of crime. Ultimately, we must go again to the Bible, and remember the stories of God's people who have gone before us. From the Bible, we know that God can save the wretched criminal, and that God will use such people to bring about the kingdom. Remember Jacob, through trickery and deception he stole his brother's sacred treasure. Remember David, who committed an intentional murder to cover his sin of adultery. Above all, remember Jesus--fully God, fully human--who willingly died so that the sins of each and every person could be forgiven and redeemed.

Remember Jesus. Remember how Jesus lived and what he taught about justice. Remember Jesus.

Remember that our God is so great that even the grave is rendered powerless. And remember that Jesus did not leave us abandoned without hope and purpose:

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1: 6 - 8 NRSV)

This very last time the apostles were with the risen Lord, they looked to him for deliverance of their people from oppression and injustice. They longed to know when God's justice would again reign. "When?" they asked. Jesus did not give them the answer they were seeking. Instead, he gave them an astounding answer to the question they did not ask, "How?"

Can it be that through the last words Jesus spoke before he was taken into heaven, he explained to his apostles that they would receive power to help restore the long-awaited kingdom through their witness? Can it possibly be that you and I, like the apostles, are sent by our Lord to teach as he taught, and to tell the world of the One whose presence and power could not be destroyed even by death? Can it be that God will use us to help bring about the kingdom on this earth, in the here and now? Oh, Risen Lord, let it be so! Given power by the Holy Spirit, we will go together into the dark pain-filled/hate-filled places throughout the world. As our Lord's witnesses, we will go anywhere and everywhere that the powerful dominate and exploit the weak, God-given resources are hoarded by the rich and denied to the poor, people are despised and tormented because of social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religious creed. In the name of Jesus, we will go where victims of crime suffer without relief, children learn wrong in order to survive, and criminal offenders do not yet know that biblical justice can be their salvation. We go, following our Lord who shows us the way now and forever as we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

**Vickie B. Sigmon, Church and Community Worker,
Open Arms Community of the United Methodist
Church, Winston-Salem.**

Did You Know?

- ❑ According to the Exodus Foundation (see To Learn More): (1) Although only 21% of North Carolinians are black, 70% of our prison population is African American; (2) 70% of ex-prisoners in NC will return to prison within 5 years; (3) NC has the 11th highest population in the U.S. and the 7th highest number of prisons; (4) Among states with the greatest racial disparities in prison populations, North Carolina ranks 21; (5) Overall, in the U.S., the vast majority of offenders (80%) are incarcerated for nonviolent drug-related crimes.
- ❑ Since the Supreme Court allowed states to reinstate the death penalty in 1976, 38 states allow the death penalty (although five of them have not used it). The U.S. Government and the U.S. military allow it. Twelve states and the District of Columbia have abolished the death penalty. NC has executed 31 people since 1976, and 188 persons are on our death row.
- ❑ The United States is the only democracy in the world that removes the right to vote from citizens who were convicted of crimes yet completed their sentences. Thirteen states do so, and this removes 4.7 million Americans, or 2% of voting-age citizens, from the rolls. About 1.8 million of those removed are African Americans. In North Carolina, those who commit misdemeanor offenses do not lose their voting rights. For felons, citizenship rights are restored after one completes the prison, jail, or probation sentence. However, many ex-convicts do not know they are re-enfranchised. (Delilah C. Summers, D&G Community Services, Greensboro)
- ❑ The NAACP and Allstate have a booklet, “The Law and You: Know Your Rights When Stopped by the Police.” They can send you free copies; call 1-888-505 4NPP.

UMC Social Principles: Criminal Justice and Restorative Justice

We support governmental measures designed to reduce and eliminate crime that are consistent with respect for the basic freedom of persons. We reject all misuse of these mechanisms, including their use for the purpose of revenge or for persecuting or intimidating those whose race, appearance, lifestyle, economic condition, or beliefs differ from those in authority. We reject all careless, callous or discriminatory enforcement of law that withholds justice from all non-English speaking persons and persons with disabilities. We further support measures designed to remove the social conditions that lead to crime.... In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole.

To Learn More...

Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, “a circle of mutual aid for those called to non-traditional gospel ministry;” 980 N. Fair Oaks Ave., Pasadena, CA 91103; 626-791-3568; inquiries@bcm-net.org; www.bcm-net.org.

Exodus Foundation, faith-based group to serve African-Americans who have been incarcerated or who are at risk for incarceration with a national community-based after-prison care program of mentoring and scholarships for college, trade school, or a GED. Rev. Dr. Madeline McClenney-Sadler, 704-947-9090; P.O. Box 480201 Charlotte, N.C 28269; www.exodusfoundation.org; exodus@exodusfoundation.org.

Families Against Mandatory Minimums-NC. LaFonda Jones, 1934-C James Hammer Way, Fayetteville, NC 28311; 910-273-8308; ljones@famm.org; www.famm.org.

Grassroots Leadership. Civil rights, community and labor organizing in the South since 1980. Current campaign to abolish for-profit private prisons, jails and detention centers. Naomi Swinton, 910-762-4255; nswinton@grassrootsleadership.org; www.grassrootsleadership.org; 524 South 4th Street, Wilmington, NC 28401.

People of Faith Against the Death Penalty. Sign a resolution for a death penalty moratorium in NC. Steve Dear, 919-933-7567; 110 W. Main St., Suite 2-G, Carrboro, NC 27510; www.pfadp.org; info@pfadp.org.

Profile: **Vickie B. Sigmon**



Vickie B. Sigmon is a Church and Community Worker, currently at the Open Arms Community of the United Methodist Church, Winston-Salem. "We offer the healing and redemptive love of Jesus Christ through Christian fellowship, church school, programs which address suffering caused by poverty, low academic achievement, substance abuse, domestic violence, and societal rejection. At Open Arms, church people are given the opportunity to more fully know God by serving the poor and marginalized."

What is the spiritual motivation for the work you do? I once was lost, but by God's amazing grace I now am found. Born into the culture of the working poor, the primary message I received from society during adolescence and early adulthood was rejection. Then the Church drew me into God's service—thereby affirming my value as a human being, naming talents I didn't know I had, and helping to liberate me from the societally inflicted wounds of rage, shame, and self destructive class-consciousness. As I am continually healed by the power of Jesus, I can better serve as a bridge between those whom society blesses and those whom society curses. Through God's eyes, I can see and feel the powerlessness of the poor, understand the abject brokenness of people who commit crimes. Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, I can try to help people born to power and privilege understand how they are complicit in injustice, what they can do to change their own lives, how they can help people whose lives are devastated by the violence of poverty and crime. If God can redeem and use a wretch like me to help with God's work, then God surely can and will bring about the Kingdom...here and now, on this earth.

Walk To Justice

"The word of God is everywhere. His truth shines." So said Winston-Salem's Darryl Hunt, finally freed and exonerated of all charges on Feb. 6, 2004, after 19 years in a North Carolina prison for a murder he did not commit. Strangely and beautifully, the Spirit shines through this man who could easily fume about his lost years of freedom and a miscarriage of justice reversed only after DNA revealed the real killer, who then confessed.

Hunt's widely publicized release came just before the retrial and release of death row prisoner Alan Gell of Bertie County. Prosecutors, it turned out, had withheld information indicating his innocence. In both cases, persistent advocacy resulted in the freeing of these men. In both cases, their home communities have wrapped their returning men in their arms, rebuilding and restoring. In both these cases, we are invited to think about our system of criminal justice and what it takes for real restoration, over a rush to punish.

We in America pride ourselves on being tough on crime. Although most modern countries have abolished the death penalty, the United States stands behind only China and The Democratic Republic of the Congo in the number of people we execute on death row. Television news stories center on crime more than on

any other topic, according to documentation by the Common Sense Foundation. The burgeoning security industry markets to our fears of intrusion or harm. Life can feel unsafe, and some of us live in parts of town that resemble war zones. All of this leads to a culture of conviction, an us/them mentality of retribution, not restoration.

In popular language, the word "justice" is most often attached to the word "criminal." Our social compact is that those who do harm must pay. Pay they do, as do we the taxpayers for imprisonment of convicts and those in jail. This year in North Carolina, according to Corrections Department statistics, 34,295 offenders are in prison, and 117,685 persons are on probation or parole; 32,010 men and 2,285 women are behind bars. Our Corrections budget was over \$906 million for the 2002-03 fiscal year. As of 2003, we had 73 state prisons and one private, not-for-profit prison in NC. More private prisons are in line to be built. The daily cost to incarcerate one prisoner in our state is about \$46 in a minimum-security prison, and \$76 in a maximum-security setting. That latter cost is \$27,000/year to lock a person up. In 2002 America had close to half a million corrections officers in our jails and prisons. The 2004-05 Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts that this job category will increase faster than the aver-

age for other occupations. We keep putting people behind bars; corrections is our growth industry.

The national Justice Policy Institute reports (News & Observer, Dec. 7, 2003) that in 1989, America's prison and jail population topped 1 million for the first time. Twelve years later, the number of inmates reached 2 million. In 2001, 5.6 million Americans had either served prison time or were in prison then--this is more than the population of 28 states plus the District of Columbia. We have the world's highest incarceration rate. This situation is the result of two decades of tough-on-crime political rhetoric, the war on drugs, and laws like mandatory minimum sentencing.

Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) is a national organization of prisoners, families, and allies who see the destructive effect of the lock-em-up-and-throw-away-the-key culture we have now. LaFonda Jones of Fayetteville is the NC Project Director of FAMM. She has data to show how we as taxpayers lose money and gain no benefits with our harsh prison policies. "North Carolina's taxpayers cannot afford to continue to lock up small-fry crooks for years on end. It is time for North Carolina to get "Smart on Crime."

Elaine Enns of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries has spent years as a mediator. In a newsletter, she describes the difference between retributive justice--the kind we have as the basis of our adversarial court process and prison system, and restorative justice.

When faced with a crime, the Criminal Justice System asks three questions: (1) Was the law broken? (2) Who did it? and (3) What punishment do they deserve? Neither the social relationship between the victim and the offender, nor the deeper meaning of the events is addressed. In contrast, Restorative Justice sees crime as fundamentally a violation of people and relationships and it poses three very different questions: (1) Who was harmed? (2) What are the needs of those who were harmed? (*e.g., victims may want to know why the violation occurred; they may want to offender to know the pain they suffer from the offense; and the community needs to repair the sense of civility and mutual accountability*) (3) Who is responsible to meet these needs?

Jesus asked those who would stone an offending woman to death to stop, to reflect on their own sins,

and be led by compassion, not the law. He asked sinners to cease their sinning, but also would not stand for revenge. When a fearful Peter cut off the soldier's ear in the garden at Jesus' arrest, Jesus put the ear back on. Likewise, we can think about our own fear and anger when harmed, and move toward that Jesus way. Who might harbor more vengeance than a relative of someone cut down by crime? By grace, some murder victim's families do not seek the death penalty, claiming more killing will not take away the pain or make them whole. Tom Fewel, who lost his daughter to murder, says this: "I am glad that, in my daughter's case, another life was not taken, for redemption remains a perpetual possibility."

Following this path, and seeking a pause to fix the kind of system that produced the Hunt and Gell tragedies, people of Faith Against the Death Penalty along with many other organizations and allies are seeking a moratorium on the death penalty in North Carolina. Our state is taking leadership here, and your congregation can help (See To Learn More). On the larger scale of international peacemaking, David Portori of Cary started an organization of 9/11 victims' families, called Peaceful Tomorrows (www.peacefultomorrows.org). All these survivors reject the notion that their relatives' deaths must be avenged by war. They instead seek nonviolent solutions to terrorism.

As Vickie Sigmon in the biblical reflection says, scripture makes plain that restoration is the Jesus way, and vengeance is not. We can keep building more prisons, but does that make you really safe? We can keep naming and warring against enemies abroad, but does that increase real understanding and build a more harmonious world? We can demonize young people who use drugs to ease their pain and lock them away, but does this restore those persons and their families? We know that the injury/revenge wheel just keeps turning, unless we heed the Jesus message and love our enemies. The area of criminal justice offers us a clear choice between the way of the world, punishment, and the way of God, restoration of the whole community. The To Learn More section and Chapter 11 Additional Resources offer ways to study and participate in restorative justice programs in North Carolina.

"An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

Dr. Martin Luther King

Discussion Questions

1. What is your personal experience with the criminal justice system?
2. How do you feel when you hear that the apostle Paul is a murderer? What does that mean in the context of our criminal justice system?
3. Jesus said: “I was in prison and you visited me.” How do you see Jesus in a prisoner?
4. Is your congregation involved in any kind of prison ministry, re-entry program, etc.?

Notes:

All through those weary first days in jail when I was in solitary confinement, the only thoughts that brought comfort to my soul were those lines in the Psalms that expressed the terror and misery of man suddenly stricken and abandoned. Solitude and hunger and weariness of spirit - these sharpened my perceptions so that I suffered not only my own sorrow but the sorrows of those about me. I was no longer myself. I was man. I was no longer a young girl, part of a radical movement seeking justice for those oppressed. I was the oppressed. I was that drug addict, screaming and tossing in her cell, beating her head against the wall. I was that shoplifter who for rebellion was sentenced to solitary. I was that woman who had killed her children, who had murdered her lover. The blackness of hell was all about me. The sorrows of the world encompassed me. I was like one gone down into the pit. Hope had forsaken me. I was that mother whose child had been raped and slain. I was the mother who had borne the monster who had done it. I was even that monster, feeling in my own heart every abomination.

Dorothy Day

Chapter 7: Education

Scripture and Reflection

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Luke 4: 18-19

Quoting Isaiah 61, Jesus began his ministry in the Synagogue in which he grew up in Nazareth with these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

In our society, freedom from oppression in no small way relates to access to opportunity. And for the marginalized, opportunity relates inexorably to viability within the public school system.

A commitment to and reverence for education is taken for granted in America. There is, however, a segment of our society for whom this is not true. For all too many families in poverty, public education represents an unhappy experience. As a consequence, education, the surest pathway out of poverty, often is not valued by those who could benefit most from it. In a fundamental way, this sense of alienation and failure to value education is contributing greatly to the "Achievement Gap" for minorities in our schools. From the positive side, a noted expert in child development, when asked why high-quality preschool programs have such a positive effect on children in need, replied: "Because parent and child come to value education."

Our public education system is a legacy, a gift to which each child is entitled. Thirteen years of public schooling, at an investment of roughly \$5,000.00 per child per year, amounts to \$65,000.00. This legacy represents a universal opportunity for self-advancement and learning. Or does it? If a child arrives at kindergarten woefully unprepared, that child is in effect "disinherited," the legacy unattainable. If the church is serious about improving education for those less fortunate in our society, it must begin by focusing

on ways to insure that no children are disinherited from our public school system.

There are two unacceptable consequences to a lack of school readiness and ability to participate in the classroom. First, because the child "cannot do what the other children do," he or she is destined to fail in school. The trajectory for a child's performance in school is normally set before arrival and no later than first grade. What portends this outcome that ultimately leads to school dropout? One of the greatest predictors of success in school is the educational level of the parents, especially the mother. Consequently, the problem is cyclical.

The second unacceptable consequence is the child's effect on the classroom. Ill-prepared children are the anchors of their class and, more often than not, the discipline problems. The teacher must pace the entire class to our disinherited children not because they are the least able but rather the least prepared. Frustrated by failure, their behavior may become increasingly antisocial, and as they reach middle school, may lead to juvenile delinquency in disproportionate numbers. Adequately prepared children represent a rising tide that lifts all ships.

This is not a secondary issue in our public schools. Talk to any elementary school principal who serves substantial numbers of inadequately prepared children and you will find a high percentage of his or her time and energy is consumed with discipline. Multiply that by the number of teachers in the school and the dimensions of the problem are easily recognizable.

If the church is serious about educational opportunities for all, these are critical points of engagement, starting with the issue of school readiness. Educators at the middle school and high school level accurately tell us

Chapter 7: **Education**

that children can still be reached and remarkable "turn-arounds" are possible; but, for many students who have experienced frustration and failure at the elementary school level, it may be too late.

The "Achievement Gap" is a complex problem taken very seriously by our public school system. If the church is serious about educational opportunities for all, these are critical points of engagement, starting with the issue of school readiness.

Robin Britt, Executive Director, United Child Development Services, Guilford County



Education advocates speak out about unfair testing, May 2000, legislative press conference sponsored by Education and Law Project.

(Photo by Phyllis Nunn, NC Justice and Community Development Center)

Did You Know?

- ❑ NC has 100 county school systems and 17 city school systems; we have 1,774 elementary schools (grades 1-8), 338 secondary schools (grades 9-12), and 93 NC charter schools. In our public school system, NC had 1,303,777 students during the 2002-2003 school year. NC school students speak over 150 different languages.
- ❑ NC public schools have over 19,000 American Indian students, about 27,000 Asian students, over 415,000 African American students (many in charter schools), about 78,000 Hispanic students, and around 785,000 white students. Over 166,000 full-time personnel run our public schools, and the total cost for the state school system (in 2001-02) was around \$8.5 billion. Federal, state, and local dollars cover this cost. Voluntary contributions by teachers, parents, and communities add a tremendous uncounted amount.
- ❑ Average SAT scores in NC versus the U.S. in 2002: Verbal: NC 493/U.S. 504; Math: NC 505/U.S. 516.
- ❑ Average teachers' salaries in 2001-02: NC = \$42,680; U.S.: \$44,683. NC Rank in U.S. = 19.
- ❑ Of all NC high schoolers, only around 60% graduate. Students are more likely to be retained in 9th grade than at any other time during their schooling; 15% are held back that year.
- ❑ Standardized testing is controversial. See the Common Sense Foundation's report for information on standardized testing and what parents can do, at: www.ncjustice.org/edlaw/closerlook.pdf.

UMC Social Principle: Education

We believe responsibility for education of the young rests with the family, the church, and the government. In our society, this function can best be fulfilled through public policies that ensure access for all persons to free public elementary and secondary schools and to post-secondary schools of their choice. Persons in our society should not be precluded by financial barriers from access to church-related and other independent institutions of higher education. We affirm the right of public and independent colleges and universities to exist, and we endorse public policies that ensure access and choice and that do not create unconstitutional entanglements between church and state. The state should not use its authority to promote particular religious beliefs (including atheism), nor should it require prayer or worship in the public schools, but it should leave students free to practice their own religious convictions. The state should not prohibit the free exercise of voluntary prayer in public schools or at other public occasions. It is vital that we not misinterpret the rightful separation of church and state as the abolition of all religious expression from public view.

To Learn More...

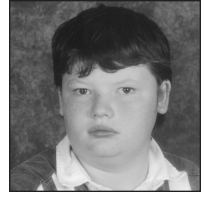
Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001; 202 628-8787; cdinfo@childrensdefense.org; www.childrensdefense.org. All kinds of information on children's needs and advocacy. Special faith-based materials for liturgies, civic participation, etc.

Division of Non-Public Education, central website for home schooling: www.doa.state.nc.us/dnpe.

Education and Law Project. Works to improve the public education system in NC so it better serves low-income and minority children, through parent advocacy training, explaining school policies, legal cases, providing resources, etc. Information on high-stakes testing, and the achievement gap. NC Justice and Community Development Center, P.O. Box 28068, 224 S. Dawson St., Raleigh, NC 27611; 919-856-2570; sheria@ncjustice.org; www.ncjustice.org.

NC Department of Public Instruction. Web site provides information you may need: www.ncpublicschools.org.

NC Council of Churches. Public Education Sabbath--materials for liturgy, information on how congregations can support public education in NC; www.nccouncilofchurches.org, Resources section.

Profile: **William Cloe**

William Cloe is 14 years old and a middle school student in Aulander, NC, in Bertie County. He goes to All God's Children UMC, and participates in the Junior Senate sponsored by the pastor, The Rev. Laura Early. Students in the Junior Senate "study laws that affect families, do worksheets on this, take trips to Raleigh and Washington to meet with officials and be part of programs. We host a radio show called *We Have Issues*. We went to a march in Washington, DC, about the No Child Left Behind law."

Why I am part of the Junior Senate: *I feel led to work for social justice because I know how it feels to have your family struggle to pay the house payments and the light bill. I know what it's like to live without insurance and not get the medicine you need or the glasses so you can see. And knowing what it feels like to live like this motivates me to help out so other people don't have to go through the same thing. I believe that it is part of faith to work with laws because the children and families suffer from some laws, laws that keep kids from having Medicaid when they need it. And when people suffer because of unfair government laws, it may bring them further away from God. And I along with others in the Junior Senate take it on ourselves to try to help them, by bringing them the things they need, through God.*

Walk To Justice

Education stems from the Latin root meaning "lead out of." We are a country that has decided it is valuable to lead all young people out of ignorance and into some basic understanding of reading, writing, mathematics, science, world affairs, and citizenship.

Early on in America, as in many Third World countries, education was a privilege of the rich, not an entitlement for all as we have now. Slaves (including some Native Americans in NC, whom many of us do not realize were also enslaved) were forbidden to learn to read and write. Slaveholders knew that education meant empowerment, perhaps rebellion. In rural areas especially, all nonwhites were intentionally kept from reading; literacy was not promoted in many areas until very recently. Manufacturers often underplayed literacy because of the need for non-literate workers who would stay in low-paying jobs.

Here is some history of the education system in our state from the NC Department of Public Instruction and other sources. We can see that commitment came late, and with struggle--a struggle that continues now.

Colonial times: Wealthy people and religious groups educated some children privately; no public education was provided.

1776, State Constitution. Authorized schools to set up and operate, but the General Assembly offered no funding.

1825, the General Assembly (NCGA) started the Literary Fund for public schools and a State Board to manage it. But funding was very low and most places still did not have public schools.

1839, the NCGA permitted each county to vote for or against a school tax to fund their schools.

1852, the NCGA created the Office of Superintendent of Common Schools.

Civil War. The war wiped out money for public education, which was virtually eradicated during this time.

1868, new NC constitution. This document authorized a uniform system of public schools paid for by taxation, and to be free for children between 6 and 21 years of age. But this Constitution was unpopular, considered "carpetbagging." In 1869, the NCGA authorized education for African Americans. However, most of the financial burden for schools fell to cities and towns; schools were mostly funded by local taxes. Education in rural areas did not recover from the Civil War until the turn of the century.

1901, the NCGA made the first direct appropriation for public schools. In **1907,** the NCGA authorized the establishment of rural high schools. In **1913,** they passed the first compulsory attendance act, for ages 8 to 12, to attend 4 months/year.

1910, Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., became aware of the sad state of

education among African Americans in the rural South. He helped build more than 5,300 schools from Maryland to Texas between the late 1910s and 1932. More than 800 were built in North Carolina, more than in any other state.

1914 and 1917, federal funding came for some courses. In **1919** the NC Constitution was amended to mandate school for 6 months/year.

1929 and the Depression. Locally funded schools mostly withered. The NCGA decided to save public schooling; with The School Machinery Act in **1933**, the school term was expanded to 8 months/year; counties were established as the basic school unit of governance; and the state began to pay for books and supplies.

1942, State Board of Education was established. Shortly after, compulsory attendance age went from 14 to 16, 12th grade was added, the school term went to 9 months/year, the school lunch program was added, and public funds were authorized for special education of the handicapped.

1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* outlawed racial segregation in schools.

1975, free education was guaranteed to all children 5-18 no matter what handicap and its cost. Pre-1974, schools could refuse to educate those with disabilities.

1978, universal public kindergarten was funded.

1979, non-public school responsibility was removed from the State Board of Education.

Since then, several school improvement and accountability programs have been instituted: **1985**--Basic Education Plan; **1989**, School Improvement and Accountability Act. The No Child Left Behind reform is a current and controversial federal mandate. Our state is in the process of complying with the **2002** Leandro court decision brought by low-wealth school districts that wanted the state to remedy historic gaps where localities could not pay for educational needs.

We can see that achieving full, fair, effective, and well-funded public education is an ongoing quest in our state. Questions arise when we talk about who really deserves a good education, how do we pay for it, and who is in charge of it. When housing patterns mean racially separated and class-divided communities, how does the school system fit in as an equalizer? Should it? How do we design a system welcoming to all cultures in a changing ethnic environment?

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Mike

Ward, is also an active United Methodist lay person who often speaks of the role of the church in public education. He recommends that people of faith “take as a mission to make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable kids.” Help close the achievement gap by tutorials, after-school programs. He expressed concern about the resegregation of our schools, and says we should “stand up and be heard” to stop this return to old patterns. We “abdicate our responsibility,” he says, if we only think of our own children and not the best plan for the community as a whole. Ward wants to hear from the pulpit a call to young adults to enter the “vocation of teaching.” Churches can give scholarships to students, he added, and support programs to subsidize housing for teachers, who can make less than a living wage.

In this complex world of education issues, here are a few thoughts to consider as people of faith:

The test of the educational system is whether it works for those who are least privileged, whom Jesus would call the “least and the last.” As programs, policies, and budgets are formed and cut, the effect on those most in need should be our primary concern. “For the last shall be first.”

The mustard seed principle applies here. Start with your local school, noticing small things, asking questions: *What happens when some cannot afford the field trip fee? How are we trying to make it easier for parents far away and without cars to be part of the school?*

“Come to me,” said Jesus to the children. All of them were dear to him. Are the kids of other parents as valuable to us as our own children? Do we look at what is best for all the young people, or just for our own, especially in questions of redistricting, busing, suspensions, funding?

The biblical reflection here asks us to make sure no child is “disinherited” from school systems. These systems can seem huge and impenetrable. Help is available to decode school policies and to stand alongside of and empower parents with concerns. See especially the NC Justice Center’s Education Law Project (To Learn More). The Children’s Defense Fund helps us understand Congressional educational proposals.

Maybe your congregation is already partnering with a local school; maybe you are a hard-working teacher, tutor, parent advocate, or administrator. Thanks and praise to all who look out for the the young ones.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** What has been your experience with the public education system?
- 2.** Does your congregation have any formal relationship with a local school, or run an after-school program or similar ministry? How is ministry with our most vulnerable children a ministry with Christ?
- 3.** Some say that free public education is the bedrock of our democracy. More and more parents are home schooling or sending children to private schools. What do you think this trend means?
- 4.** What do you think is the most important thing that could be done to improve public education in North Carolina? How might you or your congregation help that be accomplished?

Notes:



Youth from All God's Children UMC, Aulander, NC at a legislative rally by NC Alliance for Economic Justice

Chapter 8: The Earth

Scripture and Reflection

Leviticus 25: 23-24; Deuteronomy 5:7; Psalm 104:10-24; Matthew 6:19-21, 24-27, 33

For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6: 21

Susan Carlyle, the profiled person in this section, offered us this entire chapter. Here are her words. “In this section, I am using the New International Version of the Bible, the one we read at home. I’d like to take you in chronological order in the Bible, beginning with the part of the Old Testament with the laws. Then, I’ll move to the beauty of the Psalms and then go to the New Testament and the specific teachings of Jesus. I’ll tell you what speaks to my heart in these verses, but feel free to go into your own heart as well!”

Leviticus 25:23-24

The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

As part of the law, we are told that the land is not ours, and we are God’s tenants. We must be good stewards of the land. This is really clear. There are so many false gods in our lives today. They call to us for our attention and our money and our hearts. We must be really on guard to determine which messages from the world need our attention.

Psalm 104:10-24

He makes springs pour water into the ravines: it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate--bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine

trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the conies. The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Even as a child, the Psalms were my favorites. They are poetic and musical. Here is where the beauty and the bounty of our land is described. The power of God is made clear, as is his generosity to the beasts, the birds, the cattle and the plants and trees. The description of the mountains, the springs, the trees and the sun and the moon are uplifting and help us connect with nature to see our interdependence with all living things. It talks about the plants that God made for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth, wine to gladden the heart, oil to make the face shine and bread to sustain the heart.

Matthew 6:19-21, 24-27, 33

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also. No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds in

Chapter 8: **The Earth**

the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

What is most striking to me, here, is the part about where my heart is and where my treasure is. Yes, they need to be in the same place! We are asked not to worry about our clothes and our food, but to trust in God and be faithful. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things will be given to you as well. This is both an assurance as well as a challenge because this is hard to do. Putting your faith in the provider is really difficult and requires that we let go of so many of our fears and expectations. It also means getting our priorities in order and making time in our lives for the things that are truly important. We must pray for trust and for the release from anxiety.

Matthew 19:21-26

Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'

The Bible has a lot to say about wealth. Sell your possessions and give to the poor? I think it also means getting rid of the things in our lives that interfere with our seeking God first. These things are "superfluities" and take our minds and hearts away from the spiritual things that are really important.

Luke 12:48

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Now, we must be prepared to take care of what we have been given and be prepared to give something back. That may mean giving to your community or to your church and sharing more of your talents.

Here is a gift from a Quaker friend of mine in

Tennessee. I hope you can enjoy it and think about the application in our own lives.

Ten Commandments to Save the Planet, Rachel Bliss

1. Thou shall value all of creation around us with wonder, working in the Light to preserve this gift for countless generations.
2. Thou shall treasure every resource, while also encouraging the development of renewable and clean energy to fuel homes, businesses and vehicles.
3. Thou shall make each day sacred, a day in which you waste nothing and acquire as little as possible.
4. Thou shall add environmental stewardship to your family, civic and congregational values.
5. Thou shall reuse and recycle earth's gifts, striving always to buy reusable, not disposable products.
6. Thou shall speak up in defense of the earth, protecting it from rape or its beauty from being destroyed for short term, unnecessary and narrow interests.
7. Thou shall treasure and take responsibility for the land, air and water, sharing these life-giving forces with all of earth's creatures.
8. Thou shall act with integrity in your everyday actions on earth. Invest in environmentally responsible businesses (local when possible). Exercise by walking or biking instead of driving. Conserve when you consume. Work in solidarity with those burdened under environmental injustices.
9. Thou shall remember that caring and committed relationships bring more satisfaction than the attainment of a myriad of material goods.
10. Likewise, just because your neighbor seems to have everything, thou shall live simply with less and at peace with creation.

Did You Know?

- ☐ In the United States there are more shopping malls than high schools.
- ☐ The U.S. produces 25% of greenhouse gas emissions (believed to contribute to global warming) and we have only 4½ % of the world's population.
- ☐ The average U.S. citizen consumes 10 times more energy than the average Chinese, 20 times more than the average Indian.
- ☐ New homes were 38% larger in 2000 than in 1975, despite fewer people living in each average household.
- ☐ About 25% of the world's automobiles are on U.S. roads.
- ☐ It takes 24 gallons of water to produce a pound of potatoes; 2,000 gallons of water to produce a pound of beef.
- ☐ 7 people could be supported by one acre in beans or grain. Only one person can be supported by one acre in meat production.
- ☐ U.S. workers, on average, put in 350 more hours per year on the job than their European counterparts to afford "greater" consumer lifestyles.

UMC Social Principles: The Earth, and Sustainable Agriculture

All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. A prerequisite for meeting the nutritional needs of the world's population is an agricultural system which uses sustainable methods, respects ecosystems, and promotes a livelihood for people that work the land. We support a sustainable agricultural system that will maintain and support the natural fertility of agricultural soil, promote the diversity of flora and fauna, and adapt to regional conditions and structures--a system where agricultural animals are treated humanely and where their living conditions are as close to natural systems as possible. We aspire to an effective agricultural system where plant, livestock, and poultry production maintains the natural ecological cycles, conserves energy, and reduces chemical input to a minimum. Sustainable agriculture requires a global evaluation of the impact of agriculture on food and raw material production, the preservation of animal breeds and plant varieties, and the preservation and development of the cultivated landscape. World trade of agricultural products needs to be based on fair trade and prices, based on the costs of sustainable production methods, and must consider the real costs of ecological damage. The needed technological and biological developments are those that support sustainability and consider ecological consequences.

To Learn More...

Caring for Creation: Reflections on the Biblical Basis for Earthcare. Lisa L. Gould, Quaker Earthcare Witness; www.quakerearthcare.org.

Healing Ourselves and the Earth. Elizabeth Watson, 1995, also from Quaker Earthcare Witness.

Responsible Purchasing Guide for Faith Communities. The Center for a New American Dream, www.newdream.org.

Global Warming and God's Creation. Video of the NC Council of Churches; 919-828-6501.

How Much Is Enough? The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth. Alan Durning, The Worldwatch Environmental Alert Series, WW Norton Co., ISBN 0-393-30891-x.

Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective. Published in cooperation with Earth Ministry. Living the Good News, Morehouse Group, ISBN 1-88908-62-6

Profile: **Kim and Susan Carlyle**



Kim calls himself a “homesteader/activist.” Susan calls herself a “domestic goddess.” Their work is on the land in Barnardsville, NC, in the western part of the state. “We grow most of our own food and eat primarily what is in season.” Susan writes and teaches about Simpler Living and Kim speaks and writes on Global Climate Change and why this is a concern for people of faith. “We emphasize the importance of daily decision making in choosing our food, homes, transportation, livelihood and how we spend our time and money.”

How does your faith lead you into your call of caring for the earth?

As Quakers, we believe that there is "that of God" in everyone and in every living thing. Our testimonies of Peace, Justice, Integrity, Earthcare and Simplicity are the outward manifestations of the Spirit within. George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), called us to be patterns and examples in all we do. To live in right order, we felt that we must put God first in our life: laying down all false gods such as money, power, pride and things. What began as an attempt to live more lightly on the earth and to have more time for inward retirement, became a spiritual exercise, one of mindfulness. For there to be a right sharing of world resources, we need to make changes in the way we think, the way we live, and the way we consume. The survival of God's creation depends upon our willingness to address the fragility of Creation.

Walk To Justice

Caring for the Earth is, to me, all about false gods. It means asking: What is important? Possessions? Money? Time? It may mean asking: Is this the best possible use of the world's resources? Why would I be asking these questions? Perhaps as a spiritual practice? As a means to make a smaller ecological footprint? Perhaps, it's for both of these reasons.

When Kim and I merged our lives in 1994, we had at least two of everything--two jobs, two cars, two houses and more. We started to realize that although we had plenty, what we really wanted was: less. We started scaling down by giving things away, spending more time at home reading, playing games, and bicycling. We had begun our marriage without a television, so we had plenty of time for talking with each other to compare dreams. We stopped eating meat. We went from two cars to one. We erected a clothesline in the yard. We began reviving old skills like making bread, wine, beer and yogurt. We started cutting each other's hair! Then came the home energy audit. That was an eye opener. We did research on solar technology and on independent homes and began planning. Could we do it? Could we live somewhere with no need for an electric bill or a water bill? Could we live where we could grow our own food for most of the year? Could we reduce our need for money such that we could quit our

jobs and retire at age 50? What began as an ecological and economic exercise, we slowly began to realize was becoming a spiritual practice, that of mindfulness.

We moved from the Chicago area to the mountains of North Carolina. Our land has a good quality spring 150 feet above the home site, providing gravity fed water. We built a small passive solar house. We installed a solar hot water system and put photovoltaic panels on the roof to generate and supply our electricity. That put us in a place to make some more decisions. Because there was no local trash pick up available in our rural community, we began our "no garbage" lifestyle. That meant thinking before buying, making or growing it instead of buying. It meant minimizing the use of manufactured products to avoid the packaging, the chemicals, and the trip to town to get them. We planted a large garden with a lot of perennial vegetables like rhubarb, asparagus and mushrooms. We planted things that we thought would store well (in a cool place) over the winter months (white and sweet potatoes, winter squash, onions, garlic, peppers and herbs) and did a lot of food preservation, canning and drying fruits and vegetables. Berry bushes, grape vines and fruit trees rounded out the food sources. We built a cold frame and a garden cloche to extend the season so we could grow greens throughout the winter.

Living this way makes us pay attention to the weather, not only for the garden, but for the presence of the sun that we depend upon for our electricity and hot water. It means being mindful of how much electricity we use when the sun is not shining. The water from our spring is what we use for washing clothes, bathing, cooking, and drinking. We need to be mindful during times of drought that this resource is not unlimited, by any means. Living this way points out the importance of having and maintaining good health.

Some of the other changes that took place as a result of this lifestyle transformation were more gradual. We unplugged ourselves from the mass media and began relying on alternative publications for news of the outside world. We began giving tours to university students who were studying energy or sustainability. We began building local community by sharing seeds or abundant produce, starting a food-buying cooperative, and carpooling. Just imagine what it would feel like to disconnect from the local grocery store. It's a radical step, but one that feels so right. We know where our food comes from and that it is free of pesticides and chemicals. We now only buy whatever food we cannot grow, in bulk quantities, through our local food co-op. We find that we eat out less often and that we enjoy what is in season in our garden, or in storage in the pantry or the root cellar.

Our efforts to curb our use of fossil fuel have made for positive changes. Since we limit our trips to town, we have more time for homesteading activities, for inward retirement or reflection, and for friends and neighbors. Since we are forty miles away from our Quaker Meeting, we began a small worship group in our little community. We travel long distance by bicycle, Greyhound bus, or Amtrak trains. This often shocks our family and friends and sometimes requires an explanation. And we put ourselves, and our automobile, on a mileage budget with a trip log, a constant reminder to reduce the total miles driven in a year. As a spiritual practice, we have begun regular Sabbath-keeping from sundown on Sixth-day until sundown on Seventh-day. We light a candle as a reminder that this day, especially, is for living lightly. It is a day for being especially mindful and less busy. It is a day for staying home, reading, doing things that we love to do or things that fill the spirit, sometimes even fasting. It's a day for connecting with each other.

The biggest surprise of our new life was the realization that our lives have become richer in all respects. We feel in tune with the natural world and have the time to enjoy the moments as they happen. Our lives lack the complexity of most, but we are more mindful of how we spend our time, our money, and where our food comes from. Living this way is not always easy. It might be easier just to ignore the devastating effects of overconsumption in the world, such as the disappearance of species. We need to make changes because a major transformation in the way we live and the way we relate to the natural systems that support life is vital for a future that includes peace, justice and happiness. I have described a path to living an ecologically integrated life. It does not matter where you are on the path. What matters is that you are on the path and are considering some changes to your own way of doing things.

Embrace silence daily
Connect with nature and the planet
Stay home more and be less busy
Say "no" more often to requests for your
energy and time
Drive less and advocate for better local
transportation options
Give your car a day off each week
Be a non-consumer
Spend mindfully and locally
Give stuff away--less to care for or insure
Eat food in season, grown locally
Convert a garden to organic
Unplug your T.V.
Install a clothesline
Share tools and seeds
Use less water
Buy energy-efficient appliances
Use non-toxic cleaning materials
Explore low-cost leisure such as hikes and potluck
meals
Rethink your wants and needs
Buy in bulk to minimize wasteful packaging
Use compact florescent bulbs in your home
Fix instead of replace
Examine all holiday practices to see if they are
in line with your values
Reduce debts
Exercise daily
Be grateful.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** What is the last thing you bought that you really didn't need? What motivated the purchase?
- 2.** What are some of the false gods that can often demand our attention?
- 3.** Do I endeavor to live in harmony with nature and exert care in the use of the world's irreplaceable resources?
- 4.** Do I regard my possessions as given to me in trust, and do I part with them freely for the needs of others?
Why is this important to God?

Notes:



Chapter 9: Government and Citizenship

Scripture and Reflection

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Isaiah 61: 1-2

Moving from Charity to Justice

Outreach to those in need is a fundamental and recurring theme in the scriptures. Jesus asks the question: "What have you done for the least of mine?" Henri Nouwen interprets Jesus' question as being "precisely what the last judgment is all about." Nouwen concludes:

The day of judgment is in fact the day of recognition, the day on which we see for ourselves what we have done to our brothers and sisters, and how we have treated the divine body of which we are a part. Thus the question, 'What have you done for the least of mine?' is not only the question of injustice and the question of peace, it is also the question by which we judge ourselves.

As a nation, how are we doing for the "least of these?" A quote usually attributed to Mahatma Gandhi says: "A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats the weakest and most vulnerable of its citizens." By this measure, America falls woefully short.

Nearly ten years ago the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church issued a call to arms for an "Episcopal Initiative" calling Methodists to a "new level of dedication and commitment on behalf of children and the impoverished." That Initiative stated: "Public policy decisions that affect the children and the impoverished urgently need participation by the Church in the local, state, national, and world political arenas. The time is now for the Church to become the voice of the voiceless."

The Initiative strongly made the connection between public policy, engagement with the poor and our biblical call as Christians and Methodists: "The biblical witness and our Wesleyan tradition clearly affirm that

separation from 'the least of these' robs the affluent of abundant life. Relationships of justice and mercy between the wealthy and the impoverished are means of transforming grace to both."

The Initiative also cited John Wesley's fear for a church that fails to respond to its biblical calling:

The American church may be fulfilling Wesley's fear of the consequences of affluence and separation from the impoverished: having the form of religion but lacking its power.

To be an authentic voice for the poor, the church must first engage with those for whom it would advocate. We cannot speak with authenticity until we share the experience of others, listen to their stories and understand at the deepest level possible their circumstances. Furthermore, it is not enough to engage those who shape our society solely at a superficial policy level. Advocacy must address the human suffering and our foundations of justice. As theologian and author Carlo Caretto puts it: "No, brothers and sisters, it is not enough to change laws. You have to change hearts."

To become the "voice of the voiceless," the church must make its voice heard by those in position to make justice a deeper reality in our system. The church needs to make its presence felt before the City Council, the School Board, the County Commissioners, the General Assembly, the court system, the Congress and the vast array of governmental agencies. This advocacy has nothing to do with, nor does it violate, the separation of church and state. Advocacy for justice is at the heart of democracy. It has everything to do with our faithfulness to our biblical calling.

Robin Britt, Executive Director, United Child Development Services, Guilford County



2003 legislative rally about the state budget, NC Alliance for Economic Justice

Did You Know?

- ❑ Over 1 million voting-age citizens in North Carolina are not registered to vote. In the last presidential election, only half (49.6%) of the voting-age adults in North Carolina went to the polls. About 55% of the registered voters in North Carolina are women and 45% are men; just over 1 in 5 (22%) of the registered voters are people of color. (Democracy-NC)
- ❑ There is an alternative to the money race to win elections in America. "Clean Elections" programs are in place in 5 states (Maine, Arizona, Vermont, NC, and New Mexico). In NC, statewide judicial candidates can draw from a publicly supported fund if they accept strict spending and fundraising limits. The money in the fund comes from contributions by attorneys and others and from a check-off you can mark on your state tax returns: \$3 of your already-paid taxes then moves to this fund. You lose no money, but gain a nonpartisan voter guide and assurance of a more impartial judiciary. With Clean Elections (also called Voter-Owned Elections), qualified candidates are not dependent on money from donors seeking influence. Candidates more representative of average people are being elected, and they are accountable to all the voters, not just their "cash constituency."
- ❑ Electronic voting can be inaccurate; machines generally leave no paper trail and the software is open to failure and computer hacking. Ideally, we would return to paper ballots with verified manual counts.
- ❑ In the face of increasing anonymity and loss of community in our culture, local civic engagement is rapidly becoming a field of study and practice. Some of the (old-fashioned with a new twist) methods are: conversation cafes, public conversation projects, dialog circles, national issues forums, citizen juries, truth and reconciliation commissions, citizen summits, etc. All these involve "deep democracy," listening to and understanding one another before advocating a position, and looking for healing and wholeness, as contrasted with adversarial activism that can lead to the distrust of experts and large institutions.

UMC Social Principle: Political Responsibility

The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. We believe that the state should not attempt to control the church, nor should the church seek to dominate the state. Separation of church and state means no organic union of the two, but it does permit interaction. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.

To Learn More...

Democracy-NC. See how money affects politics in NC and what you can do about it. Access to an archive of ground-breaking reports on money in North Carolina's elections. Sign up to receive action alerts and updates on events and training. Beth Messersmith, 1-888-687-8683; www.democracy-nc.org; info@democracy-nc.org.

Fannie Lou Hamer Project. National education and advocacy organization for equal opportunity for everyone to participate in the political process regardless of race, gender or economic status and access to wealth. Rev. Carrie Bolton, 919-542-4111; carriebolton@democracy-nc.org; www.flhp.org.

League of Women Voters of North Carolina. 10000 Four Mile Creek Rd., Charlotte, NC 28277; Peg Chapin, 704-846-2540; www.lwvnc.org; ehchapin@aol.com.

NC General Assembly website. Learn who represents you, daily happenings, bills, etc.; www.ncleg.net.

Public Campaign. Nationwide watchdog organization publishes reports on money in politics and provides resources and statistics highlighting the need for clean elections and campaign finance reform; www.publiccampaign.org.

Profile: **Paula Wolf**

Paula Wolf was for years Chief Lobbyist for the Covenant with North Carolina's Children, and Senior Fellow, NC Child Advocacy Institute. She is respected and recognized for her effective public interest lobbying in the NC General Assembly for policies and programs that keep children and families strong.



How my faith called me into legislative advocacy:

I was raised in a working-class, secular, culturally Jewish home in Chicago. We did not belong to a temple and, because I was a girl, a Jewish education was not required. My mother, who was legally blind, taught me by her shining example that there was always work to do for those who were less fortunate. My mother was a brilliant fundraiser as a volunteer for HIAS, the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society that sponsored Holocaust survivors and other Jewish immigrants for citizenship in the United States. She also was one of the founders of the Home for the Jewish Blind in Chicago. She was a life member of Hadassah (a women's organization for the strength and unity of Jewish people). My mother would not have recognized the Hebrew word tzedakah but she understood its meaning deeply and lived her life Jewishly. The word tzedakah is derived from the Hebrew root Tzade-Dalet-Qof, meaning righteousness, justice or fairness. In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous, magnanimous act; it is simply an act of justice and righteousness, the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due.

Is there a flag in your sanctuary? Do candidates for public office come and speak to your congregation, asking for support? Do you have an opinion on vouchers for religious schools? Is your position on war based on your interpretation of scripture? Do you as a person of faith look at upcoming bills in Congress or here in NC and voice your concerns based on your biblical principles? Are you adamant that government should not pay for social programs based in churches, or that we should? Would you rather dig a ditch or fry cornbread than think about all this?

Church and politics--what a volatile combination. Debates flare around what Thomas Jefferson called the "wall of separation between church and state," and the First Amendment's phrase that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Those who founded America wanted a country where government could not enshrine any one religion as state-sponsored. They wanted the freedom to practice religion without government interference. How this plays out in real life with our 1,500 current religious groups is the subject of endless court cases, political controversy, and confusion for those of us who basically only vote (or don't) and hope to live our lives according to our faith.

Civics is a dusty old subject for most of us. Overwhelmed by too much information, good people can retreat from the public realm of engagement with gov-

ernment. We may feel that it's all out of our hands, that our vote doesn't count. There is some legitimacy to this feeling, as campaign contributions made by 1% of us determine who even makes the cut to run for office. Dollars bring access, influence, and power. Until we have publicly financed elections, all office holders must play the money game of soliciting from wealthy donors with agendas to push. For example, Governor Mike Easley raised \$10,770,588 for his 2000 gubernatorial campaign. That amounts to having to raise from wealthy individuals and corporations over \$51,000 per week for the four years he has been in office. Representatives of good will and conscience are surrounded by lobbyists and contributors with agendas. Leaders who want to heed the common person still operate in a context created by what the donors urge them to see as realistic, reasonable, or allowable goals. For average voters, it's easy to become disillusioned, discouraged, or hopeless.

Our biblical platform, however, is one of hope and involvement. The prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Amos continually exhort against the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few, and call us to share both personally and as healthy, shalom communities. We bring that hope and involvement to individuals we help, teach, and invite into our congregations. Not as many of us, though, carry that hope and mission into the more prophetic and lonely arena of local, state, and national politics and advocacy for issues of concern.

While some people of faith believe that the civic and political scene is dirty, unspiritual, and to be avoided, others understand that Jesus' incarnation means we are to walk fully into the nitty gritty of life, all parts of it. Theologian Walter Wink says that we need to pay more attention to what scripture called "the powers and principalities," evil forces engrained in our institutions of finance, government, social life, and even the church. These are forces that make false idols of notions like materialism, nationalism, individualism, and competition over the good of the whole community. If we are to help "justice roll down like waters," Wink and others believe, we must "engage the powers," these aspects of our large systems that lead to harm, not wholeness.

The NC Council of Churches offers some perspective on our call to civic engagement as a form of Christian love. Its elected House of Delegates from member denominations passed a 1996 "Statement on Christians, Churches, and Politics." It called for "vigorous involvement in political causes and political activities" as a vital aspect of "Christian witness." Priorities in our activities should be the impact of proposals and budgets on "the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable in this country and overseas." Government is neither good nor bad, it said, but it is "the agency through which the whole society can act to promote the general welfare and serve the common good." This statement makes plain that Christians have a bias as we become politically involved. Our benchmark should not be the me-first individualism now rampant in our culture, but a beloved community vision of enough for all.

In the media, we see self-defined Christians openly political around issues like abortion, gay marriage, and such goals as the reinstatement of prayer in schools. These kinds of issues stem from inferences about the purity and holiness codes, which come mainly from the Old Testament chapters of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Not so visible in the media is Christian political action around the prophetic role of the church regarding care for the poor and the ill and the alien.

The Rev. Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community in Washington, D.C., has spearheaded with others a Call to Renewal in America. It is a "faith-based movement to overcome poverty." This effort is one of public witness in Congress and in the halls of power everywhere, to say that we as Christians actively care about how

our laws and policies affect the least and the last among us. It is an effort to bridge our differences as people of faith, and stand together with children who need childcare, the ill who need health care, the homeless who need housing, the hungry who need food stamps, the aliens who seek safety.

Most major denominations offer policy statements, calls to action, and teaching and worship materials to move us to this kind of ministry of civic engagement and resistance to injustice. The UMC Social Principles draw us into the controversial world of politics, if we really live into their meaning.

Our country is a republic of states forming a nation. We are a democracy. The word democracy comes from the Greek root, "demos," meaning people. President Lincoln reaffirmed how democracy was rooted in the common person in his Gettysburg address. Grief-stricken from Civil War carnage, he sought to heal the land by lifting a vision of America as a place "of the people, for the people, and by the people."

We are those people. Both scripture and our founding documents lead us out of our cocoons and into the world of civic discourse, the zone of laws and decisionmaking that determines who has what portion of the American pie. Jesus had a lot to say about fair portions.

You and others in your community may already be civic activists or leaders who can excite others about this path and call. Plenty of groups in NC also can decode who is in charge of what, and advise how to make our voices heard on issues of concern. The NC Council of Churches distributes *Raleigh Reports* during the legislative session, with easy summaries of bills on issues Council delegates support. The Council can provide training on dealing with elected officials and advocating for your concerns.

Discouragement is easy; hope is our Christian core. Energized by God's grace and spirit, small groups working collectively can absolutely move in the world of politics and government with integrity, vision, and a prophetic call for justice in the land. Think of what might happen if the church were as vocal and adamant about poverty and economics as some are about notions of purity.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** Paul writes, "Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders. Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along." (Romans 13:7-8) How does love infect the way we view our tax structures? Why should this question be an issue of concern for the church? Is it an issue for your church ... why or why not?
- 2.** Paul also says that, "... we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12) In a democracy where the citizens ostensibly own their government, who are the principalities and powers?
- 3.** Do you know who is your representative in your city and county government? Your NC House Representative and state Senator? Do you know who your member of Congress is? Have you ever met and talked with any of these persons? About what might you want to talk to an elected official? What things do you want changed?

Notes:



Presentation by NC Alliance for Economic Justice at
2003 legislative rally on the state budget

Chapter 10: Sustainable Communities

Scripture and Reflection

“There was not a needy person among them....
and distribution was made to each as any had need.”
Acts 4:34-35

This verse from the fourth chapter of the Book of Acts describes in simple terms the basic values of community and economy manifest in the earliest Christian church.

The earliest church was a community of faith that understood the spiritual dimensions of all aspects of human life. Acts 4:35 focused on the sharing of land and houses, explaining how property was sold and the cash from the sale was brought and laid "at the apostles' feet" and redistributed "as any had need." Other passages in Scripture address the sacred nature and importance of water, air, sky, and the entire earth.

One of the most well-known passages celebrating God's ownership and power over the earth is Psalm 24:1-2:

*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein;
for he has founded it upon the seas,
and established it upon the rivers.*

Over and over again, the Bible provides the foundation for a sustainable community and society based on spiritual principles. The most common theme is that the spiritual life is one in which people live according to their basic needs, not their desires. The indicator of the presence of God is the quality of human sharing and caring for one another and for the earth.

A less well-known passage from Proverbs 30:7-9 provides a beautiful illustration of this spirit and devotion:

*Two things I ask of thee; deny them not to me
before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and
lying; give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,*

*lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, "Who is the
Lord?" Or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the
name of my God.*

Scores of scriptural passages illustrate the injustices that occur when people live according to their desire and greed instead of their need.

Nehemiah 5:1-13 is one example; it provides a dramatic story of food scarcity, land loss, slavery, and homelessness. These conditions were caused when wealthy families took advantage of the misery of others during a time of famine, by taking their farms, vineyards, and homes and charging interest on monies loaned to the needy. Nehemiah "held a great assembly against them" (5:7) and demanded that they return those homes and farms and stop charging interest on lending. James 5:4-5 describes a similar situation of abuse of laborers and farmers by wealthy landowners.

The Bible illustrates how spiritual leaders and writers designed communities of faith based on sharing and living according to one's need, not greed. These communities of faith were recognized for their care and protection of each member, and they grew in number. Spiritual leaders and writers also challenged human practices of abuse and neglect that removed the sustenance of life from others: food, clothing, housing, labor, land, farms, culture, and money.

The roots and foundation of sustainable development and their close relationship to spirituality are found throughout our Scripture passages. Sustainable development is simply the maintenance and improvement of life through:

- (1) Environmental protection, promotion, and preservation;

Chapter 10: **Sustainable Communities**

- (2) Acknowledgement and respect for the spiritual nature of all life and relations;
- (3) Land, work, and income that support individual and family security; and
- (4) Ownership, leadership, and decisionmaking by and among community members.

Five "P's" represent the values of sustainable development. They are: (1) place, (2) prayer, (3) people, (4) productivity, and (5) profit.

In a sustainable system, these values go in the order represented here, with place--or environment--as primary. Our spiritual relations with God, others, the earth, and ourselves are secondary. Third, we value people and community. Fourth, work and productivity must tie to secure wages and benefits. Last, profit is needed to maintain and sustain development.

It is both unfortunate and tragic that within our mainstream market, these values are turned around and prioritized in the opposite order and direction. Profit is emphasized, then productivity, people, prayer, and place is last. Such a system is not sustainable and cannot be sustained over the long haul. No matter how tightly controlled the economy is, the depletion of natural resources, the disruption of human labor, and the degradation and destruction of diverse cultures will eventually spell an end to how the mainstream market is presently structured.

Sustainability also has two time frames: the present and the future. By protecting and distributing natural and human resources based on need, not greed, well-being can be shared, not enjoyed by only a few. We accomplish this through the use of renewable resources and respectful management that minimizes environmental and human disruption and degradation. Grounded in God's creation, human and environmental development can be perpetual and long-lasting, providing a way of life and living for generations to come.

The word "sustain" basically means to "hold up from under." This image provides a parable for Christian community. The spiritual source of life that we hold onto and hold up is deep within the very structure and being of all life. God's power and love is what sustains us in our relations with the place where we live and

with the people with whom we live and work.

We are called to "seek first God's kingdom and righteousness and all these things (i.e., food, water, clothing) will be yours as well" (Matthew 6:35).

The early Christian church created a sustainable community based on shared values and resources and grounded in the love of God in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, as early church members became assimilated and acculturated into mainstream Roman society, these habits of sustainability were significantly lost.

The development and growth of monasteries was actually an effort, in part, to recover that sustainable quality of Christian community life. It was a model based on subsistence as opposed to extravagance. We find similar creative, visionary efforts and projects throughout Christian history that successfully renewed and sustained the bonds of community, spirituality, and productivity.

Rooted within a spiritual framework, our families, churches, communities, and businesses can seek and implement sustainable development values and practices. We can recover sacred ways of relating to one another and to the earth. Together, we can face the challenges and barriers to sustainable community and development. We have both historical and biblical leaders, and Jesus Christ himself, as inspirers, motivators, and our guides.

The Rev. Mac Legerton, Executive Director, Center For Community Action, Lumberton, NC.

Did You Know?

- ❑ The group Communities by Choice (www.communitiesbychoice.org) describes three dynamics of a community: economy, ecology, and equity. They say that sustainable communities: value and respect all people; cultivate trusting relationships among people, organizations, and institutions; cooperate for the common good; provide opportunities for communication and learning; and seek to develop and not just grow.
- ❑ The word "economy" comes from the Greek words *oikos*, meaning household or family estate, and *nomos*, which can mean rules, natural laws. The word "ecology" comes from the same root word *oikos*, and refers to the economy of nature--plants and animals and the land. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines equity as: equality of rights; justice according to natural law or right; fairness in determination of conflicting claims; impartiality.
- ❑ In 2002, there were 56,000 farms in NC. Since 1980, the number of NC farms has fallen 40%, while the average farm size has increased 29%. Fifty percent of our agricultural production is under contract to agribusinesses; this makes family farmers employees, losing their autonomy.
- ❑ In a time when big box stores like WalMart and Home Depot come to town and put small shops out of business, neighbors across the country are protesting their arrival. They are saying they have better plans for what their community needs, so that more people have good jobs and that the small town ethic of mutual care is preserved or renewed. Instead of depending on the big company from out of town to save the day, people are rethinking how to develop home-grown businesses that capitalize on local history and talent, and which won't move away.

UMC Social Principle: The Nurturing Community

The community provides the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of their humanity. We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in individuals. Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important--because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ and not because they have merited significance. We therefore support social climates in which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons and their growth.

To Learn More...

Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets.

John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Road; 847-491-3518; distributed by: ACTA Publications, 4848 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60640; 800-397-2282. ISBN 0-87946-108-X.

Joint Center for Sustainable Communities. Best practices. U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1620 I Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006. Call Geri Powell, 202-861-6784; gpowell@usmayors.org; www.usmayors.org/USCM/sustainable/backgrnd.htm.

Sustainable Communities Network. Shows what has worked for other communities, and promotes a exchange of information to help create community sustainability in both urban and rural areas. www.sustainable.org.

The Simple Living Network. Tools, Examples & Contacts For Conscious, Simple, Healthy & Restorative Living. www.simpleliving.net.

Profile: Gary Wayne Locklear



Gary Wayne Locklear is a United Methodist Missionary, Church and Community Worker, with the Rockingham District Native American Cooperative Ministries (RDNACM). “In my role with RDNACM, I connect congregations with one another so that together, they can repair homes, provide health education, reach out to youth, develop economic programs, and a myriad of other ministries designed to strengthen the community physically and spiritually.”

What is the spiritual motivation for the work you do? *Believing that none of us can be complete until all are complete, I realize I have a mission to my neighbor no matter who he or she might be. Christ loves all and calls all to do likewise, and so I love, not so much because I choose, but because Christ chooses in me, with me, and through me. As a Native American, I grew up in a world where I witnessed three school buses pass my house morning and evening, markets where there were labels on the toilet doors and water fountains--WHITE, NEGRO, INDIAN--and pharmacies where I might have a prescription filled, but could not buy a Coke. After hearing the message that I was not as good as others for much of my life, I made a decision that I would live another truth. I would live the truth that all people are important, all people are beautiful, and all people are created in the image of God. I personally know this God who is love. How can I not work for justice?*

Walk To Justice

Does it seem to you like the world is going crazy? For eons we lived in tribes on the land and knew one another's ways. Now along with the blessings of modernization, there's just too much stimulation, too much information, and a whole lot of change. We're not sure how international finance operates, why the jobs are leaving town, or why the family farm is almost a thing of the past. And what about those endless recording loops when we call a company for help? As institutions expand to global size, we lose the human touch. How might we change the course of this tide?

A movement is afoot to reclaim a sense of localism, mutual accountability, and proportion. "Sustainable" economic and community development is a burgeoning field of study and practice, based on a leap of faith and hope. It says: This is our community, and we will shape it, not be mere victims of forces beyond our control. In one of its aspects, it's about local jobs that won't leave town and which honor local gifts. Handmade in America (www.handmadeinamerica.org) well illustrates this focus on economic self-sufficiency. Steeped in the history of craft in western Carolina and Appalachia, this cooperative brings artisans together to market their goods, draw investment, and make the area a national center for the arts.

Theologian Ched Myers of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries writes about Sabbath economics. This is the faith-based practice of regular and systematic wealth and power redistribution in society. Practitioners develop and promote an economic reading of the Bible and a biblical reading of the economy. The Bible's Jubilee/Sabbath tradition, they say, has theological and political relevance for our time. For example, in the biblical Jubilee, every 50 years slaves were freed and debts were forgiven. This was a social rule to rectify unhealthy gaps between rich and poor. For us, the Jubilee ethic has implications around such things as the destructiveness of predatory lending and the debts that Third World countries owe America. It concerns the way a new WalMart can ruin some local Mom and Pop shops. It calls us to make sure there is enough for everyone--through adequate wages, social programs, our own sharing, and moving away from over-consumption by us in the First World. The Sabbath Economics Collaborative (www.sabbatheconomics.org) is a national, membership-based network for cooperation and communication among theologians, economists, and concerned persons who are exploring contemporary issues of faith and economic justice. The group explores concrete ways we form relationships of alternative economic discipleship.

One long-term sustainable community initiative in our state is in Greensboro, based out of the Beloved Community Center affiliated with Rev. Nelson Johnson's Faith Community Church. Rev. Johnson facilitates comprehensive community building. The Center's work includes an internationally recognized truth and reconciliation project, progressive education reform based in increased parental involvement, worker and peace organizing, and ministries for the homeless and prisoners. The mission of the Beloved Community Center is to foster and model a spirit of community based on Dr. Martin Luther King's vision of a beloved community, where social and economic relations affirm and realize the equality, dignity, worth, and potential of every person. Rev. Johnson and the people associated with the Beloved Community Center struggle against what Dr. King called the triplets of social oppression--economic exploitation/materialism, racism, and militarism/violence.

Another excellent example of long-term sustainable community change comes from the Rev. Mac Legerton. Mac Legerton and Donna Chavis, his wife, started the Center for Community Action (CCA) in Robeson County in 1980. With an original interfaith group of 30 people, they sought long-term change to rectify historic inequities that kept Lumbee and African Americans--two-thirds of county residents-- from equitable leadership and access to local systems. Knowing it would take 50 years to fulfill its vision and plan, CCA sought more equity in county government, education, economic development, and other areas of community life. Its collaborative work has been so successful that CCA now joins grassroots and professional leaders and organizations together of all races and walks of life to work for community change. CCA has led and collaborated in successful projects that include: equitable racial representation on the Board of Commissioners, School Board, and NC legislative delegation; the establishment of one of NC's few rural public defender systems; the halting of three multi-state toxic and low-level radioactive waste facilities in its region; an internationally recognized Green Map project highlighting local ecological, cultural, and civic assets and resources; development of River Way, a \$1 million Outdoor Adventure and Education Center; and its Jobs For the Future Project that took 150 Robesonians to Washington, DC, in March 2004 and addressed the Congressional Rural Caucus on job loss in rural America.

Two other Robeson County residents are among those who creatively seek sustainability in their own cultural communities. Gary Locklear, featured in the Profile, combines his Christian and Native traditions to address needs of local Lumbees. "Our focus has grown from strengthening the local leadership in our churches to the larger issues affecting our communities and our people--unemployment, health, food, and taking care of the underserved." And Pedro A. Massoul, Jr., a commercial construction Project Manager, helps the burgeoning Latino population adapt to this formerly tri-racial locality. "As a community volunteer helping Hispanics make ties in the community...I provide information so they can adjust better and quicker." Pedro is motivated by trying to make a "level playing field" for these newcomers, so they "do not endure many of the same hardships my family struggled so hard to overcome over fifty years ago" when they arrived in America from Puerto Rico.

Buckminster Fuller, inventor of the geodesic dome, said this: "You never change things by fighting existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." In Greensboro and Lumberton as in many other localities, people of faith are rooted in place and invested in building a new model based on the older, biblical one. They look not as much at needs as at strengths. Each person, be she homeless or out of work, a childcare giver or child, has an idea or hand to offer. This is a relational approach to healthy communities, trusting local ideas, imagination, and talent. It's an approach John Kretzman and John McKnight call "asset-based community development," in contrast to a focus on problems that experts can fix. It's also the God way of looking at our lives: we are Spirit people with gifts to offer, and the power to heal ourselves and our land. A roster of sustainable community development efforts includes the following initiatives, some old ideas, some new: Food cooperatives, social entrepreneurship, community-supported agriculture, eco-tourism. See Chapter 11 for ways to learn more about these. The church has forever been a key in making communities sustainable--with our fish fry fundraisers, mutual support, and offering a gathering place. Expanding into Sabbath economics practice is a biblically sound next step. By looking at our spending habits, at the way we trade and do business, and at the way our table can be expanded, we can be even more intentional about building a beloved community right where we are.

Discussion Questions

1. How has your community been undergoing transformation in the past several years?
2. Read Acts 2:44-47. What is the cornerstone of life in the early church in Acts? How are members living? What does their living say about their believing in God? What lessons does their living have for us today?
3. When your community is healthy and strong, what does it look like?
4. What particular aspect of your community's life would you like to change? How might you and your congregation be a part of that change?

Notes:

I feel within me a strong desire to live my life on my own. In fact, my society praises the self-made people who are in control of their destinies, set their own goals, fulfill their own aspirations, and build their own kingdoms. It is very hard for me to truly believe that spiritual maturity is a willingness to let others guide me and "lead me even where I would rather not go." And still, every time I am willing to break out of my false need for self-sufficiency and dare to ask for help, a new community emerges - a fellowship of the weak - strong in the trust that together we can be a people of hope for a broken world.

Henri Nouwen

Chapter 11: Next Steps

A Word from Steve Taylor, Director, Office of Missions

Well, you have made your way through ten chapters. Perhaps you've struggled a bit along the way, reflecting on whether or not the content can be believed, whether or not it might somehow bring one to new perspectives. Maybe, if you have been in the trenches for awhile working for justice, actively yearning for something that seemed a likely pattern for "on earth as it is in heaven," you might relate to this particular curriculum with a rather bored sigh, just another study. Either way, it is important that you understand the why of this attempt at conveying a reality that belies much of the experience of the majority who might actually take the time to consider kingdom from a justice perspective. Thus, I am compelled to say that because this study guide really is about Jesus among us, it seems important that we make the attempt to integrate these stories and this information into our actual life decisions.

Assuming that we believe Jesus when he says, "as you do unto the least of these, you do unto me," we recognize that we are called to a particular space of ministry, a place where the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, and strangers are welcomed. However, I think what we have sometimes failed to realize is that love is not a one-time act and then it is complete. Real love, holistic love, the love of a God who continually pours God's grace over us, is a love that begins to ask the question why... *why* are you hungry, *why* are you thirsty, *why* is it that you remain a stranger? God's grace does that thing for us that we could not do ourselves. God's grace reaches into our lives and brings healing to our spiritual brokenness. In grace, God reaches toward us when we were unable to reach toward God, and does so simply because we are the objects of God's affection, the beloved children of God's desire. In the same manner, the love born from faith in this God also looks at a physical reality where God's children struggle, unable to find any sense of physical wholeness. In this success system where the value of a person is often measured by how well one pays one's bills, many are continually told, "Unless you have the right education, the right skin-tone, or the right perspective, then there is no room at the table." This leads to a point of powerlessness, a place that is

always bad news for spiritual wholeness. If you have not heard it through this study, then please hear it now:

Systems that exclude those on the bottom while embracing those on the top, that provide housing for the wealthy while shutting out the poor, systems that give political voice to the powerful while minimizing the voice of the weak, systems that generate health care for those that can afford it while dismissing those who cannot, systems that embrace power, prestige, and possession, while neglecting or negating the weak, the humble, the meek, are utterly opposed to this gospel of love. As people of faith, we cannot possibly offer authentic love to those with whom Jesus says he dwells, or indeed, to Jesus himself, without also bearing the burden of those we love by working to bring about a just society where all might have access to life and life abundantly.

So, where do you go from here? You can simply dismiss these past chapters, never allowing the story and reality to touch you. Or...you can take the next step...begin a work for justice. Take one issue about which you have learned, and begin to struggle with it. You don't need to do it alone. Perhaps you might call a small group around the issue, just three or four others, so that you can speak the language of faith to one another in your struggle, so that you can remind one another that you are children of a loving God, who calls you to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. In the end, you may transform the world or you may change nothing at all, but this is sure, you will be transformed. Real love will do that.

This chapter has for you...

Descriptions of two long-term, intensive study programs that have proven transformative and successful in preparing people of faith for ministries of social justice. Each of them offers excellent learning materials and challenging tasks for personal growth in faith and practice.

Two pages of Additional Resources to amplify those in the individual chapters.

A message from the Executive Director of Conference Connectional Ministries, NC Conference, Rev. Charles M. Smith.

JustFaith: Transformational process for social justice

Empowering People of Faith to Develop a Passion and Thirst for Justice

JustFaith is a transformational process and program developed in the Roman Catholic tradition, but also used by people from many denominations all across the country. A United Methodist version is being created now. Here is a word from the national Associate Director, Chris Breu:

Several multi-denominational and Protestant groups have discovered and implemented the JustFaith program. These groups have found this program to be compelling, pertinent and effective in empowering a faithful response to the justice issues of the Gospel. The program also offers the flexibility for individual denominations to incorporate their own faith based materials as desired.

JustFaith is an extended justice education/formation program that provides an opportunity for parishioners to study and be formed by the justice tradition articulated by the Scriptures and the church's historical witness. JustFaith is a conversion-based process that seeks to integrate personal spirituality and social ministry. The aim of JustFaith is to empower participants to develop a passion and thirst for justice and to express this passion in concrete acts of congregational social justice ministry. JustFaith is a tool that has proven over and over again to be an effective strategy for training and forming parishioners to be agents of social transformation.

Jack Jezreel, M.Div., the director of JustFaith, introduced the program in 1989 while working in a parish in Louisville, Kentucky. It was immediately and dramatically successful. Since then, congregations around the country have had similar results.

Over the course of seven to eight months, participants meet weekly for readings, videos, lecture, discussion, prayer, retreats, and hands-on-experiences in justice education. The intent is to provide a tapestry of learning opportunities that emphasize and enliven the remarkable justice tradition of the church. Participants are exposed to not only a substantive and demanding course of study but are also afforded the privilege of becoming community with other participants and sharing a journey of faith and compassion that is both life-giving and challenging.

JustFaith can be--and typically is--facilitated by congregational members, meaning it does not create added responsibilities for professional staff.

The cost for a congregation to register for JustFaith for 2004-2005 is \$250, which covers a wide range of support services. Comprehensive materials that outline curriculum, facilitation options, and retreat instructions are provided and are continually updated. A website (www.justfaith.org) is available for accessing information and networking with other groups. The office will also offer full-time telephone assistance to answer questions and assist with any issues that arise in the process of preparing for or offering the program. Other costs associated with the program include books and videos. All ordering information is provided in JustFaith materials. For a complete description of program costs, contact the JustFaith Office or go to the JustFaith website.

www.justfaith.org

Call Chris Breu, JustFaith Associate Director, 502-243-9287, or e-mail her at chris@justfaith.org.

JustFaith is trademarked.

Any parish or group interested in JustFaith is required to request permission for its use.

Just Neighbors Tool Kit

To love your neighbor as yourself is one of scripture's most basic teachings. But who is your neighbor? And how do we care for our neighbors in need? Just Neighbors helps congregations answer these questions. Through videos, interactive exercises, scripture and discussion, participants learn about the struggles of neighbors in need. Participants discover ways they can help. Each session can be used on-its-own, or Just Neighbors can be used as a series.

Session 1: Who Is My Neighbor? Meet three families that struggle to survive on low wages and begin to understand the obstacles they face on a daily basis. Explore how faith can provide a basis for social action on behalf of these families.

Session 2: Making Ends Meet. When your paycheck isn't enough, is it more important to pay the gas bill or to buy healthy food for your family? Witness the struggles of a young family trying to make ends meet on two low-wage incomes.

Session 3: What Would You Choose? Walk in the shoes of Annie, a single mother of two who is slipping into poverty. Work in pairs to make the hard decisions and learn first hand how it feels to live with the stress of living life on the edge of the poverty line.

Session 4: Does Working Work? Examine information about the lives of three families. Discuss how national trends and policies regarding employment, wages and taxes affect them.

Session 5: Housing Matters. Is decent, safe, affordable housing for all Americans a reality or a myth? Learn about the process of finding housing as a low-income family; role-play a city council meeting to debate affordable housing issues.

Session 6: Prejudice, Privilege, and Poverty. A series of thought-provoking video clips helps the participants examine the relationship between race and poverty.

Session 7: Our Children, Our Future. One in six American children lives in poverty. Why and how are children deprived of the basic building blocks of a healthy life?

Session 8: Justice for All? People of different social and economic status are represented in this activity that allows participants to discuss and role play what is unfair. The participants consider what steps may be taken to address this.

Session 9: Stepping Out in Faith. Synthesizes the information about the need and the causes of poverty and helps participants develop a plan for action.

Each of the sessions is designed to be completed in one hour. The tool kit was developed by Family Promise (formerly National Interfaith Hospitality Network), founded in 1988 to address the growing need to provide emergency shelter, meals and assistance to homeless families in finding housing, jobs and job training. Family Promise works through locally based Interfaith Hospitality Networks and Family Mentoring programs. Today more than 3000 congregations and 90,000 volunteers are working in this network.

Contact Laura Bailey, Director, Media Center, NC Conference, UMC,
for assistance in obtaining this program: 919-832-9560, lbailey@nccumc.org.

Additional Resources

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church: Cokesbury (Raleigh store: 866-265-2665 toll free) offers a printed pamphlet, “Social Principles of The United Methodist Church 2000-2004,” \$.50/copy; ISBN X719903. The Social Principles are also on the main UMC website: www.umc.org, and in the Book of Discipline.

Health

Life Search: Health and Wholeness. A six-week small-group study provides suggestions for enhancing personal and communal health and wholeness. Cokesbury.

www.familiesusa.org. Families, USA, a nonprofit organization, serves as a voice for health care consumers, working for universal health coverage in the United States.

The Covering Kids Initiative. A combined effort of the NC Pediatric Society and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to assist eligible persons enroll in the NC Child Health Insurance Program. They are particularly interested in working with faith communities. Contact Patricia Garrett, ssncps@attglobal.net.

Housing

Sharing the Dream: A Place to Call Home. This video and study guide “will help you understand the issues surrounding affordable housing” in the U.S. It describes The United Methodist position on this topic, explains how the General Board invests in affordable housing projects, and also gives some ideas to local congregations on actions they can do to help in their communities. Leader guidelines are included. VC1632

www.merciumc.org. M.E.R.C.I. Rural Affordable Housing program.

Jobs and Wages

Community With Children and the Poor: A Guide for Congregational Study. Task Force for the Bishop’s Initiative on Children and Poverty. Cokesbury, 2003. #X516543.

Guidelines for Labor Relations in United Methodist-Related Institutions. Produced by The General Board of Church and Society, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C.; also available as a download from the website: www.umc-gbcs.org.

Job Loss: A Guidebook for Pastors, by Barbara Zelter and the Economic Justice Committee of the NC Council of Churches. Free as a download from the NC Council of Churches website, www.nccouncilofchurches.org; see Resources/Miscellaneous.

Criminal Justice

Restorative Justice: Moving Beyond Punishment. Harmon Wray, General Board of Global Ministries, 2002. X509073; BK260. Wray can be reached at 615-297-7010; hwray@comcast.net.

www.nccumc.org/CJMM. The Conference Committee on Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries, downloadable list of resources.

Race

Ending Racism in the Church, edited by Susan E. Davies and Sister Paul Teresa Hennessee, United Church Press, 1998, ISBN 0-8298-1238.

Additional Resources, continued

Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance, General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, The United Methodist Church, available from the General Board of Global Ministries e-store.

Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family. Cain Hope Felder, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1989, ISBN 0-88344-535-2.

Education

Hand in Hand Project. A ministry that connects churches with schools. Communities of faith act as a resource by motivating membership to volunteer as mentors, tutors, reading buddies, and prayer partners with the school staff. Contact Hand in Hand Project Director, Susan Pennock, 1-800-849-4433, x 301, Pennock@2khiway.net.

The Earth

101 Ways to Help Save the Earth. A guide that gives ways individuals can change their daily habits to make a difference in caring for the environment. Includes 52 weeks of congregational activities.

Becoming the People of God: Caring for God's Earth. Examples of actual individuals and congregations engaged in ministry around environmental issues. This study can be used for seven to eleven sessions. Cokesbury, 2003. ISBN #511925.

Green Guidance: How to Plan Environmentally Responsible Events. From the United Methodist Women's website: <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw>. Click social action, green guidance.

Government and Citizenship

Becoming a People of God: Walking Humbly, Doing Justice, edited by J. Richard Peck, Cokesbury, 2003, ISBNX511937.

"Politics and the Pulpit: A Guide to the Internal Revenue Code Restrictions on the Political Activity of Religious Organizations." At www.GCFA.org, from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, www.pewforum.org.

www.umc-gcbs.org. Receive legislative resources: e-mail addresses of federal, state and local elected officials, legislative alerts and updates, and key votes.

Sustainable Communities

Center for Participatory Change. Helps people recognize their own power, work together, and transform their communities, through grassroots organizing, capacity building, networking and grantmaking. www.cpcwnc.org.

List of Community Supported Agricultural Farms in NC (neighbors pay ahead to get weekly produce from local farmer): www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/csafarms.html, and www.carolinafarmstewards.org.

Laura Bailey, Director, Media Center, NC Conference, UMC, can provide assistance in obtaining most of the items here: Call 919-832-9560 or write to lbailey@nccumc.org. To receive a copy of the longer list of resources given out at the Thy Kingdom Come workshops, call Becky Biegger, Missions Division, NC Conference, 1-800-849-4433.

A Word from Rev. Charles M. Smith, Executive Director of Conference Connectional Ministries, NC Conference

Taking Our Turn in the Prophetic Tradition

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop, the prophet Elijah was there alongside him and Moses. That's a biblical way of reminding us annually on Transfiguration Sunday that Elijah stands first in the line-up of prophets, those "troublers of Israel" as King Ahab called him. Ever since, people who pay more attention to God than to earthly rulers have been thought of as troublemakers by those in authority. Seeing Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, and receiving once again our Creator's blessing, encourages us who worship him as Lord and Savior to follow his holy boldness wherever it takes us in our time.

John Wesley certainly understood this tradition and calling when his revival challenged the practices of eighteenth-century England where the new gin houses, the drug problem of his day, were so prevalent that street talk said you could get "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence." And his abhorrence of slavery converted many of his contemporaries and helped plant the seed for its abolition in the following century. His care coupled with his advocacy for the poor and the imprisoned led his descendants to adopt the first "Social Creed" early in the twentieth century.

Now, as followers of Christ in The United Methodist Church of the twenty-first century, it is our turn to challenge conventional wisdom that allows so many of our citizens to be poorly treated by those in authority in our day. And the church that follows in Wesley's train, who said that the Bible knows no holiness other than a social holiness, cannot sit back and content itself with preaching that lacks the prophetic note, or teaching that dare not trouble for fear of disturbing the status quo.

For our church to be true to our founders, we must constantly be raising questions about why our nation invaded Iraq, why we are the only advanced nation

without universal health care, why those earning the minimum wage cannot support themselves much less a family, and why some of our citizens are not allowed some of the rights and privileges of others due to their sexual orientation.

Sir George McLeod, founder of the Iona Community off the coast of Scotland, reminded us that Christ was not crucified on a brass cross between two candlesticks, but on a rough wooden cross between two thieves where men gambled and talked smut. He was urging the church to remember that it is called like its Lord to work for the salvation of the world, even at the risk of losing its own life. Like the prophet Isaiah, he was reminding us of the kind of fast God desires, one that exalts the poor and the oppressed and demands that those in authority treat them right if they want God's blessing for themselves and their community. Those are street smarts worth having and passing along to our generation and our descendants.



**Design and printing by Corporate Press, Inc.
Raleigh, North Carolina**

printed on recycled paper made in United States

