

# ShALOM!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

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## Alleviating Poverty

**As I think about how** to frame this edition of *Shalom!*, my mind is flooded with random thoughts on poverty.

*The ironies:* I'm sitting in my warm home, at a fairly state-of-the-art computer, with a full-time job that at this point seems secure enough and plenty of food, and I'm trying to write with integrity about poverty. I've seen poverty up close (favellas in Recife, Brazil; the trash heap in Cairo, Egypt; inner city slums and delapidated rural homes in the U.S.), but even though there have been times in my life when I felt like I was poor, the truth is I've never been desperately poor. Which leads to the next thought....

*The relativity of poverty:* Most poor people in the U. S. make a small fortune compared to poor people in many parts of the two-thirds world. In 2008, for example, the poverty threshold for a family of four in the U.S. was \$22,200 a year, while one billion people around the world live on less than \$1.00 a day—a huge difference. Desperately poor people in other parts of the world would feel wealthy beyond their wildest imaginings if all of a sudden they had \$22,000. Of course, that doesn't negate the reality that in the U.S. an annual income of \$22,000 doesn't go very far, and there are many in the U.S. who don't even make that much.

*The current state of the economy:* As banks fail, companies go out of business, and unemployment rises, uncertainty and fear abound. If we think the poverty level is high now, are we in for a huge increase in the number of people who can't provide for their basic needs? Will some of us who have lived comfortably suddenly find ourselves among the ranks of the poor?

*The so-called "war on poverty":* This war seems never-ending. The campaigns called "mobilization to end poverty" and "making poverty history" are laudable but is their goal realistic? Can we ever actually end poverty? To justify answering "no," we quote Jesus, "You will have the poor with you always," forgetting that when he said this, his point had a lot more to do with the importance of spending time with him while he was on earth than with reassuring his disciples there would always be poor people (see Matthew 26 and Mark 14). Perhaps a more realistic goal is "poverty alleviation" or halving global poverty rates by 2015.

*Causes of poverty:* It's easy to say that people are poor because they are irresponsible and/or don't work hard. But most of us know it's far more complicated; war, climate (droughts, floods) and systemic injustice cause a whole lot of poverty, and while we can't do much about climate, it is certainly within our power to do something about war and injustice.

*Responses to poverty:* So what can we do about poverty? The range is wide: we can give money (to the BIC World Hunger Fund, for example); we can live more simply and consume less of the world's resources; we can advocate for public policies that mitigate systemic injustice; we can volunteer in community, national and international agencies that directly meet the needs of the poor (food banks and soup kitchens, homeless shelters, Mennonite Central Committee); we can develop congregational ministries that reach out to poor people in our communities; or we can educate ourselves about the cause of poverty and possible solutions.

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# Black Horses

by Steve Newcomer

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Is there a hierarchy to this list of responses, or are all equally important? I don't think it's particularly helpful to prioritize the list of responses because I think each one of is responsible to figure out his or her role in responding to people who are poor. I do firmly believe, however, that God both cares about people who are poor and expects us to do something. The Bible harshly judges those who oppress the poor and don't reach out compassionately; see Amos, Isaiah, and Matthew 25, for just a few examples.

This edition of *Shalom!* addresses poverty alleviation efforts that are very small scale in the great scheme of things. But it will take efforts of every size and type to alleviate poverty in any significant way, and I believe God calls us to this kind of work wherever we are and whatever we are able to do.

**Harriet S. Bicksler, editor**



*Shalom!* A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

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**From Revelation 6**, as the seven seals are being opened, John's vision includes the appearance of four horses. None of the four horses represents something to be desired, but let's focus on the black horse (v. 5). We don't know for certain but Matthew Henry opines that the black horse represents famine. That interpretation seems plausible in the context of the scales, money, and food items also mentioned in verse 6. I ask your indulgence to write about "black horses" euphemistically to preserve the imagery associated with hunger, starvation, or famine. Black horses can be "foaled" for a variety of reasons. Some are born naturally by events such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, climactic changes, etc. Other black horses make their appearance by man-made activities.

For Chris and me, having lived in Zimbabwe for the past six months, we have gained a great deal of exposure to black horses. Zimbabwe is a country in crisis. Agricultural activity has plummeted. Hyperinflation has decimated the economy. The health care and educational systems have collapsed. Corruption has become a growth industry. But is the cause of any black horse pertinent? An examination of passages such as Matthew 25, II Corinthians 8, Isaiah 58, James 2, etc. does not include any information about the source of the black horse. What is evident is that we, as a body of believers, have a mandate to respond to the presence of the black horse.

II Corinthians 8 merits further examination. In this chapter Paul is holding up the Macedonian churches as an example of how we should respond to black horses. This specific black horse happened to be located in Jerusalem. In verse 4 we read that they (the Macedonian churches) "begged" for the "privilege" (NIV) of giving to the needs of other believers in Jerusalem. These are not words that we often associate with generosity and compassion today. So I want to understand as much about the Macedonian believers as I can. In verse 3 Paul does provide the information that they were not excessively wealthy and were not simply

getting rid of their loose change. Somehow they had an excellent understanding of community, materialism, and eternity. Why was this so? The only clue can be found in verse 5 where Paul wrote that first they had given themselves to the Lord and secondly they gave of themselves to others. As I attempt to put their theology process into a hierarchy, they had God first, others second, and themselves last. Somehow this seems remarkably consistent with the sequence Jesus identified in Matthew 22:35-40. Are these only nice words to be read on Sunday morning or should we be challenged to modify our choices in the way that we live?

The late president John F. Kennedy observed that in written Chinese the word "crisis" requires the use of two separate symbols. The first character, when used alone, is interpreted as "danger." The second character is interpreted as "opportunity." An intriguing question then arises as to whether or not a crisis should be seen as an "opportunity with which some risk is associated"? When viewed in the context of black horses there is often some degree of danger involved. Ron Sider has observed that "desperate people do desperate things." Few people are more desperate than the individual who is starving and unable to provide for his or her family. In Zimbabwe prostitution has become rampant. Our neighbor at Ekuphileni Bible Institute had their house broken into a few weeks ago. The thief ignored the expensive electronic devices in the living room and took only prepared food from the kitchen. It is difficult to condemn the customs official who is not paid enough to feed his family and resorts to demanding a bribe/tip before doing his job.

As believers on which of the two symbols do we place our emphasis? The world around us is fixated with the "danger" involved. Is this not a reflection of how extensively we may have allowed a secular worldview to pervade our thinking as believers? Does the Word of God not direct us to focus instead on the "opportunity?" In my opinion the questions are quite rhetorical.

Let me describe a few of the positives and negatives associated with any attempt to

“round up” black horses. It would be naïve to deny that danger is not real. The “breeder” of black horses does not want them to be eliminated. Efforts to combat black horses will face opposition. One of the axioms of which I frequently remind myself is that “nothing worthwhile comes easily.” However, it is worth the effort. I wish we could capture the smiles on faces, glowing eyes, heartfelt expressions of gratitude with which we have been blessed in the past six months.

We also need to be constantly aware that our efforts to assist do not lead to an unhealthy dependence. It must be accepted that we will make mistakes. When an immediate decision needs to be made it is not always possible to research the legitimacy of a need when someone is knocking at your door and saying they have not eaten

in 2-3 days. Being a known source of relief also makes one a potential target for theft. The position that Chris and I have taken is that if such an event happens then it will not be a surprise to God and we will continue in the same vein unless there is clear direction to discontinue.

Six months in Zimbabwe has given us extensive experience with difficult economic times. Consequently, I believe it is critical to reexamine the principles of biblical economics. Is it really possible to receive by giving (Luke 6)? Can temporal dollars really be transformed into eternal riches (Luke 12)? My actions are the best indicators of what I really believe. Am I willing to validate my faith by translating it into deeds? Was Jesus speaking literally or figuratively when he directed the

rich, young ruler to sell all he had and give the money to the poor (Matthew 19)? The most basic rule of exegesis is that a literal translation should be applied unless the literal translation does not make sense and then some other meaning must be sought. Whether or not the translation is to my liking is irrelevant. God’s character and his commands are not influenced one iota by my level of comfort. Black horses are real. Black horses will not be eradicated until our Lord comes again. But the presence of black horses does give us the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that our faith is genuine, tangible, and relevant.

*Steve and Chris Newcomer serve in Zimbabwe under Brethren in Christ World Missions.*

## The Toolbelt Needed to Conquer Poverty

By Kirsten Grubb

Sharon’s childhood was spent in dingy, abandoned buildings. Her only pets were the rats that scrambled across her blankets at night. Her family extended beyond her mother and siblings to include the others who shared the filthy space, yet Sharon soon figured out that no one could be trusted – violence and betrayal were commonplace. School was something to attend sporadically. Food was scarce. Personal hygiene was out of the question.

As an adult, Sharon continued in the only life she knew – poverty. When she entered Pacific Lifeline’s shelter program, there were many obstacles to overcome before she could achieve self-sufficiency. Life skills as simple as how to clean a shower or cook a can of beans were new and unnatural to her. So how does a woman, who knows nothing but a life of homelessness, get to a point that she can conquer poverty and create a better life for herself and her children?

Pacific Lifeline is a long-term transitional shelter for women and their children. Our mission statement is “Pacific Lifeline, a faith-based ministry, empowers women and their children facing chronic homelessness to

achieve personal and social stability.” In order to accomplish this mission, we arm our residents with many tools that help them set and reach their goals as well as achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. These tools, received through our case management and therapy programs, include improved skills in budgeting, parenting, basic life, social settings, and decision making.

Pacific Lifeline’s staff feels successful when a woman is armed with these tools and ready to live independently. But what tools do Pacific Lifeline’s graduates value when they leave our program? Is it a certificate from a parenting class? A monthly budget? A better credit score?

While these help the women combat poverty, when asked “What tools did you receive at Pacific Lifeline that have helped you?” the graduates’ responses were both surprising and inspirational. In their toolbelts, alongside their budget and credit report, are love, faith, support, self-confidence, and inner-strength.

Teresa, who graduated from Pacific Lifeline in 2004, wrote, “There are many blessings that I have received from Pacific

Lifeline, but most of all I would say LOVE. After years of abuse I felt like I was nothing when I arrived at Lifeline for my interview. The shelter experience is humbling in and of itself, and I was welcomed with open arms and showered with love. With the love of the Lord all things are possible, and I would most definitely say this strengthened me the most.” Teresa is now working in the financial aid department of a Christian university and supporting her daughter.

Bethany, who graduated from Pacific Lifeline in 2002, wrote, “One of the biggest tools that I left the house with is CONFIDENCE...With all the love and support from everyone, I knew in the long run that I could do anything.” Bethany works in customer service for a gas company and is raising three sons.

Raylene, who graduated from Pacific Lifeline in 2001, wrote, “The tools that I took with me from Pacific Lifeline are independence, self-worth, and feelings of accomplishment. Another thing that I took with me is a greater sense of appreciation... I found myself thanking God every single night for giving us a warm bed and comfort-

able place to live and sleep at night. I took with me a faith in God that was so strong that even after the many obstacles I've faced since being in the shelter, I've gotten through it all." Raylene is supporting a family of five children.

What about Sharon? Is there any set of tools strong enough to break a cycle of homelessness that stretches many generations? While the tangible and practical tools are helpful, it is the transformational tools—those that strengthen the heart and spirit—that truly break the cycle of poverty. When armed with tools given through God's ministry - love, confidence, independence, self-worth, and a spirit of gratitude - poverty can be conquered, and a life that has been fully entrenched in poverty and homelessness can rise out of the depths of despair and gain a new hope and a brighter future. Sharon is in the process of becoming a licensed day care provider. Her two teenage daughters are doing well in school. The beautiful smile on her face defies the years spent in filth, fear, and poverty. It is a smile that reflects the new life she has built using the tools God gave her at Pacific Lifeline.

*Kirsten Grubb is director of development at Pacific Lifeline in Upland, CA. Pacific Lifeline is a ministry of the Brethren in Christ Church.*

## A Bridge of Hope in Tough Times

by Jodie Smiley, Ruth Lesher and Leslie Homer-Cattell

**Every year 600,000 families** with 1.35 million children experience homelessness in the United States, making up about 50 percent of the homeless population over the course of the year (Culhane, D., 2004, *Family Homelessness: Where to From Here?*).

Families without homes live in urban, suburban, and rural areas, sleeping in shelters, cars, motels, and abandoned buildings. Statistics like these feel overwhelming alongside the desire to follow the biblical calls to care for one another. The vision of the Bridge of Hope network is to end and prevent homelessness for women and children across the United States by calling churches into action. The Bridge of Hope network helps families faced with difficult times restore hope in their lives.

### In tough times, being a bridge of hope

When four-year-old Emma comes to Judy van Naerssen's home, she knows exactly where her toys are kept. But building that kind of secure "family" feeling took some time for this once-homeless little girl and her single mother.

"Emma was overly shy when we first met her and her mom, Toma," says Judy van Naerssen, leader of a mentoring group from First Presbyterian Church of West Chester that was matched with this family. "My grown boys took Emma in like a little sister - they were so patient. She eventually started to talk with them and now they tease and interact just like brothers and sister!" says Judy. "While Toma graduated from Bridge of Hope last year, she and Emma are still at our home often to visit and they are always included for holidays and birthdays. They are part of our extended family. Emma has her own toy cabinet at our house and she has become a real chatterbox!"

Before her Bridge of Hope experience, Judy describes herself as living a sheltered, middle-class life. She says she was astounded to learn how many people experienced homelessness in Chester County - one of Pennsylvania's most affluent. After volun-

teering at a local shelter, she was looking for a way to be more personally involved.

At the time, Toma was homeless. She had no family to turn to and was staying at a women's shelter with Emma. With rental assistance from Bridge of Hope Lancaster and Chester Counties, she rented an apartment; her mentoring group helped furnish it. She enrolled in nursing school and now works full-time as an LPN.

"Today, Toma is grounded in the community. And she's one motivated lady!" says Judy, who says Toma shared her plans this year to buy a home and enroll in RN school.

"Bridge of Hope brought professional expertise and played an important educational role in Toma's life. We, as the church, tended to the human side of life - we gave Toma and Emma a family. And we got so much out of it, too! We really loved seeing this family grow in so many ways."



Toma and Emma at graduation

### Bridge of Hope ministry to mothers and children who are homeless and at risk

After a decade and a half of successful ministry in southeastern Pennsylvania, Bridge of Hope National was established in 2002 to call and equip Christians across the country to exemplify Christ's love through a life-changing mentoring ministry with homeless single mothers and their children. As of January 2009, there are 15 Bridge of Hope affiliates and four start-up groups in a total of eight states.

- Bridge of Hope's ministry model is built on three-way partnerships between homeless families, trained church-based mentoring groups and local Bridge of Hope affiliates.
- Single mothers are finding long-term solutions to homelessness that work for their families. With the support of mentoring friends, professional case management, and temporary rental assistance, they can pursue employment training and gain a fresh start.
- Bridge of Hope National provides start-up services, leadership development resources, a complete mentor training program, as well as unlimited consultation and a wide variety of board and staff resources, to Christians seeking a way to connect Protestant and Catholic churches in their communities with homeless and at-risk single mothers and children.
- Local Bridge of Hope affiliates bring together professional staff and trained church-based mentoring groups to empower homeless and at-risk single mothers to attain permanent housing, financial self-sufficiency through employment, and attain stability and enhanced self-esteem through ongoing mentoring friendships. The goal is to exemplify Christ's love and to promote physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wholeness.
- Bridge of Hope believes that the church is the vital link for ending homelessness and that mentoring groups provide a long-term supportive network for homeless and at-risk families.

### One Bridge of Hope Affiliate

Bridge of Hope recently established an affiliate in the Harrisburg, PA area. Jodie Smiley, from the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church, and Joyce Eby of Slate Hill Mennonite Church led the formation of this affiliate from the start-up stage. They hired their first program director, Melanie Miller, in the fall of 2008 and the first families are now being matched with mentors and served by Bridge of Hope Harrisburg Area. "It was such a blessing when we moved our first mom and her two children from a shelter to a home!" said Jodie Smiley. She added,

"God certainly cares about the needy and hurting. I'm excited to see God leading our Bridge of Hope in the Harrisburg Area at each step of the way, as we reach out to the homeless and at-risk women and children in our community." Joyce Eby noted, "I also see Bridge of Hope as a way to serve with people from other faith traditions. God has led in such exciting ways, and we are very thankful!"

Melanie Miller explains what drew her to Bridge of Hope to be the first program director for the Harrisburg Area affiliate. "There were many things that attracted me to Bridge of Hope, but the most powerful is the holistic model of service. The model not only helps families with their physical needs, but also addresses issues of spiritual, social, and educational development, to move families toward self-sufficiency. It is a fully life changing experience for program participants."

The Bridge of Hope network seeks to partner with individuals and churches to reach more women and children in need of that life-changing experience. To learn how you and your church can get involved in your local Bridge of Hope, or to learn how to start a Bridge of Hope in your community, visit [WWW.BRIDGEOFHOPEINC.ORG](http://WWW.BRIDGEOFHOPEINC.ORG) or contact Leslie Homer-Cattell at [LESLIEHC@BRIDGEOFHOPEINC.ORG](mailto:LESLIEHC@BRIDGEOFHOPEINC.ORG) or 866-670-HOPE.

*Jodie Smiley and Ruth Lesher are members of the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church, and serve on the Bridge of Hope board of directors. Leslie Homer-Cattell is director of outreach and communications for Bridge of Hope.*

## One Woman's Story

by Barb Daigle, Bridge of Hope Family Resource Coordinator

**Some women get knocked down** when they become single and can't seem to get back on their feet. Andrea Rose is not one of them. When Andrea came to us, she had not worked for several years since the birth of her first child. She had two preschool children, Jordon (2) and Arianna (1). She found herself suddenly single and feeling insecure. She wanted to stay home with her kids, but knew that she needed to move her family forward. Her rent was in arrears; she had debt she could not handle; and she had no income. Her marketable skills were dusty. Initially, she was able to get a job as a bus driver's assistant because of her previous experience in the medical field. Then, as we explored her career options, she identified her long-term goal to become a registered nurse. The first stepping stone she considered toward that goal was to become a Certified Nursing Assistant. However, we soon recognized that a previous injury to her back would make this path very difficult and painful. She settled on taking classes in Phlebotomy. This seemed like a perfect fit, since she was already comfortable with giving herself insulin shots for her own diabetes.

Andrea enrolled in a Phlebotomy course at community college in June and graduated with straight A's in September! The best part was that she obtained a job related to her internship and began working at Reading Hospital a few weeks later. Her mentors have become "Jesus with skin on" to Andrea's family. Her finances are beginning to stabilize; her children are adjusting to life at day care; and she is most thrilled to see her faith grow as she has looked to God to be her provider. Some women fall down and can't get back up. But not Andrea Rose.

*Excerpted from the newsletter of Bridge of Hope Berks County (PA)*

# Living Simply With People Who Are Poor

by Jesce Walz and Jessica Shoffner

## Overcoming my ideals

Waiting for a new place to become home is all too familiar for me. My family moved across Minnesota several times while I was in school. The ability to adapt has been required of me often, and has become second nature. What I may never get used to is the space between adaptation and actually feeling like I belong in a place. Today, I write to you from my bedroom in a Philadelphia community house. I arrived here two years ago with much hope, trepidation, and a desire to live and serve in an impoverished urban neighborhood alongside other Christians.

Leaving Minnesota is the most difficult thing I have ever done. Life did not pause when I traded lakes and trees for trashed buildings and blasting music. Joy and loss have continued to enter my heart, invited or not. I've needed to practice vulnerability in a strange place, allowing my delicate senses to be permeated by the ghetto. Those I've been vulnerable with have brought conflict, love, and refinement as we've worn upon and sharpened one another.

Amidst the disrepair within our community, my housemates have been supportive and encouraging. They have also been mirrors, requiring me to examine first the plank in my own eye. I see plainly that I am broken, and that it is not my job to fix any community or save the objectified poor. My job is to take one step at a time in the way of Christ. This is challenging and extremely humbling, because Christ's way is to respect, love, and empower others with complete trust that God is in control. I can't say I'm very good at that yet.

In many ways, I'm still just another white girl living at "that house on the corner." I have more questions and less certainty about how to live out God's kingdom than when I arrived. Yet the wisdom I desire cannot be gained through correct answers. I wait patiently for wisdom that comes only through experience and perseverance. Each day I stare out the window, walk around our block, laugh, cry, or offer hospitality - the foreign sights my eyes graze become more familiar.

A quiet change has occurred with the

passing of time. I've begun the incredibly rich journey of knowing what it is to overcome. I have not overcome poverty or racism, but am allowing experiences and relationships to overcome my own expectations, ideals, and defenses. My spirit has struggled, but not been snuffed, and what once seemed oppressive is being lightened by the Spirit of God. I finally feel free to be myself here, and our house has become a home.

-Jessica Shoffner

## Love is not about doing things for but with people

"Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4: 11-12).

Poverty is not the reason I came to The Simple Way; love is. I try to throw out the agendas and the lists of what I can accomplish among "these" people. I am one of "these" that so many speak of. It is not a matter of coming from the outside in or moving from the inside out. It's about loving all people that you share life with wherever you are. Each of us has our own form of poverty that needs to be identified - spiritual, physical, economic, etc.

I am a part of The Simple Way because of its work through love to engage and empower people. Love is not about doing things for others; instead it gets things done with others. This is not as simple as it reads. It takes much time and energy to empower others. It takes endurance and trust to do things with and not for. A problem that reoccurs is identifying someone else's need for them. It happens so naturally, but that way of thinking needs to be addressed within ourselves. Who are we to say what someone needs, when we don't know them, love them, or live with them? Are we pursuing deep relationships with those in need or are we giving handouts?

The Bible talks about the people among whom Christ lived. Jesus was with the poor-

est of the poor, the sick, the lame and those who were hated (including tax collectors). Living among those with visible needs helps me to see my own need for a Savior. My inner being needs to be restored. I choose and continue to choose to live in a poor neighborhood because the souls here are beautifully raw. Life is real and the need of the Divine is real. There are no facades, all walls are broken. I will continue to invest time and energy, so that I can call my ghetto my home.

-Jesce Walz

*Jessica Shoffner and Jesce Walz are residents of the Potter Street Community House in Philadelphia, PA. Jesce is a graphic designer and artist, exploring the relationship of creativity, justice, and peace. Jessica is the unofficial gardener for The Simple Way, hailing from Chapman, Kansas. They both attend Circle of Hope (BIC).*

## Conference on poverty:

# Mobilization to End Poverty

April 26-29, 2009, Washington, DC

Hosted by Sojourners

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Committed to the biblical imperative of reducing domestic and global poverty, and calling President Barack Obama and Congress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. President Obama has been invited to speak.

*Program and registration information is available online at [sojo.net/mobilization](http://sojo.net/mobilization).*

# The Messy Kitchen

*Mountain Ridge Church in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, is a seven-year-old church plant of the Mechanicsburg Brethren in Christ Church. With plans to build someday, we currently have no building but with a community of people who want to make a difference, nothing is impossible. One effort in what we like to call “fully engaging our community” is the Messy Kitchen, led by Melissa McElwee, an unpaid volunteer who wanted to make a difference. Following is an interview with Melissa by the pastor, Ken Landis.*

## **How did the church decide to start The Messy Kitchen?**

As with most churches, Mountain Ridge Church (MRC) had a small meal ministry for those that attended MRC – families with new babies, illness, etc. At MRC, we have a “go big” mentality – and the meal ministry was not what it could be. Our pastor, Ken Landis, stated time and time again that church is not about us – we need to use the gifts that God has given us to help the community. So the “Messy Kitchen: Meals Reaching the Community” was created.

MRC is what you could call a “virtual” church; we currently rent space in the Northern Middle School in Dillsburg and do not have kitchen facilities. The Messy Kitchen’s donated freezers were in the garage of a member. In spite of that, in the fall of 2006, we decided we would help New Hope Ministries in Dillsburg with their holiday food baskets. We wanted a personal touch for these families, so we decided to bake some cookies – two dozen cookies per family (300+ families) for a total of 8,000 cookies. In three weeks, we had collected more than 11,000 cookies!

At this point, we knew God was leading us in a direction that was bigger than we ever considered. At the same time, the church was working on breaking the “virtual” barrier and putting down roots in the borough of Dillsburg. As a result, “The Impact: Meeting and Resource Center” was created. We found space in town that was not only perfect for The Impact, but also had an adjoining facility in the rear with fully equipped kitchens perfect for The Messy Kitchen. (We ran this outreach for over a year, and then closed The Impact last summer to prepare for building our permanent church.)

## **How does The Messy Kitchen work?**

It’s done through referral and there are no rules for qualification; anyone whose circumstances require meal assistance (birth of a baby, surgery, accident, death, financial troubles, etc.) is eligible. Depending on the circumstance, we usually offer delivery of complete dinners for 5-7 days. Another part of the Messy Kitchen is where we go beyond simple casserole dinners for families. We have had the honor of working with community groups and community events including Channel 27 Home Makeover Reveal Parties (350+ people in attendance), Home Makeover gifts to families (60 meals over 12 week period), New Hope Ministries Youth After School Program (bi-weekly dinners), New Hope Ministries Youth summer program (bagged lunches), The Second Mile - Foster Family Day at Hersheypark (bagged lunches for 80 people), Soup’s for Supper monthly free dinner for the community. We also hosted several “take-out” baked ziti dinners that benefited New Hope Ministries. Last but not least is Loaf’n Around Town, our team that redistributes a local Panera Bread’s daily overflow. We have teams that each week pick up the bread from the store, sort the donation (usually 200-300 pieces), and distribute to different community groups including a York Springs BIC missions group and Helping Hands Ministries of Harrisburg, Inc. (an outreach ministry in the city of Harrisburg for the homeless, the downtrodden, and other needy people). We are honored to be a group that helps these organizations.

## **How have people responded to “Soup’s for Supper”?**

Soup’s for Supper was created as a way for us to put hands and feet to these ministries in the community. We wanted a time when neighbors can get out, meet one another while enjoying a free meal, with no strings attached. Dillsburg is a small town and, as with many small towns, cautious of new endeavors. But the response was very positive and each month we saw more and more new faces. We typically served around 50 people through the evening, including familiar faces and new faces – families that stopped in because they realized they didn’t have enough money for dinner that night and we “coincidentally” had free dinner. I don’t ask where they go to church or if they have faith; I simply ask how they’re doing, give them dinner and leftovers to take home. God has told them that we are here for them and we are safe. (We’ve stopped this ministry for the time being as we prepare to build our permanent church.)

## **How do people respond to the work of The Messy Kitchen?**

As one of our team members recently said, “People stopped me to say how delicious it was...especially for a church dinner!” That made me chuckle. They don’t know that we don’t church cook...we God cook. We aren’t cooking for the love of the church...but, for the love of God!” The response to TMK and the impact it has been able to have on others has been nothing short of miraculous. We have even been contacted by other “mega” churches inquiring about how it works. We have also had monetary and product donations. But the best response of all comes from the families we are able to help. They are usually dumbfounded that a group of people they don’t know could care so much. Some families have visited the church, but that’s not why we do it. One young mother brought her daughter home from the hospital and was stunned when we called and asked if she’d like meals delivered for the week. She accepted and appreciated the blessing; she

(continued from page 7)

explained, “It was like Christmas every night. You never knew what you were going to get.”

### **Are there any plans for the future of the Messy Kitchen?**

Future plans for TMK include preparing for our new space once the church is built and continuing our mission in the community. How this is done is constantly changing.

When we first started, we wanted to make meals privately and get them to people that needed them. That was it; if it didn't fit in that “box” then we didn't want any part of it. Of course, God blew that box apart and we are doing more for the community and partnering with community groups in ways we never would have imagined.

## **Angel Food Ministries**

by John Melhorn

**In 1994 a factory** in a small town in Georgia closed down leaving many in that town unemployed. A pastor and her family decided to purchase food and then sell boxes of this food to the people who lost their jobs at a low price. That first month they sold 34 boxes of food from their house. Thus, Angel Food Ministries began. Now about 600,000 boxes a month are sold over 35 states with churches as their host sites.

In February 2008 my sister-in-law suggested that we find an Angel Food host site and purchase food from there; we were a family of four living on two part-time jobs. At that time no Angel Food Ministry (AFM) host site existed in the Baltimore area, so we began exploring it as a church. In October 2008 we began as a host site, but by then two other churches on the east side of Baltimore also had become host sites.

AFM sells boxes of mostly perishable food at a low price; food banks in our area give out mostly non-perishable food. Clients may purchase a regular box of food which often has 6-7 different types of meat, some frozen vegetables, eggs, milk, and other various items for a price of \$30 (the estimated store price is \$45-60). AFM also offers a convenience box of ten heat-and-serve meals for seniors or people on the go, and they offer various boxes of meat and a fruit and veggie box, if you purchase a regular or convenience box.

You can be rich or poor to purchase food through AFM; there are no qualifications. We only take their name, address, and phone

number. Intriguingly, the clients often offer something else – their stories. Those who are experiencing financial challenges often want to tell why they are purchasing food; those who are not struggling as much usually don't share as much. So the stories vary and are sometimes heartbreaking, but that is often where our ministry of the love of Jesus truly begins.

One lady lived in the Baltimore area, but her father was dying in New Jersey. In order for her to arrange care for her dad, she had to take off work with no pay. How was she going to make ends meet? She heard about AFM. Another woman had her husband desert her with their twin three-year-olds. A husband who was working hard to get off food stamps lost his job when the company lost several contracts. Some people purchase food for their elderly parents who have little income. Others purchase it for their adult children who are struggling. Single mothers, fixed income retirees, people who are facing crises have either purchased food or called for information. We have prayed with several, formed friendships with some, and recently one of the family units attended church. Another nearby AFM host site has had some people come to know Jesus and become part of the church.

We did not enter this ministry to fight poverty. We entered this ministry to show the grace and truth of Jesus Christ at people's point of need. We wanted to give a hand up, not a hand out (an AFM slogan.) Since

we have begun this food ministry, we have received many more calls seeking free food. I refer them to our local food bank which we support. Intriguingly, I have learned that people who are looking for a hand out are not often willing to receive a hand up.

Poverty has more flavors than Baskins Robbins. Poverty is a snowball rolling down a hill, for it is a vicious cycle. Crises (outside circumstances), poor choices (inward attitudes and responsibility), some government policies, and even unwritten cultural attitudes build the snowball of poverty. In our area, I have learned that poverty itself is more often a symptom of brokenness and not the cause of brokenness. Addictions of various types, victims of abuse, splits in families of different forms, not to mention beliefs that directly counter biblical principles – all of these and more enlarge the snowball. We at Faith are trying through AFM to offer the wholeness of God so that the snowball won't keep rolling unchecked.

*John Melhorn is the pastor of Faith Brethren in Christ Church, Baltimore, MD.*

# Free! Just like God's Love

by Janelle Groff

In hard economic times, many families seek out basic necessities that are free. The congregation at Refton Brethren in Christ Church developed a clothing room, where clothing is free. The stipulation is that those shopping for their new wardrobe will hear Nettie Miller proclaim, "The clothing is free just like God's love." In fact, every article of clothing is tagged with the size and the saying, "Free, just like God's love."

Nettie Miller, the organizer of the Clothing Room, had a vision for what to do with all of the clothes her three children had outgrown. One snowy January day in 1999, Nettie decided to organize Refton's first clothing drive. Right before Nettie was about to give up because no one came, a family arrived, ready to shop for the six children, and Nettie's vision was rejuvenated. The family sent a letter to the church thankful for what had been provided at no cost. In the spirit of making a difference, Nettie set up a one room "shopping experience" for the whole community. Anyone can shop at the Clothing Room, including members of the congregation who



Customers at The Clothing Room

both shop there and replenish the supply of clothing. Darlene, a current and repeat customer of the Clothing Room, says she enjoys shopping here because she "sees the body of Christ working through the volunteers and the quality of clothing available."

Nettie has two faithful volunteers, Har-

ry and Cheryl Eckman, who help her sort and organize the clothing. Many volunteer hours are needed since many of the clothes are sent overseas. Clothing has been sent to Hurricane Katrina victims, Native American reservations in New York, Haiti, Costa Rica and Peru. The Clothing Room has also served victims displaced by natural disasters such as fire and floods as well as immigrants and those who have lost their jobs.

The congregation at Refton uses the Clothing Room as a symbol of God's love. Nobody will ever be turned away. Volunteers like to think these verses from Matthew say it all: "Do not worry, saying... 'what shall I wear?' Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given (free) to you as well. Therefore, don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt. 6:31-34).

*Janelle Groff is a senior at Millersville University and attends the Refton Brethren in Christ Church in Lancaster County, PA.*

## "In the Name of Christ": MCC Ontario's Poverty Advocacy

**Mennonite Central Committee**, well-known for its work around the world in relief and development "in the name of Christ," has played a crucial role in Ontario in speaking the truth to the government about poverty at home.

MCC Ontario was deeply engaged in working to get the Ontario government to create a provincial poverty reduction strategy – a significant change in government social policy. MCCO wrote to the Ontario government, participated in government consultations, and joined other groups advocating for poverty reduction.

As a result, the Government of Ontario released a poverty reduction strategy in December 2008. The government's objective is to reduce child poverty by 25% within 5 years, lifting more than 90,000 Ontario children and families above the poverty line.

Advocacy may seem a far cry from MCC Ontario's typical work. Offering a pastoral presence among people who are chronically homeless. Supporting women and their children as they break the cycle of homelessness. Helping churches sponsor refugees coming to Canada. Engaging youth to resist militarism and be active peacemakers. Encouraging a restorative, rather than punitive, approach to crime. Walking along side

aboriginal communities. And more.

This person-to-person relationship building is a hallmark of how MCC Ontario works. So where does government policy advocacy fit in this picture?

First of all, the one-on-one work walking with people living in poverty actually gives MCC a unique perspective on how government policies work and do not work for people.

FOCUS ON  
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Take Streets-to-Homes, a City of Toronto initiative aimed at ending homelessness. Many of the people that MCC Ontario street pastor, Doug Johnson Hatlem, knows are dealing with many things in addition to being homeless. Things like addictions, physical or mental health issues. It is hard for people to overcome those challenges if they don't have stable housing.

Streets-to-Homes is part of a "housing first" approach to tackling homelessness gaining momentum in cities across North America. The idea is to get people off the streets and into stable housing – not shelters – first. Then provide the mix of services and supports they need to stay off the streets and build a better life.

The approach works. So it is important for MCC to let governments – both municipal and provincial – know that and to call on them to keep funding these programs. At other times, MCC Ontario raises concerns over government initiatives that make life worse for people in need.

### **Toward a poverty-free Ontario**

Secondly, advocating before the government for fairer social policies can make a difference in the big picture. MCC Ontario's advocacy to reduce poverty goes back many years through its participation in the Inter-faith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC). ISARC was formed in 1986, and since then has been advocating for greater justice and dignity for people living in poverty.

In 2007, something new happened in Ontario. Other countries and other provinces in Canada had put in place coordinated strategies to reduce poverty. MCC Ontario and other groups looked to Quebec where a poverty reduction plan had cut child poverty in half over the previous decade. In July 2007, Ontario Campaign 2000, a network of groups working to end child poverty, released a discussion paper calling for an "Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy" with the first target of reducing poverty by 25% in 5 years.

This led to the formation of a new network – the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction – that came together in the lead-up to the 2007 provincial election to press all parties to commit to poverty reduction. The Liberals made that commitment during the election campaign and were re-elected to

form the government.

The Network, with MCC Ontario's Poverty Advocate on the steering committee, applauded the Government's steps to create a Cabinet Committee to coordinate the poverty reduction efforts. It challenged the government to hold inclusive consultations across the province and succeeded in getting dozens of open consultations, rather than the 14 invitation-only meetings the Government first announced. The Government learned that the consultation process could be and was a positive experience to gather input into the poverty reduction strategy.

MCCO participated in these consultations and made a written submission to the process. MCCO's submission, *Toward a Poverty-Free Ontario*, drew upon our work walking with people living in poverty and our participation in coalitions like the ISARC and Campaign 2000 to provide recommendations to the government.

But then there was some drama. When the global economic crisis broke in the early fall, Ontario's Premier suggested that his government might have to pull back from its commitment to poverty reduction. Upon hearing that news, MCCO's Executive Director, Rick Cober Bauman, wrote to the Premier urging him to hold fast on his commitment. Together with similar messages from many other groups and individuals across Ontario, the 25 in 5 Network succeeded in getting the government to reaffirm its commitment to poverty reduction.

MCC Ontario recognizes that realizing the vision of a province where everyone can live free from poverty cannot happen overnight. But we also understand that without a concerted effort it will never come to be. And we feel compelled, out of our work walking with people living in poverty, to speak out for policies that will help reduce poverty, hunger and homelessness, and improve the lives of those who are most vulnerable. MCC cares about the lives and well-being of people with whom we walk at home and around the world. And we want to make sure government policies work to improve their lives. This too is "in the name of Christ".

*Greg deGroot-Maggetti works as MCC Ontario's Poverty Advocate. The document, Toward a Poverty-Free Ontario, is available online at [MCC.ORG/ONTARIO/PEOPLEINPOVERTY](http://MCC.ORG/ONTARIO/PEOPLEINPOVERTY)*

## *Facts & Resources on Poverty*

### **Some facts about global poverty:**

- About 30,000 children die each day worldwide because of poverty, which means that 18 children die every minute, and one every three seconds.
- More than nine million people, five million of them children, die worldwide each year from hunger and malnutrition. More than 11 million children die from preventable causes like malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia.
- More than 25 percent of children in developing countries are underweight or their growth is stunted.
- Half the world's people live on less than \$2 a day.

### **Selected web resources on poverty:**

All of the following organizations provide statistical information about poverty (similar to the above facts) and offer ideas for action against poverty.

#### ***End Poverty 2015 Millennium Campaign***

» [WWW.ENDPOVERTY2015.ORG](http://WWW.ENDPOVERTY2015.ORG)

Believes that ours is the first generation that can end poverty, and is based on a promise made by 189 world leaders when they established the Millennium Goals. The eight goals: ending hunger, universal education, gender equity, child health, maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, global partnership.

#### ***The One Campaign***

» [WWW.ONE.ORG](http://WWW.ONE.ORG)

A grassroots campaign and advocacy organization committed to the fight against extreme poverty and preventable disease, particularly in Africa; co-founded by Bono of the rock group, U-2. Currently has a focus on the crisis in Zimbabwe.

#### ***Make Poverty History***

» [WWW.MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY.CA](http://WWW.MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY.CA)

Canadian initiative based on Millennium Development Goals. Aim can be expressed in 14 words: more and better aid, trade justice, cancel the debt, end child poverty in Canada.

#### ***Do Something***

» [WWW.DOSOMETHING.ORG](http://WWW.DOSOMETHING.ORG)

Youth harnessing the power of the internet to address a variety of issues, including poverty. Aims to "inspire, support and celebrate a generation of doers: people who see the need to do something, believe in their ability to get it done, and then take action."

# Poverty Can Be a Good Thing

By Jeremy Ritch

**Jesus spoke of the poor often** and emphasized our role as Christians in helping them. In the Beatitudes Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Another translation reads, “Blessed are those who are poor and recognize their need for him.” This better explains this verse. I often hear people misquote this passage as though Christ is addressing the physically poor. Being poor in spirit is something entirely different and in this particular case it is a good thing. It literally means, “happy are those who know they are lost without God and understand they need him everyday.” This poverty is one of the soul, the understanding that we are helpless without God.

To be poor in spirit is to accept the fact that we are sinful beings who need saving. This poverty is so important for us to recognize. It is the basis for salvation, the reason Christ came and died, our depraved souls crying out for God because we know we are lost without him. This is true poverty that is only defeated when we swallow our pride and hit the bottom. This is a point where nothing we own matters because we are empty and hollowed out. Even the poorest man hangs onto something he owns. What Christ is saying here is you do not need to hold onto anything but me.

This understanding of Christ’s words is the only way to break the poverty of our spirits. There is a catch, however. Jesus wants us to recognize our need for him but also not to forget that feeling of need. While we live this life we must always remain poor because it is the only way we can truly rely on him. Then we can empathize with those who are hurting and in need of salvation. Jesus spoke very frankly about how the poor are to be treated and how Christians are to approach the issue of poverty. What makes this verse in Matthew so important is he is telling us that no matter how wealthy we are, we should be glad that we have an impoverished spirit that relies on our father in heaven. In that reliance we



find the wisdom, strength and courage to serve those around us with humble hearts. Our blessings may come in different forms but our final blessing is promised by Christ as the Kingdom of Heaven. So while our souls are poor and needy, our reward for accepting that is a kingdom. That is a pretty sweet deal and it is also the best way we can tackle the issues that are facing our world.

We can feed the hungry, clothe the naked and heal the sick, but until we show our own poverty we have not truly helped anyone. We must be able to experience the poverty of the soul in order to heal the poverty of humanity. Our culture is fixed on the need for financial stability, status and wealth. We see people ruin their lives chasing after these elusive prizes. In the end those that find them want more and those who don’t begin to chase something else. Jesus, however, is saying that we all are poor and our only ticket out is to realize how poor we really are. In doing so we will be able to rely on God and chase after his goodness. We should rejoice in our poverty because it means we will one day be fulfilled beyond what a plasma screen or a Mercedes could ever do.

I think about a homeless man I once knew who had nothing of value but had a faith in God that kept him smiling in the midst of his struggle. That should be our goal, to know we are impoverished but to also know we will one day be fulfilled. This could be the best way to battle poverty in our country and around the world – to change hearts and show there is something better. The poor will always be with us and luckily so will God. Maybe if we showed others the beauty of our poverty we could give them hope that theirs might one day be forgotten.

*Jeremy Ritch leads Hold Fast Ministries in Harrisburg, PA, and attends the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church.*

## The Micah Challenge

» [WWW.MICAHCHALLENGE.ORG](http://WWW.MICAHCHALLENGE.ORG)

Builds on the challenge of the prophet Micah to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Global Christian campaign which “aims to deepen our engagement with impoverished and marginalized communities; and to challenge international leaders...to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.”

## NetAid

» [WWW.NETAID.ORG](http://WWW.NETAID.ORG)

Another youth-focused organization that “educates, inspires and empowers new generations of young people to fight global poverty throughout their lives.”

## Stop Child Poverty

» [WWW.STOPCHILDPOVERTY.ORG](http://WWW.STOPCHILDPOVERTY.ORG)

Works to raise awareness about child poverty and to change the way people think about child poverty. As they say on their web site: “Child poverty doesn’t have to be an irreversible reality. ‘Eat all your vegetables because there are children starving in Africa,’ doesn’t have to be the dinner-time cliché.”

# Editor’s Notes

## Remaining topics for 2009:

**Spring:** Responding to evil (war on terror, relating to enemies, forgiveness and nonviolence)

**Summer:** Creation care and environmental stewardship

**Fall:** Money matters

If you or someone you know would like to write on any of these topics, please contact the editor.

## Subscription contributions & renewals:

Thank you to everyone who responded to my personal invitation to consider giving an extra contribution to *Shalom!* at the end of 2008. You gave more than \$450, which enabled us to begin 2009 in the black. I very much appreciate your generosity! The 2009 subscription renewal letter will be mailed soon, and I encourage you not only to renew your own subscription but also to consider giving a gift subscription to someone else.

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P.O. Box 390, Grantham, PA 17027

## Listening to the Wind: A Children's Story

by Lois Saylor

**In 1993 in Pakistan**, Greg Mortenson attempted to climb K2, the world's second highest mountain. The climb failed and Mortenson, tired and disoriented, wandered off from his group, and found himself in a small, impoverished village. The people of that village nursed him back to health and while there he saw the need for a village school. The villagers could not afford the dollar-a-day pay for a teacher, but still the 84 children of the village attended to their lessons in an outside classroom using sticks and dirt as paper and pencil. Before leaving, Mortenson promised to return and build a school for the children. He kept his promise and also began a new humanitarian campaign to build needed schools in other remote villages of both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Mortenson's story is told in three books. There is the original version, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time*, and a young adult version. There is also a just-released children's book called *Listen to the Wind*.

*Listen to the Wind* tells the story in the voice of the children from the village of Korphe where Mortenson was nursed back to health and returned to build his first school. The tale the children tell is simple and straightforward. The book is beautifully illustrated with picture collages made with layered papers, fabrics and watercolor paints, and they are a delight to study in detail. After the story and collages is "A Korphe Scrapbook" with photographs set in the same rich tapestry of

collage with captions allowing the readers to see the real people and places of the storybook. Following the photos is an "Artist's Note" from co-author and illustrator Susan L. Roth. Her notes also add to the depth of the story, to understanding the people in the story, and help the reader understand her artistic sensibilities and inspirations.

*Listen to the Wind* is suitable for both home and church use. It introduces children to a new place in the world where other youngsters live, play, go to school, and even help build their school. While not a Christian book, there are biblical lessons to be taken from it. The villagers take in the stranger, feed him, and nurse him back to health. The stranger, now friend, helps the village and the children in ways that are truly useful and needed. He also helps in ways that do not disrupt the village, but align with the ways and culture of the village. It was reminiscent of the BIC core value Serving Compassionately that reads, "We value serving others *at their point of need*, following the example of our Lord Jesus." Serving compassionately and peacemaking could certainly be themes to discuss while reading and studying the book with children. And both are ways to fight poverty.

The book also easily inspires a home or church project of making collages of the children's own schools or Sunday school classes, depending on the setting in which the book is being shared. One can envision

smaller individual collages or the collective effort of a large wall hanging. Collages are a wonderful way to bring out the creative and artistic aspects of each child that reflects the creativity of God.

At the end of the photo section in the book there is an invitation to support the building of the schools through Mortenson's organization. The BIC also have an educational program in this part of Asia called the BIC Scholarship Program for International Children's Education (SPICE). Originating in India in the 1950s and now extending into Nepal, SPICE sponsors the education of BIC children in Bihar, Orissa, and Nepal with nine hostels housing nearly 800 children. Yet even more children could use support to live in a BIC hostel while in school. A reading of *Listen to the Wind* could also lead to discussion in either a home or church setting about what the Brethren in Christ do to help children's educations and possibly inspire a project to sponsor SPICE. To understand more about the program and how to be involved go to [WWW.BIC-CHURCH.ORG/WM/SPICE/](http://WWW.BIC-CHURCH.ORG/WM/SPICE/)

To learn more about Greg Mortenson's project and order any of the available books go to [THREECUPSOFTEA.COM](http://THREECUPSOFTEA.COM).

**Lois Saylor** reviewed *Listen to the Wind: the Story of Dr. Greg and Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortenson and Susan L. Roth (*Dial Books for Young Readers*, 2008). Lois and her husband Andy are deacons at the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church.