

The Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis

Mission & Ministry Successes Mid 2008

Faith & Fathers Mentoring Program

Michelle Meer

New interim associate director,

“I was in prison and you visited me.”

Young men incarcerated in the *Indianapolis Juvenile Correction Facility* and the *Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility* in Indiana are given an opportunity to turn their lives around through the weekly visits of mentors as-well-as parenting classes. The mentors are men trained to give spiritual encouragement to these youth as a brother in Christ and to provide witness to responsible parenting as a friend. They visit their young man once a week for three months. Mentors hear the yearning of that incarcerated person who just wants someone with whom to talk.

- Currently we have 5 mentors in the program, with a waiting list of young men who want to share time with a mentor.
- In two classes we trained a total of 35 young men in effective parenting.
- On May 20th, over 200 young men at Pendleton participated in the 10th Annual Social Services Fair with 8 agencies present.

Hispanic-Latino Forum

The Forum has its roots in a decision made at a *Greater Indianapolis Urban Forum* meeting in 2001, to host civic and church leaders of the Hispanic/Latino and non Hispanic/Latino communities at a seminar. This was an effort to bring members of both communities together to discuss the needs and issues of Central Indiana's growing Hispanic/Latino population.

Members of *The Forum* work to present opportunities for dialogue with the Greater Indianapolis community related to Hispanic/Latino culture, tradition, and values. *Cultural Encounter Initiatives* and *Public Forums* facilitate opportunities for cross-cultural relationships in an environment that promotes dynamic common experiences.

- Hispanic/Latino and African American pastors participate in monthly meetings to promote cooperation.
- Their focus is on language and similarities and differences.
- A cultural visit on February 21st to the *Underground Railroad* in Cincinnati was a success for those who attended.
- We made a second cultural visit to the *Mexican Cultural Museum* in Chicago on April 24th.

Benevolence Fund Ministry

New interim associate director, Michelle Meer

Everyone can contribute to strengthening his or her community. Residents who are part of a neighborhood know best what needs and assets exist there. Through this fund, grants are made each year to qualified congregations and religious organizations to implement programs and projects, which enhance community/neighborhood life.

- The fund is administered by a *Church Federation* committee of 9 members from *Church Federation* member congregations. The committee meets 4 times a year: March, June, September, and December. By early June 2008, 12 grants of \$3,000 each have been awarded.

EXAMPLE:

With money from this fund *St. Philip Neri Catholic Church* sponsored an *Art with a Heart* program in cooperation with *Holy Angels School, Horizon, St. Florian Center, Lutheran Family Services, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Loving Care, and Auntie Mame's*. Over 90% of the students showed improved artistic skills and were positive about their art.

Caring Churches Network (formerly known as the *Loaves & Fishes Network*)

New interim associate director, Michelle Meer

The Caring Churches Network was established in 2004 to assist churches to provide holistic support to individuals needing financial and spiritual support. *CCN* provides such support in addition to practical guidance for everyday life and personal resource management.

CCN optimizes the delivery of church-based social services and spiritual support by fostering collaborative church efforts, resources are pooled, and professional expertise is provided to participating churches. Currently, 8 partner churches participate in the network with ongoing efforts to increase the level of church participation.

- As of May 2008, *CCN* served 81 clients. Between 2005 and 2007, 1,084 clients were served.
- *IUPUI* social work interns developed a qualitative and quantitative tool to assess the impact that *CCN* has had on those seeking assistance.
- Currently, the advisory committee and staff continue to meet with congregations to expand local church support for the program.

Faith & Education Initiative

Beginning in the fall of 2005 *The Church Federation* initiated a *Back-to-School Prayer* emphasis throughout our churches as we pray for students and parents, teachers, and all administrative-staff personnel in the IPS school system.

- We work to create liaisons between IPS schools and churches for educational support initiatives (tutoring, etc.)

Public Events & Partnerships

- Public Forum: *Religion, Race, and Electoral Politics* was held on March 25th at St. Luke's United Methodist Church.
- Members of *The Church Federation Board* were officially installed at a worship service on Sunday, April 13th at *Pilgrim Lutheran Church*, the home church of our new Board President, Rev. Al Goertemiller.
- District 7 Congregational Candidate's Forum: co-sponsored with *Light of the World Christian Church* and *IUPUI* on April 20th at *Light of the World Christian Church*.
- We continue our support of *the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives* (JDAI).
- On April 20th a *Time for Timothy* celebration was held at *the Children's Museum* in Indianapolis. This 50th anniversary event drew over 100 families who came to celebrate the memory of this special; TV series developed in Indianapolis by *The Federation* for children in the 1950's.
- *The Church Federation* continues to participate in meetings of the *Special Curfew Committee* (government agencies and churches) working on safety issues for teenagers.
- *The Federation* developed a series of 5 prayer services in May on the anniversary of the 100th year of *the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. Host Churches were: *Covenant Community Church, Church of Acts, Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, St. George Orthodox Church, St. Mary's Catholic Church*. Between 75 and 200 people attended each prayer service.
- Sacred Conversations: *Religion, Race, and Electoral Politics 2008*. June conversations with congregations, faith-based institutions and community leaders addressing race relations in Indianapolis. Kicked off on May 18th at *St. Luke's United Methodist Church*.
- Church & Neighborhood Partnership: A community-based partnership with 20 churches drew over 60 low-income housing and church youth to a community fair. The goal was to provide dialogue and agenda setting for training events to address violence, financial literacy and safe places for community organizing in low-income housing areas.

The Ecumenical Project for Reconciliation and Healing

New interim EPRH director, Rev. Tracy Ross

➤ **Prayer Vigils**

- After every homicide in Indianapolis, family members, friends, and other caring Christians from across the city of Indianapolis gather together to reconsecrate the ground at the site of the homicide and to pray for the victims and their survivors. This is the 11th year for *The Church Federation* - sponsored *Prayer Vigils*.

"To stand in prayer with families who have lost a loved one is a grace filled moment. To hear the prayers of families who are asking for grace from God to truly forgive whoever killed their loved one is for me a sign of God's presence in our midst.
Joe Zelenka – Prayer Vigil Coordinator

- The number of homicides in Indianapolis between January - and – May31 is 46.
- To date in 2008 we have conducted 46 prayer vigils at the sites of homicides (12 held in January from December 2007 homicides) 34 from homicides in 2008.
- During the course of last year, Joe Zelenka, traveled over 3,204 miles in the city of Indianapolis to meet with families and conduct prayer vigils.

➤ **Services of Reconciliation & Healing**

Worship services are held each year to remember loved ones lost through homicide during the past six months. During the service family and friends are invited to come forward to light a candle in memory of their loved one.

- We held a *Light the Night for Life* service in January at the *Crown Hill Peace Chapel*.

➤ **Mentoring Program with Families Affected by Homicides**

Following the *Prayer Vigils*, we offer follow-up support. Individuals and families who have lost someone from a homicide frequently find themselves unable to cope with the pain and anguish of violent death. We train lay people and clergy to serve as mentors to those in need of support. Through the mentor's presence, thousands of church members demonstrated Christ's compassion.

- Between the years 1999 and 2008 we trained 110 mentors.
- On May 13th we commissioned 13 new mentors. They will begin their work immediately.
- We have 18 lay and clergy persons active as mentors.
- To date, in 2008, we made contact with over 16 persons/families through our mentors in an attempt to stand with families that have experienced homicide and assist them at an extremely painful time.
- Staff members met with former mentors and representatives from churches to reclaim the participation of former mentors.
- A goal of the current initiative is to establish 10 additional sites across the city to train mentors, and form grief support groups.

Prepared by: Rev Dr. Ray J. Marquette, Director of Development & Membership
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