

The New Vision

The Rocky Mountain Conference of The United Methodist Church



Christmas 2009

What if? It's a question of vision, of contemplation, of hope...

What if Church was a verb? What if the church had ten thousand doors for people to use to connect with their spiritual path? What if the doors led to service opportunities?

This issue of *The New Vision* looks at ways in which "church" became a verb for those who walked through these new "doors..." **What if we Rethink Church?** "Rethinking Church" moves into dialogue with those who seek life in abundance, service that makes the world better, and deeper human community, eventually transforming the world.

Meeting God in Easter Eggs...

The people of Saint Paul's United Methodist Church in Boulder know about Church as a verb: they have offered an Easter egg hunt and a "love wreath" at Christmas to families of the Emergency Family Assistance Association in Boulder. Last Easter, they filled Easter eggs with goodies, recruited an "Easter Bunny" (John Cross, well-known to many in the Conference), gave money for grocery coupons, and the youth put up flyers inviting the families to some fun. It was a project involving many people who cared, and it resulted in more than they might have imagined. The next day they found a hand-written thank you letter from one mother near the foyer flowers:



Dear People at Saint Paul's:
I have never written a letter like this before, but I just had to write you tonight to let you know how much your kindness and generosity mean to me and to my son.

We heard about your egg hunt at EFAA [Emergency Family Assistance Association], and we almost did not go. What a mistake that would have been. You treated me and my son to 90 minutes of sheer joy, fun, and companionship. We have not had so much of that lately. Thank you.



The egg hunt is all that my 6 year old son has been able to talk about today--we had such a good time.

I was putting Michael to bed tonight and he said, "Mommy, wasn't it so great to see God today." I told him that we had gone to a church and some people call churches a house of God and that we had seen many different people there but not God.

"No, mommy," he said, "God was those nice people who helped us feel better today," he said.

I opened my mouth to correct him again and then it hit me like a rush of adrenaline. Michael had it right. I could barely talk. "Yes, Michael, you are right. God was those nice people who helped us feel better."

I kissed him good night and came out to my living room to type this letter so you would know how much today meant to my family. You just have to know how important and wonderful today was for us. I prayed tonight for the first time in a while--I have not felt like praying much lately. I prayed to God to say thank you for Saint Paul's church and for the hope and love and joy you gave us today.

I hope someone finds this letter and lets everyone know how you have touched our lives today. Thank you. R

Making a Difference in the Mountains

The people of the Deer Park United Methodist Church near Bailey, Colorado, are making a major



difference in western Jefferson County and northeastern Park County, the result of 4 churches coming together to provide both food and wood for area families

in an Interfaith Pantry. People in need are referred to the pantry by human services agencies. This season, four times as many families and individuals are coming to our food pantry as last year. The prediction is that twice as much firewood will be needed. To help meet the need for firewood, some people, dressed in worn jeans and sweatshirts that had seen better days, gathered in the lower parking lot. Bruce was running the splitter, Dave and Jonas and a few others were carrying chunks of wood to be split, Sharon and Robert and several more people were cutting logs into stove-wood lengths and stacking the split wood. Within the hour, a convoy of pick-up trucks began arriving, carrying loads of logs and driven mostly by women. As Dave said, it reminded him of that parable, the one about the "loads and the dishes." Thus began a morning of sweat, pulled muscles, sore backs, scrapes, and bruises, a beautiful, powerful, and natural dance of enthusiasm, passion, love, fellowship, partnership, and small groups. Twenty people, dancing together to the music of a wood splitter and chain saws, entering into the suffering of people who would be cold this winter were it not for the stove wood we were preparing for them.



Rev. Kay Krebs, pastor at Deer Park, said, "People all around me are taking a stand with the poor and vulnerable, walking into the realities of troubles and suffering we all share. As followers of Jesus, we are finding our way to more pain and discomfort, not less. We are serving people who have no money for groceries or heating fuel by providing food and wood; we are serving women who, with their children, have fled domestic abuse by providing kitchen utensils and paper goods as they start new lives; we are serving people in hospice by providing prayer shawls to comfort them and their families when they pass into eternity; we are serving poor families in far-off countries by giving money for health care, education, and bed nets to prevent malaria. We are becoming more human, more real, as we enter into the suffering, participating as we are able, looking around for God, and embracing the mystery of it all. In the process, our lives are being transformed, deepened, marked with beauty and holiness, in ways we could never have imagined. We are becoming rich beyond measure, as we are pulled through the eye of the needle by the grace of God, for whom all things are possible."

Tons of Food, Thousands of People!

Pastor Jerry Boles, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Colorado Springs tells about that church's feeding program: "Since back in the spring we have been averaging 12 tons or 24,000 pounds a month of food that passed through our doors on the way out. Our last 6 month total is around 140,000 pounds. Serving 1,867 Families totaling 5,276 people in the last six month period. Just quietly serving the Lord and feeding His Sheep."

St. Luke's Feeds "5000"

The folks at St. Luke's United Methodist Church have had some great weekends. For three beautiful October days, they stood in the sunshine directing the coming of carloads and the going of truckloads filled with food for the local food bank. Associate Minister Brad Laurvick, organized this year's food-raising event called "The Feeding of 5,000...we need U2!" On the Monday morning following the long weekend, he and others in the congregation were still reeling with the success of collecting more than 55,000 pounds of food for Denver Urban Ministries (DenUM). A food bank that originated out of the basements of local United Methodist churches, DenUM now serves more than 66,000 clients a year.



This is the third year the 2,000 St. Luke's members have been the doers behind the community-wide event. The Sunday before the food drive, the mission-minded congregation took home more than 2,000 brown collection bags. In all, volunteers distributed some 12,000 bags on doorsteps, to office buildings and from neighbor to neighbor in Highland's Ranch, a Denver suburb. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, St. Luke's "servants" not only sorted, boxed, loaded, palletized and delivered the fruits of their labor; they also stood outside the doors of local King Sooper's grocery stores personally meeting and greeting food donors who stopped by to pick up a brown bag.

Laurvick has no shortage of "God moments" that describe just how "The Feeding of 5,000" transformed participants.

"We had a seven-year-old helper whose parents came to get her to go to a birthday party, but she didn't want to go," recounted Laurvick. "In tears, she told her mom and dad, 'I want to stay here and help,'"

Another of Laurvick's "God moments" occurred when a couple of teenagers showed up with their parents to donate food. They were not St. Luke's members, but asked if they could stay to help. The

12- and 17-year-olds helped and attended worship that evening.

"We had people at worship Sunday morning who told me, 'We got the bag and just wanted to come and see what kind of church does this,'" Laurvick said.



"The Feeding of 5,000 was 'Rethink Church' put into practice," Laurvick said. Read the full story from United Methodist Communications on the web at <http://tinyurl.com/yhb3je7>.

Skip Strickland, Director of Mission and Ministry for the Rocky Mountain Conference, commented, "This is the kind of Rethink Church project that each local church should consider doing to impact their community."

RAFT Ministry – Rescuing Asylees From Terror
University Park UMC has a program which offers aid to asylee applicants, those who are petitioning for political asylum because returning to their native country would place them in imminent danger of death or torture.

An asylee is a person in perpetual transition. He cannot return to his home country; only death, or worse than death, awaits him there. He often receives a cold welcome in his new country, the USA, where he is treated as little better than a criminal, needing to prove his innocence and victimhood. His is very lucky if he can find a place to sleep, food to eat, and people to help along the way. Unable to seek employment, he is at the mercy of charity and has no social safety nets. All of this is due to differences of opinion, philosophy, religion, etc., with the government or other social groups in his native land, something we take for granted in the United States.

The asylee applicants go through humiliation, uncertainty, and endless waiting. Because they are not permitted to work, mere subsistence in the United States as they wait for legal immigration status requires a certain amount of money and/or assistance, and this is where RAFT steps in. Working with the Rocky Mountain Survivors Center, we provided housing for asylees, assistance with living expenses, and opportunities for work training and volunteering during the six to twelve months' waiting time to get asylum granted. Unfortunately, the Center lost its funding, so we are continuing to explore ways to support for those seeking asylum and refugees.

RAFT welcomed two asylees in the summer of 2008: Oniankpo Akindjo and Yonas Demtsu. Oniankpo is from Togo, a small west African country. After continuing his education and becoming a teacher, he won a Fulbright Scholarship



and fled his country due to political persecution. At Ohio State University, he earned a Ph.D. in Education; winning another scholarship, he earned a second Ph.D. in French. He then went into

practicum teaching at East Carolina University in North Carolina. He would be tortured and possibly killed if he returned to Togo. Dr. Akindjo was granted a work authorization permit this past August and is currently a professor of French at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn.

Yonas Demtsu is from Eritrea, an east African country. He is a trained paramedic and worked in a hospital for years. However, because of religious persecution by the government for his involvement with the Pentecostal church, he was forced to flee. His brother was residing in Denver, so in January 2008 he managed to make his way here. He wishes to continue his work in health care and has applied for training as a certified nursing assistant for the elderly during his asylum application process.

We have also assisted Dawit Kidane, a native of Eritrea, where he had a career in the military. He was a Pentecostal Christian and was put in prison for 14 months, during which time his wife fled to Sudan. Now he is here applying for asylum, while he waits to discover word about his wife. He is a skilled wood worker and metal worker and hopes to return to this type of work when his asylum is granted.

Additionally, we have been receiving the assistance of Emad Nasser Hussein, the former communications director and spokesman for the Iraqi Olympic Committee who was granted asylum this past May and is currently in the process of bringing his wife and two children to Denver. Emad is our first success story, an asylee who has received support through the church and UPark members Lois and Ray Nelson.

This ministry was started by UPark members Lois and Ray Nelson. With the Rocky Mountain Survivors Center as an ally, they raised funds and were able to place these young men in furnished apartments with all utilities paid. Ray finds work projects for these

men, such as washing cars in the church parking lot on Tuesday mornings in the summer, raking leaves in the fall, and shoveling snow in the winter. In appreciation for these voluntary services, church members make donations to the RAFT Ministry, which provides some of the funds the ministry uses to pay the rent and utilities for the participants apartments.

University Park UMC is pleased to be able to help these young men and others like them who will be coming through Denver. For more



information, contact Ray or Lois Nelson at rayn35@aol.com. — Jessica Glaser and Carol Feickert, University Park UMC

Pastor Paul Kottke says, “in the short year and a half that it has existed, it has deeply impacted the life of this congregation. This is one way that we can address one of our core values: to reach out to the international community. In my mind it represents the best of ReThink Church.” To read another story about RAFT, go to:

http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/ci_11974138

Blessings and gratitude to all those who are serving and opening doors for others to serve together! Keep opening those "10 Thousand Doors"!



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