

PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK TO END HOMELESSNESS

e-newsletter

Spring-Summer, 2007

The **Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness** was founded in March, 2004 at a national conference on ending homelessness held at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago. In 2005 PNTEH published a handbook for pastors and congregations addressing homelessness and, in 2006, PNTEH helped prepare an overture on ending homelessness which was approved by the General Assembly of the PCUSA. This newsletter marks the launching of PNTEH's Quarterly "e-newsletter."

- **Our mission** is to affirm, challenge, educate and empower local churches and the Church as a whole in the struggle to end homelessness.
- **Our vision** is for each Presbyterian congregation and Presbytery to embrace a comprehensive approach to ending homelessness that includes:
 - Compassionate responses to immediate human needs
 - Creative empowerment of homeless individuals,
 - Courageous advocacy for effective and systemic policy changes (such as housing production, homelessness prevention, service provision, and promotion of livable incomes.

PCUSA Commits to Helping Homeless

At the 217th General Assembly, in June, 2006, the Assembly voted to support the PNTEH sponsored Overture 128, a remarkable denominational commitment to help fight homelessness in our communities.

The overture "challenged Presbyterian congregations to embrace a comprehensive approach to ending homelessness" by working for systemic policy change, developing affordable housing, providing services to homeless, and promoting "livable" incomes. Further, the overture urged congregations to "honor the dignity" of homeless and include them as "equal and respected" congregants if they so choose. Presbyterians should work with other faiths, civic organizations, and businesses on this effort, the overture said.

Finally, GA instructed its Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to work with PCUSA organizations, such as Presbyterian Women and Presbyterian Healthy, Education and Welfare Association (and PNTEH), and with outside faith groups and councils, to launch a task force to study the implications of the overture and its relation to another area of concern, low-income and very-low income housing.

Starting in the fall of 2006 a task force was assembled to create a sustainable model of what actions churches and individuals can take to help end homelessness in their area. They are looking at root causes of homelessness and what churches and individuals can do to advocate a change in the status quo. Examples are lobbying employers to pay a living wage and provide health care, two common issues that aggravate homelessness.

This task force will make a formal report to General Assembly, 2008.



PNTEH member **David Murad** (standing) helps homeless men at the Elam Davies Service Center at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago.

E news folks: PLEASE send us your ideas, stories and hopes for the PNTEH organization. We share your desire to end homelessness. We want to affirm, celebrate and share best practices and together make a difference for homeless people across the country.



Join us in making the hope of ending homelessness a reality!

✓YES. I want to join the **Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness** and join other lay persons, pastors, social service professionals, and activists who seek to end homelessness through direct service programs, local coalition-building and organizing, and public policy advocacy. Our network will bring you valuable information and help you share information with others and learn from others at the same time.

Membership Dues:

Low-income membership: \$10.00 per year
Individual membership: \$35.00 per year
Congregation or organization membership: \$150.00 per year

JOIN NOW:

Mail your check made out to:

Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness and mail to:
P.O. Box 12616, in Chicago, IL 60612



CONTACT US:

P.O. Box 12616, in Chicago, IL 60612

Email: info@pnteh.org; **Web:** www.pnteh.org

Phone: 1-800-848-4122

Mental Illness and Homelessness

One of the most disheartening sections of the "Homeless Overture" ties mental illness to homelessness by stating that "some of the largest city governments" take resources from social services that prevent homelessness. They remove support for "established and highly successful programs such as day care for persons with mental disabilities ..."

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Homeless people suffer from high rates of mental health problems, exacerbated by living on the streets and in shelters."

In 1987 researchers Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper interviewed homeless men and women over two years and wrote, in *Psychology Today*, "The symptoms of those with mental disabilities are easily worsened on the streets."

The problem affects all, even our veterans: the Veterans Administration estimates that 45% of homeless vets suffer from mental illness.

And there are few community health centers for homeless people with severe and long-term illness. (However, see article on the Opportunity Center just opened in Palo Alto, CA.)

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) is charged by the GA with coming up with a plan to address the issues of homelessness, and of homeless mental illness. And the GA's overture charges us, as Presbyterians and Christians, to support ACSWP – and the mentally-ill homeless in our communities – until this problem is eradicated.

ACSWP recently distributed copies of the church-wide study guide, ***Serious Mental Illness: Seeking a Comprehensive Christian Response***, throughout the denomination.

This guide provides four sessions for discussion and reflection, with the goal to study ways people living with mental illness are included and/or excluded from participating in the work of the church and society in general. Theological, ethical, therapeutic, and social-service dynamics are presented for response.

Presbytery and synod groups and individuals are encouraged to study this topic through September 2007 and send comments and reflections to the Task Force on "Serious Mental Illness" by then, or to ACSWP through December, 2007.



Documentary Film Being Made on "How To Make The World A Better Place"

PNTEH Board member Pat Plant is working with White Noise Productions of Seattle, WA to make a documentary film, "How To Make The World A Better Place," to encourage and excite people and give them skills to make positive change locally, nationally, and globally. The film shows four stories about people who, individually or with others, caused amazing change to occur. One of the four stories is on the Opportunity Center (story above).

The film will be completed this summer and will be available through a variety of distribution services and the Presbytery of San Jose (check: <http://www.sanjosepby.org/HowToMakeTheWorldABetterPlace.htm>).

The film is part of a bigger project including a book and an event that will be held in Sunnyvale CA in October. The film, book and plans for the event will be available to use around the country hopefully exciting more people to make positive social change.

What Communities Can Do for the Homeless By Working Together



The Opportunity Center was dedicated on September 17, 2006

The First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto is an example of working with your community to help the homeless. They ended up with a multi-service center supported by the entire community.

First the church, active in the local faith-based community organizing group, asked Palo Altans what was needed to make a better community, and the overwhelming answer was help the homeless.

The church decided, in time, to build a multi-service center for homeless people, with medical, job training, mental health, and hospitality services as well as permanent housing.

After much fund-raising, grant-writing, and working with civic powers, the Opportunity Center, as it is called, was completed, opened, and dedicated in September, 2006.

Services include case management; screening for medical and mental-health care; substance-abuse support groups; housing and emergency shelter assistance; jobs- and life-skills (how to dress, keep a room, etc.) training; legal and budgeting consulting; and women's programs such as domestic-abuse victims.

The new Center is managed by InnVision, a San Jose homeless agency, in conjunction with the Housing Authority of Santa Clara County. This has greatly improved the lives of the people who now have housing where none existed, and services where none were available. (For more information, go to: www.innvision.org/index.html)

The church continues to partner with the Opportunity Center, with many members continuing to be actively involved in the Center's future.



Book Recommendation:

"Under the Overpass: A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America" by Mike Yankowski

Mike Yankowski, a guitar-playing college student from Santa Barbara, CA decided, with a friend, to live as homeless men in four cities across the U.S. and really learn about homelessness. On their sojourn, the young men discover a lot about themselves, about church attitudes toward the homeless, and about the resilience of homeless people they encountered. This book's a VERY good read. Yankowski is now a seminary student. (http://www.undertheoverpass.com/book_list.aspx)

Get your PNTEH End Homelessness Handbook!

We have a useful handbook available to you at no charge which includes: tips on how to help the homeless when they come to your church; the theological reasons "why" we should serve the homeless; facts and myths about the homeless; and how to advocate for their needs. Simply email info@pnteh.org for one or download it from our website: www.pnteh.org.