

Faith United Church of Christ, State College, PA
PROJECT SERVE – Tuesday, January 21, 2014 – noon brown bag luncheon
Topic: NEEDS OF THE HOMELESS
A Summary

The purpose of Project Serve is to help us discern unmet needs in the community, and also help us at Faith Church explore the question *“How does God want us to reach out and serve the needs of our community?”*

Jane Childs welcomed the gathering and introduced the guest presenters: Regina Diller, the Executive Director of Bridge of Hope of Centre County; Rev. Anne Ard, the Executive Director of the Women’s Resource Center; and Thom Brewster, the Executive Director of Centre Peace, Inc. (Tom also shared a Mission Moment at Faith Church on Sunday, January 19.)

Regina Dillar was the first presenter. **The Bridge of Hope** is a church-based approach to ending family homelessness, particularly for single mothers. Its brochure reads: “Bridge of Hope ends and prevents homelessness for women and children with the help of trained mentoring groups within congregations. Our goal is to exemplify Christ’s love and to promote physical, emotional, social and spiritual wholeness. Single mothers attain: * permanent housing *financial stability through employment *life changing friendships * growth and wholeness.” Bridge of Hope, a national organization, was founded in Lancaster, PA, 25 years ago. Bridge of Hope of Centre County has been in existence for six years, and Regina has been the director for three years. Single mothers are the invisible homeless. Referrals come from the Women’s Resource Center. Housing is very expensive in the Centre Region for this population. These women are not eligible for Out-of-the-Cold. They need rental assistance. Affordable housing is a great need. There are also costs for child care and transportation. Bridge of Hope is now serving three women. Each woman has a Case Manager, and there is a group of 8-12 volunteer mentors who assist the women. Some of the organization’s budget comes from the United Way. It is a United Way organization. Some churches have written the organization into their budgets. There will be a Mother’s Day Walk in May with the hope of raising \$15,000. Bridge of Hope is seeking Board members and volunteers to be mentors. There are now 8 Board members. The organization is seeking a Social Worker to be on the Board. Prayer support is appreciated for the women and mentors. More information can be found at www.centre.bridgeofhopeinc.org and on YouTube.

Rev. Anne Ard was the second presenter. **The Centre County Women’s Resource Center** is a United Way organization. It is also a member of PCAR (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape) and PCADV (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence). Its mission from the brochure: “Providing services for women, men, and children experiencing dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.” It also oversees the Child Access Center, whose purpose is “providing a safe and supportive environment for monitored custody exchanges and supervised visitation.” Anne stated that many agencies overlap in their concerns for the homeless and the abused (e.g., MidPenn Legal, Transitional Housing etc.) In the Transitional

Housing program women and children can stay for 30 days. Transitional Housing can serve 3-4 women and their children at one time. In a year, 125 women and children are served by the shelter. The Resource Center, in addition to the emergency shelter has a 24-hour hotline, legal and medical advocacy, and a prevention education program which is in all five area school districts. There is civil and legal assistance to women in abusive relationships. Women need housing, employment and transportation. Critical needs in Centre County: affordable housing, people struggling with mental health issues, people struggling with poverty that leads to violence. The Resource Center has recently received two grants (from PCADV and Verizon) to help work with women in transitional housing, to help with budgeting, management of financial resources, saving, insurance. The Resource Center serves about 1000 people each year. It has a robust volunteer program to do crisis intervention.

Thom Brewster was the third presenter. **Centre Peace** has been in operation since 1994, and Tom has been director since 2006. Centre Peace sells used furniture and household goods to support a program/ministry to assist prisoners from the County Prison and also from Rockview. About 95% of the budget comes from the selling of goods, and 3-4% comes from the United Way. (Another 1% or so must come from other sources.) At Rockview, Tom leads life skills training for men with mental illness. They often end up in prison because there are no mental institutions, and they have no other place to go. There are 250-275 prisoners (men and women) at the County Prison. Most sentences are less than two years, with the average sentence about 90 days. If they are eligible for parole with no place to go, they stay in prison. Centre Peace has purchased a home behind its store, which can house three men at a time, men who work at Centre Peace. As they find employment, they pay a little rent and are in the process of finding more permanent housing. Certain crimes won't get one in Housing Transitions. Mentors are needed for persons still in jail. Reentry programs are needed. 900 sex offenders are in prison in Centre County, and they often have nowhere to go so they have to stay in prison.

After the three presentations, there was a time for questions and comments, which follow:

- People are afraid of persons who have been in prison.
- Don't be discouraged with failure.
- Centre Peace gives \$20,000-\$30,000 worth of furniture each year to special needs (e.g., victims of fire...)
- Bridge of Hope commits 18-24months for each woman in the program.
- GED programs are offered through the school districts.
- Economic empowerment...The Women's Resource Center is involved with cross-training with Career Link.
- Centre Peace will provide training for financial management and resume writing.
- Project Hope in Ann Arbor, MI, provides an "Idea Exchange" for helping agencies work together to provide solutions. "Ministry is messy." Unclaimed coats can be found at the hospital and at bars. (Mentioned by Donna Snyder, the DCE at St. Paul's UM Church.)

- A church could set up mailboxes for prisoners who are being released.
- A church could provide a taxi service.

All the attendees experienced the enthusiasm of the presenters for their programs, and realized that there are great needs in our community.

Pastor Monica closed with a hymn (“Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant”) which the gathered group sang.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Meckstroth