

Project Serve November

Our Project Serve "Mission Moments" and information sessions continued in November, with very impressive and inspiring presentations by the Reverend Ruth Donahue, Director of Interfaith Human Services, and Carol Pioli, Executive Director of the State College Area Food Bank. Reverend Donahue spoke during our worship service on Sunday, November 17, and both she and Ms. Pioli provided in-depth information about their work at a gathering in Romig Hall on Tuesday evening, November 19, hosted by the Membership and Fellowship Ministry Team.

Interfaith Human Services (IHS)

Reverend Donahue presented an overview of the many services provided by IHS, explaining that the four major types of services fall into the categories of "*Fast, Furniture, Fuel and Finance.*"

Fast: These are services provided to families in emergency situations, such as loss of housing (eviction, fire), loss of power for heat, unexpected prescription needs, and emergency transportation needs (i.e., transportation to Danville). Rev. Donahue explained that the goal is to stabilize the family situation, reduce stressors, and keep families together in their homes during a crisis.

Furniture: IHS maintains a warehouse of furniture, where families in transition can pick out furniture for their new location. A truck is also provided by IHS for those needing to transport furniture and belongings. Victims of the DoDee fire in Bellefonte were able to make use of these services, as do women staying at the Women's Center who are needing to set up housing for themselves and their families.

Fuel : IHS distributes between \$53 - 73,000 per year in fuel assistance, providing oil, coal, propane and wood for heating. Electricity is not part of the program because the portion used for heating cannot be extracted from overall electrical use in a home. The IHS works closely with the St. Vincent De Paul Society in this effort.

Finance: Financial care programs include short-term loans (i.e., car break down), money management (goal setting and priorities; negotiating with debtors), and general counseling and support on a weekly basis if necessary. These programs support clients by addressing financial situations that could engender frustration and anger, threatening family stability.

Offering her thoughts as to **areas of need where Faith Church may find a mission**, Reverend Donahue spoke of the increasing number of families who need heating assistance but do not meet the eligibility guidelines. **Community Fuel Banks** have been established in other areas and perhaps could be established in our community, whereby fuel is purchased by a collaborative group (i.e., church groups and agencies) for distribution to those in need. Another possibility would be to purchase space heaters that could be loaned out to families for temporary use.

Transportation is another area of need. Congregations could create car pools for people who have been displaced to outlying areas and need transportation in order to be able to get to work.

Reverend Donahue also spoke of the need for "**shared housing**" to help those living alone who need minimal assistance with chores and regular companionship. A person needing a place to live would come into a home and have a live-in room in exchange for providing some services and/or some rental payment. Reverend Donahue stated that there are people in the community who are waiting to talk to us about this idea.

State College Area Food Bank

IHS and the State College Area Food Bank collaborate closely with about a dozen or so agencies in the area, getting together monthly to discuss current needs. Referral agencies (i.e., IHS) direct people to the various types of assistance available.

Ms. Pioli informed us that our SC Food Bank serves seven townships as well as State College and Port Matilda. It also supports other Food Bank services in the area, such as the 24-hour food pantry at the Community Health Center. The Food Bank serves unemployed, underemployed, and disabled people, in addition to those in poverty, working to sustain families as well as helping in an emergency. Income guidelines are 150% of the poverty level, or \$17,000. Families or individuals can visit the Food Bank once monthly and in addition, twice yearly for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. The amount of food for any one family depends on family size.

The Food Bank partners with Feeding America and receives donations from local grocery stores and restaurants. As a result, fresh produce and meats are often available. The Food Bank will be moving soon to a new location on South Atherton (formerly Paul and Tony's Stereo), where there will be more room to store supplies. Its current location is on Hamilton Street but supplies are also stored at the Nittany Mall.

In addition to sustaining families with an ongoing supply of food, Food Bank volunteers form relationships with the clients served, who often stay for a bit and converse. These relationships are important in supporting families, sometimes resulting in creative solutions to meet a particular need.

In relation to **unmet needs that may be addressed by Faith Church**, Ms. Pioli identified two populations, **children under the age of seventeen and the elderly**. There are a lot of children seen at the Food Bank who could benefit greatly from adults who would help to move them out of poverty through tutoring and mentoring. In addition, seniors who live alone often have no family nearby and have physical limitations, making it very difficult to get to the Food Bank. A program to deliver food supplies to them would be of great help.

Following her presentation, those in the audience had a variety of questions. It was clear that all were grateful for the information shared and vitally interested in these services and how they operate to serve those in the community who are in need.

We look forward to our next Mission Moment and Information Session on January 19 and 21, respectively, when we will learn about issues of the homeless in our local community.

Submitted by Recorder,
Virginia Biber, member
Outreach and Service Ministry Team