

News from INTER-FAITH HOUSING ALLIANCE

"We Must Substitute Courage for Caution" Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, 1965

In times of economic uncertainty, it is easy to become fearful. Inter-Faith Housing Alliance is concerned about the economy's impact on our ability to provide vital services to the community's most vulnerable people. However, we have embraced Dr. King's credo, and are ready to substitute courage for caution.

To that end we are planning some exciting, meaningful, and important programs for our community and our families that you can participate in.

Fund Development Events:

In this newsletter you'll find information about three entertaining fund development events—some long-standing, some brand new. The events will help us raise the revenue we need to keep our programs strong, and provide ways for the community to join in. If you are interested in helping to plan an event, or just want to attend and have fun, please let us know.

Community Garden:

Inter-Faith is working on grants and collaborations to create a small Community Garden. The garden will provide fresh, organic produce for our families and our food cupboard, and many educational opportunities as well. Volunteers will be needed for planting, weeding, and generally tending the garden, as well as to provide workshops on gardening, cooking and nutrition.

Mural Project:

The hallways of Hope Gardens are about to be painted a brighter, cheerful color, befitting a place of hope and comfort. Once complete, we will embark on an ambitious project—creating a mural. The indoor mural will feature messages of support by the families who live here now for those who will come after them--eventually forming a lasting but always-changing portrait of hope. We are actively seeking an artist, with or without mural experience to help us design it, and volunteers who would like to help with the mural's creation.

Workshops:

We are expanding the programs offered to the families we serve. This year we are offering parenting classes that our parents will co-lead, budgeting workshops with field trips, teen mentoring programs, and children's art classes. Volunteers are always needed to lead workshops and provide child care.

These and many other opportunities are available with Inter-Faith.

Our success has always been due to our partnership with committed community volunteers. It's a partnership that is more important than ever.

To become involved, please call Lois Bowman, Volunteer Coordinator, or Laura Wall Starke, Executive Director, at 215-628-2334. You can reach them via email at lbowman@i-fha.org or lstarke@i-fha.org. ♦

Spring 2009

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Lois Bowman, Network and
Volunteer Coordinator

Beth Jenkins, Administrative
Assistant

Visit our website!
www.i-fha.org

Community Events

Members of Inter-Faith's newly invigorated Fund Development Committee have established a schedule of exciting events for 2009. Please mark your calendars, and then check back for updates.

12th Annual Golf Tournament

Monday, June 15, 2009

Old York Road Country Club

Spring House, PA

Please join us for the 12th Annual Golf Tournament, golf-themed silent auction, and luncheon.

The Inter-Faith Jazz Festival

Sunday, September 20, 2009

Gwynedd-Mercy College

1325 Sumneytown Pike

Gwynedd Valley, PA

After an absence of a few years, Inter-Faith is thrilled to once again present our autumn Jazz Festival. Join us for an afternoon of amazing music in a beautiful outdoor setting.

To volunteer for
any of these events,
we welcome
your participation.

Please contact
Laura Wall Starke
at
215-628-2334



Dinner and Silent Auction

The late autumn date is yet to be set, but Inter-Faith is planning an evening of dinner, music and fantastic silent auction items.

It's an opportunity for you to help support our mission, shop for holiday gifts and enjoy a lovely evening among friends.

More details will follow soon.

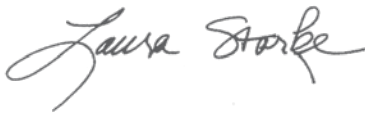
Lois Bowman Wins Award

Inter-Faith Housing Alliance is pleased to announce that Lois Bowman, our volunteer coordinator, is the 2009 recipient of the Wissahickon Faith Community Association's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Award.

The award honors Lois for her years of service to this community. Our board joins the community in congratulating Lois on this honor. ♦

From the Executive Director

Recently Rev. David Canan, Minister of Trinity Episcopal Church introduced me to Matthew, an advocate for the homeless who stayed with Rev. Canan and his family in December 2008. It was a gift to spend a few hours with Matthew on a sunny Saturday afternoon. He has allowed me to share his story for this newsletter.



You can contact
Matthew at:
matthewworks@yahoo.com

In 1995 Matthew was a typical blue collar worker. He lived in Boston and had a job in a warehouse that he'd held for fifteen years. But when he lost his job, he fell far behind on the rent and was eventually evicted from his apartment. Matthew found himself homeless. "The first night was rough. The second night was rougher. And it got rougher and rougher. You get so exhausted so fast. I wouldn't have survived if it wasn't for my faith. It sustained me more than anything else."

Matthew explains that "three weeks after I hit the streets I walked up to Boston Common and there I saw a wooden altar on wheels. Standing behind it was a woman priest and she was holding up a glass chalice. She was conducting an Episcopal service, outside, for the approximately thirty homeless people who gathered in the park. It was called Common Cathedral. It had been going on every Sunday for over a year at that time."

Every Sunday a different church from the suburbs would come out and help the priest and her small staff. After the service, the altar would become a serving table and youth groups would distribute sandwiches they'd made and brought.

"I kept going each Sunday and they got to know me." Matthew explains. Eventually Common Cathedral's leaders asked Matthew to go on speaking engagements with them, so he could tell his story. To his surprise Matthew found he was a good public speaker and his talks were enthusiastically received. That first year he spoke at most of the prestigious universities in the Boston area.

And after that first year of successfully speaking on behalf of Boston's homeless population, Matthew recalls, "I said, hey wait a minute. We're still homeless." He also noticed that every Sunday after the outdoor service in Boston Common, the wooden altar was wrapped in blankets, wheeled back into a Cathedral, and safely put away. "They do that to give the altar refuge and protection. They should, because without that protective care the altar could be damaged by exposure to the elements. Well-what about us?"

Eventually a homeless man who regularly attended the outdoor church was found frozen to death on Boston Common. Matthew said "and that's when it hit me—Boston Common is surrounded by churches, all of which lock their doors at night." Matthew argued that if convenience stores could be open 24 hours a day, couldn't churches do the same?

Since then, Matthew has worked to create a network of congregations similar to Inter-Faith's, but that would open their doors to homeless men. While he has had mixed success, he remains a vocal advocate for homeless people—speaking to colleges, congregations, and civic groups throughout the country. He's been interviewed for NPR's *This American Life*, and written about in the book "God's Politics" by Jim Wallis.

Matthew remains homeless. When asked if he wanted a permanent place to live, he became very thoughtful. "I do want to no longer be like a nomad. But I don't want to be the only one to benefit from the work I've done."

Matthew remains dedicated to his advocacy work, which he considers a calling. And he hopes one day to have a small apartment in his native Boston. But for now Matthew stays with families and congregations, and occasionally on the street, as he works to educate us all on what homelessness really is.

At the end of our interview Matthew, who does not like to give his last name, offered his favorite biblical quote. It is Psalm 9:9, and it seemed especially fitting for his life: "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed and a stronghold in times of trouble." ♦

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I become a volunteer of the Inter-Faith Housing Alliance?

If you would like to volunteer for the Inter-Faith Housing Alliance, please fill out our Volunteer Form* and bring it or mail it in to our Volunteer Coordinator. Or call us at 215-628-2334.

How can I make a donation to Inter-Faith Housing Alliance?

Mail in our Donation Form* or if you prefer, call us at 215-628-2334.

Where do your volunteers come from?

Inter-Faith's volunteers come from all over the communities Inter-Faith serves. The majority of our volunteers are members of the more than 20 local congregations that support our efforts as Host and Buddy congregations. We are extremely fortunate to have over 2,000 active volunteers. You can apply to volunteer by mail, in person or call us at 215-628-2334.

* Volunteer and Donation Forms can be found at our website, www.i-fha.org.

Community Volunteer

Candice Chachkin is a seventeen year old high school senior who wanted to spend time on something that involved giving to others.

Her Mom, Margie, is head of Social Action at Congregation Beth Or and has worked with Hope Gardens for many years. Candice herself is the religious and cultural vice president of the synagogue's youth group.

"I love playing guitar. I'm always playing. I thought that a lot of kids out there love music as much as I do, but don't have the chance to learn to play." Candice decided to tutor a child who would not otherwise have an opportunity to learn an instrument.

"My mom contacted Hope Gardens and Mason's mom responded right away."

Mason is ten years old and lives at Hope Gardens with his mother and younger brother.

Candice explains that Mason catches on very quickly and really enjoys his lessons. "When I first started I told him that the guitar is not a toy. You can't mess around with it. It's the same talk I got from my teacher when I started. When I talk to Mason I don't talk to him like he's a child."

Mason doesn't have a guitar. He uses Candice's, although her guitar is too big for Mason's small hands. Still, he has already learned a few chords and a universal strum. Candice explains that "Mason's hands are really small, which is why he needs a child's guitar. He just can't stretch his hand far enough to play the chords and he gets frustrated."

"He got the strum and the chords down the first time I taught it to him. He just needs some patience. So we're working on that, and on healthy ways of expressing his frustration. It will teach him life skills beyond learning to play the guitar. He's a very special kid." Candice explains that it's easy to get frustrated when you're learning. "I get frustrated too when I'm learning a new song. The patient miracle worker in the house would be my mom."

Eventually Candice will teach Mason songs with simple chords, like Scarborough Fair and Puff the Magic Dragon.

Candice has been playing music for five years, both the guitar and flute. "It's a great way to express yourself. It's not easy to be where Mason and his family are and if music can help, then that's great."

This fall, Candice will begin her freshman year Kutztown University, where she will major in psychology. She would eventually like to work with children in a clinical setting. "The things we learn as a child very much carry over to adolescence and adulthood. Being able to help a child before they get to a crisis point is important to me."

We are very fortunate to have Candice as part of the Inter-Faith family. Mason and his mother remain very grateful for her support, and for the skills she has provided for Mason that he will stay with him as he grows up. ♦

Congregation Spotlight

Bethlehem Baptist Church - Love God and Serve People

When the Bethlehem Baptist Church choir sang at the dedication of Hope Gardens in 1995, the Rev. Charles Quann knew this was an organization he wanted to be a part of. So for the next ten years, he served as President of Inter-Faith's Board of Directors.

And throughout the years, it has been clear that the congregation's commitment is equal to that of their pastor. Bethlehem Baptist Church houses Inter-Faith's shelter families one month per year, provides food baskets for each family every Christmas, and raised over \$10,000 to sponsor a Hope Garden's apartment. Inter-Faith has also benefited from the work of three members of the Church who have served on our Board. Pastor Quann stresses that "Inter-Faith is in our budget. It's not an afterthought. It's a part of our church structure."

Members of the congregation see the relationship with Inter-Faith as an opportunity to give back. This is a message their pastor has fostered and the congregation has embraced. Rev. Quann explains "I always want our outreach ministry to become part of the life of the church, and not just driven by the pastor."

Rev. Quann explains that "the congregation by and large appreciates helping people. Inter-Faith is just one of the important organizations in the community that we support. We sometimes struggle getting enough volunteers to stay overnight when we host, but the congregation is very committed to Inter-Faith."

The collaboration has been enriching for both groups and difficulties have been few. However, pastor Quann remembers with a laugh the day one of the families brought a pet cat into the church during their network stay, a clear although cute violation of the rules.

One of the things pastor Quann values about working with Inter-Faith is the agency's affect on the greater community. "I've run into several families living and working in the area who I know have stayed in the Network or at Hope Gardens. Now, they're just part of the community. Inter-Faith helped to make that possible."

Welcoming homeless families overnight has been particularly meaningful for the congregation. As pastor Quann explains "We were not blessed with this beautiful building for it to become a museum." ♦

St. John's Surpasses Its Goal



The Rev. Charles W. Quann, Inter-Faith Board Member and pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church; pastor Sandra Ellis-Killian, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church; Laura Wall Starke, Executive Director of Inter-Faith Housing Alliance; Rabbi Craig H. Axler, Beth Or Congregation, President, Wissahickon Faith Community Association

In 2008, their 100th anniversary year, St. John's Lutheran Church pledged to raise \$10,000 to support the programs of Inter-Faith Housing Alliance. The congregation wanted to commemorate their centennial by helping to make a difference in their own community.

The tiny congregation of 58 members quickly surpassed their original goal, so they set a new goal of \$15,000.

In February 2009, St. John's Lutheran Church presented Inter-Faith Housing Alliance with a check for **\$20,500.**

Inter-Faith Housing Alliance is deeply grateful to pastor Sandra Ellis-Killian and the members of St. John's Lutheran Church for their support of the work we do, their belief in the mission of ending homelessness, and their partnership in helping to make that mission a reality. ♦



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MISSION STATEMENT

Inter-Faith's mission is to serve God by providing charitable services to persons located in Montgomery County whose life situations have become unstable. These charitable services shall include homelessness prevention, temporary shelter, guidance in life skills, and assistance in locating appropriate housing opportunities thus enabling families at risk to remain in or return to independent living.

Inter-Faith Housing Alliance is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. The official registration and financial information for the agency may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State, 1-800-732-0999.

How We Help - How You Can Help!

You may not think homeless families inhabit our suburbs, but they're here ... in growing numbers. These families may have been very much like yours and mine until a personal tragedy like a job loss, or family break-up left them without the financial resources necessary to cope. When that happens, most families quickly exhaust the support of relatives and friends. Finding adequate employment, health care, and affordable child care can seem insurmountable. Long-term goals and dreams that enhanced their lives before disappear in the daily struggle for food and shelter.

Fortunately, that's when a simple phone call to Inter-Faith Housing Alliance can start a family on the road back — by extending a helping hand and providing them with a place to live, enough to eat, and help developing new skills, finding a job, and becoming independent.

Won't you consider making a donation to Inter-Faith Housing Alliance. Your tax deductible contribution will go a long way toward helping our families to reach self-sufficiency And as Pastor Sandra Ellis-Killian states "Now that's staking a claim to the future." Together, we can make a lasting difference by breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness.