

A United Methodist Church Quadrennial Foci: Engaging in ministry with the poor.

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People who either had been working or were close to retirement are finding themselves without enough funds to even pay their bills. A number of our members as well have lost jobs. Some have had success in finding another. Others are still looking.

We’ve been working with a family whose husband lost his job; then the wife lost hers. They had been on the public housing waiting list for two years after bouncing around from anyone who would take them in. They lost their house and vehicles. With three children (the oldest one being a diabetic), it was difficult. They had food stamps and worked odd jobs to try to stay afloat. They just got into public housing Jan. 20th and our church has been helping them get on their feet.

Our Good Neighbor Cupboard in Anderson has had to close one day a week because they did not have enough food to stay open. AIM, Anderson Interfaith Ministries, has been extremely short on funds and helping only with heat and food.College degrees but no food for five in Lexington County

I would like to share a story about a middle- class family who lives in a middle-class neighborhood who suddenly finds itself in unfamiliar circumstances. The husband is in his mid-40s, wife late 30s, and three kids all younger than 13 and in public school. Both husband and wife have college degrees and, until recently, were beneficiaries of good jobs.

The husband recently found himself with a serious medical situation that goes beyond his company’s insurance and, after a period of time, he lost his job, placing the full financial burden on the wife as a single income-provider for a family of five. Things for this family deteriorated rapidly and changed quickly causing them to require both food and financial assistance from any sources available. This included both the local food bank and their church family. Not only did their situation change very quickly, the future at this point in time does not appear optimistic.Food for Greer’s elderly dwindling

Greer Community Ministries is struggling right now. It has a soup kitchen and provides emergency help for individuals and families in need of food and clothing. Sicknes ends single dad’s income in Gilbert

A single dad with a teenage daughter and a 5-year-old son is surviving only by extended family support, church love offerings and community support.

The father had two major heart attacks and one minor one in January 2009. This was followed by a stroke and several more minor heart attacks in the summer. He is self-employed, so he has had no income from January 2009 to present. Each hospitalization delayed his disability hearing.

His disability application has recently been turned over to lawyer and he is hoping for quick approval.Gleaning Upstate stories of hurting families

I work with dozens of hunger relief agencies in the Upstate – Greenville, Anderson, Pickens, Spartanburg counties and more. We have one group called the Upstate Hunger Coalition where about 15-20 agencies participate in

coming together to discuss how we address these concerns.

ALL of my agencies are experiencing higher frequency of use. Many talk about the first-time faces and the faces of people whom most would not consider to be poor or needy, such as working professionals of teachers, state employees and others who need help with food because their spouses have lost jobs or been cut back in pay or hours.

Thankfully for 2009 in the Upstate, all of our numbers were up with the Society of St. Andrew, rescuing fresh fruit and produce to give to hunger relief agencies, food pantries, soup kitchens, and impoverished neighborhoods. There are too many personal stories to tell:

Families where both parents have lost jobs and cannot find new ones; single mothers working three jobs*; people moving from New Jersey to South Carolina because its cheaper to live here even if they lose their job. "My agency people have hundreds more to tell." The Rev. Ashley N. McCoy-Bruce

Upstate S.C. Gleaning Coordinator, Society of Saint Andrew Union County people in financial trouble

A Union County pastor lamented unemployment is 20 percent there. Nearly one in five has lost a job.

FILLING IN THE GAPS – The Wynn family of Waters Edge UMC is helping to eliminate childhood hunger in the greater Beaufort area by providing backpacks of food to get children through the weekend, spanning the time they receive free or reduced lunch on Friday to the time they return on Monday. Washington Street UMC in Columbia and Lexington UMC also have a backpack ministry. Individual students are referred by a teacher or social worker who sees signs of chronic hunger in the child. A Richland I principal said the food had been "tremendously helpful."