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Newsletter

A ministry associated with Classis Lake Superior of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

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KaRen Family Childcare

By Bonnie Smith

Several months ago, I was gathering information from the KaRen refugee families from New Life Church in New Brighton. One of the recurring themes for women seemed to be a desire to do childcare as employment. However, with their limited English and lack of experience, they were not qualified to work in a childcare center.

In Minnesota, there are two levels of "family" childcare which the county will approve for subsidy: registered and licensed.

Registered family childcare allows a person to care for relatives and the children of one non-relative family in the home. It requires no experience, some training, and a home inspection. The amount the county will pay is less, between \$2-\$3 depending on the age of the child.

Licensed family childcare allows a person to care for children regardless of relationship. It requires more training, a home inspection, a fire inspection, and takes up to two years. The amount the county will pay increases to between \$4-\$6 per hour depending on the age of the child. And, there are supportive grants available for food and other supplies.

I have learned that getting a license to do childcare is extremely difficult for refugees due to their lack of English and an understanding of our culture's norms for childcare. In addition, the families live in small apartments which are inadequate for doing a family childcare.



Interested Childcare Workers: Ke Kei Thaug, Mu That, and Moo Moo Soe.

Upon investigating, we learned of an effort in Minneapolis to "incubate" refugee family childcares as a collaboration of Abbott Northwestern Hospital and the YMCA. After visiting that facility, it seemed like something that might work for us.

So, our plan is to begin a family childcare with the three women shown above in a house where we can incubate a family childcare. Starfish Ministries staff and volunteers will help them learn the county's rules and expectations for childcare, beginning as a registered family childcare and working toward licensing.

The women will share the income and, at least until their income increases, Starfish Ministries will help with the costs. With the income from the family childcare business, it is hoped that the families will be able to eventually lease or purchase a single family home where they can do childcare on their own.

Deacon's Page

So I'm a Deacon — What Now?

Note: In the Christian Reformed denomination, from which Starfish Ministries emerged, deacons are in charge of ministries of mercy.

*“On the day of my installation it suddenly struck me how little I know about deacons and their work. As a member of the congregation I paid little attention to what they were doing and they did little to catch mine.
- a recently installed deacon*

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find a clear job description for a deacon. However, references are made in various places. Galatians 6:10 speaks of doing good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. I Timothy 3 outlines the qualifications for deacons. In Philippians, Paul in his greetings “to the overseers and deacons” encourages humility in Christ, taking the very nature of a servant.

As the years have passed and deacons respond to a variety of needs in the congregation, the

community and the world, primary tasks have developed.

The Deacons' Job Description:

Deacons are charged to:

...inspire faithful stewardship in this congregation. Remind us that 'from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded'

(Luke 12:48b). Teach us to be merciful. Prompt us to seize new opportunities to worship God with offerings of wealth, time and ability. Realize that benevolence is a quality of our life in Christ and not merely a matter of financial assistance.

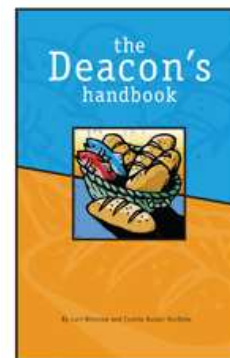
Therefore, minister rich and poor alike, both within and outside the church. Weigh the needs of causes and use the church's resources discerningly. Be compassionate to the needy. Encourage them with words that create hope in their hearts and with deeds that bring joy into their lives.

Be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and be sensitive counselors to the victims of such evils. Let

your lives be above reproach; live as examples of Christ Jesus; look to the interest of others.

So, a deacon is a servant sharing the compassion of Jesus Christ himself, a minister of mercy to rich and poor alike, a counselor for the distressed, and a leader and teacher urging the congregation to get involved in ministry.

There are resources available to you. Faith Alive Christian Resources has recently published a new Deacon's Handbook. They can be contacted at 1-800-333-8300 or www.FaithAliveResources.org.



[Adapted from A Resource Manual for Deacons published by Diaconal Ministries of Eastern Canada, October 1989]

My Narrative

by Khaing Aung

I was born in a village in...Burma... In 1988, people and students protested to the government for democracy... They shot many students and people with machine guns... Some people were not dead yet, but soldiers picked them up and put them in a trailer mixed with dead people. They caught many people, and sent them to jail.

Many people, including me, escaped to the Thailand-Burma border. We joined ethnic revolution groups and fought the government. The government and people started war. People needed democracy, but the government did not agree. So we fought a long time with the government.

We lived in the jungle. We built huts with bamboo and leaves. We didn't have enough of anything. Many people died by malaria or wounds in the war.

Later the military government occupied ethnic groups' and students' camps. We didn't have places to live, and we didn't have food to eat. We entered into Thailand illegally and we tried to become refugees...

We haven't seen our parents, relatives and friends since that time. We will always remember in our mind the people dead on the road during the demonstration, during the war, and in the jungle by malaria. We prayed for them. They went to heaven.

[An excerpt from Journeys, An Anthology of Adult Student Writing, 2009, published by The Minnesota Literacy Council, St. Paul, MN]

Volunteer's Page

Give them Intimacy, Not Answers

By Jim R. Kok

Intimacy, not answers. That's what we need to remember when we're attempting to comfort someone who's hurting...

Recently in a small group setting, I spoke candidly about my dismay over a devastating illness of a dear friend. Needing comfort, I received instead a mini-lecture on current cancer treatments and an assurance that "a miracle can always happen, you know." I politely thanked them for their concern, but their comments hadn't helped me at all.

In the book *The Way of the Wolf* by Martin Bell is a wonderful story entitled "The Porcupine Whose Name Didn't Matter." For obvious reasons, the porcupine was a misfit in society and had no friends. But one day he stumbled over a raccoon that had been shot and was near death. The porcupine sat by the raccoon and heard its sad story. Then both fell silent. After a while the raccoon asked, "Are you still there?"

"Yes," replied the porcupine, "I'm still here. I was just wondering what to do now."

"Oh, you don't have to do anything!" said the dying raccoon. "Honestly, I mean that. Just stay with me for a little while. Just be there. Don't go away, please. I'm afraid. You won't go away, will you?"

Helpless Comforters. Perhaps the reason such a simple gift of intimacy is so difficult to give is that it's best given with silence. But when we are silent in the face of suffering we run headlong into a

terrible feeling of helplessness. If we talk or actively assist, we feel helpful. But just "being there" confronts us with our own weakness, dependency, and helplessness.

To be an acceptable comforter we must learn to be comfortable with our own feelings of helplessness...



The Healing Presence. In *The Book of the Dun Cow* by Walter Wangerin, Jr., we learn of the healing power of presence, of being there, when the Dun Cow comes to comfort the injured, distraught, and grieving Chauntecleer, the regal rooster.

"She put her soft nose against him, to nudge him into a more peaceful position. Gently she arranged his head so that he might clearly see her. Her sweet breath went into his nostrils... The Dun Cow took a single step back from the rooster, then, and looked at him... Her eyes were liquid with compassion—deep, deep, as the earth is deep. Her brow knew his suffering and knew besides that, worlds more. But the goodness was that, though this wide brow knew so much, yet it bent over his pain alone and creased with it.

"Chauntecleer watched his own desolation appear in the eyes of the Cow, then sink so deeply into them that she shuddered. The tears rose and spilled over... he watched—felt—the miracle take place. Nothing changed; the clouds would not be removed, nor his sons returned, nor his knowledge plished. But there was this: his grief had become her grief, his sorrow her own. And though he grieved not one bit less for that, yet his heart made room for her, for his will and wisdom, and he bore the sorrow better."

The Dunn Cow represents the Presence from whom we draw all healing, but in this spirit-renewing episode we also are reminded of the blessing *our* presence can be to others.

Beyond Words. Sometimes we act as if the best thing God has given us is words, information, answers; in reality, God's best gift may well be his caring presence amid our confusion and our struggles. Certainly the best gift we can give anyone is ourselves: our presence, our crying, hugging, waiting, listening, smiling, and sharing. Intimacy, not answers, is what people need most...

The biggest challenge for many of us is to learn to eliminate our need to answer and fix, to straighten others out, to give them advice. Once we conquer this challenge, we can find the quiet strength to walk with others through their dark valleys...

[From *The Banner*, published by the Faith Alive Ministries, November 28, 1988]



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Treasurer's Report

For Fiscal Year 2008-09

<u>Income</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Churches	\$14,375	\$10,629
Classis M.S.	16,450	19,055
Grants	0	0*
Individuals	36,865	16,708
Miscellaneous	<u>510</u>	<u>11</u>
Total Income	\$68,200	\$45,653
<u>Expenses</u>	<u>62,110</u>	<u>54,709</u>
Difference	\$ 6,090	\$ -9,056

* Note: We received a grant and other donations totaling \$12,750 specifically for the KaRen community development effort which are not reflected above.

Designate Starfish Ministries for your United Way or employer matching programs!

Identify us as the Eastern Minnesota Deacons Association doing business as Starfish Ministries, MN Tax Exempt No. ES 36110.

Communities First Corner

The following is an excerpt from *The Theology of Development* workbook of Communities First, page 48.

The Image of God

God's intention for the whole creation, and especially for human beings, was that all things should exist in peaceful, loving harmony so that the whole creation could flourish. This is *shalom*: all things being and doing as God intended them to be and do. *Shalom* could only happen as long as human beings, God's image bearers, were faithful and obedient to God, honoring God above all else and trusting in him alone. The sinful actions of Adam and Eve's rebellion and disobedience caused *shalom* to be broken. And since they were given the task of helping the creation to develop and unfold, all their work was infected by their sin, so that the whole creation suffers because of it (Romans 8:22). God's plan of salvation is to restore *shalom* to the whole creation. At the heart of God's plan is his work to restore human beings and all their relationships.

Many people in our communities have lost their understanding of being made in the image of God. They often feel that they are much less than this. For example:

→ Some poor people believe that, since they have little of value, they are themselves of little value.

- Women are not honored and respected; they are often treated simply as property or as sex objects.
- Disabled people who cannot work and require much care are not treated with dignity.
- People feel helpless to change their circumstances because decisions affecting their lives are made by others who are wealthy and powerful.
- People who feel insignificant in this world believe God has no interest in them either.
- Children are disregarded because they cannot contribute to the economy.
- Elderly people are discarded because they cannot contribute to the economy.
- Strangers are treated with suspicion because they are different.
- Enemies are treated in inhumane ways because others are afraid of them or think they are justified in acting violently towards them.

An essential ministry of the church is to restore people's understanding that they are made in the image of God.