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Newsletter

Winter 2009

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Why Can't Nancy Find a Job? By Bonnie Smith

Nancy [not her real name] is the single mother of three children, ages 14, 12 and 4. She has a high school diploma and even completed nursing school in the 80s [but didn't pass the licensing test]. In 1998, she completed a year's schooling and received a secretarial certificate. For over two years after that, she worked for a local bank. After her last child was born, she volunteered for several months at a childcare center.

Nancy is a Starfish family and was adopted by a church in September 2006. Despite having an employment coach, Nancy has not been able to find anything but temporary positions with the longest lasting only three months.

So, why can't Nancy find a permanent job?

"Many individuals who receive welfare would like to work but discover that finding and retaining employment is difficult for a number of reasons.... Current data

shows that many of these individuals face significant barriers to employment, and individuals with multiple barriers are less likely to successfully enter the workforce than those with one or no barriers." See table below.

"In addition, 85% of recipients had at least one barrier and 74% had two or more barriers. The study found that the probability that a mother worked 20 hours or more decreases as her number of barriers to employment increases." [From Michigan Family Impact Seminars, Barriers to Employment, by Deb-

orah Satyanathan, page 13].

Nancy has four barriers identified below. She has little work experience. She does not have a vehicle. She suffers from many allergies. Her older children have been truant, are involved with the court system, and are in counseling for emotional issues. In addition, she is eligible for childcare assistance for the youngest child but only during the day and has no childcare resources for jobs on second or third shift.

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Employment Barriers		
Percentage of single mothers working 20+ hours per week	With barrier	Without barriers
Less than high school education or GED	38.7	66.3
Low work experience	33.3	62.3
Previously used fewer than 4 job skills	34.2	64.0
Had 4 or more prior perceived experiences of job discrimination	56.7	57.8
Lack of access to a car and/or license	44.8	69.2
Recent major depressive disorder	47.9	61.0
Drug dependence	40.0	58.3
Mother's poor health	39.0	62.2
Had a child with health, learning or emotional problems	48.5	60.6

Deacon's Page

Visiting Orphans and Widows

Religion that God our Father considers pure and faultless is this: that you visit orphans and widows in their distress and keep yourself unstained by the world. —James 1:27

This familiar verse shows up often... In its familiarity, it can lose its punch. But the injunction to “visit” the needy is rich and challenging, considering the other uses of the word “visit” in Scripture.

Visiting = Imparting Life

...In I Samuel 2:21, God “visits” barren Hannah—and the result is that she is enabled to have five children. You’ll recall that God had graciously given Hannah the gift of a son, Samuel, whom she dedicated back to the Lord. God has more that He wants to do for barren Hannah, and so He “visits” her and she conceives new life. The visitation of God imparts life!

In Luke 7:16, Jesus and the disciples have entered the town of Nain. A...a young man has died, and is mourned by his widowed mother. Jesus looks upon this, and, moved with compassion, tells the woman not to cry. Then He puts His hands on the coffin, and commands, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” And sure enough—the coffin opens, the dead boy sits up, and the crowds “are filled with awe.” Then, Luke tells us, the crowd began shouting and praising God. And what did they say? “Surely God has visited us!” *They knew God has visited them because life was imparted to the dead.*

This suggests that our “visiting” of orphans and widows in



their distress involves a ministry among them that imparts life... We are to share our own lives, and invite them to taste of Christ’s life. We are to pray for fullness in the places where they are empty. Where they experience deadness, our ministry aims to quicken. Where they experience barrenness, our ministry helps them connect to Jesus and experience fruitfulness. He is the lifegiver to all who are destitute, empty, dead and barren.

Visiting = Rescue and Redemption

...In some translations, Exodus 3:7 is translated as God say that He has “visited” His people Israel in Egypt and took note of their suffering. And this is immediately followed by God’s statement, “So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them...into... a land flowing with milk and honey.” So here we have a connection between the visitation of God and His plans to deliver the Jews from slavery. Here, visiting, involves rescue and deliverance.

In Luke 1:67-79, the father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, exults in a prophetic word that foretells the coming of Jesus the Messiah. In verse 68, he says, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, *for He has visited His people*

to redeem them.” Again, we see the connection between visiting and deliverance, visiting and redemption...

The incarnate God came to visit us in the form of Jesus, the God-Man. Jesus came and He shined on people living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to rescue them from the clutches of sin and death. And the Scriptures tell us, the Church, that now WE are the body of Christ, now WE are the hands and feet of Christ. And so we need to be Christians who visit those widows and orphans who live in darkness and in the shadow of death.

We are to bring the light of Christ to little children who live in innercity hell holes, hearing the gunfire every night. We are to rescue widows in Third World countries who are surrounded by dark paganism, by teaching them truth and economically empowering them. We are to support the efforts of Christian groups like International Justice Mission that rescues runaway children from the hidden hovels where they are forced into prostitution. Visiting...[is] a radical, exciting, even dangerous mission of bringing Jesus the Redeemer near to the hurting who live “in darkness and the shadow of death.”

About the Author: Dr. Amy L. Sherman is the founder of Charlottesville Abundant Life Ministries, a holistic, church-based ministry among lower-income urban families in the Propsect Avenue neighborhood of Charlottesville.

[From *Sharing God’s Heart for the Poor*, co-published by Trinity Presbyterian Church and the Hudson Institute, 2000.

Volunteer's Page

A New Year's Resolution In a Hungry World

New Year's is traditionally a time for resolutions marking fresh determination to break old habits and begin new courses of action. It is also a time to be thankful. Our resolve to be more faithful and to recommit ourselves to God's service is a response of gratitude to the One who has given us all things in Christ.

Our commitment to acting as Christians is often demonstrated by how we respond to the needs of others. John wrote, "Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18). The divine love within us helps us "to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

In a world where nearly 800 million people are chronically under-nourished, what does it mean to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God? As this new year begins, what kinds of resolutions can U.S. Christians make that are responses of obedience and gratitude?

We can resolve to:

Examine our own life styles.

- Do we see ourselves as stewards of the earth's resources and not as owners? Do we remember that God is the owner and has given us the earth as a gift to be cared for and protected for future generations?
- Do we seek peace and justice for all people, desiring that every person would have what is needed for physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being?
- Are we content when our own needs are satisfied? Could we begin to compare our standard of living with hungry people rather than with our affluent neighbors, and then live more gratefully and give more generously?

Educate Ourselves and Others.

- Learn about the causes of hunger and poverty and the needs of the hungry people in our own community and the world. Study Scripture to know God's compassion, justice and concern for poor people.

- Learn about the U.S. political process and how government decisions affect hungry people. Explore ways concerned Christians can be involved.

Become Advocates.

- Use our gifts, citizenship and financial resources to help speak on behalf of those who have no voice.
- Join with other concerned Christians to increase support for relief and development and to affect public policy decisions on behalf of hungry people.
- Join organizations such as Bread for the World. Deciding to commit ourselves to help end hunger in our world is a life-long challenge. Let's pray for God's guidance and wisdom in choosing concrete steps to implement our resolutions.

For more information on how you can get involved, contact:

Bread for the World
1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1100
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-608-2400
www.Bread.org

Why Can't Nancy....[cont. from page 1]

Nancy doesn't have a choice – she has to find work. Her 60 month limit for cash assistance from the county has run out and she has no income. She lives in public housing and receives food stamps but no cash.

There are no easy answers. But maybe John Calvin had the right idea: "The church in Ge-

neva under John Calvin's leadership centuries ago operated a well-thought through benevolence system from which we can learn much. Poor refugees streamed into Geneva, many fleeing religious persecution, often with only the shirts on their backs. These poor families were categorized according to the different nature of their needs... Those who could work – and were willing to do so – were

given tools or no-interest loans to start their own businesses... He was not given an on-going handout that would demean him or engender an unhealthy dependency upon the public dole. And the able-bodied poor who refused to work were exhorted to change their ways." [Sharing God's Heart for the Poor, by Amy L. Sherman, pages 28-29]



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Treasurer's Report

For July 1 thru December 2008

	6 Mo. Budget	Actual
<u>Income</u>		
Churches	\$ 7,188	\$ 7,664
Classis M.S.	8,225	7,787
Individuals	18,433	8,750
Miscellaneous	250	5
Total Income	\$34,100	\$24,206
<u>Expenses</u>	<u>31,085</u>	<u>27,446</u>
Difference	\$ 3,015	\$-3,241

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 *Through God's Eyes, With God's Heart* workbook of Communities First, page 3.

Community Ministry

Three existing approaches for a church's community ministry are...:

Ministry in: When a church implements a ministry in a community, it chooses the programs and services it will offer based solely on what members want to do for themselves and possibly for the community. The church gathers little or no input from the community about the choice of programs and services and where these services should be provided. Most often these ministry programs are short-term and do not address long-term community needs. Most of the activities take place at the church. The measure of success in this approach to community ministry is the number of people who sign up and participate in the program or event.

Ministry to: This is a variation of the "ministry in" approach. The location may not be the church, but as with the previous approach, little or not input is gathered from the community as to the type or content of programs or services provided. The program is ten to the community, but as with the "ministry in" approach, it

does not reflect any community participation in the planning and it tends to be a short-term rather than long-term response to community needs. The measure of success in this approach is the number of people who participate in the program or service and the church's capacity to implement programs outside of its own building.

Ministry with: Ministry with the community starts by gathering input and information from members of the community. This information is used to determine which programs and services the church can offer to make a long-term impact. Ongoing evaluation and input from community members participating in the programs is expected. The location can be any appropriate venue in the community depending on purpose and input gathered from community members. The measure of success in this approach includes what happens to participants in the program, the impact on the community as a whole, and what happens in the process of working together as a community.

Which model best describes your church's approach to community ministry?