

Celebrate

SDOP Sunday Resource & Yearbook
People Investing in People

March 10, 2024 *and beyond!*



Presbyterian Committee on the
**Self-Development
of People**

Each story/page can be used as an individual resource!

By Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson | SDOP Coordinator

What does it mean to align ourselves with those who know poverty well? In Matthew 25, Jesus Christ demonstrates what this means in verses 40–45 when he



shows the disciples and us that what this means is that he, himself, not only assisted poor and oppressed people, but he also aligned himself with them showing that God has a preferential option for the poor and Jesus taught his followers that they should share that same primary responsibility.

SDOP Sunday is one important way that we as God’s people can do the same. As the Body of Christ, we are called to be unified in faith and action through sharing our resources to confront poverty and promote economic empowerment. The Matthew 25 text presents a direct challenge to us as people of faith in that it calls us be aware of the ways that Jesus Christ teaches and instructs through the work of communities who are battling poverty. It is here that we are called to a deeper learning and thicker listening to the work of anti-poverty that Jesus calls us to partake.

The content of this SDOP Sunday resource is a yearbook, yes, it is a yearly report so to speak, but more excitingly, it is also a testament to a deeper learning about the ways diverse communities confront the intersectional issues of poverty and economic injustice. As I think about what it means to be a disciple — one who is called to learn, and more importantly act on that learning, I would also like for you to think about how the ministry and work of SDOP can serve as a conduit for you, your church, your leadership, etc., to learn more about what poverty eradication means and act on it.

Speaking of learning, it is noteworthy to mention that in partnership with the Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program, a missional program of the PC(USA), presbyterianmission.org/ministries/yav, we have a YAV who is shadowing our work and utilizing her learning by engaging communities. Her name is Juliet Owuor, she is a 2023–24 YAV doing excellent work at the YAV site in the heart of New York City, and she is doing this work by supporting, engaging and enhancing our SDOP

ministry by learning more about what it means to seek economic equity, build relationships with communities and do justice! Next year, we hope to have another YAV who would be willing to walk with and work with SDOP in learning more about how our ministry, as a part of the PC(USA), is building relationships with communities.

As we continue to embark upon Matthew 25’s rich gospel, I believe that it is prudent for us to use this SDOP Sunday resource as a tool to create and facilitate learning. Something has always echoed within me in doing this work, and that is the reality that our communities are the most profound teachers of the work of poverty eradication. Share this resource with your mission and outreach committees. Take this resource to your youth ministries to create generative discussion about poverty and the dynamic communities who use their power to confront it. Feel free to use this resource to equip your leadership in preparing them to engage the work of community building and justice seeking. Share this resource with your adult classes, use it to create materials for bulletins, Bible studies, “Minutes for Mission” and other places in the church that are conducive to learning. Share it with members of your church, your presbytery, your synods! Most importantly, I challenge you to share this resource and the work of SDOP with those in your community in hopes that it will inspire relationships as well as fuel action. I also hope that the ministry of SDOP and its amazing community partners move you to greater involvement with our ministry through attending our workshops, giving to the One Great Hour of Sharing, or joining, and even in some cases creating an SDOP local committee if you do not have one in your presbytery. I tell you, each community, each powerful story in this resource is attached to deeper, more profound stories about restorative spirits, thriving communities and transformed lives. As you engage this resource, be open to the ways that it seeks to engage you and the church to live up to its identity to be profoundly responsive in bringing the Good News to the poor, which is the essence of Jesus’ ministry.

*Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson,
Coordinator of the Self-Development of People*

By **Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace** | Co-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



As a young person, I recall my dad — the Rev. Felix Santana — serving on the SDOP on several denominational levels. At that time, I had no idea of the value and foresight of that ministry. Looking back and leaning forward into the future, I consider our denomination’s SDOP one of our unsung or under-sung heroes. It concretely embodies our call to connect the words of our faith to the works of our gospel service. It embodies our commitment to serve as partners with community organizations focused on empowering individuals in a way that is transformative for them as they seek to transform others who find themselves on the margins. As the church continues to re-form itself in this post-pandemic era, I believe SDOP is a model of ministry that teaches us much and I am grateful for the opportunities and lessons of resurrection hope it both affords and encourages.

*Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace,
Co-Moderator of the 225th
General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*



Photo courtesy of Strength to Love Farm



Photo by SDOP Staff (Clara Nunez)

WHAT DOES SDOP DO?

SDOP is a ministry that affirms God’s concern for humankind. We are Presbyterians and ecumenical partners, dissatisfied with poverty and oppression, united in faith and action through sharing, confronting and enabling. We participate in the empowerment of economically poor, oppressed and disadvantaged people seeking to change the structures that perpetuate poverty, oppression and injustice.

SUGGESTED USES FOR THIS RESOURCE

- If your presbytery/synod has an SDOP Committee (call the national office to find out if a committee exists in your mid council), invite one of its members to speak during your worship service. Call the national office to find out if there are national committee members in your area who could be invited to speak to your congregation.
- SDOP committee members or others can promote the resource (i.e., Social Justice Committee, Mission Committee, etc.); you do not have to be a pastor to do so. It is, however, always encouraged to bring the resource to your pastor’s attention.
- SDOP committee members can share their own experiences as they promote the resource.

If you are a national or mid council SDOP committee member:

- Take pictures if you are meeting with local groups or if you are present at SDOP events. We encourage you to also take pictures, if possible, when a local group or a representative of SDOP speaks in a congregation, presbytery or other venue. Send us copies of those pictures so that we, too, can lift up what you are doing for SDOP Sunday.

HERE IS HOW YOUR CONGREGATION CAN HELP

- Invite participants of a nearby SDOP project to offer a “Minute for Mission” during your Sunday worship service. Contact the national SDOP office to learn of community partners in your area.
- We encourage you to include this resource in newsletters, articles, etc.
- You can call pastors and other church leaders to remind them of SDOP Sunday and the materials available.



Photo courtesy of Gullah Farmers' Coop



SOUTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE HELPS BLACK FARMERS TO THRIVE

By Darla Carter

Black farmers in the Lowcountry of South Carolina are making economic gains thanks to banding together to take advantage of the “buy local” trend.

More than a dozen Black farmers with limited resources came together to form the Gullah Farmers Cooperative Association in 2010 to secure markets for their products and to get paid fair prices.

“That was our big vision: To start this co-op, let the farmers grow what they know to grow and sell it at a wholesale price to these different vendors,” said Walter Mack, administrative director.

The pitch: “Instead of getting stuff from California or Mexico, why don’t you get it locally?” he said.

Most of the farmers in the cooperative, which is supported by the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP) and other entities, are from area communities such as Jasper, Hampton, Allendale, St. Helena Island and Johns Island.

Part of the motivation for starting the cooperative was that school systems in the region had become interested in securing locally grown food.

“The children now will be able to eat locally grown, fresh, nutritional, healthy food instead of that processed stuff,” Mack said.

The cooperative helps farmers in a number of ways, including marketing and technical agricultural training and assistance with seed selection, budgeting, farm certification and USDA programs. “Training is always ongoing with these farmers” to achieve success beyond roadside markets, Mack said.

According to the cooperative, “Historically, small Black farmers have had to endure inequitable marketing practices from buyers and distributors when trying to market our farm products. These unfair practices have led to many small farm families living in poverty or losing their small family farms. One of the reasons that the Gullah Farmers Cooperative was formed was to create a larger marketing entity that could compete with larger big-box farm producers and could sell larger volume for a fair market price.”

Two years ago, the cooperative identified a 10,000-square-foot building on St. Helena Island and received federal funding to transform it into a fruit-and-vegetable processing facility.

“It’s something that local people are proud of, and now we’re getting a lot more of them to grow fruits and

vegetables and bring it to us,” Mack said.

One of the advantages of the cooperative is that participating farmers now have money to pay for property taxes and other expenses. “That’s a great economic impact,” Mack said.

The processing facility also has created local jobs in areas such as sales and outreach that are helping educated people to remain close to home instead of having to move away to earn good salaries.



Photo courtesy of Gullah Farmers Coop.

Another stride that the cooperative has made is transporting produce to vendors in refrigerated trucks, which small farmers often can’t afford on their own.

“We actually go to the farmers and pick up their produce in our refrigerated truck, bring it back here and put it in our coolers until it’s processed,” Mack said. “... Our dream is to have about two or three 18-wheelers come and take deliveries from us on a weekly basis.”

Funding from SDOP has been helpful with operations, something that many organizations do not provide grants for, he said. The cooperative also has received money from Sea Island Presbyterian Church in Beaufort, South Carolina.

The cooperative hopes to expand by helping to establish a processing facility in the northern part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor someday, Mack said. “We have learned some tough lessons, but I think we can help people not make those same mistakes ... and they can move much faster than we did.”

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

Visit presbyterianmission.org/ministries/sdop/get-involved for ways to further engage with the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People



ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES ADVOCATES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE AND OTHERS OVERLOOKED BY SOCIETY

By Darla Carter

A group in Chicago is making sure that people who often get overlooked, such as individuals with disabilities, are seen and heard when it comes to issues related to health, education and welfare.

The Alliance for Community Services is a grassroots, member-led organization that was formed about 10 years ago when public aid offices were being closed and Medicaid benefits were being cut around the state, said Fran Tobin, the alliance's part-time coordinator.

The organization's members include people with disabilities, families struggling to make ends meet, older people, frontline public service employees and people who live or have lived in long-term care facilities.

is unique because it includes both unions and disability groups, said Lyndsay Sullivan, steering committee member. "There's really no other organization like ours."

Funding from SDOP helped the alliance with a coordinated effort to prevent deaths from Covid in nursing homes.

"The disability justice leaders within the alliance sparked this effort to build a campaign ... to promote greater safety and accountability in the pandemic," Tobin said, "but also looking at how do we transform the long-term care system so that people with disabilities, and seniors, have choices?"

The alliance successfully pushed for a shortage of ombudsmen to be addressed as a result of "a campaign that required both citywide and statewide mobilization," Tobin said.

The alliance also has advocated for more people to have "the option to live in their own homes and in the community as they're disabled or elderly and to increase the freedom of speech so that people who are in nursing homes are not silenced when they want to speak up about abuse or neglect or violations of their rights," Tobin said.

Another issue that's important to the alliance is making sure that people retain their Medicaid coverage despite bureaucratic obstacles. For various reasons, people "are getting their Medicaid canceled. And so, we're trying to first, alert people to what the threat is, and second, when people do get canceled, provide support to them in filing appeals so they can get back enrolled," Tobin said.

The alliance also has been involved in a broader coalition that's working to get a system in place so that when a person is experiencing a mental health crisis, they're responded to by a mental health person and not a police officer. "We're promoting what we call treatment, not trauma," Tobin said.

The alliance is grateful to SDOP for multiple reasons, including "being able to have the resources" for things like training and leadership development. "The SDOP vision is one that emphasizes what this alliance really wants to do anyway, which is people speaking up for themselves about what do we need? How do we build our power?"

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"We collectively organize ourselves around the needs that we have, and so the only issues that we would speak on are issues that we ourselves have experience with," Tobin said.

In a written description of the group, the alliance notes, "Our members benefit directly from our advocacy. Billions of public dollars are allocated for health, education and welfare with little or no input from those of us directly affected. By organizing, we can have a voice in these policies."

The organization, which is a partner of the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP),



SDOP VISITS PANAMA TO MEET WITH FARMERS AND HEAR IMPACT OF AGRICULTURAL PROJECT

By Clara Nunez

The International Task Force and staff of the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP) visited with members of SDOP-funded projects in Panama in August 2023. El Espino Agro Entrepreneurs and two other funded groups in the area came to meet with us. The other two groups were San Miguel group and United Peasants of Banazo. Upon our arrival, the group members were sitting down on chairs in the open field and had prepared tables decorated with beautiful flowers for our meeting.

The farmers and their families gave testimonies of the blessings received from an agricultural project, involving the growing of cassava, plantains and vegetables for their families. The grant was used to purchase equipment, tools and seeds to produce crops for the participating families and for the sale of surplus. It was a very uplifting time. Every one of the speakers said they wanted to be present to thank the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and SDOP for the agricultural project and its benefit to their families. One of the members of the group said they not only got protein from the produce but also produce to sell at the market. Another one said he was proud to receive the assistance. They had felt abandoned by the government, but the project and being able to work have given them a feeling of accomplishment and a feeling of pride in their work.

The Rev. Dr. Karen Brown, member of the International Task Force and chairperson of the SDOP National Committee, explained how the Church, to work against injustice, created SDOP. Julieta, a group member, explained how in Panama farming areas are forgotten and big companies are preferred over poor people.

These farmers are growing mangos; yucca; black, red and white rice; bell peppers; corn; malanga; coffee; and cucumbers; and now they are raising chickens and quails. Manuel said the black and red rice contains antioxidant elements on the layer that gives the color to the rice.

One of the highlights of the conversation was when one of the members of the Boca de Tucue community stood up and said that his community had heard good things about SDOP helping El Espino farmers and wanted to also participate. He took out from his backpack a completed SDOP application and everyone clapped. The Task Force will be reviewing this.

SDOP partnered with El Espino Agro Entrepreneurs farmers with a grant to purchase equipment, tools and seeds to produce crops for the families participating and to sell surplus crops. The machine that peels the rice was center stage of the covered area. Bunches of rice were hanging from the beams waiting to be cleaned using this machine.



Photo by SDOP Staff (Clara Nunez)

The farmers showed us the fields and the crops; many of the members and families walked with us and were proud to show us the plants and the fruits because of their labor. One of the women walking with us pointed out to the corn fields and let us know that corn is grown from generation to generation as a traditional crop.

The farmers prepared a meal for us in a big pot cooking with wood in the open area. All of us sat down and shared a meal and cucumbers from the fields that we just picked up. Fresh preserves and fruit were desserts. We felt blessed to be part of this visit with these farmers making a difference for their families.

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HELPING YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS BUILD A FOUNDATION

SDOP Trailblazer Karen Brown helps shape futures

by Rick Jones

The Rev. Dr. Karen Brown has a passion for helping people start new businesses. The Baltimore native grew up in the Presbyterian church and quickly found her niche in ministry.

“Three of us went to General Assembly in Hartford, Connecticut, as observers and sat up in the nosebleed section and that was all I needed,” she said. “I was hooked at my first experience with the national church at that Assembly. We came back from that and organized youth advisory delegates in Baltimore.”

Long before joining the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP), the music education major began working at a local Presbyterian church, with an emphasis on young people.



Upon her graduation from Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, she came back to Baltimore and served as an associate pastor at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church for about a decade. It was during that time that Brown says she heard about SDOP.

“Our young people came up with the idea of starting a greeting card company and we began selling Christmas and Kwanzaa cards. We did this for six consecutive years and sold 50,000 boxes of cards every year and made \$150,000,” she said. “One of the funding sources we received was SDOP. We also received funding from presbytery and synod levels.”

Brown says she was very involved in urban ministry in Baltimore, running the church’s outreach center, which

served 150 people a day.

She also has worked as a grant writer for another nonprofit in Baltimore called Intersection of Change.

“A group of young people have started a business selling T-shirts, jewelry and tote bags. They submitted a grant request to Baltimore Presbytery’s SDOP Committee and received funding” for multiple years, Brown said. “Another is an urban farm called ‘Strength to Love,’ managed by returning citizens. It received funding from the national SDOP as well as the local SDOP ... so I’m back in the role again of promoting the work of SDOP.”

Brown says these types of success stories motivate her to keep working.

“I know the impact, having worked with underserved populations as part of my ministry for the last 25-plus years, coming across one barrier after another,” she said.

Brown says she loves being able to share SDOP with people who see so many doors closed.

“They are shocked that there is a place where groups can potentially get funding to do their work. There so many good people doing this grassroots, boots-on-the-ground work,” she said. “Because they don’t have strong financials or a strong board, they can’t get funding. They don’t have the money, or they won’t get selected by some of these potential sponsors.”

Brown, who is serving her second and final term on the national SDOP committee, says she and other committee members are simply doing what God has taught them to do.

“I see my God as a God of the oppressed, and so when I see God’s work and magical hand telling his children it’s going to be all right, that what we’re doing is good, it is amazing,” she said. “One penny or one dollar has a rippling effect that is changing lives and communities.”

Brown says she maintains contacts with a number of the businesses, including the youths that ran the greeting card business many years ago.

“It’s important to love, nurture and provide opportunities for young people and they will become the adults that God has created them to be.”

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EXTENDING WELCOME TO THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED

Co-Moderator: 'Do we believe that people are made in the image of God?'

by Darla Carter

Special guests of the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP) encouraged churches and other segments of society to find ways to help formerly incarcerated people get back on their feet.

The Rev. Gregory Bentley, Co-Moderator of the 224th General Assembly (2020) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), was among several panelists who made their voices heard during an SDOP webinar.

Bentley challenged viewers to look at mass incarceration as a systemic issue and to get beyond the stigma that many formerly incarcerated people face.

“This is where we have to lean on our faith,” he said. “Do we believe that people are made in the image of God, regardless of what they’ve done? Do we really believe that? Because that makes all the difference. If I believe I’m dealing with a person who is beloved of God in front of me, I relate to them in a certain way.”

Bentley went on to say that part of what it means to love someone is to listen to them. “Rather than saying, ‘Well, you know, you’ve been in prison, and I know what you need,’ let me hear what you need and let’s figure this thing out together.”

The discussion took place in 2021 during “The Struggle is Real,” a virtual series designed to help churches live into the Matthew 25 invitation, which calls on churches to actively engage in the world around them.

SDOP’s coordinator, the Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson, acknowledged that some churches are fearful of engaging with formerly incarcerated people and may not know how to get started.

Panelist Katie Talbot, an activist and formerly incarcerated person with Neighbor to Neighbor in Holyoke, Massachusetts, said to keep in mind that no one is better than another. “We’re human. We’re fallible. We make mistakes.”

Michigan activist Monica Jahner said one of the ways she’s been able to change hearts and minds is by holding community events. “You’ve got to get the people to hear the stories, hear the injustices and hear ... what the needs are.”

Minister Chibueze Okorie talked about being involved in prison ministry for the Church of Gethsemane in Brooklyn, New York. “I have seen a lot of people come from prison and become law-abiding citizens,” he said.

However, many people who are reentering society

feel rejected and have trouble finding jobs and acquiring housing, he said.

Speaker Bonifacio Aleman recounted a personal experience that he had when he went to apply for a summer job after having been incarcerated. Although the person who interviewed him was excited about the prospect of hiring him and was eager to seek good pay for him, the people in charge ultimately chose to offer him an unpaid position.



“When we’re talking about justice-involved people and mass incarceration and how to engage them, step No. 1, pay us,” he said. “We know that people who are incarcerated are 10 times more likely to be homeless.”

Norris Henderson, founder of the Louisiana group Voice of the Experienced (formerly Voice of the Ex-Offender), noted that despite reports of worker shortages, “nobody is stepping up saying, ‘Well, wait a minute. Here’s a whole population of people who’ve been scratching and clawing trying to get jobs. Let’s see if we can offer jobs to them.’”

The webinar featured multiple SDOP partners funded through the PC(USA)’s One Great Hour of Sharing offering, including the NorthWest Initiative A.R.R.O. (Advocacy, Reentry, Resources and Outreach), Henderson’s group, and Neighbor to Neighbor.

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EMBODYING KINDNESS ON THE STREETS OF LAS VEGAS

One Great Hour of Sharing gifts help Caridad Gardens restore houseless veterans and neighbors back into community

by Emily Enders Odom

For Shawn Duncan, it's the little things — like getting a birthday card — that mean a lot. Perhaps it's because Duncan, a military veteran living in Las Vegas, hadn't had a mailbox in years. Or a home.

A native of Michigan with no strong family ties, Duncan had been struggling for years with homelessness and mental health issues — including PTSD — when a chance encounter on Facebook with his former youth pastor changed the direction of his life.

“I hadn't talked to him in years, but after my old pastor and I got up on Facebook, he called me later that night and said, ‘Hey, let's talk,’” Duncan recalled. “And we prayed. That's when he introduced me to Caridad and Merideth.”



Duncan's life-changing introduction was to Caridad Gardens, a Las Vegas-based nonprofit dedicated to helping and “humanizing the homeless” — through job skills training and mental, emotional and physical wellness programs — and its founder, Merideth Spriggs, a former youth pastor who was once homeless herself.

Spriggs started the organization in San Diego, where she was living at the time, not long after the university where she had been employed laid her off. As a result, she ultimately lost everything, including her unemployment benefits and home.

“I realized if homelessness could happen to me, it could happen to anybody; and that I could be a unique voice,” said Spriggs, whose own work as a volunteer with the San Diego Rescue Mission proved transformational. “Even

though I really felt God's calling on my life to do this, most days I would not have picked this — and still don't pick this — but I do not feel released from my calling.”

What began in San Diego in 2009 as an all-volunteer organization moved to Las Vegas in its “3.0 version” in 2013.

Spriggs, who has always been Caridad's director, bears the unique title of its chief kindness officer.

“When I was doing street outreach in 2014, it was a police officer I was working with who inspired it,” she recalled. “When I gave him my card, he said, ‘That title, director, doesn't fit you at all. You need to be the kindness officer or something.’ So, I Googled it and since there was no such title, I made it up.”

The unique, street-centered, V.I.P. “concierge approach” of Caridad Gardens is made possible, in part, through a grant from the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP), which is in turn supported by Presbyterians' generous gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing.

For 75 years, its purpose of helping neighbors in need around the world remains constant, giving the PC(USA) and other Christian denominations a tangible way to share God's love. In addition to SDOP, One Great Hour of Sharing also benefits the Presbyterian Hunger Program and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

Caridad's “Undies Sunday” — complete with its own superhero, Mighty Tightly — ensures that its clients have socks and underwear, with Hanes having recently joined with the nonprofit as a corporate sponsor. One of Spriggs' close friends also gave Caridad the use of his farm, where the organization has grown and distributed fresh produce to supply area restaurants and to feed the hungry.

“The work of Caridad Gardens, in many ways like Matthew 25, acknowledges that we find the plight of Jesus as well as hope in those who are directly impacted by poverty,” said the Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson, SDOP's coordinator. “Caridad Gardens engages in the intersectional work of recognizing that poverty, race and class are intimately linked.”

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'WE SAW YOU IN THE PEOPLE ASKING FOR JUSTICE'

One Great Hour of Sharing gifts help to foster hope in Puerto Rico after hurricane

by Emily Enders Odom

In all her 66 years, Magda Cruz had never witnessed anything like Hurricane María's power to destroy. But greater still was the power she saw in the human spirit to prevail — even in the face of the 2017 hurricane's widespread devastation.

And it was her people's total commitment to improving their communities' living and working conditions that inspired Cruz to harness her own power to persist in the fight for social and environmental justice.

Because Cruz had seen how Puerto Rico's public education system had often overlooked or outright failed low-income communities such as hers, she vowed to do something about it. As a lifelong resident of Barrio Obrero San Ciprián in San Juan, Puerto Rico — one of several communities that surround the Martín Peña Canal — Cruz had already spent decades advocating for justice for children with learning differences well before the Category 4 hurricane ravaged the island.

When her ongoing work as the administrator of a local community center, where children could gather after school to access water and electricity, was severely compromised by the hurricane, the efforts of Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña provided a lifeline.

Fideicomiso [fee-day-cō-mē-sō] is a community land trust that manages 200 acres along the canal through collective ownership of its members. It was created to protect the rights of residents, many of whom for decades informally built on the land, which was previously owned by the government.

In María's aftermath, Fideicomiso has come to the aid not only of the community centers, but also to families like Cruz's, whose homes weren't built to withstand natural disasters. Because many residents lost large parts of their roofs, they had to either abandon their homes or sleep in unsafe conditions.

One of Fideicomiso's many ongoing projects, Techos para el Caño, addressed that need by building and installing safe roofs throughout the community. Now, "the residents and I are no longer so worried," Cruz said.

Because especially dire conditions following the hurricane continue to impact the island's most vulnerable communities, which also face escalating climate change and an often-nonexistent infrastructure, three Presbyterian Mission Agency ministries joined hands and resources to help.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program, the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP) and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) — partners in the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering — came together to send a delegation to the archipelago in 2018.

"Our work with Fideicomiso speaks to the call that we all have to work together as the body of Christ in our ministries," said the Rev. Edwin González-Castillo, PDA's director.



It is on just such a universal call that the ecumenical One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) Offering was founded in 1949.

For 75 years, its purpose of helping neighbors in need around the world remains constant, giving the PC(USA) and other Christian denominations a tangible way to share God's love. "In working with Fideicomiso, we are in many ways responding to the question, 'When did we see you?'" González-Castillo said. "This project answers the question. We saw you in this community. We saw you in what has been going on for many decades. We saw you in the people asking for justice."

Margaret Mwale, an SDOP associate, added, "By helping communities to have a more stable source of electricity and to become more water secure — which is a basic human right — what we are really providing through the (OGHS) Offering is a clear message of God's provision and God's hope."

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ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING GIFTS RENEW WOMEN'S LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS IN PANAMA

Women's Meeting Space sows seeds of hope

by Emily Enders Odom

Paola Tognarelli's [Tog-na-rē-le] connection to Mother Earth is sacred. Just like the bond she now shares with the other significant women in her life.

When the pandemic was at its loneliest, Tognarelli blossomed through new, life-giving friendships nurtured around community gardens and in WhatsApp-based support groups sponsored by Women's Meeting Space, a nonprofit organization based in Panama City.



“In quarantine, it was great to meet this group of women who, despite the situation, took time together to share their experiences and give each other feedback,” said Tognarelli.

Women's Meeting Space advocates for the rights of Panama's women, both Indigenous and from its poorest communities. Many of the women are heads of household who are unemployed, and their families grow food at home to help overcome challenges worsened by the pandemic

“Personally, planting helped me a lot with my daughter who has autism,” she said. “Planting was, for both of us, a therapy; and then my husband and my other daughter also joined us. This united us more as a family.”

Women's Meeting Space — along with the Chilibre Women's Training Centers and the Gonzalillo Community Organization, also in Panama City — receives funding through the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP), which is in turn supported by the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS).

Founded in 1949, OGHS helps neighbors in need around the world through the Presbyterian Hunger Program, SDOP and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

“I'm not surprised that when we first started working in Panama, we were finding women's groups,” said Teresa

Bidart, bilingual mission specialist for SDOP. “We started in the Dominican Republic in 2007, Belize in 2010, and now Panama in 2018. ... In all these poorer countries, children and families mostly depend on the women for everything.”

The gardening project includes starting an experimental nursery to produce seedlings and installing a community stand. Its goal is not only to feed the growers' families but also to sell surplus food to cover workers' basic needs.

“Not only did women work in the sowing, but the garden also became a family space,” said Ileana Lopez, project coordinator. “It seemed to improve the mental health of many participants impacted by the Covid-19 virus.”

As Tognarelli began to teach workshops on sowing through improvisational theater, she found the clouds of Covid lifting.

“My mind forgot how terrible the pandemic was, and I appreciated how important it is to be in contact with the earth,” she said. “Also, in this process, it was beautiful because I remembered my grandmother, who always told me about the benefits of medicinal herbs, which she planted and shared with her neighbors.”

As for Bidart, she further appreciates that the mission of these three cooperating organizations is congruent with the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Matthew 25 invitation, which, like Women's Meeting Space, is dedicated to dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty.

“These women's organizations are fighting with the structures that keep them in poverty. They had a concrete plan to alleviate their poor living conditions by creating home gardens and a community nursery. These activities allowed them to provide for their families and participate in their family economy. That's exactly what one of the focus areas of Matthew 25 is about, eradicating poverty.”

Bidart also highlighted the importance of the ongoing and frequent communication between SDOP and the participating organizations. “It wasn't just about the money,” she said. “It was that they knew that somebody was thinking of them and supporting them in this period of crisis.”

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

Visit presbyterianmission.org/ministries/sdop/get-involved for ways to further engage with the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People.

INTERNATIONAL



18,715
People Benefited

Total Number of
International Projects

13

\$235,700

Total Dollar Amount of
International Grants

MID COUNCIL (LOCAL)



5,677
People Benefited

Total Number of
Mid Council Grants

25

Total Number of
Administrative Funds

2

Total Dollar Amount of
Administrative Funds

\$1,168

\$132,653

Total Dollar Amount of
Mid Council Grants

NATIONAL (DOMESTIC)



27,750
People Benefited

Total Number of
National Grants

15

\$233,750

Total Dollar Amount of
National Grants

SDOP ON THE MOVE IN THE WEST



by David Johnson, National SDOP Committee and West Task Force Member, Palos Verdes Estates, California

National SDOP West Task Force members recently visited the Center Pole, a grassroots Native American community-based organization located on the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana. The Crow Indian Reservation is 2.3 million acres and home to 13,000 Crow, or Apsáalooke, many of whom still speak their language and practice ancient traditions. The “Living Culture” campus is situated at the base of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. The Center Pole was first established as a youth development organization, but today is involved in various interconnected initiatives and activities that address the needs of the Crow community, including a radio station, food sovereignty, digital archives, an art and cultural center, an Indigenous media and education center, and a project to demonstrate alternative energy.

on the reservation and distribute food donations to the reservation communities. To attract tourism money and further support, the Center Pole has constructed a healthy foods café on the Crow Reservation next to their food warehouse. The café brings together local Indigenous food entrepreneurs, particularly those who specialize in traditional and healthful meals. Furthermore, they host workshops on sustainable methods that benefit the extremely poor, preserve Mother Earth and Indigenous cultures, and offer decolonization education.

An Indigenous group of Northern Cheyenne and Crow women and elders leads the Center Pole, making all the decisions for their own community projects. The food bank and garden resources are utilized by the tribal community’s members to provide food for their families, and their leadership and energy power these efforts. The Center Pole also offers decolonization education and community seminars on sustainable methods that benefit the extremely poor and safeguard Mother Earth.

SDOP ON THE MOVE IN THE NORTHEAST



by Julia Hill, National SDOP Committee Member and Northeast Task Force Co-Chair, Yeadon, Pennsylvania

The National SDOP’s Northeast Task Force had the privilege of visiting Connecticut from Nov. 2–4. The primary purpose of the trip was to expose to the Presbytery of Southern New England the wonderful work SDOP is doing. In collaboration with the presbytery, we held an in-person meeting for clergy and community leaders in the morning followed by an in-person workshop in the afternoon with community groups. Both were well-attended, and many connections were made.

We received an invitation from one of the participants of the afternoon workshop to come to Waterbury and check out what they are doing. The afternoon was spent at the Afro-Caribbean Cultural Center, which housed several not-for-profit entities. This is a beautiful facility and is doing wonderful work in the Waterbury community.

Saturday was spent attending the presbytery meeting in New Haven, at which National SDOP Committee Chair the Rev. Dr. Karen Brown delivered the message. The meeting was held at the First Presbyterian Church and the meeting was also on Zoom since this presbyter covers a large geographical area. We were able to share with those who were in attendance more about the work of SDOP. This allowed us to spend one-on-one time with those attending the meeting. Interest was



Through their social enterprises — a café and coffee shop, a gift shop featuring Native arts, a resale shop, trail rides, battlefield tours and tipi stays — they impart and exemplify entrepreneurship. These businesses give community people job training and employment opportunities while ensuring the sustainability of their initiatives.

The Crow Native Americans and Northern Cheyenne people are collaborating on this hunger alleviation project, which recently received an SDOP grant of \$23,750. The Center Pole aims to restore the lost agricultural practices of its ancestors. Interns from the Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes work and learn at their food warehouse

high in forming an SDOP committee in the area.

Since this was the pastor's last meeting, having taken a new call, we all went to lunch, where we were able to have more meaningful conversations.

The Northeast Task Force consists of Julia Hill, Rick Morrow, Karen Brown and Tony Lin (who was unable to accompany us). Also in attendance were Margaret Mwale, SDOP's associate for Community Development and Constituent Relations, and Juliet Owuor, the Northeast Young Adult Volunteer. We are especially grateful for the help received from the Revs. Shannan Vance-Ocampo, Presbytery of Southern New England general presbyter and co-chair of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board, and Dallas Bradell, Presbytery of Southern New England vice moderator.

We look forward to connecting with other presbyteries in our region to spread the word about SDOP.

SDOP ON THE MOVE IN THE SOUTH **Working Toward Justice for All**

by Jan Lewis and Elaine Wiegert, Presbyterian Women, Northeast Georgia Presbytery

Presbyterian Women of Northeast Georgia Presbytery, inspired by one aspect of our fundamental purpose, "to work for justice and peace," sponsored the presbytery's first Social Justice Symposium, "Working Toward Justice for All," at First Presbyterian Church in Athens on Oct. 14. The Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson, coordinator of the SDOP Committee, served as special guest and worship leader.

Following worship, three breakout sessions were offered: "The Least of These," an anti-poverty workshop conducted by Johnson and Margaret Mwale, SDOP's associate for Community Development and Constituent Relations; "Showing the World What HOPE Looks Like Through the Church — Courageous Conversations," facilitated by the Rev. Andy Cook, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Augusta; and "Welcoming, Including, Loving ALL God's Children," led by the Revs. Will Norman and Hailey Lerner from the Presbyterian Student Center on the campus of the University of Georgia in Athens.

This event was presented with the hope that all who attended would learn more about our siblings who are denied justice, and as a result, that they would become inspired to be the spark that motivates their congregations to actively care about the vulnerable and marginalized in their communities.

SDOP ON THE MOVE IN THE SOUTH

SDOP Empowering Young Leaders (a Project of the James Presbytery SDOP Committee)

by EYL Executive Team Members

Several teens from Sussex County, Virginia, are excited to have a chance to work with the Presbytery of the James SDOP Committee to implement the "Empowering Young Leaders" (EYL) project. We are hoping to have a greater impact on the lives of others while enhancing our own leadership skills and giving back to our community through civic engagement.

EYL is a program developed by United to Empower (UTE), a nonprofit organization founded in 2016 that was created by a group of caring adult volunteers who wanted to serve individuals 18 years old and younger who reside in underserved, rural communities in Southeastern Virginia. EYL seeks to educate, enhance and empower the lives of youth and to help them to become leaders in the communities that they live in. Youth are given opportunities to be "their own voice" — responsible for being their own advocates, offering their perspective to identified needs and then helping to create solutions to problems. Youth become decision makers who are resources instead of mere recipients of services.



According to the president of EYL, William Bowers (a high school senior), "the main thing we will do with the (SDOP) funds is hold community events. Community events would help boost the community's morale with fun for every age group and would educate people on better living and how to achieve it. EYL also plans to clean up areas to restore pride, read to the youth and more. All of these ideas will only be brought to life with the help of the

SDOP ON THE MOVE ...

SDOP funds. Holistically, I envision creativity, ambition, dependability and many positive traits to be exemplified from myself and my fellow EYL members.”

High school junior Jakaiya Scott says, “We EYL youth are strong, smart and powerful!” She said she would really like to see more programs to help youth with mental illness and with job training. EYL member Ceniya Clarke shares that the project activities already have given her more confidence in expressing her opinions. She believes kids can make a difference because “we are the future and often have a better understanding of some of the issues in the community (because they deal directly with us).”

The EYL students already have played a major role in helping their high school to coordinate their first student-led “Drug Prevention Awareness Week Activity” in support of the national Red Ribbon Week held in October. The students provided educational information to their peers on the negative impact drugs and alcohol can have in hopes to deter future usage. The week concluded with a carnival event to engage the entire high school in alternative

activities to do instead of drugs. The event was a success and showed the EYL that they can positively impact their peers when they work together and have a strategic plan.

To sustain their activities for the future, EYL seeks to build partnerships with other community groups in order to host activities during after school and weekend hours at locations easily accessible to families who may have transportation issues.

EYL students are looking forward to learning from their core group of mentors to include UTE and the SDOP volunteers who have pledged to assist as speakers and facilitators for activities.



Photo by SDOP staff (Teresa Bidart)



Photo courtesy of Candida Gardens

RECOMMENDED READING LIST: POVERTY AND RELATED ISSUES

Poverty, by America

by Matthew Desmond

We Cry Justice: Reading the Bible with the Poor People's Campaign

by Liz Theoharis

Unbroken and Unbowed: A History of Black Protest in America

by Jimmie R. Hawkins

From Dream to Reality: A Contextual History of Twenty Years of the Presbyterian Self-Development Program

by James A. Gittings

Liturgies From Below: Praying with People at the End of the World

by Claudio Carvalhaes

Jesus and the Disinherited

by Howard Thurman

The Problem of Wealth: A Christian Response to a Culture of Affluence

by Elizabeth L. Hinson-Hasty

Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City

by Matthew Desmond

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption

by Bryan Stevenson

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

by Michelle Alexander



13 WAYS WE CAN ENGAGE IN POVERTY ERADICATION

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has determined that “poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Various social groups bear a disproportionate burden of poverty.” We can engage in poverty eradication if we:

1 Educate the American public on the immensity of poverty in America and worldwide, and how little we are doing to combat it. Challenge the mentality that people are poor because they are lazy or don’t work hard enough to overcome poverty.

2 Deracialize poverty: Reeducate the American public on the conscious and unconscious false connection between poverty and race. The face of poverty is often portrayed as being Black or Brown, while millions more white people are impoverished.

3 Partner with agencies that are effective in strategy and delivery. Study what works and apply strategies and programs to apply in local communities.

4 Identify ways to fight poverty on a multitude of levels: federal, state and local. Do a study of the most effective programs that work and duplicate their paradigms and eliminate those that are ineffective.

5 Address poverty as a regional issue. Identify the most prevalent causes of poverty in your state and local community. Define whether you live in a high-, low- or medium-poverty region.

6 Base the federal minimum wage on the cost of living. States should adjust their state minimum wage based on the cost to live in that state.

7 Determine state-by-state what the basic income necessary is to be able to afford to live in that state rather than utilizing a national average. According to the Economic Policy Institute’s Family Budget Calculator, the revenue needed for a family of two (adults only) “varies from just under \$43,000 in one state to over \$66,000 in another.”

8 People suffering from poverty in each region must have full political, economic and social participation in the “design and implementation of policies that affect the poorest and most vulnerable groups of society” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

9 Advocate that the federal government raise the national standard determining poverty, established in 1963, that defines poverty being an annual income of \$24,858 for a family of four; \$12,488 for an individual. This is exceedingly low and completely unrealistic.

10 Strengthen government safety net programs (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], Earned Income Tax Credit, Social Security, Medicaid/Medicare), not weaken them. A 2018 Urban Institute analysis estimated that SNAP lifted 8.4 million people out of poverty in 2015 and reduced child poverty by 28%.

11 Address the intersectional root causes of poverty systematically:

- Food insecurity. Increase SNAP benefits.
- Wage inequality.
- Lack of opportunities for upward mobility in employment.
- Inadequate public transportation.

12 Address and remove the barriers placed upon those formerly incarcerated that keeps them impoverished. The stigma of a felony conviction prevents employment and prevents any type of government assistance. Develop effective re-entry programs that provide support and mentoring for people who have suffered incarceration.

13 Work to eliminate homelessness by providing homes, not programs.

References:

- *Economic Policy Institute, “Government Programs Kept Tens of Millions Out of Poverty in 2017,” (Sept. 12, 2018)*
- *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Programs Targeted for Cuts Keep Millions from Poverty, New Census Data Show” (Sept. 10, 2019)*
- *USA Today, “Progress in Fighting Poverty in America has Slowed Despite Recent Economic Recovery” (Oct. 4, 2018)*
- *USA Today, “Hawaii, Alaska Among the States that Require a Higher Family Income to Avoid Poverty” (Dec. 3, 2019)*

GIVING OPPORTUNITY

Consider giving directly to SDOP at presbyterianmission.org/donate/E051602.

SDOP is supported by generous gifts to the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS). Contribute to the OGHS Self-Development of People

- online at presbyterianmission.org/donate/og200000;
- by phone at 800-872-3283;
- or to send a check, please write “OG200000” on the memo line and mail to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

CALL TO ACTION

GET INVOLVED WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE ON THE SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE!

- Consider giving to the One Great Hour of Sharing, a special offering taken up during Lent to support Self-Development of People, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Visit specialofferings.pcusa.org to learn more about the OGHS offering and/or to give.
- Consider giving directly to SDOP. Your gift together with others makes it possible for thousands of communities all over the world to have an opportunity to take control of their own destinies and develop solutions to their own challenges. The power of your giving is in the fact that it gives hope, meaning and purpose to people who for one reason or another find themselves in hopeless situations.
- Invite SDOP committee members or staff to speak to your congregation, presbytery/synod meetings, mission fair, etc.
- Learn more about SDOP’s local, national and international projects.
- Serve on the SDOP committee within the bounds of your presbytery or synod. If there is not a committee, consider establishing one.
- Submit a form to the General Assembly nominating committee to serve on the National SDOP Committee. Email valerie.izumi@pcusa.org.
- Invite an SDOP group in your area to share about its project with your congregation.
- Share a “Minute for Mission” about SDOP with your congregation.



Photo courtesy of Strength to Love Farm

On the SDOP website, pcusa.org/sdop, you will find stories about SDOP community partners, and a variety of resources, including:

- Sermons and liturgy (which you can use to plan your Sunday worship service).
- PC(USA) Policies on Poverty: presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/acswp/topics.

The following print resources can be ordered by calling the Presbyterian Distribution Center at 800-524-2612:

- SDOP Trifold Brochure: PDS #25422-17-001 (includes basic information needed to apply for a grant and stories about SDOP partners).
- Wallet Card: PDS #25422-07-001 (includes basic information about SDOP in a wallet-size card).
- Celebrate Hope Poster: PDS #74350-05-005 (colorful SDOP poster).

Call the national office for additional electronic or print resources: 800-728-7228, ext. 5781/5782/5790/5792.



The Matthew 25 Five Spiritual Practices to End Poverty can be downloaded here: presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Five-Spiritual-Practices-to-End-Poverty.pdf

LINKS TO SDOP VIDEO RESOURCES

“The Struggle is Real” on Vimeo: vimeo.com/showcase/9083159.

Questions?

English
800-728-7228, ext. 5781/5782/5792/5790

Spanish
800-728-7228, ext. 5781/5790
Email: sdop@pcusa.org
Fax: (502) 569-8001

“THE STRUGGLE IS REAL!” A WEBINAR SERIES ON THE INTERSECTION OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES

SAVE THE DATE!

Join SDOP’s 2024 Learning Opportunities/Webinars:
Topic: Urban Poverty and Homelessness
Time and date to be announced.

The webinar will feature:

- Poverty engagement and intentional action by churches stepping outside their walls to form relationships and live out loving their neighbors.
- Best practices about relationship building and developing partnerships with communities.
- Presence and activism, explore and learn ways to take concrete actions to eradicate poverty.

Further details will be available online (at pcusa.org/sdop) in the spring. You may also email sdopevents@pcusa.org if you are interested in participating in the above webinar.

facebook.com/SelfDevelopmentOfPeoplesdop



“Jesus is Still Hungry, Thirsty, Sick, Imprisoned and a Stranger!”

Our passage is found in Matthew 25, verses 31–40. What is it about Matthew 25 that connects with the call of Christian discipleship? It is a beautiful, poetic passage that reads with the assurance that God is with people in the midst of suffering. And that God calls those of the Christian faith to care about those who are impoverished by hunger, thirst, homelessness, illness, imprisonment or migrant/refugee status. It is a call to care and to be good stewards of our resources for the impoverished of the world, regardless of where they live.

Matthew 25 has become a major component of Christian denominations as they determine their mission in the 21st century. All have a commitment to helping those impoverished, both in the United States and globally. The [Anglican Church of North America](#) has an annual Matthew 25 Conference whose purpose is “prioritizing God’s heart for ‘the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.’” The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a [Matthew 25 Initiative](#) that declares, “When we welcome others, we welcome Christ; when we bring together people who are divided, we are doing God’s reconciling work. We are called to serve Jesus by contributing to the well-being of the most vulnerable in all societies — rural and urban, small and large, young and not-so-young. From affordable housing to community gardens to equitable educational and employment opportunities to healing from addiction and mental illness to enacting policy change — there is not just one way to be a part of the Matthew 25 movement. Make no mistake, Jesus is calling us to perform ordinary acts of compassion in daily life. In so doing, we continue Christ’s work of proclaiming release to captives and good news to the poor — the good news of God’s righteousness, justice and peace for all.”

Presbyterians have demonstrated a caring for suffering people. You examine the webpages of presbyteries and congregations throughout this denomination and you see feeding programs, academic enhancement ministries and partnerships with nonprofits. These ministries are legitimate, necessary and part of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ. Thousands of hungry people, men, women and children without homes, have been helped by the efforts of our congregations in some of the most food-deprived areas in the nation. Presbyterians have not sat idly by but have opened the doors of their churches to provide needed sustenance to those in need.

But these ministries of healing and outreach must expand to include advocacy. There are simply too many people who need assistance and too few resources held by our congregations. Therefore, we must advocate that our society does what it can to meet the needs of its people. We must include advocacy in our outreach ministries to serve and impact public policy in order to make a long and lasting impact wherein people are empowered to provide for themselves. There is no need for food donations if the poor are paid a living wage, provided health care, and systemic racism is eliminated from the corridors of our systems. The federal government must adhere to a policy of ensuring that people are paid a living wage. Far too many people have to work two or even three jobs simply to pay their rent, put food on the table and clothe their children. And let’s be clear about this, no parent wants a handout in order to take care of their children. Every impoverished person has the same amount of dignity and belief that they should work in order to provide for themselves and their family. We must ensure that those who do work are paid fairly, for a “*laborer is worthy of his wages.*”

Every American must have health care. There are over 40 million people in this county who still have no coverage and the answer is not to do away with the Affordable Care Act, but to expand it. Medical insurance can’t be just for those who can afford it. Why must an emergency room still be the primary doctor’s office for poor children as families experience bankruptcy because of hospital bills? Our society can do more to ensure that all receive proper medical care.

There is tension determining the primary mission of the Christian church. Is it evangelism or advocacy? We all adhere to Jesus’ instruction to his disciples: “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” Therefore, we are to go and proclaim the good news for the purpose of discipleship.

But there is a twofold element to discipleship that is inclusive of evangelism and justice. The truth is that people of God must do both, for there is no competition between evangelism and advocacy. We must proclaim the good news of the gospel so that people can come to faith in Christ Jesus and be saved. But if it is good news, it must also address the issues of life with which people contend: poverty, war, violence, hunger, health care, education, racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and so many more.

Jesus celebrated disciples who cared for others in meaningful and impactful ways. Matthew 25 is the verbal reciting of his ministry, for he fed the hungry and offered assistance to the impoverished. He was calling each one of us to follow his

example when he said, *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

He then connected the providing to do charity with a call to change the societal structures through justice advocacy. In Matthew 23:23 he criticized the religious leaders for their lack of compassion and commitment to improving the lives of others. He accused them of *“neglecting the weightier matters of the law,”* which are *“justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”* Luke 4 gives witness to his words describing his ministry: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Christians have a biblical, divine call to be people who seek justice, for we serve a God of justice who is active on behalf of those suffering. Micah 6:8b: *“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”* Amos 5:24: *“Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”*

The prophet Isaiah delivered a penetrating charge from God, who rejects our offerings if they are not matched by compassionate acts of charity and advocacy:

*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, “Here I am.”
If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

We must work to help people of faith understand that this is an issue of faith. For we serve God to remove the barriers that prevent people from being their true self as a child of God created in the image and likeness of God. We are called to be people who care about what is right and what is wrong and to try to do something about injustice. We have to be concerned and involved in the affairs of life that impact the poor and those in desperate need. They need good news but evangelism is only good news if it changes the totality of their lives. The world needs an end to war, famine, human trafficking, hate and intolerance of one’s sexual identity, and anything that brings hardship to another human being.

The epistle of James boldly asks, *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”* 1 John 4:20–21 reads, *“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”*

Discipleship involves keeping a watchful eye out for opportunities to evangelize in a manner that brings about the kingdom of God and wipes away the things in life that oppress people. It means to challenge injustice when it is right before us.

On [Oct. 29, 2018](#), then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a member of the United Methodist Church, gave a speech titled *“The Future of Religious Liberty.”* A fellow United Methodist, the Rev. Will Green, stood up and began to quote Matthew 25 to him. Pastor Green said, *“Remember the words of Jesus: I was hungry and you did not feed me. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me. Brother Jeff, as a fellow United Methodist, I call upon you to repent, to care for those in need, to remember that when you do not care for others, you are wounding the body of Christ.”* Sessions thanked him for his comments and for the *“attack”* as police ushered him out of the room. Green responded: *“Sometimes when we encounter Jesus it does feel like we are being attacked, because when we encounter (it) we can see clearly that what we are doing*

on this earth is an obstacle to Jesus. ... I interrupted Attorney General Sessions today because his entire political agenda is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Brother Jeff and I are members of the United Methodist Church, so I think I have a responsibility to call him to account about the harm he's doing." As Green was being escorted out, the Rev. Darrell Hamilton stood up and raised his voice over boos and shouts of "go home!" from others in the room. He expressed disbelief that a crowd gathered around the topic of religious freedom suppressed that of his brother in Christ. "That is a person that represents the Christian tradition, the faith that everyone here professes to believe in, actually sharing the words of Jesus himself." Green agreed, saying, "You really can't do religious liberty without taking into account how people practice their religion, which includes social witness and social action."

We are the church of Christ Jesus and as his disciples we are to take the good news to the ends of the earth. But the message is incomplete if we do not challenge the suffering being inflicted upon the poor, the vulnerable, children and the defenseless, both near and far. Poverty is an aberration to a God who created a world with the resources to provide for all. Jesus is still hungry, thirsty, sick and imprisoned, as well as a stranger. Faith is demonstrated when we preach and heal to a world desperate for hope, help and recovery. We cannot do any less as the Disciples of Christ.

For we worship in the name of a God who is described throughout Scripture: "*(You are a) gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment*" (Jonah 4:2b).

In God's name. Amen.

JUSTICE IS A JOURNEY ONWARD

Jane Parker Huber, 1994

AUSTRIAN HYMN 8.7.8.7 D

Franz Joseph Haydn, 1797

1. Jus - tice is a jour - ney on - ward, up - ward e - ven
 2. When we hear a cry for jus - tice from the depths of
 3. Em - pa - thy with - out firm ac - tion turns to emp - ty
 4. Jus - tice is a jour - ney on - ward, up - ward, out - ward,

through the pain. Jour - neys have their hills and val - leys;
 hu - man need. Our re - sponse puts love in ac - tion;
 sen - ti - ment, But the call to free God's peo - ple
 spread - ing still. Christ has set us on this jour - ney,

still the dreams and goals re - main. We are peo - ple
 fol - low - ing our Sav - ior's lead. Where we see op -
 leads to self - de - vel - op - ment. When the struc - tures
 claim - ing us for God's own will. Let us share our

freed from bond - age by our Mak - er's will and power.
 pres - sive sys - tems, peo - ple hun - gry, crushed by fear,
 need re - shap - ing, or our neigh - bor is down - cast,
 neigh - bor's bur - dens far a - way or face to face.

We must now re - spond with ac - tion, in this place and for this hour.
 We must be the voice of jus - tice, and the hand to help and cheer.
 Let us seek a bright - er fu - ture, fair - er than the days gone past.
 So may we, by tak - ing ac - tion, be a part - ner through God's grace.

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CELEBRATE HOPE!

John A. Dalles

DUKE STREET

Cel - e - brate hope! Come, — ga - ther near!
 With Christ our friend, whom — we a - dore,
 The work at hand, is — hea - ven — sent;
 By the re - turn of — dig - ni - ty,

The spi - rit of the Lord is near! For Christ has
 We shall be - friend and bless the poor! Bind up the
 Our mis - sion is em - pow - er ment! In one great
 May we build up com - mu - ni ty, With a con -

come — good — news to — preach: Good news for
 wou - nds of — bro - ken — ness! Bring li - ber
 ho - ur, — may — we — share, An off - er -
 cern — for — hu - man - kind, Till we are

all! Good news for each!
 ty to the o - pressed!
 ing of las - ting care!
 one, as God de - signed.

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