

Good Neighbor Fund Report or Sermon on the Amount
Tuesday, January 06, 2009

The Palmyra- Macedon- Farmington Clergy Council is composed of clergy representing seven Protestant Churches, with St. Pat's and St Ann's Catholic churches currently represented by their outreach Deacon, Leo Chinelly. The Reformed Church is part of the Council but currently without a pastor. The Good Neighbor Fund was established in 1989 as a cooperative effort to assist persons whose needs could not be met by Social Services, other agencies or other church funds.

From January, 2008 to January 1, 2009, I have done intake interviews for 80 new people to be served by the Good Neighbor Fund at Western Presbyterian Church. New people are to be distinguished from those that pastors fondly call "frequent flyers" or those people who are chronically poor and in need of our ongoing assistance. My intake interviews are by appointment only. Each takes anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes and are held in my church office, preferably with my secretary Ellen outside at her desk. Besides obtaining basic information such as name, address and phone numbers, family information, verification of personal identification and a description of the immediate need, I try to do a brief psycho-social and spiritual assessment based upon materials I have used in the past while working in hospice. Confidential records are maintained by me as well as other clergy in the Council. Western Presbyterian Church and the Good Neighbor Fund are not meant to be Social Services, but Church related community organization, caring for neighbors through pastors. Realistically, for the most part people are here for monetary assistance and often in a hurry for it but we also serve as a social and spiritual support to those who need.

Rarely is money distributed the same day as the intake interview. I have gas vouchers on hand and often refer people to the food bank. I have worked with the Lions' Club to assist a neighbor with vision problems. I refer people to the Food Bank, Kings Daughter's Congdon Committee, to Social Services, HEAP and to our Angel Tree Fund. On occasion, I have given cash to those most in need. I am on a first name basis with the troubleshooter at NYSEG and in 2009 will continue networking with other groups in the county and state.

Follow-up visits can be scheduled and tend to be shorter. We handle many of our other interactions via phone. If a neighbor can wait, the GNF treasurer will mail checks to me. If there is a deadline as often is the case, I drive by and pick up checks from treasurer Doug Arnold, a Deacon at First Baptist of Macedon, so that people can pick up checks at WPC the next morning.

At the end of December, 2008 there were 80 checks written from the Palmyra- Macedon- Farmington Clergy Council's checkbook for the calendar year 2008. We are very cautious and hope to be good stewards of the funds donated. Sometimes, I remind the good neighbors that I know many of the people on fixed incomes who donate money \$25 at a time so that they have an opportunity to receive emergency funds.

Sources of income include the Bullis Fund of the Rochester Community Foundation, Palmyra's Kings Daughters, the Lions Club and our Clergy Council churches as well the Advent Choral Festival offering.

Because of our visibility (Main Street/ Route 31), I was responsible for the interviews and follow up on forty of eighty people who were assisted by the Good Neighbor Fund in 2008. Our policy is to write checks to a third party, e.g. the landlord, NYSEG etc. No checks are made out to the neighbor in need. The largest sum we generated from the cooperative account was for \$400 for a family with three young children, pregnant stay at home mom whose father had been laid off and who were in danger of being evicted. Checks average around \$200 and are given only once a year. We make every effort to refer and redirect additional requests.

In 2008 the Clergy Council Cooperative fund distributed approximately \$18,360. and we could have done more as we ran out of funds a couple of times this year.

Because of the great need, Western Presbyterian Church established its own Good Neighbor account. During Western Presbyterian Church's Christmas in July Service we collected funds and also restocked the food bank. Later our Mission Committee and Deacons donated additional funds, and pooled them with donations from individuals and events such as my installation, birthday and Christmas gifts. This has allowed me some further flexibility to serve those who are in need.

Through WPC's fund, we distributed an additional \$3,014.36 in Good Neighbor funds. Again, information is shared with the Clergy Council so that no one family has received a disproportionately high amount of funds. As I review the situations of the 2 dozen or so families served by our supplementary funds, they are primarily families with young children and among the most distressing stories. I am reminded that most poor people in this country are children. WPC's Treasurer Jerry Kelly has often interrupted his day to drive to church so that I can distribute checks within 24 hours. Some people literally have light and roofs over their heads because he was willing to assist in this ministry.

Because the Good Neighbor Fund operates as a cooperative fund, we were able to stop several persons from abusing the community trust, or tapping multiple churches for funds, through our reporting efforts this year.

The Good Neighbor Fund is not intended to be a regular income subsidy. It is a resource for times when people experience unexpected trouble or need. Generally, the people who receive assistance from us and the Clergy Council's Good Neighbor Fund are working people. Many are folks who live from paycheck to paycheck, have been laid off or encountered medical problems. Often there are small children in the house. Referrals come from Social Services and church members. Increasingly, I notice that landlords are referring people to us as well.

One person who received assistance this year has been contributing fifteen dollars a month to help others. The work is on-going. I wish that you could see the eyes of those grateful neighbors and children or hear their stories. There but for the grace of God go you or I.

In 2009 we will continue efforts to network and shall be creating a task force of both Presbyterians and community members who can further our work through additional cooperative efforts. As you may know, Angel Tree Christmas present distribution has been administered through our church so we share information. My hope is to further assist families through education on budgeting and money saving efforts. While we pray that the situation will not worsen, realistically the economic forecast suggests that 2009 will be an even more challenging year than 2008.

Thank you so much for participating in this effort. This ministry is a labor of love. I write to thank you for your generosity. My experiences have taught me that your gift has been well used. The stories are often heartbreaking but the hope is also palatable...just a little bit goes a long way to help people see the light at the end of the tunnel. So, thank you and Happy Epiphany! I wish you great joy in the New Year and in this season of Light.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Nancy J. Farrell