



# UNITED CHURCHES' NEWS

Published Monthly by the  
**UNITED CHURCHES OF LYCOMING COUNTY**  
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[www.uclc.org](http://www.uclc.org)

MARCH 8, 2016

[Pleas notify us of change of email address](#)

*Thank You* for receiving our newsletter via email.  
 It is a wonderful donation of postage, office supplies and volunteer time.

## **POVERTY - A FAITH-BASED RESPONSE\*** *from our Christian Social Concerns Committee*

**B**lessed the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD, his God, The maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, Who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, who gives bread to the hungry. (Psalm 146:5-7). We are called to secure justice and to give bread to the hungry. To what extent are we doing this? Should we be doing more?

**Local School Lunch Programs Reveal Pervasive Level of Need:** Recently released data for the 2015-16 school year for Free and Reduced Lunch programs in county schools reveals a high level of need. Many school districts experienced a second year of increase in the total percentage of eligible children. The overall county average was 46.3% which includes 7,465 children.

School District	% Free Eligible	% Reduced Eligible	Total % 2016	Total % 2015
East Lycoming	26.2	5.8	31.8	31.2
Jersey Shore	39.6	6.2	45.8	38.4
Loyalsock	33.3	3.2	36.5	34.1
Montgomery	33.0	6.7	39.7	40.1
Montoursville	24.1	2.4	26.5	25.7
Muncy	34.1	5.0	39.1	40.1
South Williamsport	33.5	6.7	40.2	41.0
Williamsport	60.8	5.6	66.4	70.0

In charity we need to do more to support food pantries and other programs that assist families with children.

Congress has yet to reauthorize the full extension of the School Lunch Program for five years as part of the Child Nutrition legislation that was introduced in 2015. (Statistics are from the PA Department of Education.)

**Love Your Neighbor. Yes, All of Them:** Those of us who live in affluent countries like United States have the capacity to support those who live with the challenges of hunger and poverty elsewhere. Our differences, or the needs in our own country, are important, but they weren't reasons for the early Christians to ignore the need of others. The often cited texts in 2 Cor. about stewardship (specifically 8:1-9:15) were written in the context of Paul urging the Corinthian church to complete its pledged giving to the cause of relief. Paul writes, I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. (2 Cor. 8:13-14) Together, these texts, and many others, point to a God who is concerned with the well-being of people who suffer. In Jesus' parable and Paul's collection, we see that love has no bounds. In caring for the needs of people near and far, we share God's love with the world. Learn more about the 2016 Bread for the World Offering of Letters: Survive & Thrive. (Source: [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org))



Follow us and others at "United Churches of Lycoming County" & "Walking With God in Lycoming County"

**FOOD PANTRY \****Mona Rundio, Coordinator 570-322-1657**E-mail - [foodpantry@uclc.org](mailto:foodpantry@uclc.org)*

**S**pring is near so let us all rise up, out, and forward! No matter our circumstances there is always someone worse off than ourselves. A way to give thanks for our blessings is to give to others by any means we are able. A word, reaction, or an item can help one feel better, put a foot out the door, and try to walk forward to a better life.



One way here at the food pantry we live by is a happy and positive look at all types of living. To help others do the same, we need to keep them thriving with energy by having a healthy way of eating.

As of right now our pantry is low on donated food. Please help us build the shelves up with food for the upcoming months. The nicer weather coming will have people out and about burning off calories, especially the children. So we are in need of such things as:

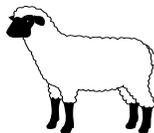
<i>Cereal</i>	<i>Canned Fruit</i>	<i>Soups</i>
<i>Pastas</i>	<i>Juice Mixes</i>	<i>Tea</i>
<i>Canned Meats</i>	<i>Healthy Snacks</i>	<i>Jellies</i>
<i>Peanut Butter</i>	<i>Baby Foods</i>	

We love helping others and will continue to encourage all to live rightly and safely in this world of our Risen Savior! Have a very Happy Easter!

We are located at the rear of 320 Park Avenue (Msgr. Castellano Center) Donation hours are 9:30-12, operation hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:15-3.

**SHEPHERD OF THE STREETS\***

J. Morris Smith, Th.D.,

570-322-6538, [shepherd@uclc.org](mailto:shepherd@uclc.org)*Jesus and the Poor*

**L**ent is a time to look within...within one's spirit, within one's faith, within one's ministry. During this prayerful and penitent season it is always good to take inventory to make sure that one's life is still effectual for the kingdom, that one has not lost the longing to be as he ought. This is especially true at a ministry like Shepherd of the Streets, where opportunities are magnified and accountability is constantly required.

Just as Jesus took His disciples to the fields of the poor to teach them the kingdom of God, so we must let Him take us. At the beginning of His ministry, He gave a comprehensive outline what He had come to do. "When He came

to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: '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 let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And He rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Then He began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His mouth." (Lk. 4:16-19)

He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. Opportunities abound for the gospel to be the answer to crisis and the right judgment of the multiple problems of the poor. Have I remained sharp to hear the Spirit at the same time I listen to the problem?

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives. Those in the captivity of sin and the bondage of behaviors are most open to find release and deliverance. Do I hear the deeper issues of Satan's work in the shadows of heritage, rejections, poverty, and hardships or do I focus on my ability to "fix it"?

He has sent me to give recovery of sight to the blind. For those who have not been raised in the Light of Life and those that may have returned to the gloom and doom of this world, do I hear the darkness and do I light the fire that leads to eternal life?

He has sent me to let the oppressed go free. Do I try to define the oppression by God's Word that keeps one in poor health, darkness, superstition, and sin or put a band-aid on the visibly vulnerable that does not free, but may even intensify the problem?

He has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Do I proclaim the Word of Truth and Life in grace, so that one does not get a false impression of legalism and make salvation a display of being right but, rather becomes a dynamic example of the meekness of unpretentious sanctification?

All who care for the poor, must first understand their own poverty and the free gift of grace given by God the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. All are called to holy poverty receives the mark of the cross, for indeed, though He was rich, He became poor for our sake, that we might know the poverty that makes us rich.

Is this just another Lenten season, or have I been given additional time to seek out the faults and overcome the fears?

**Life is Worth Living:**

**Enjoy your Family Every Moment**

Come build a tool box to help enjoy life as a family.

Enhance the time you spend together with....

Stress Busters - Activities - Ideas - Resources

Saturday, April 9, 2016

8:30 A.M. - Noon



**Provided: (at no cost)**  
**Continental Breakfast**  
**Workshop Materials**  
**Child Care Services**

**Workshop Location:**

**New Covenant United Church of Christ**  
**202 East Third Street, Williamsport**



**Presented by staff from:**  
**Area School Districts and Colleges**  
**United Churches of Lycoming County**

**Register with Patty or Gwen**  
**at the United Churches office**  
**at 570-322-1110 or [director@uclc.org](mailto:director@uclc.org)**  
**by Wednesday, January 21**

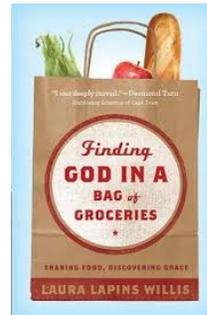
**Mark these 2016 Dates on Your Calendar:**

- Ascension Ecumenical Service-Thursday, May 5
- United Churches Sixth Annual Golf Tournament on Friday, September 23, at White Deer at 8:45 a.m.
- CROP Walk - Sunday, October 9, 1:30 p.m. along the River Walk, beginning at St. Mark's, Wmspt.
- United Churches Assembly: Thursday, Nov. 17 at First United Methodist Church, Muncy, 6:30 p.m. dinner meeting.



Tammey Aichner, Coordinator, [ucm@uclc.org](mailto:ucm@uclc.org)

**M**eat In A Bag: On April 2<sup>nd</sup> United Campus Ministry will be participating in our 4<sup>th</sup> Meal In A Bag event. This idea was born among the students 3 years ago. In a reusable bag, we supply everything a family would need to put a meal on the table. This year we will be delivering to an elderly community. In preparation for this, we are requesting donations of boxed spaghetti, jarred sauce, bagged salad, bottled dressing, fresh baked bread and cookies. If you would like to donate towards this, contact Tammey at [ucm@uclc.org](mailto:ucm@uclc.org).



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**WEDNESDAY ECUMENICAL LUNCHES\***

**J**oin us Wednesdays for lunch and a interesting program! The lunch line opens about 11:45 a.m. and you are always assured of a tasty \$6 lunch, warm ecumenical fellowship and a thoughtful program designed to enrich your life mentally, physically, spiritually and socially. The parking is free in the Pine Street lot north of the church from 11 to 1:30. No reservations are necessary, but a call to Gwen at the United Churches Office 570-322-1110 if you are not a regular attender will help the caterer know how to prepare.

**MARCH:**

- 9 - **The Rev. Dr. John Charnock**, Director of Mission Integration, *"Extending God's Healing Love: Chaplains and Volunteers at Susquehanna Health"*
- 19- **Dr. Dan Doyle**, Board Member, *"Son Light House Food Pantry: Serving the Needs of Eastern Lycoming County"*
- 23- **Rev. Gwen Bernstine**, Holy Wednesday
- 30- **Jackie Engle**, Artistic Director, Community Theater League, *"Laughter is Good for the Soul"*

**APRIL:**

- 6- **Mrs. Tammey Aichner**, United Churches Coordinator of United Campus Ministry at Penn College, *"God's Calling"*
- 13- **Mrs. Susana Falck & Mrs. Donna Bubb**, St. Boniface Catholic Church *"Walk for Water: Making a Better Life for the People of Nicaragua"*
- 20- **Rev. Susan Halverstadt**, Pastor, Warrensville United Methodist Charge, *"Mexico Mission Trip to Give Ye Them To Eat Project"*
- 27- **Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Sones (Mary Jane)**, Owners of the Sones Farm and Home Museum, *"Life in the Early Days of Eastern Lycoming County"*

**SAVE THE DATE****6<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT****UNITED CHURCHES OF LYCOMING COUNTY**

Friday, September 23, 2016 8:45 AM Shotgun Start

Registration 8:15 AM White Deer Challenge Course

Golfer Entry Fee \$85, \$340/foursome.

**Contact:**

Ken Weiss  
161 West Hills Drive  
Williamsport PA 17701  
570-321-9555  
[kweiss1213@gmail.com](mailto:kweiss1213@gmail.com)

**LUNCH AND GIFTS FOR EACH GOLFER!****CHURCH WOMEN UNITED**

**M**ay Friendship Day luncheon celebration (costing \$8.75) will be on Friday, May 6, 2016, at South Williamsport United Methodist Church. Information will be coming out soon.

**Walker Bags** are still needed to fulfill the requests of nursing homes this spring throughout our county this year. Instructions for these items can be obtained from Pat Wittig by calling 570-322-4330.

We will start now to build up funds for our annual Christmas Project to nursing home residents. A donation of \$3.00 per gift bag allowed us to distribute about 1,000 packages. Donations can be made any time of the year. Your Fair Share Contribution goes to our local Church Women United of Lycoming County Budget and is very much appreciated when you are able to send it in.

**DIAL - A - DEVOTION \***

Have you called yet?

The number is 570-322-5762.

It's available 24 hours a day.



**D**evotions are three minutes or less, change weekdays and once on the weekend, and are designed to lift your spirits and help you to have "A Closer Walk with God." The devotionists this winter include:

3/7-13 Pastors Kathy & Jim Behrens	3/14-20 Mrs. Dorothy Wagner
21-27 Rev. Danesta Whaley	3/28-4/3 Mrs. Pat Jenkins
4-10 Rev. Dan Kovalak	/11-17 Michelle Lozensky

Listen today and tell others about this ministry!

**CREATION CORNER***from our Christian Social Concerns Committee*

**Earth Day Sunday, Soil & Water Stewardship Week and Arbor Day 2016**

- ◆ **Earth Day is Friday April 22** this year. Observed as "Care for God's Creatures Day" by the good people at Creation Justice (Justice for God's Planet and God's People) the following Sunday (April 24), Earth Day Sunday churches are urged to raise up concern for the furry, feathered, finned, four-legged, and winged, the diversity of God's creatures that inspires wonder and awe. From the Garden of Eden, to Noah's Ark, to barn animals surrounding baby Jesus, to the vision of the lion dwelling with the lamb in Revelation, God's creatures play an important role in the Bible and our Christian faith tradition. By their very being, all creatures give praise to God. Knowing and loving God's creatures helps us better know our Creator. Earth Day Sunday 2016 will include liturgical resources, Bible study material, and invitations to take action by creating habitats and getting loud on social media for animals. Materials will be ready in Word Doc format at <http://www.creationjustice.org/gods-creatures.html>.
- ◆ For the annual **Earth and Water Stewardship Week of April 24-May 1**, the theme of "We All Need Trees" is raised up the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), and for the first time all the materials for religious (and secular) leaders are in electronic format and are free of charge. These include activity sheets and placemats, posters, bookmarks, student booklets for different K-12 levels, church leader's guide, litany and program inserts.  
  
Emphasis is on the value of trees for our air, water, shelter, food, clothing, and our "souls". "A Forest's Job is Never Done", says the NACD motto, as they are working 24/7.'
- ◆ The Arbor Day Foundation annually promotes **Arbor Day the last Friday in April**, and the nationwide Tree City USA program effort to have municipalities promote their urban tree canopy.
- ◆ A recent ad from the Nature Conservancy notes that nature cleans our air, and that trees absorb 1/5 of carbon emissions. See [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).
- ◆ In Pennsylvania a public/private partnership is making an effort to help restore tree cover, especially in metropolitan areas, due to an alarming trend of tree loss. See [www.treevitalize.net](http://www.treevitalize.net).

*A Journey Through Lent*

### Good Friday Services; Friday, March 25

**Noon- 3:00 pm**

**St. Marks Lutheran Church**, 142 Market St., Williamsport, by the Williamsport City Min.

**Calvary Church of the Nazarene**, 3200 Lycoming Creek Rd, by the Hepburn Lycoming Min.

**Christ United Methodist Church**, 148 S Main St, Hughesville, by the E Lycoming Ministerium.

**1:00 pm**

**First United Methodist Church, Muncy** 602 South Market St., Muncy, by the Muncy Ministerium. Meditation 12-3, Service 1.

**7:00 pm**

**Warrensville United Methodist Church**, 5748 Warrensville Road, Williamsport, hosted by the Montoursville United Methodist Cluster.

**First United Methodist Church, Montgomery**, 41 W Houston Ave, by the Montgomery Min.

### EVENTS

**Church Concert Series** at Faxon Kenmar United Methodist Church, 1301 Clayton Avenue, Williamsport, is well under way. Be sure not to miss these free concerts this spring, all beginning at 2 p.m. Sunday afternoons.

March 20: Spencer & the T-Bones

April 17: Tim Schram, Organist

May 1: Second Annual Faxon Festival Choir

**Seed Starting Workshop** will be held Thursday, March 31 at 6 p.m. at the Salvation Army, 457 Market St., Williamsport. This is for all Red Shield Community Garden participants and anyone in the community interested in gardening. The program is led by the Penn State Master Gardeners. All who RSVP by 3/24/16 will receive a free seed starting kit. Call Amy at 570-326-9187x109.

**Bach Birthday Bash** will be presented by members of the Williamsport Chapter of the American Guild of Organists on Sunday, April 3, 2:30 pm, at Messiah Lutheran Church, 324 S. Howard Street, South Williamsport. Organ, piano, and choral music will be offered in observance of J. S. Bach's 331st birthday. A free-will offering will be taken to benefit the Messiah Preschool Scholarship Fund. A post-recital reception will be hosted by Messiah's Women of the ELCA.



**R**enowned speaker, author and relationship coach, **Leslie Vernick**, will host a marriage seminar at Faith United Methodist Church on April 29.

Ms. Vernick is the author of seven books, including, *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*, and *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*. She speaks regularly all over the world on various relationship topics and specializes in training pastors and counselors in the process of shepherding Christians through troubled marriages.

The Marriage Cornerstones seminar has two sessions for two audiences. First, local counselors, clergy, and lay leaders are invited to attend a training seminar during the day. The objective of the day seminar is to help equip those who are called to come alongside marriages (i.e. – pastors, counselors, volunteers etc.) and help them build a biblical methodology from which to guide spouses in troubled marriages. Ms. Vernick will facilitate a forum to help professionals think through the idea of a process that integrates biblical principles of grace and truth, to ideally help save troubled marriages.

The second portion of the seminar is intended for a public audience. Ms. Vernick will facilitate a session that will accentuate growth opportunities for marriages in all stages (newly married, seasoned marriages, engaged, dating etc.). Her primary objective in this time with the public is to foster healthy relationship practices while also offering practical, biblical wisdom to help those stuck in destructive relationship patterns.

The day seminar for professionals will be held from 8:30am to 3pm with lunch and refreshments provided. There is a \$20 registration fee and pre-registration is preferred by April 22. The free public evening seminar will be held from 7pm to 8:30pm. Childcare is available for children up to 2 years old, but pre-registration is required. Please contact Faith United Methodist Church at 570-368-2459 or visit [www.faithum.net](http://www.faithum.net) to register for either event.

Leslie Vernick is also a licensed clinical social worker and life coach with a private counseling practice in Pennsylvania. She has over 25 years of experience helping individuals, couples and families heal, rebuild or grow their relationships. Whether counseling, speaking or writing, Leslie gently leads people to make real changes in their lives. Leslie and her husband, Howard, have been married for over 34 years and they have two adult children.

**Invitation to Dinner from Christian Care Community on Substance Abuse:** CCCSA is hosting an appreciation dinner on Saturday, April 16, 2016 at 6:00 PM St. Paul-Calvary United Methodist Church, 1427 Memorial Avenue, Williamsport They invite Pastors and spouses to be their guest for dinner and fellowship. If the pastor is not able to attend a representative of the church is invited to attend.

CCCSA was organized to initiate the safety of the community by becoming a viable mechanism through which individuals and groups can pursue strategies of personal, cultural and social empowerment.

CCCSA believes that embracing the love of Jesus and providing others with the opportunities and resources to do likewise, is truly the answer.

Please call Mitzi Davis at (570-329-1179) or Lou Gatti at (570-220-9211) by 3-31-2016 to accept this invitation and let them know the number of people who will attend with you. They look forward to this event.

#### PROJECT BALD EAGLE'S FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE



**Prayer Service Planned:** As Project Bald Eagle continues to work to stem the tide of the heroin epidemic in Lycoming County, the Faith-based Initiative Subcommittee is inviting the community to a prayer service in support of those affected by drug addiction. *"Hope for Healing*

*and Recovery: A Service of Prayer"* will be held Sunday, March 13, 2-3 p.m. in the Tower Chapel of Williamsport Regional Medical Center, 700 High Street. With emergency rooms in Lycoming County treating 20-30 heroin overdoses each month, prayers will be offered on behalf of first responders, health care providers, families coping with loved ones with addictions, and those in recovery.

**Project Bald Eagle's Inaugural Open Nest Symposium** will be held at the Community Arts Center in downtown Williamsport on *Wednesday, March 23 at 7 p.m.* The Heroin epidemic is being called the single greatest threat to community health in Pennsylvania. Bring your family and friends to hear from industry experts on the most important issue of our time. Learn what Project Bald Eagle is doing in our communities to stem the tide of the heroin epidemic. Then sit back and listen to two eye-opening presentations. *"Understanding Opioid Use Disorder"* with Dr. Bradley Miller and Dr. Cheryl Stayton, and *"An Evidence-Based Approach to Treatment"* with Amanda Wilson, MD. The evening is free and open to the public.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY

**Winter Workshop:** The ONA (open and affirming) Ministry Team of the United Church of Christ's Penn Central Conference will be holding its Winter Workshop at New Covenant UCC, 202 East Third Street, Williamsport, on Saturday, March 19. It will run from 9:30 - 2 and is open to all interested persons. The workshop, titled "Welcoming the T in LGBT" (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) will address some issues of understanding (What is gender? How does gender differ from sexual orientation?) and local church welcoming of transgender people. Admission is free. Lunch will be provided. To register email Shirley Keith Knox at [skeithknox@comcast.net](mailto:skeithknox@comcast.net).



**Meal Packaging Event** to be hosted by Messiah Lutheran Church in South Williamsport on April 1, 2016. Don't Be Fooled - Hunger Is No Joke!

This April Fool's Day, join Messiah Lutheran Church to pull off a great trick . . . come and help us feed 20,000 hungry people (or more!) Seriously . . . Hunger is no joke. In fact, hunger is the world's number one health risk. It kills more people every year than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined. Locally, nearly 1 in 5 children in our area struggles with food insecurity – not knowing where their next meal is coming from or when.

More volunteers are needed to package nutritionally enriched macaroni and cheese meals to be distributed to the hungry in our local communities. Volunteers will work assembly line style. In addition to packaging meals, a number of other volunteers are needed to fulfill roles related to hosting the event. To volunteer, sign up online at <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e0845a5a623a4fc1-endhunger> or contact Kathy Wither at [wither15@comcast.net](mailto:wither15@comcast.net) or 570-326-9171, ext. 203.

They now have funds to do well over their 20,000 meal goal. As they try to double the blessings you can still donate online at [www.EndHungerNE.org](http://www.EndHungerNE.org) by clicking on Donate Now (blue box in the upper right-hand corner) and noting EndHungerNE event #2 (when you are reviewing your donation...under "Please apply my donation to:"). Donate by mail by sending a check, made payable to Outreach, Inc., to 1574 Ocean St, Marshfield MA 02050 (ATTN: Matthew Martin), noting EndHungerNE Event #2 in the memo section.

**Celebrate Easter and help United Churches \***

**W**e are having an Easter fund raiser this year through Sunset Ice Cream. For the week of Easter, March 27 - April 3, if you use the coupon below at Sunset Ice Cream they will give 15% of your total purchase to us. So if you given up sweets or deserts for Lent, or if you are just ready for a spring treat, please enjoy a frosty treat to celebrate Easter Week and allow us to benefit too!

Please copy and share our coupon with others. The more the merrier. Coupons are also available at our office.



The coupon from Sunset Ice Cream and Frozen Yogurt is the other attachment of your email.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

**H**ymnals Available Free to a good home: The Celebration Hymnal ©1997. Call New Covenant United Church of Christ, 570-326-3308 (40 available)

**K**imbal 800 Organ available free to a good home. Call 570-337-5409.

**RESOURCES IN OUR COMMUNITY**

**F**irst-Time Moms: Susquehanna Health Nurse Family Partnership is an evidence based home visitation program for women who are having their first baby. Registered nurses visit moms in their homes throughout pregnancy and continues until the child is two years of age. The goals of Nurse Family Partnership is to improve pregnancy outcomes, improve child health and development, and increasing family economic self-sufficiency. Nurses provide support, education, mentoring, coaching, and case management in order for new moms to succeed and to be the best parent they can be for their child. Nurse Family Partnership is a free program and open to women who receive medical assistance or qualify for WIC benefits. Call 570-326-8156 for more information or to enroll in the program.



**P**remarital and early marriage assessment: SYMBIS is now available in our area. SYMBIS is an instrument which provides vital feedback to couples who are looking to get married or are in the early years of their relationship. It can serve as a tool to help in marriage preparation or aid couples in enriching their newer marriage or assess problem areas which may be emerging. Through the practice of Dr. Tim Bryant at Cornerstone Family Health, an office of Family Practice Center, this instrument is now available to couples in this region. For details contact the website: [www.SYMBISAssessment.com](http://www.SYMBISAssessment.com) or contact Dr. Bryant at 570-326-4118.



**U**nited Churches is celebrating it's Seventieth year!

The Christian Social Concerns Committee was an original part of who we are, and some of the early efforts on behalf of congregations included reminding people of the importance of voting, sending over 96 tons of clothing in eight years to help in recovery after WWII. In the 1950's we helped with Hungarian Relief and Refugees, sponsored Bloodmobiles, and worked to help Transients. Late in the decade Migrant Workers who came to the Jersey Shore area were part of our ministry. We also went with the Jewish community to the Williamsport School District to talk about graduation and many other events being scheduled on their Sabbath.

The 1970's found us co-sponsoring Meals-on-Wheels, beginning CROP Walk, working with Ministeriums to start food pantries, developing Habitat. The 80's found us helping to fight racism and to uplift Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., working to reduce pornography in our communities, establish a fuel bank, open a job bank, begin Latch Key, start the Shepherd of the Streets Ministry and the Williamsport Interfaith Hospitality Network which has now come back in a new name, Family Promise.

The 1990's and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century had us doubling our efforts to combat racism as the KKK decided to hold a parade in town. The elimination of racism continues to be a focus for us, as does building community. We hosted two GROUP Workcamps, (in 1992 and 1995) to repair housing throughout the county. Disaster Relief was necessary after the '96 Flood and we started our first Unmet needs committee, and worked after the 2011 flood. The tragedy of 9-11 focused our community on those we do not know well and Interfaith dialogue became more of a focus for us. We continue to also focus on responding to poverty and to caring for creation.

**YOKEFELLOW PRISON MINISTRY (YPM)**

By Rev. Danesta (Nessie) Whaley: 570-326-6868



**W**hat a privilege to work alongside of each of our volunteers! Here is a sample of what the Lord is doing in their lives – a testimony from one of our new volunteers, Connie:

“Exceedingly, Abundantly More Than I Could Think or Ask” - Ephesians 3:20.

This title expresses what I have experienced for the past 6 months as a volunteer with Yokefellow Prison Ministry. Going into this experience I had expectations and lots of enthusiasm. Yet it was much more than you imagined? I believe it depends on which Table you sit down to. If you take a place at the World’s Table you find competition, jealousy, disdain, disappointment, judgment and somehow you stand feeling stuffed and sluggish. But when you sit down at the Lord’s Table, you never want to leave. You feel refreshed and nourished. The banquet of delights never ends! And you are free to “come as you are”.

One of the things I discovered when I began visiting the Correctional Facility is that any preconceived plan I have may or may not work. One week we may have eight women attending small group and the next week one or none because of health or behavioral issues, transfers, etc. Flexibility and patience are virtues a volunteer develops or strengths. But any qualities that you naturally lack are not things you must labor to acquire. When you enter this ministry with a true heart for the Lord, He will supply everything you need to accomplish His purpose.

In their training, Yokefellow teaches that their purpose is to provide warm, accepting, caring fellowship. Their three Guiding Principles are: Caring Fellowship, Open Dialogue, and Intentional Ministry, all of which are purposed to both encourage and challenge participants.

I have experienced these three Principles at work in these ways:

- Listening comes first. Between visits, I find it effective to be in prayer for the women, for the fellowship to come and for any direction the Lord gives.
- Ask and you shall receive. I find myself praying that each woman will be open to receive whatever the Lord has for her. When that need is filled is not the issue.
- Give me wisdom and clarity to hear what You are telling me, Lord. On occasion a woman comes with a need to be heard. It is important to patiently hear her. It is equally important to hear when the Lord prompts me to redirect the focus into the whole group encounter.

- Disciplined living is not something we accomplish by striving. It’s a by-product of a heart captured by God’s love for each of His children; a life that is drawn into a closer walk with Jesus; and a mind submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit as He comforts us, teaches us to hear the Lord speaking, and conforms us to the image of Jesus by renewing us through His Word.
- Intentional Ministry is a decision we make every day of our lives, learning to apply the Word and ways of the Lord to our walk. This ministry may be directed to a congregation, group, or a waitress at the coffee shop.
- Faithfulness to remember the goodness of God and the many graces He has poured out upon us. I now keep a Prayer Journal. Since I may only encounter a woman one time, it feels important to record her requests in a journal dedicated to prayers offered and any answers I am aware of. I pray as I enter each person into this Lord’s Book and revisit entries periodically. This prayer journal has expanded into other areas of my life too.
- God’s Word is living and powerful, so I often provide a scripture an individual can focus on that week, or come in the following week with a scripture that came to mind from the previous meeting. I also make sure all the videos we use as jumping off points for discussion include God’s Word.

In short, my volunteer experience with Yokefellow Prison Ministry:

- ▶ Leaves me feeling I am the one being ministered to.
- ▶ Has deepened and widened my prayer life.
- ▶ Has opened my heart and rooted out any judgments I have been tempted to make.
- ▶ Has expanded my circle of friends, both fellow volunteers and the women who attend the groups
- ▶ Has made me more aware of my daily interactions with strangers and “chance encounters”
- ▶ Has streamlined my planning and grown my confidence in simply carrying Jesus inside me and letting Him flow throughout the meeting and prayer times;
- ▶ Has confirmed my confidence that simply sowing seeds is much more important than is usually credited;
- ▶ Has reminded me that no matter how much we believe we’ll remember God’s goodness, it is best to record it. It comes in such abundance that we do not recall the multitude of blessings He pours out on us regularly.
- ▶ It causes me to resolve to “Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all His benefits.” Psalm 103:2