

*York City Mayor C. Kim Bracey and the  
York County Council of Churches present...*

# **FaithNet 2011**

*Inspiration to Action:  
Strengthening Connections in the  
Faith Community*

## **Post-Event Report**

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# FaithNet 2011 Post-Event Report

## SUMMARY OF FAITHNET 2011

On July 12, 2011, The York County Council of Churches and York City Mayor C. Kim Bracey jointly presented FaithNet 2011, an all day event intended to inspire the faith community to action and strengthen the connections among faith leaders. FaithNet was designed as one of Mayor Bracey's 9 in 9 initiatives to unite leaders from the faith-based community to respond to critical needs in the community. FaithNet 2011 created an important opportunity for people of faith to meet with others, engage in dialogue, share experiences and knowledge, and work together to develop a response to the three critical issues of poverty, the family and housing.

Over 650 faith-based organizations and individuals were invited to attend Faith-Net 2011. Of the 119 individuals in attendance, 32 were Clergy. Representatives from 34 community organizations and 32 faith organizations attended. The faith organizations represented included: United Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Moravian, Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, Church of God in Christ, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Islam and Non-denominational or Independent.

York City Mayor, C. Kim Bracey, opened the FaithNet 2011 morning session with a declaration that communities are truly strong when resources are accessible for those in need and when faith, regardless of religion or denomination, brings people together as a community. The Mayor urged participants to "best the barriers" that divide and separate by joining together as a mighty force for the greatest good for today and for our future. Mayor Bracey concluded by saying, "I am certain that by engaging in collaboration and confronting community challenges head on, we will produce transformative outcomes."

Bev Mackereth, Director of York County Human Services, opened the afternoon session by asking participants to get involved in "Communities That Care," a program carried out in cooperation with school districts that identifies risk factors among the County's young people. Listing many ways to help and assuring that helping those in need is not difficult, Director Mackereth urged the faith community to do more. What York County needs, she said, is to get back to neighbors helping neighbors – that is what gives people a sense of community and a positive outlook for the future.

Dr. Kevin Daniels, Pastor and Professor of Social Work at Morgan State University and Rev. Dr. Jonathan West, Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church, Pennsylvania Council of Churches, gave keynote addresses to open and close FaithNet 2011. They offered personal reflections on the power and strength of cooperation and the imperative of faith-based organizations working together as key partners in their neighborhoods and communities to help those in need.

Eric Saunders, Executive Director of New Hope Ministries, Cindy Daley, Policy Director, Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, and Loni Smith, Director of the Burdis Family Foundation, spoke from personal experience about poverty, housing and the family, respectively, and made recommendations for responses by the faith community.

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At 2pm participants met in three breakout sessions for the opportunity to share experiences, develop strategies and create an action plan to guide the faith community's response to poverty, housing and strengthening the family in York County. Each breakout session was led by a facilitator:

**Poverty** – Lynne Leopold-Sharp, Director, Financial Stability Partnership, Lutheran Social Services  
**Families** – Helen S. Gyimesi, Drug and Alcohol Prevention Educator, Memorial Hospital  
**Housing** – Craig Zumbrun, Deputy Director, York Housing Authority

The breakout session groups were tasked to create a 3 point action plan of specific tasks to be undertaken and identify one person or group to oversee each task's implementation and success.

FaithNet 2011 challenged and inspired participants to work collaboratively and use their gifts, talents, passions and experiences to cast a vision together and create an action plan to improve our communities and the lives of our York County neighbors.

Jason Lewis  
Vice President, York County Council of Churches

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Note: To see many of the presentations at FaithNet 2011, visit <http://www.wrct.tv/jml/> and click on "videos on demand" at the top of the page. Then select FaithNet 2011.

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## SUMMARY OF FAITHNET 2011 SPEAKERS

Dr. Kevin Daniels, pastor and professor of social work at Morgan State University, declared that the work of FaithNet 2011 is critical because of the dire issues that confront us today. Faith-based organizations, he said, are key partners in times of crisis because people of faith “know how to get moving, know how to help and to get things done because our commitment gives us a moral and social responsibility and clarity of purpose.”

Dr. Daniels attributed much of the development of his character and knowledge to living equally distant from a mosque, a church and a synagogue, each of which were integrally involved in the life of his neighborhood. When faith organizations are cemented into the community, he said, they *can* save people, especially when those faith organizations come together and help families in need.

Dr. Daniels closed with an inspirational quotation. Every one of us, he reminded the participants, is meant to shine. “We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”

Pastor Danny Evans, York City Police Department’s Director of Community Services, declared that FaithNet starts with us loving one another, and he called on every one in the room to stand up and find three people to love and to hug. The hugging that ensued created a power in the room that participants were “all of one accord.” Here is the point: we need to touch the lives of the people in our community.

Pastor Evans reasoned that with all the churches we have, we just need to get the churches involved and working together to demonstrate a level of love and unity that causes men, women and young people to believe in themselves and in the future. Pastor Evans challenged every faith organization in the room to consider: would your neighbors know if your church, your center, your mosque or your temple closed today? If your church, your center, your mosque, your temple is not a tangible and visible presence in its neighborhood, the time to act is now. Get involved.

Eric Saunders, Executive Director of New Hope Ministries explained that at New Hope Ministries “we love our neighbors without trying to define who are neighbors are.” What is poverty? Poverty is not all or nothing – there are degrees of poverty. Poverty is not simply a lack of financial resources. Poor people have something to offer us. Caring for the poor is more than just giving people a handout, but there is a role for charity for charity’s sake. The poor are not to be judged, and they need our help.

The role of the faith community, Mr. Saunders said, is to bring meaning to the circumstances in which people find themselves. So many people that New Hope Ministries serves have lost a vision for what their lives could be. They’ve lost an understanding of how to get their lives on track and they’ve lost hope for the future. People of faith can provide that help for today and hope for tomorrow. There is so much more we can do by working across barriers and across lines of faith. We can all agree on loving our neighbors, caring for those in need and recognizing that this is one of the highest callings for people of faith.

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Cindy Daley, Policy Director, Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, started her remarks with the basic principles that guide the work of the Housing Alliance: people who work hard and play by the rules should be able to afford a decent place to live; nobody should be involuntarily homeless; our older neighbors and people with disabilities should be able to live with dignity in the communities of their choice; and businesses that invest in the community ought to be supported by policies that enable them to sustain a work force that is able to live near their jobs.

Affordable housing is generally defined as costing not more than 30% of income for rent and utilities or for a mortgage payment and utilities. It takes an income of at least \$30,000 or more to afford a \$100,000 house. A quarter of households in PA have incomes of \$25,000 or less, which means most of these people cannot afford to live in areas that are safe and good for families. 50% of renters in York County pay more than 30% of their income for housing. 32% of home owners are paying more than 30% of their income for housing, and these numbers are growing. What can faith-based organizations do? Ms. Daley recommended: (a) supporting organizations that are increasing the supply of affordable housing, like Habitat for Humanity, (b) providing shelters for families that have no housing, (c) opening a facility to house people (some congregations buy a house in their neighborhood and rent it out), or (d) advocating for decent and safe housing and urging elected officials to do more to make decent, safe, affordable housing available.

Loni Smith, Director of the Burdis Family Foundation related how the Burdis Family Foundation was created to strengthen her parents' work as foster parents. Mr. and Mrs. Burdis have fostered or taken in more than 70 children. Fundamental to the work of the Burdis Foundation is supporting the whole family because addressing the needs of a child alone is not enough: ministering to the whole family is the only way to keep children out of foster care and put that child on the road to success. Building a successful relationship means being open to helping a family in any way they will allow them to be reconciled to each other.

The Burdis Family Foundation helps in many ways: by subsidizing rent, finding host families and adoptive parents, and supporting families when the father is in prison. Ms. Smith challenged the audience with three calls to action: (1) one church - one organization to minister to one family in need. How many families could be helped if every congregation or agency in York County undertook to walk along side one family? (2) We must support the men and fathers who are important in the lives of their children. (3) Life on life for life – there is no exit strategy. The practice of dedicating your life for others in ways that encourage others to invest in their own lives is a lasting commitment. This is what ministering to families requires, and we must rise to meet that need.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan West gave the final keynote address. He reflected on the inspirational words of the speakers and collaborative work in the breakout sessions and called on participants to continue what was started at FaithNet 2011. Dr. West cited the success of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches that unites communities of faith as ecumenical partners: "putting faith into action, the conference ministers to and advocates for those in need and encourages all to reach their full potential." Dr. West declared that we had made a good start here in York with FaithNet 2011.

The faith community, he said, is uniquely equipped and inspired to action that should bring us closer together to develop effective solutions to respond to those critical issues of poverty, the family

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and housing. Dr. West acknowledged that there are differences between and among participants and that the pressures of modern life, with instant communication, the changing and transient aspects of family, work and life, separate us and create barriers. However, despite the differences, we can come together on those things on which we do agree.

Dr. West invoked the Lund Principle: that faith-based organizations must “do together everything except what irreconcilable differences or sincere conviction compels us to do separately.” All of us share a strong concern for those in need, a desire to help and, by our attendance at FaithNet 2011, a desire for work together and collaborate to be more effective in responding to the needs of the poor, families at risk and the need for decent, safe and affordable housing. People of faith must seek out the purposes and goals we have in common and act together on those areas of common agreement to improve our communities and the lives of our neighbors.

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## SUMMARY OF FAITHNET 2011 BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Three breakout sessions worked for 90 minutes to create a 3 point action plan of specific tasks to be undertaken and designating at least one person or group to oversee each task's success. Each facilitator recorded her personal observations and reported on the goals adopted.

Poverty: Facilitator, Lynne Leopold-Sharp,  
Lutheran Social Services of South Central Pennsylvania.

There was a spirited conversation about ways in which the faith community can assist those in poverty. Everyone agreed that collaboration is crucial, and that in order to be successful building relationships is essential. The possibility of matching city and county congregations for dialogue and service was suggested.

Some felt that social services agencies should make a point of "introducing themselves" to congregations in their communities; some social service agencies and faith representatives felt that this had already been done where they live. There was frustration about the lack of a comprehensive system for information and referrals. Although some suggested that the FIRST Directory serves this purpose adequately; others felt that it was incomplete.

Some participants hoped that congregations would suggest concrete ways to address poverty now (for example, if every congregation in the county would make a commitment to mentor/support just one family we could help hundreds of households) while others were interested in specific initiatives to address risk factors or root causes of poverty.

Congregations want to help people in poverty. They don't always know the best ways to do this, however, and are concerned that they remain good stewards of their limited resources, including time. The poverty goals may help to move them forward in this work.

### Poverty Goals

1. Offer poverty awareness workshops for ten churches or affiliated groups. Lynne Leopold-Sharp, Lutheran Social Services of South Central Pennsylvania. <http://lutheranscp.org/cos/financial-stability>
2. Twenty congregations will hold "community conversations" with their neighbors (businesses, residents, schools, other faith groups and political authorities) to build new and strengthen old relationships for the purpose of identifying and seeking to address the shared "needs/wishes" of their local neighborhood(s). These conversations will help in creating a greater presence of the faith community in the work of facilitating local community building and problem/issue solving. Two possible outcomes will be that the relevance of the congregation to the larger neighborhood is enhanced, and the local mission of the congregation may be clarified and/or expanded. Rev. Patrick Walker, Church World Service. [http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=crop\\_regions](http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=crop_regions)
3. Make fifteen presentations to pastors, congregations and other community leaders about mothers and children facing homelessness. Describe the challenges they face and faith-based strategies

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to assist them. Tammi Morris, Bridge of Hope.

<http://www.bridgeofhopeinc.org/template/index.cfm>

Families: Facilitator, Helen S. Gyimesi, Drug and Alcohol Prevention Educator,  
Memorial Hospital, Strengthening Families Program

The group came to a consensus that there is: a big disconnect between the needs of families, knowing what resources are available and how to access them; a lack of networking between pastors, individual churches, and non-profit service providers; a need to develop a method of disseminating information efficiently; and a need for collaboration and pulling together of resources.

## Families Goals

1. A committee of 4 individuals will meet with the United Way to explore ways the FIRST Referral service can accommodate the needs of the faith community.
2. A series of presentations about the success of The Salem Square Project and connecting churches to their communities will be made by Pastor Danny Evans.
3. Establish a program for mentoring families.
4. Provide family workshops to community and faith organizations. Helen S. Gyimesi, Memorial Hospital.

Note: The individual or organization responsible for completing some of the above goals is yet to be determined.

Housing: Facilitator, W. Craig Zumbun,  
Deputy Director, York Housing Authority.

Members of the group admitted they need a better understanding of current housing resources, so the group created a list of resources in York County:

- Bell Family Services, offering shelter, housing especially for mental health and mental retardation client populations.
- Access York/ York YWCA: shelter and transitional housing especially for abused women and children.
- YMCA: SRO for men and rental housing along Market and in the west side of York City.
- Rescue Mission: emergency shelter
- York Housing Authority: County-wide Public Housing, Section 8 rental assistance, turnkey lease to purchase.
- York Area Development Corp.: rental housing and SRO throughout the county.
- Changing Lives: Hanover based emergency and transitional housing
- CPC: case management and other counseling support
- Crispus Attucks: Youth Build: Rehabilitation of housing through on the job training of youth.

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The facilitator suggested one approach would be to consider the continuum or range of types of housing assistance and support: emergency shelter, transitional housing, housing counseling, home repairs, rental assistance, housing counseling, and home ownership initiatives.

The group also made a list of ways to support housing needs: education, exploration of resources, coordination of current efforts, networking, Bible-based counseling, outreach efforts (especially for the homeless), family strengthening programs, a need for prioritizing - and not just fixing squeaking wheels - the desire to have stronger resources by combining current efforts, teaching responsibility, fostering gratitude, tutoring/mentoring programs, and family friendly events.

## **Housing Goals**

1. Survey all congregations and create a complete and comprehensive database with contact information and resources for housing related services.
2. Build a network of home repair services by area or region and identified by labor skills and specialties (e.g., roofing, plumbing, etc.).
3. Build a service delivery center with capacity to guide and track the match of needs to accessibility of services and services available.

Note: The individual or organization responsible for completing this goal is yet to be determined.

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## **FAITHNET 2011: OPPORTUNITIES REMAIN**

As one of the organizers of FaithNet 2011, I was privileged to observe several things that others may not have. I believe FaithNet 2011 accomplished many of the things we set out to do and yet three opportunities clearly remain.

Last year's Pastor's Summit brought together pastors and church leaders from the city and throughout York County. Unfortunately, many of those who attended last year's event did not return this year. Despite the significant increase in participation this year, many of the faces in the room were new, and many others were missing. All of us share a common geography, a concern for those in need, and a desire for collaboration. The opportunity remains for everyone to annually return to the same table and to work together to respond to our community's most pressing needs.

Many of the new faces at this year's event were representatives from parachurch ministries and community organizations. While I stood at the podium, I recognized that many of us were not necessarily pastors and church leaders, but rather those representing feeding ministries, housing organizations, educational institutions, and social service agencies. It was apparent to me that many came on their own accord without any obligation to being present for their employer. The opportunity remains for York to embrace all corners of our faith community and to acknowledge diversity not as a barrier but rather a bridge to greater impact.

As I listened to participants express their concerns about our community, I was reminded of the similar concerns that were raised last year. I sensed the frustration and anxiety that surrounded some issues. I also sensed great passion and a sincere openness to new ideas surrounding others. It was obvious that momentum was growing in response to some areas of concern while other needs remained overlooked or forgotten. As we continue to bring more individuals and organizations to the table each year, the opportunity remains to respond to our community's most pressing needs in a strategic and coordinated effort.

As chair for the 2011 FaithNet event, I encourage you to volunteer your unique backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and ideas to help achieve the goals set in this year's FaithNet breakout sessions and return to the table next year to work in collaboration with the faith community to make an impact, bring about change, and strengthen our community.

Jason Lewis  
Vice President, York County Council of Churches