

DOWNTOWN PULSE spring 2007; vol1, issue 2

bringing the heart of the church to the heart of the city



The Sidewalks of Springtime

A reluctant spring is finally here, and the city is blooming. I love springtime in the city. The porches fill with people and conversation. Everyone is out walking, and since few people in our neighborhood have central air, everyone is talking about the weather. It is an old fashioned community where lives cross on the street, kids are on bikes instead of computers, and you can see how much your neighbor's pit bull puppy has grown over the winter. Okay, maybe not so old fashioned in some ways, but old fashioned in some valuable ways. Generations of families still live within blocks of each other. The elders of the community still have a respected voice. Life slows down on a front porch chair. We know people on every street, by face if not by name.

Some of the most vibrant city life takes place on the sidewalks and streets. I like the way the late city-studier Jane Jacobs described

this life as a ballet. As the day moves forward, life is choreographed among those going to work and those going home, kids playing in the street and shop owners opening up business for the day, those walking just to be walking and those walking because they have no other place to be. Since the ballet often unfolds in the same pattern, familiar faces cross paths, smiles and nods are exchanged.

"How're you doin'?"

"Aw-right"

"Beautiful day."

"Yes, it is." After a few of these interactions with the same people, the smiles reflect relationship more than simple courtesy.

Last week, we went on a wonderful spring walk. We talked with a neighbor around the corner, ran into a friend and walked a little ways with her and her dog, walked into a corner store to buy something to drink, and ran into another old friend sitting on a front stoop as we exited the store. This may sound like a normal outing, and for us it is. What we forget is that every one of those interactions involved marginalized people of society. Our neighbor is a woman with whom we've prayed when she has had too much to drink and with whom we celebrate as she is doing better and thinking about getting a job again. Our friend with the dog is someone we know from the Lexington Rescue Mission who lives in one of the slum boarding houses. Many people who go into the

corner store don't buy the bottled tea we buy, but rather beer and cigarettes. The owner is an Arab immigrant. The other patron in the store was an elderly man who had traveled there using a walker. The friend sitting on the stoop was an old housemate of John's when he was living in a ministry house on West Third Street. He's homeless now, after just finishing a 90-day stint in prison for "stickin' a guy."

I would say that both of us first entered urban ministry because we felt that as Christians we were to serve the poor and marginalized. After several years of being downtown, we realized that if we really serve the poor and marginalized (instead of servicing them), we forget that they are poor and marginalized. They are simply our friends, and sometimes they become family. Dignity was one of the greatest gifts Jesus gave to the poor and marginalized. He allowed them to have legitimate places within society (which is what they lacked to begin with – the definition of marginalized).

I don't think these kinds of authentic relationships among very different kinds of people come easily, but I do believe that they come through Christ. As He brings us all into more legitimate places within the society of His Kingdom, as I no longer see people as poor or marginalized but as friends, we all gain more dignity. We become more human in the ways we were meant to be. As we see each other as God sees us, we better reflect the image of God. And God looked at what He created and said, "This is very good."

the beat

to get the full scoop, www.downtownpulse.org

... helping a man, his son, and his grandson who are about to lose their home, business, and retirement to eminent domain ... continuing the Epiphany discipleship group and our Wednesday night Bible study (which is

growing) ... serving on FUMC's Downtown For Good Task Force ... co-led a session for School(s) for Conversion conference ... networking with other traditional downtown churches as we continue to raise support ... designing a "Vacation Bible School for Grown Ups" that connects the Bible and downtown ... working with Athletes in Action to lead one of the nights of their college-age Urban Plunge in Lexington ... met with our FUMC Home Team to set goals ... we are still working at Comprehensive Care and the Univ. of Kentucky part time until we receive pledges for our full support ... attending city district meetings about downtown issues

PULSE points

● **"...the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, having no one. I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience."**

- Mother Teresa

● **Approximately 4000 people in the Lexington area are homeless.**

● **According to the US Census 2000, 7% of Lexington's total households are single moms with children under age 18**

● **Lexington, like many small cities, receives a considerable number of refugees every year.**



UBS for Grown Ups

Athletes in Action Urban Plunge

urban missionary training in Brazil

retreat with college age ministry at FUMC to create opportunities of discipleship in the city



a new kind of family

"Who are my mother and my brothers?"

Jesus asked the crowd after someone informed Him that His family was waiting to speak with Him. He looked

at the disheveled mass of people around Him and said, "Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-34)



It's hard to overestimate what a radical statement Jesus was making to this crowd of disciples and onlookers gathered to listen to Him. In ancient middle-eastern culture, as is true today in that and many other parts of the world, blood ties were all important. There is a saying among Arabs, "I will stand with my brother against my cousin, but I will stand with my cousin against the foreigner." Against this backdrop, Jesus was creating a new definition of family, one dependent not on familial kinship or ethnic identity, but dependent upon relatedness through Him, through *His* blood. Paul put it this way, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." (Galatians 3:26-29)

We hear daily of the ethnic, tribal or sectarian violence that is leaving splattered blood on otherwise peaceful city streets. The echo of Cain's response to God's inquiry about his dead brother's whereabouts rings dimly in the background of these bloody atrocities. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:1-16) Christ's radical answer resounds loudly - *yes, you are!*

In a less vivid sense, yet equally as revealing, we can see this brokenness in the ethnically and economically divided neighborhoods in America's cities and

towns. Even within the church, the people God ordained to turn the world's concept of family upside down, the people called to be "one in Christ", we flounder in our attempts to break down the devastating tribal, ethnic, and social boundaries that divide us. In fact, the most racially segregated time of the week is Sunday morning.

So this leaves us with some tough questions to address as we look at the world around us. What does this mean for how we relate to one another within the church? When we come to the communion table, does it feel like we are coming home for the family supper? What about those in our community and city who have no family: the homeless, the mentally ill, widows, orphans, prisoners? Who in our immediate context are our "brothers and sisters and mother"?

In Christ, we are a reunited human family. We are no longer strangers and foreigners divided from one another by nation, tribe, or social class. We are, in fact, all brothers and sisters with one Father God, and one eldest brother Jesus, woven together by the Spirit. It's time that we as the church embrace Jesus' family values.



contact us!

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Please contact us if you would like to be added to our monthly email prayer letter.