



Living It Out

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The Newsletter of Greater Birmingham Ministries

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From Poverty to Promise:

It's Time to Focus on Ending Poverty, Not Just Ending Welfare

by Mark Barwick, Southeast Regional Organizer for Bread for the World

Bread for the World, a network of people and congregations across the nation who work to overcome hunger, is calling on Congress to implement changes in the current welfare reform laws passed in 1996 in order to assure that we are actually focused on reducing poverty, not just reducing welfare. H.R. 4210, the Working from Poverty to Promise Act of 2002, was introduced on April 11, 2002 by Representatives Marge Roukema (R-NJ-5) and John Tierney (D-MA-6) to do exactly that.

Many people in America today are working hard to leave poverty behind them and move toward greater self-sufficiency. The transition is often difficult – and they need all the support they can get. One part of the solution to hunger and poverty in the U.S. is important public assistance like that provided through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF is up for revision by Congress this year. And we have the opportunity to make it stronger for those who truly need it.

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Recon-

ciliation Act established TANF, replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). This law ended a 60-year federal commitment to guarantee a safety net for families living in poverty.

The 1996 federal law imposes lifetime time limits for cash assistance, requires that adult recipients

work in order to receive TANF and sets work participation rates that states must meet. The states, within certain limits, can now design their own programs, including setting benefit levels and determining eligibility.

In Alabama, TANF is known as the Family Assistance Program (FA). Currently over 18,000 low- and no-income families throughout the state benefit from the support offered through FA.

Many have said that TANF has been a tremendous success, noting the sharp drop in caseloads and increased work participation rates. However, the economic situation for most former recipients is precarious at best.

Despite the caseload declines and increases in employment, by 2000 nearly half of adults who had lost cash assistance have not been able to find jobs within reach of

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 their transportation and childcare resources. Those who did find work were often stuck in unsteady, limited and low-paying jobs, earning on average \$6.75 an hour and receiving no benefits. Work also adds additional expenses to low-income families, especially childcare and transportation, that can actually leave some families worse off than

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they were while receiving public assistance and inhibit their ability to put food on the table.

The primary goal of TANF must be to reduce poverty, not simply to reduce caseloads. A decline in caseloads matters little if TANF families' situations have not improved. *Working From Poverty to Promise*, Bread for the World's 2002 Offering of Letters campaign, is urging Congress to focus on **poverty reduction** by:


- Allowing adults to gain the education and training necessary to move successfully into the workforce;
- Providing critical supports for working poor families;
- Easing time limits and

- Providing sufficient federal funding.

Working from Poverty to Promise legislation (H.R. 4210) has been introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives. Check out Bread for the World's web site (www.bread.org) for updates on the progress of this legislation. You may also call BFW's Southeast Regional Office toll-free at 1-888-BFW-0073 for more information. An excellent resource guide, including a 10-minute video, is available to assist you in your organizing efforts.

Please write your congressional representatives and urge them to support improvements to TANF that emphasize poverty reduction and work supports. Senator Sessions (U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510) is particularly important to reach this year, since he sits on two key subcommittees that will have some jurisdiction over the TANF reauthorization process.

Together we can really make a difference in the lives of poor and hungry people in the U.S. We can help ensure that low-income people have the supports they need to achieve the promise of a life without hunger or poverty. ■



Bread for the World's Campaign to Make Poverty Reduction the Real Focus of Federal Welfare Reform Legislation

Visit them on the web at www.bread.org

Recent Studies Increasingly Indicate Welfare Reform Not a "Victory" for Children

Politicians regularly like to speak about the "victory of welfare reform," but an increasing number of studies indicate that the results of the 1996 welfare overhaul have been mixed at best, but are raising the most concern for its impact on children. When welfare reform was passed, 75% of all recipients on the caseload were children under 18, many of them very young children.

The most recent study to be released, "*New Lives for Poor Families: Mothers and Young Children Move through Welfare Reform*," (www.tc.edu/new-lives) is a three-state study of 948 women with preschool-age children conducted by Yale University, the University of California, Berkeley, Stanford University and the Teachers College of Columbia University. Among its findings:

- Many women have moved into low-wage jobs, and their total income has risen significantly. Yet their income remains below the poverty line.
- Related measures of economic well-being show little improvement. For example, almost one-fifth of all mothers recently cut the size of meals because they didn't have enough money to buy more food, three times the rate reported by all adults nationwide. The average mother reported about \$400 in savings.
- The magnitude of income gains, thus far, is too weak to improve home environments

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- or allow women to move into better neighborhoods.
- Disturbingly, but not surprisingly, mothers are spending less time with their pre-school-age children as they leave home for jobs. No consistent gains were detected in pro-literacy parenting practices, like reading with their children, establishing dinner-time or bedtime routines, sensitivity toward the child, or for 49 other measures of home qualities.
- Participating mothers displayed twice the rate of clinical depression, two in every five, compared to the general population. Maternal depression sharply depresses their young children's development.
- Many children moved into new child care centers and preschools. Lower-performing children who entered center-based programs displayed significantly stronger gains in

“The current goal of welfare is not to improve the well-being of children,”

—Wade Horn,
Administration for Children
and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services

cognitive skills and school readiness—moving about 3 months ahead of the children who remained in home-based settings. This positive relationship was significantly stronger for children who attended higher quality centers.

- In Connecticut, researchers were able to compare women in the study to a control group of women who were not subjected to the new welfare rules. They found that while 69% of the women in

Many politicians are simply taking credit for the efforts of low-income women themselves.

the study were working at least part-time four years after the start of the program, almost 60% of the women in the control group were working, even though the state did not pressure them to find one. This finding is similar to other welfare research, and it indicates that the vast majority of women on welfare have consistently moved into work on their own.

This last finding would also indicate that many politicians are simply taking credit for the efforts of low-income women themselves.

Recent attention has turned to the fact that the 1996 welfare reform law far too easily allowed states to achieve work goals because they were allowed to count anyone who left the system (or was removed from the system) as having gone to work when it came time to report their results to the federal government.

In fact, there is growing acknowledgement that “the current goal of welfare is not to improve the well-being of children,” according to Wade Horn, the head of the Administration for Chil-

dren and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. “It’s not an explicit goal.” (*The Associated Press, April 16, 2002*).

The good news is that states are often spending more money on childcare for women to go to work, and in many instances they are able to retain benefits for some period of time after going to work.

However, pushing mothers off the welfare caseload or simply moving them into low-wage work has not improved life for children. Without livable wages, reliable transportation, affordable health care, decent housing and strong human relationships, their lives will continue to be extremely difficult, regardless of how much politicians want to say otherwise.

According to the Census Department, while poverty rates fell during the economic upturn of 1998 to 2000, child poverty actually rose in full-time working families in 2000. The number of poor children who live in families with a full-time year-round worker rose to 4.1 million in 2000, up from 3.8 million in 1999 - a rise of 326,000 children - according to an analysis by the Children's Defense Fund (<http://www.childrensdefense.org/release010925.htm>). Nationally, 16% of all children were poor in 2000, including nearly one fourth of all children in Alabama.

The census Department also noted that Alabama was one of three states in which the real median household income declined between 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

These studies increasingly indicate that it is time to rethink policies as they affect families with children, especially families with young children. ■

HABD Begins to Demolish Metropolitan Gardens

Built to provide housing for over 900 low-income families with no other housing options,



Metropolitan Gardens Public Housing Community is now being demolished by the Birmingham Public Housing Authority to make way for a new mixed income development principally designed to serve non-poor residents.

“What’s really tragic about this whole initiative is that poor people are being displaced in the name of creating a mixed income community when it simply did

not have to be done this way. Mixed income developments are a good thing, but there is no prerequisite to demolish what housing poor people *did* have in order to provide housing for people with more options,” stated Scott Douglas, GBM Executive Director.

GBM has raised concerns about the project since the day when current residents who helped designed the new development were notified that most of them would never be able to be a part of the new community. Nev-

ertheless, the project has gone forward, and all Metro residents have left or soon will as demolition goes forward.

“No one knows for sure what has happened to many of the families who were in Metro,” notes Sarah Price, GBM staffer and once President of the Central City neighborhood that includes the Metropolitan Gardens community. “Millions were spent here to build these apartments for people who could not

afford or find any other housing, and Metropolitan Gardens was in better physical shape than in other public housing in Birmingham.”

“GBM’s focus now is to assure that the units in the plan designated for low-income families are completed and that as many of the people most in need of housing actually secure it,” said Merika Coleman, GBM’s Economic Justice Organizer. “There is also a need to find a way to replace the nearly 500 units of affordable housing for low-income people that will be lost as a result of the HOPE VI initiative.” ■

GBM Board Votes to Support Moratorium on Death Penalty

At its February board meeting, the board of Greater Birmingham Ministries voted to support efforts to place a moratorium on executions in the state until there is a thorough review of its use and the pending cases where the sentence has been imposed. As a result of a growing number of studies regarding the use of the death penalty, the increased availability of DNA testing, and the fact that it tends to be imposed disproportionately on defendants who are poor and people of color, several states have enacted or are considering moratoriums on death penalty executions while they conduct a thorough review of the system and the sentences that are currently pending. Senator Hank Sanders has sponsored a

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bill in the Alabama Legislature, and citizen groups are calling on Governor Don Siegelman to support the moratorium and the review. According to the Equal Justice Initiative based in Montgomery, "Alabama has no state-wide public defender system and there are dozens of death row prisoners without legal representation. In the past three years, Alabama sentenced more people to death per capita than any other state in the country. In the past 10 years, Alabama's death row population has doubled so that there are currently 187 people under sentence of death in the state. Alabama's unusually high death row population is partially due to a unique provision which allows an elected judge to set aside a jury's verdict of life imprisonment. Nearly 25% of the people sitting on Alabama's death row received a life verdict that was overridden by a trial judge.

Additionally, nearly 70% of those executed in Alabama in the past twenty years have been black. Each year in Alabama, nearly 65% of all murders involve black victims. However, 80% of the prisoners currently awaiting execution in the state were convicted of crimes in which the victims were white."

GBM's board believes that the current situation merits review, especially since there have been cases in which the state has discovered that the person accused of a murder was wrongly convicted of a crime they did not commit. Since the issue is literally life or death, there must be a very high level of accountability in all such cases. ■

GBM Notes Deaths of Board Members Leo Merriweather and Rosie Lee Patterson

GBM has been touched and saddened by the recent deaths of Reverend Leo Merriweather and Ms. Rosie Lee Patterson, both long-time members of the Greater Birmingham Ministries board.

Reverend Merriweather was the Presiding Elder for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church for the Birmingham District, and he was extremely active in his church as well as in many community efforts to improve the lives of people around him.

Ms. Rosie Lee Patterson was one of GBM's longest standing board members and was always very active in the North Birmingham neighborhood in particular.

"They were both amazing people, highly committed and compassionate community leaders who never stopped giving to others," noted Scott Douglas, GBM's

Executive Director. "They were the kind of people that every organization needs, and we will miss them both very much. They will always be a part of GBM." ■

Bishop Theo Larry Kirkland Assumes Leadership of AME Church 9th Episcopal District

GBM is pleased to welcome Bishop Theo Larry Kirkland as the new bishop for the 9th Episcopal District of the AME Church and to extend our best wishes to Bishop Zedekiah Grady who will assume new duties as a bishop in his home state of South Carolina. "It has been a pleasure to work with Bishop and Mrs. Grady over the past several years, and we are looking forward to continuing the work with Bishop Kirkland," stated Scott Douglas on behalf of GBM. The AME Church has been a sponsoring organization of GBM for over twenty years. ■

York-Hartness Wedding Gifts Make a Difference

When Karen York and Tim Hartness married recently, they registered their gift selections for the community—literally. They asked their friends and families, in lieu of purchasing wedding gifts for them, to make a donation to Greater Birmingham Ministries for use in helping low-income people's needs. Tim and Karen are members of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Birmingham, and we send them our deep thanks and best wishes. ■

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Sixteenth Street Baptist Church
Temple Beth-El
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Unitarian Church of Birmingham
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church

Living It Out is produced by the Faith in
Community Work Group of
Greater Birmingham Ministries

Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral Is Newest GBM Sponsor

Greater Birmingham Ministries has entered the new year with a new member faith community. Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral joins 10 other Christian denominations as well as two Jewish synagogues and the Unitarian Church as official sponsors of GBM's work.

The idea of the Greek Orthodox Church joining GBM at the sponsorship level has been in discussion for several years. The idea originated in discussions with Father Immanuel Vasiliakis, past Bishop of the cathedral who died before the process could be completed. With the arrival of a new bishop and the important role of cathedral member Libby Pantazis, the final decisions were made by the cathedral and the GBM board.

"GBM is deeply honored and grateful to welcome Holy Trinity-Holy Cross as a new sponsor," stated Scott Douglas, GBM's Executive Director. "It is a relationship that has been there for a long time, and many of us believed it was just a matter of time. We are glad that the

GBM Direct Services Report		
	January-December 2001	January-March 2002
Total Number of Families Assisted	3,496	826
Total Number of People Assisted	9,195	1,891
Total Children	4,495	765
Number of Food Bags Distributed	5,334	164
Value of Food Given	\$196,580	1,309
Number of Families Receiving Clothing	1,292	\$41,890
Qualified Financial Requests Received	\$359,760	\$77,305
Financial Assistance	\$205,065	\$40,280
Total Funds and Value of Goods Given	\$430,710	\$84,630

time has finally arrived."

Holy Trinity-Holy Cross will have two members serve on the board of Greater Birmingham Ministries, and the Cathedral has committed to involvement and participation in all of GBM's work areas.

"The Greek Orthodox Church is a very significant and important faith community locally and across the world," GBM staffer Robert Montgomery added. It will be a privilege to learn more directly from that tradition and its long history of serving human beings in the name of God. We're delighted that they are going to be at the table here at GBM." ■

Gracie Taylor Marks 20th Year on Staff at GBM



Gracie Taylor came to work at GBM in 1982, and has been a consistent and dependable presence ever since. She has managed GBM's finances, along with an unbelievable number of administrative responsibilities during those years. She has also played a crucial role of managing the finances of many other groups as they obtain nonprofit 501(c)3 status from the IRS.

There have been many transitions at GBM during her years here, and the amount of work often seems to just keep building. "But GBM is here to do whatever we can to help the community," says Gracie. "That's why we're all here. Happy 20th, Gracie! And many more!"



Hunger No More:

A congregational study guide available from Bread for the World.

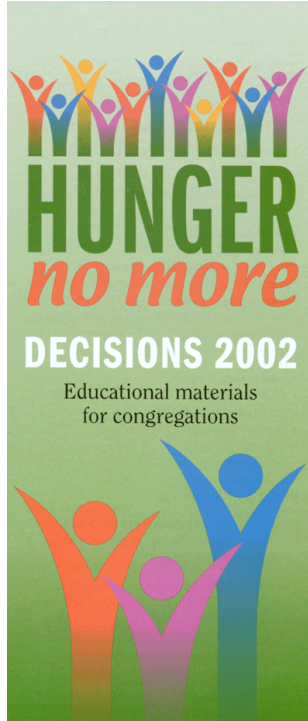
GBM encourages congregations and Bible study groups to consider using *Hunger No More* as a part of their educational curriculum during this spring or summer, in particular. Focused on the Biblical concern for people who are hungry and poor, the six sessions focus on important topics both in the Bible and in current public policy decisions. The materials for each sessions can be used separately as well as a series. Topics include:

Who is hungry and poor in the United States and why?

Why is 2002 such an important year for decisions?

How are current welfare programs working?

What does it take to help people get out of poverty and into good jobs?



What constitutes a "livable income" in the United States?

How can public policies support people to make ends meet?

How are U.S. children faring?

How should personal and social responsibility be balanced?

What is the role of faith-based organizations?

Hunger no more is a uniquely cooperative effort by Bread for the World Institute, American Baptist Churches USA, Christian Reformed Church, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, The Episcopal Church, ELCA World Hunger Program, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Presbyterian Hunger Program, Reformed Church in America, United Methodist Committee on Relief, in conversation with the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

www.bread.org

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**GBM
Needs A
Van**



In order to pick up food from our donors (schools, congregations, individuals, stores, etc.), GBM needs a donated new or late model van in prime condition. A donated van (tax deductible) allows more of our scarce resources to be directed towards the needy among us. A new, or virtually new, van is needed so that those resources will not have to be applied to expensive maintenance.

Please help us identify sources for the van. We'll honor your support with continued persistence in seeking wholeness, peace, and justice on behalf of the poorest of our neighbors. Please contact Scott Douglas at 326-6821, or scott@gbm.org with any leads.

Thank you.

**Wanted:
Clean Elections in
Alabama**

Across the nation, there is a growing movement for Clean Money Elections. Current Alabama law allows for PAC-to-PAC transfers, a roundabout way getting money to candidates without disclosing the true source of the funds. As an example, contributions to a "National Hog Leavings Bureau PAC" could legally end up in the coffers of a

"Sweet Home Alabama PAC." From there the money is distributed to the candidate. The candidate then reports "Sweet Home Alabama PAC" on the campaign disclosure form, and no one is the wiser. Such money "laundering" is currently legal, but it's not "Clean Money." There can be no political equality when access to money is the single most decisive factor in deciding who runs Alabama. Watch the GBM web page for the misadventures of *Eberhard* and *Gritter* at www.gbm.org and help build a movement seeking clean elections and the public financing of electoral campaigns. Somebody has to own Alabama's governance, why not ordinary Alabamians? Only the people of Alabama can remove the "For Sale" signs from our public offices.



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**Holy Trinity-
Holy Cross
Greek Orthodox
Cathedral Is
Newest GBM
Sponsor
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