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New ways to love neighbors

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Almost 20,000 Baptists in one place! This gathering made the New Baptist Covenant an historic event. Faculty, staff and students from the Baylor School of Social Work were there, with our dean, Diana Garland, presenting on congregations engaging in poverty and with an exhibit to promote the *Family and Community Ministries* journal, the Church Census and our Congregational Community Ministry Initiative, “Walking Alongside.” It was great to meet Baptists from far and wide. From young pastors with a new urge to make a difference in their communities to veterans of the pastorate asking age-old questions about strengthening families, we were enriched by conversations with leaders about the ministries of their churches and ways that the Center for Family and Community Ministries might join them in their journeys.

As a part of this gathering, I was able to meet Michael Hester, the first director of the Center for Family Ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. That center no longer exists – it went the way of the seminary’s School of Social Work – but I have come to appreciate his initial leadership and that of the many other Baptists who value our mission to strengthen ministries designed to serve families and communities. The New Baptist Covenant provided an expression of Jesus’ command to love God with our whole being; the exciting thing for me is that it also pointed to new ways Baptists are taking seriously the rest of Jesus’ command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

From the ecumenical gathering I discussed in the last issue of the journal to this meeting of Baptists, my staff and I are excited about the many opportunities we have to walk alongside your ministries of Christ’s love

through the life of this journal and the research and education we offer.

This issue reflects the ways we are seeking to do this. The book reviews **Amy Castello** offers point out new resources for your ministry and the contemplative resources that **Michael Sciretti** has gathered are well worth the time spent with them in prayer and contemplation. **Wendy Wright** adds to this issue her tender insights into the seasons of family life and a reminder of God's call to be transformed through family transitions. In another personal word, **Vicki Kabat's** "This Too Shall Pass" offers a poignant story about congregations caring for children. As you'll see below, our next issue has even more to say about children in the care of missional congregations.

Michael Kelly includes two Faith in Action pieces that demonstrate the range of our interests. One of these is **Jay Van Groningen's** introduction to Asset-Based Community Development, a resource that can be of value for experienced community planners as well as first-time community ministers. Although there are many resources available on community development, this resource is a powerful reminder of the wealth of assets God offers us in community, even when all we see are challenges.

The other Faith in Action piece points to a ministry that seeks to nurture young boys in an after-school program. In this piece from **Krista Petty**, a new friend of the CFCM who originally wrote this article for the Externally Focused Church Network, what we see is a reminder of God's parenting love and the opportunities available for us to express that love.

The Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, who co-authored the National Council of Churches USA child care study in 1983, continues the legacy of research into how churches are engaging local communities. Here, along with the **Rev. Marcel Welty**, they offer to us the Congregational Health Ministry Survey Report.

This report represents their attempt to understand how congregations are involved in health

education, direct health services and health care advocacy. It is an exciting discussion of the many ways congregations are engaged in health ministries. The report also suggests some inspiring implications for pastors, denominational leaders and all who are concerned about health care services and the state of health care policies in the United States today.

To complement the Health Ministry Survey Report, **Brian Dodd** highlights his experience in a health-related social ministry and the value of church volunteers who are engaged in hands-on ministry with people in need.

Our lead article is the first in a series of two on congregational early childhood care and education. **Diana Garland, Michael Sherr, Angela Dennison** and I discuss how churches care for children. Congregations offer a variety of child care programs and family support services, but they are more likely to be serving middle- and upper-middle class children. And, since the groundbreaking study by the National Council of Churches 25 years ago, churches are serving fewer children overall.

The second child care article will run in our next issue. In fact, the entire Summer issue will highlight the church's role in advocacy for children. In preparation for that issue, we are sponsoring a congregation-based child care research summit, "Who Cares for the Children?" Co-sponsored by Buckner Children and Family Services, the event will be held at Buckner's Dallas Campus May 12-13. To learn more, visit our Web site at www.Baylor.edu/CFCM.

Thank you for the many opportunities to join you in serving families and communities as we seek to share Christ's love for our world.

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