

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” - God (Is. 1:17)

Paths of Justice

Why do we have a Justice Mission at FCC?

The reason that we have a justice ministry in our church is because God is just and he has a heart for justice. This is very evident throughout the Bible. A most striking example is found in Isaiah 1 when God informs his people that their worship and prayers are unacceptable to him. He says, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen.”

What was the reason behind God’s rejection of their heartfelt worship? Answer – the people did not combine worship with a commitment to defending the rights of the weak and powerless. He says, “Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”

Yes, God calls us to worship him with sincere hearts and to be people of prayer. But these essential practices must be accompanied by tangible deeds of compassion and justice for those being deprived of freedom, dignity, treasure or livelihood. This is the heart of God and it is his will for our church. - Pastor Nick

Beyond Christmas

Brian’s parents occasionally took him and his sisters to church. His father was a schoolteacher. He recalls, “We had a home, dogs and a cat, a pool. Everything but a white picket fence ... and a relationship with Jesus.”

Then one night, when Brian was just 12 years old, the unthinkable happened. His mother came home at 2 a.m. His father, who had been drinking, shot her in a jealous rage. He tried to shoot Brian and his sister, and finally himself, but by God’s grace, the gun misfired. No one died, but Brian's whole life unraveled. His dad went to prison for the next 16 and a half years. His mom tried to forget her troubles by drinking and partying, leaving Brian and his sister home alone. The children bounced from friend to friend and relative to relative, living wherever they could find refuge for a while.

Then one Christmas, Brian received gifts from Angel Tree, including one that turned his life

around. He remembers opening that gift like it was yesterday. It was a leather-bound Bible, which became his most treasured possession. "I prayed secretly and believed in Jesus," Brian recalls. Wherever he went, the Bible stayed with him.



When Brian married and started a family, the Bible was there. When he didn't have a job and couldn't put food on the table for his children, the Bible was his comfort. When Brian's dad was finally released from prison and Brian didn't know how he would face him, he had the Bible and prayer to see him through.

That year for Father's Day, Brian thought to himself, “What better way to show my dad I have forgiven him than to attend church with him?” So he did, and he took his family with him. It was another life-changing event. “I preach from the pulpit with the Bible I received from Angel Tree.” (Continued)



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Definition of injustice: Injustice occurs when someone with greater power deprives someone with lesser power of freedom, dignity, treasure, or livelihood.

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after orphans and widows in their distress...” – James 1:27

Beyond Christmas (Continued)

Today the entire family—including Brian's father—attends church together every week.

Here at Faith Community Church, we have participated in Angel Tree for the last several years. Last year, the Justice Team examined the ministry in greater depth and found it to be a great one to continue partnering with and even expand on. It is a Christ-centered ministry, effective in reaching the lost and restoring broken relationships, and seems to be a good fit for our church.

At Christmas we enjoyed having several families visit our church. We had good conversations with the adults, played fun games with the kids, and provided presents for the kids from their parent who is in jail along with a card to receive a free Bible in the mail. We also delivered presents to the homes of those who could not make it.

Please pray for, get to know, and invite those who will visit our church to future events.

Caring for families with incarcerated loved ones is important beyond Christmas as well. Children often feel lonely and abandoned when their mom or dad goes away to prison. Those between the ages of 2-6 can feel separation anxiety, impaired socio-emotional development, traumatic stress and even survivor guilt; ages 7-10 may experience developmental regressions, poor self-concept, acute traumatic stress reactions, and impaired ability to overcome future trauma. Children from ages 11-14 may experience rejection on limits of behavior and trauma-reactive behaviors. Finally, those who are 15-18 may experience a premature termination of dependency relationship with their parent, and it may lead to intergenerational crime and incarceration. Other difficulties often include chronic sleeplessness, difficulties concentrating, aggressive behavior, depression, underperforming at school, and

sometimes dropping out. Some develop temporary school phobias that made them unwilling to attend school for up to six weeks following their parent's incarceration.

It can be difficult for caregivers of the children as well, which may involve single-parenthood, multigenerational households, or grandparents raising the children. They in turn feel overwhelmed, are more stretched financially, and can struggle with anger and resentment toward the incarcerated parent while trying to support the child's relationship with the parent. There can be conflicts with the parent who's in prison, there are higher rates of divorce, and they often feel judged by others and so avoid connections that may help them.

How can we help beyond Christmas? As Christians, we need to continue praying for these families and to love those who are hurting. We can help them to repair and rebuild their lives. Some members of our congregation are sending personal invitations to those we served at Christmas to join us for our Good Friday and Easter Sunday services, along with brunch and activities for the kids on Sunday. Please be intentional about praying for those we invite and initiating conversations with those who come. Begin to get to know them and establish connections, and consider inviting them back to church, to your faith group, or to your home for a meal. Listen to them, encourage them, and share with them the kinds of things Jesus has taught us.

1 <http://tinyurl.com/k3cvfka>

2 <http://tinyurl.com/l7wq9pn>

3 <http://tinyurl.com/lwcoccu>

Opportunities

- If someone could help organize a baby shower when we have the opportunity from PDHC, please let us know. If so, contact Doug Dunsmoor at dwdunsmoor@hotmail.com.
- Do you want to get involved with righting injustice? Come to our Justice Team meeting. Check with Doug Dunsmoor or Tom Castor for dates and times.