

Saturday "Sermon"

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Hospitality & Hope

One of the things I like about Bristol is that we're a "mixed-use" community in which the very rich, the very poor, and middle-class folk live and work in fairly close proximity to each other. This means that, if we're paying attention, we have plenty of opportunity to interact with and learn from persons of very different economic situation than ourselves.

Nearly two years into The Great Recession, many of us have become much more aware of the fairly precarious nature of our employment, our retirement accounts—if we are fortunate enough to have them—and even our ability to keep a roof over our heads. And not a few among us have found themselves unable to succeed in that last task.

In our town, excellent help is available for men and women who find themselves homeless. But in Bristol, as in many other places, there is virtually no emergency housing available for families who find themselves homeless—especially if they have children. Sometimes such need comes through being laid off; sometimes through fires or floods; sometimes from health crises—homelessness has many roots.

Many of us would like to help families in such situations, but we can't do very much working alone. The Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN; www.familypromise.org) was founded nearly 25 years ago in response to this need. Today, IHN is a national organization involving more than 5,000 congregations and more than 125,000 volunteers. The genius of IHN is the way in which it allows people of faith to "put feet to their prayers" and to discover the deep gladness of providing faith-full care for families in need.

IHN has been in place in Kingsport and in Johnson City for a number of years now, and it's time for us to bring this ministry to Bristol. On Thursday, August 5, at 7 p.m., Brian Rosecrantz, Executive Director of IHN of Johnson City, will meet with interested Bristoleans at Central Presbyterian Church to answer questions about this ministry and help us move forward.

The Bible tells us that "*there will always be some in the land who are poor*" (Deuteronomy 15:11), and I think that at least part of the reason for that is to teach the blessings of hospitality and compassion to those currently in more comfortable circumstances. "*This is the kind of fasting I want,*" says the Lord. "*Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. . . . Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind*" (Isaiah 58:6-8).