

## **Presentation to Cameron County Christian Center, Emporium, PA FMC**

**By Bishop Richard Snyder**

Listen, dear friends. Isn't it clear by now that God operates quite differently? He chose the world's down-and-out as the kingdom's first citizens, with full rights and privileges. This kingdom is promised to anyone who loves God (James 2:5, *The Message*).

Cameron County Christian Center is the kind of Free Methodist Church of which Jesus, John Wesley and B.T. Roberts would be proud. They get things in the right order. Love God ... the only true God, love people ... all kinds of people.

Cameron County specializes in welcoming the world's down-and-out. They don't minister "to" them. They become an integral part of the Cameron County family. The church not only "opens its arms" to the "unlovely," it goes to get them, bring them in and treat them with love and respect.

It's not just a place where the unlovely are welcomed; it is a place where God transforms the hearts of all kinds of people. On a given Sunday, you might just find someone leaving a half gallon of rum in the sanctified trash can. Cameron County is a place where God is calling people to toss away lingering habitual sins. One Sunday a girl handed the pastor a bag of marijuana and said, "God told me He doesn't want me to smoke this anymore, will you take it from me?"

Pastor Rock Pifer knows this isn't a matter of working the right angles; it is a matter of prayer. Pastor Rock has led the Cameron County Christian Center to take responsibility for the sad condition in its home town -- Emporium, PA. That included

taking responsibility for the despair leading to suicides; for the drug abuse, alcoholism and high divorce rate; for the high instances of child sexual abuse and incest. The church agreed to take responsibility and repented of their indifference. They renewed their walk with Jesus.

One new member wrote about her resistance to attending CCCC. "I resisted the pull because I was not sure I wanted to worship next to someone who was actively hallucinating. I resisted the pull because I was not sure I wanted to walk up the steps into the door passing a heap of cigarette butts and the small cluster of addicted people who were dropping them. I resisted the pull because I was not sure I wanted to worship in a place where exuberance went unrestrained to the point that a 60-year-old man with mental retardation would jump up and do a cheer for Jesus. But the "pull" was the Holy Spirit ... and I knew that ... and the example of the church was Jesus ... and I knew that. God orchestrated the circumcision of my heart, using those whom most would call 'unlovely.' And I wanted to be where they were, because that is where Jesus is."

Tonight, we salute the Cameron County Christian Center because you are doing what we as the Free Methodist Church value. You are reaching God's cherished missing, one soul at a time.

## **Presentation to Mars Hill FMC, Indianapolis, IN**

**By Bishop Joe James**

The West Morris Street Free Methodist Church in Indianapolis was launched in 1914. A few years later, members of that church, wanting to reach their own community, quit riding the street car to West Morris Street and established a church in their own neighborhood, Mars Hill.

At first they met in hotel rooms, then a storeroom and then in the basement of their present church. The church flourished in the 1950s and 1960s but by the 1990s, it was so small it almost closed its doors.

Wabash Superintendent David Colgan and Pastor Mark Van Valin (then at West Morris Street) worked together with the Indianapolis-area churches to begin an aggressive revitalization effort at Mars Hill. Offerings were received and at least one family permanently moved from West Morris Street to assist the Mars Hill church.

Pastor Don Meier felt called of the Lord to return to urban ministry and agreed to the Mars Hill appointment. The Mt. Carmel Free Methodist Church not only gave up its pastor, but gave \$5,000 to help the Meiers in their new assignment. Now there is a partnership for you!

Pastor Meier began to pray and to walk the neighborhood, introducing people to the pastor, to the church and to the Lord. Today more than 100 people call Mars Hill their church home. It is a great story of church revitalization in one of the Indianapolis' poorest and most difficult neighborhoods.

In addition to the many ministries similar to other churches, Mars Hill reaches out to alcoholics and the addicted. Not only do they open the doors of the church for AA

meetings, they get involved in loving and caring for the people, building vital ministries around 12-Step programs.

The church doors are wide open on Christmas Day providing food and gifts for the poor and the homeless and fellowship and companionship for the lonely and abandoned. About 75 percent of the Mars Hill congregation invests some of their Christmas day to share Christ's love with the people of their community. At the end of this month, the church will sponsor its first car show to connect with another segment of their community.

Pastor Don and Kathy Meier are deeply loved and appreciated. It is no surprise that God has honored their obedience to Him so the church has outgrown its facilities and saved more than \$50,000 toward a much needed expansion and renovation.

Tonight we honor the Mars Hill Free Methodist Church, and Pastor Don and Kathy Meier, for their love and compassion for the poor, the addicted, the lonely and the lost of their community. Kathy is unable to be with us tonight. But we are pleased that Al Spencer, who came to faith in Christ through the church, and is an active member of the congregation, stands alongside Pastor Meier to receive this gift and our words of commendation.

## **Presentation to Calvary Haitian CPP, Lansing, MI**

**By Bishop David Kendall**

The first mission statement of the FMC was this: to maintain the Bible standard of Christianity and preach the gospel to the poor. Among the poorest and neediest in that day, and any day, were immigrant communities within our cities. These are people beloved by our Lord who live near enough to be called "neighbor" yet are often treated in the most un-neighborly ways. From its inception, the FMC targeted such communities, reached out to them, and welcomed them into the Family of God. Indeed, from the earliest days, the FMC organized and mobilized with such poor particularly in mind.

It seems wonderfully appropriate, therefore, to recognize the Calvary Haitian Free Methodist Church of Lansing, MI, for its outstanding local and global ministries to Haitian people who need Jesus.

In the year 2000, this church began in the heart of Pastor Ralph Funk, then lead pastor of Lansing Central FMC (MI), with a vision for welcoming an ethnic pastor to his team, one who would then launch a church plant. No one could have imagined that the vision would be fulfilled in the way it has, a clear indication that it was indeed from the Lord.

God called the Pastor Serge Bonhomme to come to Michigan and start a church among people from Haiti there. At nearly the same time, God inspired a Haitian woman in Lansing with a dream of a growing Haitian church in her city.

Over the next years, God brought together this Anglo pastor, this Haitian pastor and the Haitian women with a dream, and further supplied others who were eager to see the church mature and thrive.

By the summer of 2004, the plant became a full society and is now a dynamic church where life transformation occurs, where prayer for the needy "works" in powerful ways, and regularly One More Soul from among the poor and needy find a place in the Family of God.

Because of the unique gifting of Pastor Serge, Calvary Haitian has become home base for a network of Haitian ministries in the Northeast, Florida and in Haiti itself -- through the church as well as radio and internet broadcasting.

I praise the Lord and am delighted to recognize the Calvary Haitian Free Methodist Church of Lansing, MI, and the fruitful leadership of both Pastors Serge Bonhomme and Ralph Funk.

## **Presentation to Rainier Avenue FMC, Seattle, WA**

**By Bishop Roger Haskins**

Rarely a night goes by when there isn't the sound of gunfire in what the locals call "the valley of death." The Rainier Valley -- this "valley of death" -- is in the southeast quadrant of Seattle. Rainier Avenue Free Methodist Church is located in the heart of this valley. Pastor Paul Olver and his wife Delia live near the geographic center of this "valley of death." They will tell you that they consider this to be a wonderful place to live and minister!

All the bad things you've heard about the Rainier Valley are true. There is plenty of brokenness: individual brokenness -- addictions, health problems, lower education, poverty level; family brokenness -- domestic violence, single parent families, parents/children literally don't speak the same language and don't have same cultural values; neighborhood brokenness -- schools in chaos; gang activity (kids 11-13); high crime and inadequate access to services others take for granted.

But there is another side of the picture that is also true: The Rainier Valley is really a thriving community. This is one of the few urban core communities in the U.S. that is gaining in population. The Rainier Valley is rich in diversity with an estimated 100 languages and dialects and a literal feast of ethnic foods. Here you will find people from six continents and many different countries, living side by side. These are remarkable people with stories of overcoming obstacles, demonstrating resilience, escaping from war, and even swimming to freedom across the Mekong River.

You can look down on this community as different, difficult and dangerous, or you can see it as a place of opportunity, potential and possibility. This diverse community is a place to reach the world -- with many international connections. This needy community is a place to live out Jesus' priority of caring for the poor. This is the community where the Rainier Avenue church has served for over 100 years. Many historically white churches like Rainier Avenue were either closed or relocated when the neighborhood changed. Our Rainier Avenue FMC stayed -- and changed with its community. Thirty ethnic groups are now represented in the congregation.

Most churches in Seattle and the U.S. draw from a wide radius. Rainier Avenue is a neighborhood church -- 2/3 of the congregation lives in the Rainier Valley. People have chosen to move into the neighborhood to live incarnationally. The Rainier Avenue FMC is becoming a mirror of the community. It is educationally and economically diverse, and includes people who have no formal education, some who are even illiterate -- all worshipping and serving next to brothers and sisters with advanced degrees.

The Rainier Avenue FMC and a neighboring church, Emerald City Bible Fellowship, jointly sponsor Urban Impact, a nonprofit organization working to improve health, education and economic opportunity.

This church is also reaching out to other communities through planting. In the 1960s Rainier Avenue helped start churches in Renton and Bellevue, WA. This summer they launched the House of Oaks Ministries in Tukwila. They have plans to start a Spanish congregation in the fall. They continue to reach out to other countries through missions -- giving birth to a network of churches in Thailand and a family house church in Laos, and sending a missionary to Southeast Asia.

The Rainier Avenue staff and volunteer leadership team reflects the church's diversity in its composition: Mexican-American, Korean-Canadian, African-American, Spanish speaking Japanese-American, Vietnamese-American, Swiss-Argentinean and Anglo.

The Rainier Avenue church now has two services and envisions offering from three to five services in different languages. The church's building is ideally located for ministry but is outdated and inadequate. The church is pushed by growth and is in the midst of a "By Faith" campaign to raise funds to upgrade and expand its facility.

Tonight we honor the Rainier Avenue Free Methodist Church and Pastor Paul and Delia. In a community where there is brokenness their mission is to encourage people, families and systems to find wholeness in Jesus Christ. The Rainier Avenue church is working for wholeness, racial reconciliation and transformation. Paul and Delia, we honor the Rainier Avenue FMC for your vision to transform this "valley of death" into a "valley of life" so you might reach the world!