



Kjwo1972/Wikimedia Commons



Secure Dwelling Places A HOME FOR EVERYONE

by Tammy Alexander

I still remember what it felt like to evacuate New Orleans for my first major hurricane threat, wondering if the house I was leaving behind would be there when I returned.

We had boarded up the windows and tried to put everything of value on the second floor. I tightly wrapped my favorite portrait of Jesus in a large garbage bag and stuck it on the top shelf of my bedroom closet.

That was 1998. Our house was fine. The hurricane turned to the east at the last minute and New Orleans was spared. Seven years later, the Gulf Coast was not so lucky.

I had since moved north, but many of my friends found themselves without a home—at best, for several weeks, some for several months, some for years. In their stories, I got a glimpse of what it is like to lose the security of one’s home.

It’s something many of us take for granted: a place to return to, at the end of a weary day, to find shelter from the cold and the rain. A place where you feel safe. A place that is uniquely yours.

Two of my friends and their families struggled to regain this concept of home after Katrina. Their stories exemplify the realities faced at the time by tens of thousands of families along the Gulf Coast.

One family found themselves in a Houston hotel room, quickly running through their meager savings. They were lucky to have a local church step in to help while they tried to wade through the morass of government assistance programs.

Another family ended up in one of the infamous FEMA trailers for over a year while their house was rebuilt. Both families endured many frustrations, indignities, and stresses. One couple divorced.

It’s tempting to think of the destruction along the Gulf Coast as a temporary, isolated incident. But more than one million families in the United States lost their homes to foreclosure in 2008. Millions more struggle to find affordable rental housing.

Every day, families and individuals who long to have a safe place to rest their head at the end of the day instead face the fear, the frustration, and the injustice of being a person without a home.

Read on to gain a better understanding of housing issues in the U.S. and to learn how you and your congregation can take action to help ensure that all of God’s people can “abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isaiah 32:18). ✪

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Seeking a More Balanced Option

Renters and Homeowners in the United States

by Christina Warner

Mennonite Central Committee seeks to address housing needs across the United States, refurbishing houses in Appalachia and advocating for just housing practices for those still struggling after hurricanes Katrina and Ike. But until the recent economic crisis, many of us took housing for granted.

The need for safe, affordable and permanent homes is no longer something we can ignore. This new understanding has highlighted some of our society's weaknesses and can point us toward practices that care for our neighbors and ourselves in the future.

In 2008 the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) granted up to \$700 billion to purchase debt from banks and companies facing bankruptcy and simultaneously allowed the government to purchase shares of the companies.

More recently, the Obama administration extended tax credits to homeowners and first-time homebuyers. Now, first-time buyers will receive up

to \$8,000 in tax credits, and eligible homeowners up to \$6,500, if they enter into a contract by April 30. Homeowners can refinance mortgages with lower interest rates and more manageable payments.

This effort and similar legislation took some of the edge off of the mortgage crisis. Housing indicators are improving and economists say we are headed out of the recession. More people are confident that they will keep their homes and have a permanent place to live. Congress is considering legislation to form the Consumer Financial Protection Agency, to ensure that harmful practices do not continue.

Although the recession is deep and homeowners continue to feel strain, there are hopes for relief and protection. The results may not be as positive for individuals and families with low incomes. For them, the housing crisis only heightened the struggle to find and keep affordable, safe and adequate housing.

A Brief History of U.S. Housing Policy

Housing assistance in the U.S. arose during the Great Depression, with the U.S. Housing and Community Development Act of 1937. The legislation designated government funds for building *public housing*, simultaneously creating jobs in the local area.

Since then, public housing agencies (PHAs) have rented units to low-income residents. In 2008 there were 1.16 million available public housing units, an inadequate number for the amount of need. In some areas, applicants can be on waiting lists for up to 10 years.

Public housing units were often built far from basic services such as jobs, schools, banks, hospitals and public transportation. The resulting lack of mobility disproportionately affected communities of color.

In an attempt to address these problems, Section 8 *voucher-based programs* were created to increase integration into mixed-income neighborhoods. Vouchers allow a tenant to purchase a unit in the private market by subsidizing a portion of the rent.

These subsidies are either project-based (given to an owner who maintains a unit specifically for low-income housing), or tenant-based (subsidizing

The housing crisis has only heightened the struggle to find and keep affordable, safe and adequate housing.

any private unit with certain limitations). In 2008, there were 3.47 million Housing Choice vouchers available.

Although the Section 8 programs help many individuals and families integrate into mixed-income, higher opportunity areas, inadequate living conditions in public housing continue, largely because of chronic underfunding for maintenance and upkeep.

Currently, about 100,000 affordable apartments are built each year, but underfunding means that for every unit built, two public housing units are lost to deterioration, abandonment or conversion.

In 1992 HOPE VI was enacted in an attempt to permanently address these problems by demolishing the

worst public housing projects and building mixed-income communities in their place.

Although the project initially mandated that one low-income unit be built for each destroyed, this standard was eventually dismissed in the name of expediency. Since 1995, 165,000 public housing units have been demolished without replacement. HOPE VI became notorious for displacing tenants, creating long waiting lists and tedious screening of applicants for the new homes.

Our Current Situation

Of the major housing assistance programs, Section 8 may be the most suc-

cessful in alleviating poverty and providing low-income households with some social mobility.

However, Section 8 increases the number of renters in the market without simultaneously creating more units. In the wake of the recession, increased foreclosures have pushed former homeowners into the rental market, and have left many habitable homes empty while awaiting completed foreclosure.

The important successes of Section 8 do not negate the effect it has on the market. In order for the program to be as successful as it could be, affordable units which are both accessible and adequate for low- and extremely low-income households need to be integrated throughout a city.

Further, the pressure on private owners of affordable housing is high. The increased demand for affordable units has pushed the fair market value of many rentals above the maximum payment allotted from PHAs. The option of higher profit creates an incentive for an owner to leave the program rather than renew a contract. Each year, 10,000 to 15,000 units are lost due to owners' exits.

The needs of the housing market run through almost all areas of our society, but the effect has been most profound on those who were in need long before the recession. Low-income renters have desperate needs that are not addressed by most of the legislation passed to address the recession.

For example, in 2008 alone, it is estimated that \$144 billion in tax breaks were given to homeowners. The recent tax cuts contribute to this number. Although there are more homeowners than renters, these funding priorities are unbalanced and shameful when compared to the \$46 billion *entire budget* for low-income housing programs.

Unbalanced aid from the government prioritizes the needs of banks and homeowners over renters and low-income families, concentrating wealth for the upper- and middle-class. Since

(continued on page 6)

“The New St. Bernard”

The St. Bernard neighborhood was a close-knit community centered around a development that housed approximately 900 families. They took care of each other's children and pitched in when times were hard. St. Bernard was home.

Like all New Orleans residents, what most families longed for following Katrina was the opportunity to return home. But they were thwarted, first by locked fences, then demolition of their homes. In the past two years, federal and city housing authorities have demolished 4,000 units of public housing in New Orleans.

The story of the New Orleans “recovery”—and too often U.S. housing policy—is a story of profits before people. Private contractors, often with personal connections, get tax credits and other publicly-funded financial incentives to demolish and then rebuild “mixed income” units, many of which rent at full market value.

Plans for the “new St. Bernard” include only about 160 public housing units, thus permanently displacing more than 700 families. After some time, developers can legally convert all the units into full price without penalty. The supply of affordable housing shrinks while well-positioned private contractors' pockets expand.

In an earlier era, public housing was built to provide subsidized housing for those, especially women and children, who could not otherwise afford it. Many residents, including more than 70 percent of St. Bernard residents, work low-wage jobs. In New Orleans, many service sector jobs pay annual salaries of less than \$20,000 to full-time,

year round workers. They work hard, but given these wages, 41 percent of New Orleans renters pay *more than half* of their pre-tax income on housing.

Now we are demolishing public housing, imagining that somehow if we “deconcentrate” poverty, people will miraculously find a way to work their way out of a need for housing support. May God have mercy on our souls.

Pam Nath works with MCC Central States in New Orleans.



Secure Dwelling Places

Worship Resources and Reflections

by Ken Nafziger

This winter, the MCC Washington Office invites congregations to pray, reflect and act for “Secure dwelling places: A home for everyone.” The suggested Sunday is January 31.

Last week, a very large gaudy yellow and red sign appeared across the street and three doors to the right of my house. It announced the date for a foreclosure sale, and the dates when the house would be open for viewing. I have seen no such signs in my neighborhood before now—elsewhere, but not here.

If I were planning worship for this Sunday dedicated to *Secure Dwelling Places*, I would use this recent event to help me and my congregation grasp the frighteningly intimate closeness of the problem and its enormity.

In this case, I don’t know the people who are losing their home. They moved in during the summer, and then, for a long period of time there was no evidence of anyone there. There are so many ways of looking into the foreclosure itself: were there bad or risky choices by the occupants? Did the owners have personal problems that altered plans for a new home? Were the buyers misled by an irresponsible lending officer?

Then there are the issues around caring for “the least of these”: is intervention appropriate? What are the root causes? Does “fixing things” mean treating symptoms or causes?

In a speech last February in Phoenix, President Obama said:

Our housing crisis was born of eroding home values, but also of the erosion of our common values. It was brought about by big banks that traded in risky mortgages in return for profits that were literally too good to be true; by lenders who knowingly took advantage of homebuyers; by homebuyers who knowingly borrowed too much from lenders; by speculators who gambled on rising prices; and by leaders in our nation’s capital who failed to act amidst a deepening crisis. So solving this crisis will require more than resources—it will require all of us to take responsibility.

And there are issues that might affect me. How will this foreclosure in my neighborhood involve me? What if someone buys this property and it is subsidized as low-income housing? What might it require for me to love this neighbor as I love myself?

And there is the much larger picture of how the housing crisis fits into the social malady of homelessness. There are many excellent resources online (see the MCC Washington Office website for a list of these).

The information here and the statistics that are cited can take us easily to a point of hopelessness. The sheer numbers are staggering: estimates of the homeless in this country are equivalent to the population of any one of the following states: Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, Utah, Nevada.

This complex issue requires the efforts of the whole village and its government. Chapter 32 of the Prophet Isaiah prophesies this reign of justice:

See, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule with justice.
Each will be like a hiding-place from the wind,
a covert from the tempest,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.
Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed,
and the ears of those who have hearing will listen.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.
*My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.*





AgnosticPreachersKid/Wikimedia

So what might my plan for this Sunday’s worship service contain?

There would be plenty of time for singing hymns that remind us of the love of God: a love that surrounds those who have homes and those who have none, a love that is larger than any of our social issues that seem to be insoluble.

Suggestions for songs

Hymnal: A Worship Book

- 4 Unto thy temple, Lord, we come
- 6 Here in this place
- 29 Like the murmur of the dove’s song
- 77 God of many names
- 135 God, whose purpose is to kindle
- 145 There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
(esp. stanzas 1, 3–5)
- 169 I to the hills will lift my eyes
- 229 Tú has venido a la orilla
(Lord, you have come to the lakeshore)
- 397 God loves all his many people
- 519 Shepherd me, O God
- 590 The care the eagle gives her young

Sing the Journey

- 1 We sing to you, O God
- 2 Hamba nathi (Come, walk with us)
- 34 Loving Spirit

Sing the Story

- 53 Here to the house of God we come
- 63 Herr, füll mich neu (God, fill me now)

Shirley Erena Murray’s text, *Here to the house of God we come*, is an amazingly rich hymn, deserving of some time and attention. If I were planning the service, we would first sing it, next have someone (or a small group of people) open up the text for us, and then we would sing it again. The tune name, Khao I-Dang, is the name of an infamous holding center for Cambodian refugees located in Thailand. (Pictures and information are readily found online.)

Suggestions for Bible readings

- Isaiah 32
- Jeremiah 1:4-10 (from the lectionary), on Jeremiah’s call to act
- Psalm 71:1-6 (also from the lectionary), on God’s constancy
- various Gospel references to Jesus, who was homeless:
 - born in a stable while a refugee
 - said of himself that he had nowhere to lay his head
 - encouraged his followers to “consider the lilies . . .”
 - entered Jerusalem on a borrowed colt
 - buried in a tomb that was loaned to him.

Given the enormity of the issues surrounding housing, I would make it a priority that we begin the work of creating a modest proposal of what we could agree to do. A thoughtful and reflective approach might well result in making a difference in one’s own community.

The issues will not be resolved in a Sunday worship service, nor in a Monday morning march. But with intentionality and the work of our communities, light can be brought to places of shadows, hope to places of despair. *We all need each other to lean on . . .*

Additional worship resources available at washington.mcc.org/life.

Ken Nafziger is professor of music at Eastern Mennonite University.

Give the Gift of Shelter

Through MCC's Christmas giving catalog, you can help provide the gift of shelter for people in the United States and around the world. View projects online at donate.mcc.org/project/give-shelter or donate by mail: MCC, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501.



Seeking a More Balanced Option (continued from page 3)

renters and low-income families are disproportionately people of color, these policies systemically contribute to race, sex and class discrimination.

As Christians, we can ask for a shift in priorities. Several pieces of

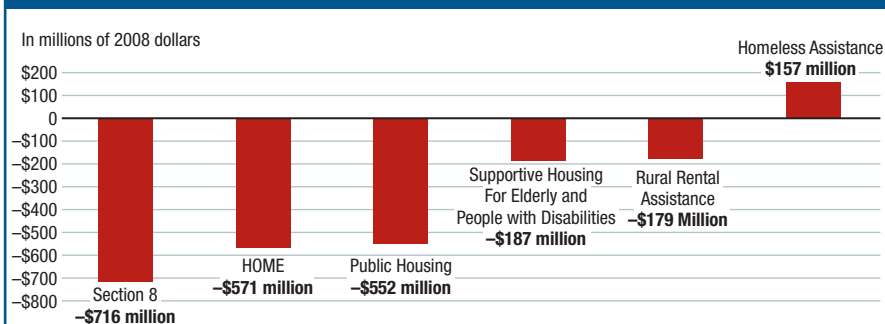
legislation have been introduced to provide funds for the National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF). The NHTF is a permanent fund meant to build, preserve and rehabilitate housing units. Ninety percent of the funds must be

used for rental housing. By increasing the number of available units, programs like Section 8 would be more successful in alleviating poverty by providing homes, safety and greater opportunity.

The need for more balanced aid is great. Homeowners and renters have an equal need for shelter, comfort, safety and the confidence of a permanent home. This is not reflected by legislation that addresses homeowners' needs while neglecting lower-income households.

We have the resources to ensure that all who live in the United States have secure dwelling places. As a church, may we pray and act for a home for everyone. ✪

Funding for Federal Low-Income Housing Assistance Fell by \$2 Billion, 2004 to 2008 (millions of 2008\$)



Source: OMB Public Budget Database. "Section 8" includes tenant-based and project-based rental assistance. All figures are for budget authority, except for Section 8, where outlays were used to eliminate distortions due to rescissions, expiration of long-term contracts, timing shifts, and policy changes.

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

After Years of Displacement, Returning Home



Doug Hostetter/MCC

Students enjoy breakfast at St. Monica's School in Gulu, northern Uganda.

by Wade Snowdon

For years, Beatrice Aciro* and her four children slept under the cover of thick forest to avoid being captured or mutilated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group that has ravaged northern Uganda since 1986.

In October of 2002, in an effort to eradicate the rebel threat, the government of Uganda (GoU) ordered all civilians to vacate their homes and move to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, leading to the displacement of more than 1.8 million people throughout northern Uganda.

"Government soldiers visited my home and told us that anyone who remained would be considered rebel collaborators and killed," said Beatrice. "It was the growing season. I begged them to let us wait so we could harvest what we had planted. They refused and we lost everything."

Having no other option, Beatrice and her children went with all they could carry and began to restart their lives amongst conditions once described by the UN Undersecretary General as "the worst humanitarian disaster in the world."

In an area that at one time only housed one family, Beatrice erected her small grass thatched hut among thousands of other displaced persons facing a similar plight.

"We had no food and no clean water. We survived off of help from neighbors and food rations provided by the World Food Program. Each day people died all around us," said Beatrice.

Today, northern Uganda is experiencing relative calm, allowing those such as Beatrice to rebuild their homes in either smaller, less congested satellite camps or in their original homesteads. However, resettlement has not been easy.

While the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan developed by the GoU

has put forth a framework for addressing these needs, the implementation has been slow and ineffectual.

Despite the challenges, Beatrice is glad to have returned home and remains full of hope and optimism. With a smile on her face she said, "I have begun to cultivate my land and sell some of my produce in the market . . . I used to be dependent on others for help, but now I am able to support myself."

Currently, just under 500,000 people remain in IDP camps throughout northern Uganda as the process of resettlement continues. ✪

Wade Snowdon is an MCC service worker in Uganda.

Speak Out for Northern Uganda

After years of conflict and insecurity, Northern Uganda is at a critical juncture. With the help of the Government of Uganda and consistent attention from the international community, Northern Uganda could emerge from its painful past.

The U.S. government should commit itself to making long-term recovery for communities affected by the violence a priority in the region. Further, transitional justice mechanisms are needed to ensure justice and encourage healing.

Visit washington.mcc.org/advocate/alerts to take action for Northern Uganda.

*Name changed for confidentiality purposes.



by John Filson

Reflection Iraqi Home Is Where the Heart Is

Parents, brothers, sisters, and cousins uprooted from Baghdad share a warm winter meal in Erbil, Northern Iraq.

by John Filson

Housing is a big deal in the United States. Property taxes, real estate markets, and affordable housing are hot-button issues that make candidates for public office jump. The reason is simple: home is precious. In every culture in the world, home is the center that ties together everything we do in life: work, grow, love, learn, and remember.

Iraqi homes are magnificent centers of living. During my 20 months in Iraq, I spent countless hours as a warmly welcomed guest in somebody's home. Imagine everything you love about home, but experiencing life as part of a large family clan: most of your extended aunts, uncles and cousins live nearby, and they feel as close to you as a brother or sister. You don't lock your doors, but if you did all your cousins would have keys. There is no need for them to call ahead or glance at appointment books. Visits for dinner or just to chat are as routine as reading the paper or getting ready for bed.

But then imagine the politics in your country (or someone else's) slowly become more serious and ominously close, and some people begin resorting to violence. Every aspect of your foundation begins to fall apart. Breadwinners lose their jobs. Basic services and supplies become scarce. Some neighbors start acting strangely.

It becomes too dangerous to leave the house after dark.

Millions of Iraqis have been uprooted because of the war. When families leave their homes, they do so at an unimaginable emotional and financial cost. More than just losing the house, displacement severs roots of family and history that have sustained generations of shared life, welcoming newborn babies and saying good-bye to beloved grandparents. Imagine how strongly this issue would dominate political debates if it happened in the United States.

Today, power moves and collides freely across national boundaries, but democratic political systems stop at the border. The decisions of the U.S. government directly impact billions of lives across every continent, but only the people who happen to be Americans have the ability to vote for U.S. leaders. In our inter-connected world, the power to create or destroy is global. Democracy needs to catch up. ✱

John Filson was Program Coordinator for MCC Iraq, based in Erbil, until July 2009.

Leaving Home in Iraq

The latest UN High Commissioner for Refugees' report in 2008 estimates roughly 2.3 million Iraqis displaced inside Iraq and another 2 million refugees outside the country.

Precise numbers are difficult to determine because of the wide range of ways families migrate in search of safety. Some families have to live in makeshift housing or camps, but most move in with relatives or look for an affordable place to rent.

As they flee hot spots such as Baghdad or Mosul, where families go depends on financial resources and religious and ethnic identities. Christians and other minorities often relocate to Northern Iraq, while Sunni and Shi'i families may look to Western or Southern Iraq, respectively.

Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) has introduced legislation that would increase government aid for uprooted Iraqis, "Iraqi Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Security Act" (H.R. 578)." As of this writing, the bill has not moved through committee.

Washington Memo Blog

Visit the Washington Memo Blog to stay informed about Washington Office activities, events, action alerts and news regarding the issues we cover. Here is an excerpt from a recent blog post:

LaShinda Clark/MCC



A Step Backwards for the Fight against HIV/AIDS

November 9, 2009

“It’s no secret that the global economy’s near collapse in 2008 had a widespread effect.

In addition to lay-offs and mortgage foreclosures, Wall Street’s tumble has had significant implications on funding for HIV/AIDS programs.

“Until the economic crisis, funding for HIV/AIDS has steadily increased in recent years. This global allocation of resources has succeeded in declining AIDS deaths worldwide.

“Dr. Tido von Schoen-Angerer of Doctors Without Borders aptly notes:

After almost a decade of progress in rolling out AIDS treatment we have seen substantial improvements, both for patients and public health. But recent funding cuts mean doctors and nurses are being forced to turn HIV patients away from clinics as if we were back in the 1990s before treatment was available.

“PEPFAR (President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) and the Global Fund are two programs that have effectively produced results in treating and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. . . .”

Health Care Bill Passes in House

November 9, 2009

“The U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, late Saturday night 220–215. One Republican, Joseph Cao of Louisiana, joined 219 Democrats in voting for final passage of the bill. From *The Washington Post*:

Action now shifts to the Senate, which could spend the rest of the year debating its version of the health-care overhaul. Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) hopes to bring a measure to the floor before Thanksgiving, but legislation may not reach Obama’s desk before the New Year.

Website Resource Highlights

The MCC Washington Office website provides information about the office, action alerts, upcoming events, and resources on domestic and international issues. Recent highlights include:



A New Design MCC recently launched a newly designed website. Along with the new design, the Washington Offices pages have been updated and reorganized. Several new sections have been added, including faith reflections.

We hope you enjoy our new look and invite your feedback on how we can keep improving the site. Check out our new design at washington.mcc.org.



“Abundant Life: Economic Justice for All” These Washington Office web pages include additional resources on the U.S. housing crisis. The Abundant Life campaign focuses on health care, international debt relief, U.S. housing issues, and fair trade. To find background information, prayer and worship resources, action alerts, and outside resources, or to sign up your congregation, visit washington.mcc.org/life.



Sarah Adams/MCC

“Security Strategy for Afghanistan” Theo Sither of the MCC Washington Office recently helped create a new resource for congregations on Afghanistan. View it on our website.

Advocates' Corner



The Advocates' Corner highlights current advocacy work by Anabaptist congregations. Please let us know what your congregation is doing, so that we can include it in a future issue.

STORIES OF CONGREGATIONAL ADVOCACY

Worship Service Focuses on Advocacy, Cluster Bombs

First Mennonite Church (Bluffton, Ohio) recently hosted the MCC cluster bomb display in their fellowship hall and made it available for community members to view as well. On October 18, Washington Office Director Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach spoke about advocacy to government.

The youth Sunday school class viewed the MCC video "From Harm to Hope: Standing with Cluster Bomb Survivors." Following the service, congregants signed postcards to their Members of Congress about cluster bombs and participated in a lunch forum.

Proclaim Jubilee: A New Beginning

North Baltimore Mennonite Church (Baltimore, Md.), along with a dozen other congregations, participated in the "Abundant Life: Economic Justice for All" campaign on October 25 by devoting their worship service to learning about debt relief and signing postcards.

Many countries continue to pay millions in illegitimate debt payments when this money could be better used for health care, infrastructure, food and clean water. MCC Washington Office staff members Theo Sittler and Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach presented during the Sunday school hour and worship service.

To request a speaker for your congregation, contact the office at 202-544-6564 or mccwash@mcc.org. For a list of speaking topics, visit washington.mcc.org/resources/speaking.

SAMPLE LETTER ON U.S. HOUSING

Dear [Member of Congress]

I am writing out of concern for millions of Americans who suffer from a lack of affordable, safe and adequate housing. Since the recession has hit, the majority of assistance has gone to corporate bailouts and the needs of homeowners.

I ask that Congress pass legislation which would share this needed assistance with all areas of the housing market, especially renters and low-income households who are particularly hurt by the recession.

Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development decreased by at least \$2 billion from 2005–2008. The result has been limited voucher assistance through Section 8 and continued depletion of public housing units.

To begin addressing these issues, I ask that you support full funding for the National Housing Trust Fund. These funds contribute directly to rentals and to the maintenance and creation of affordable housing.

I also urge you to pass legislation which mandates a one-to-one replacement of all demolished public housing units, and which provides adequate services to ensure a complete transition for households whose units are being demolished.

Sincerely,

Name and address

For a more detailed letter, visit washingtonmemo.org/newsletter/winter09.

abundant
life
economic
justice for all

Secure Dwelling Places: A home for everyone

Join the MCC Washington Office this winter to pray, reflect, and act for those in need of safe and secure homes. The suggested Sunday for action and reflection is January 31, although congregations may choose another Sunday if they prefer.

Sign up today at washington.mcc.org/life to indicate your congregation's participation. There are many ways to be involved—use one of the suggested prayers during Sunday morning worship, sign postcards to your elected officials, or organize an evening forum to learn more about the issue. Do as much or as little as you are able.

Together our efforts will point us toward Jesus' vision of Abundant Life for all.

Waging Peace in Sudan

On October 2, Mennonite Central Committee and fellow members of the Interfaith Sudan Working Group met with Joshua DuBois, the Obama administration's Director of the Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. DuBois stressed the important role of faith based communities in drawing attention to the ongoing tragedy in Sudan.

"The people of Sudan are facing significant challenges in the coming months. It's important for the President and faith community to unite and ensure peace for the entire country," says Cynthia Lapp, pastor of **Hyattsville Mennonite Church (Hyattsville, Md.)**. Lapp represented MCC at the meeting alongside fellow members of the Interfaith Sudan Working Group, a Washington, D.C.-based coalition of faith-based organizations working for lasting peace in Sudan.

The group asked administration officials to incorporate important policy recommendations from the Interfaith Sudan Working Group when they convene regular meetings prior to the upcoming election and referendum. The group also touched on other issues of concern such as violence against women in Sudan, which has been reported in staggering numbers.

Faith leaders delivered a letter signed by 1,410 Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy, including 100 Mennonite pastors. The letter urges the Obama administration to work with multilateral coalitions to ensure the Darfuri people can safely return to their homes and begin to rebuild their lives.

The letter also asks that the United States continue to pave the way for peace in the war-torn country and work toward full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005. Furthermore, the letter calls for greater attention to the lesser-known conflict in Eastern Sudan.

"This meeting allowed the faith community to express its united commitment to advocating for peace in Sudan," says Lapp. ✨

Days of Prayer and Action for Peace in Colombia April 16–19, 2010

Join hundreds of congregations across the United States and in Colombia to pray for an end to the conflict and to act for policy changes that better reflect the values of God's kingdom. Contact Theo Sittler at tsittler@mcc.org for details.

MCC Washington Staff Transitions



We welcome Christina Warner to our staff as Legislative Assistant for Domestic Affairs. Christina focuses on U.S. economic justice, crime and justice, civil rights and Native American concerns. She is a graduate of Huntington University and served with MCC's SALT program in India.

We also said farewell in November to John Filson, who was a three-month Legislative Fellow focusing on U.S. policy regarding Iraq. John recently finished a term as Program Coordinator for MCC Iraq.

This past fall we also enjoyed the contributions of two interns: Colin Boese Meddings and Zach Montoya. Information about our internship program is available at washington.mcc.org/advocate/internships.

IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

Senator _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3121
senate.gov

Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 224-3121
house.gov

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111
president@whitehouse.gov

MCC U.S. Washington Office
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washington.mcc.org
washingtonmemo.org

SIGN UP!

Sign up for our e-mail action alert lists by going to washington.mcc.org or by contacting gschlabach@mcc.org.

UPCOMING DATES

January 31

Secure dwelling places: A home for everyone
Suggested Sunday for action and reflection

March 19–22

Ecumenical Advocacy Days
advocacydays.org

April 16–19

Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia

April 25

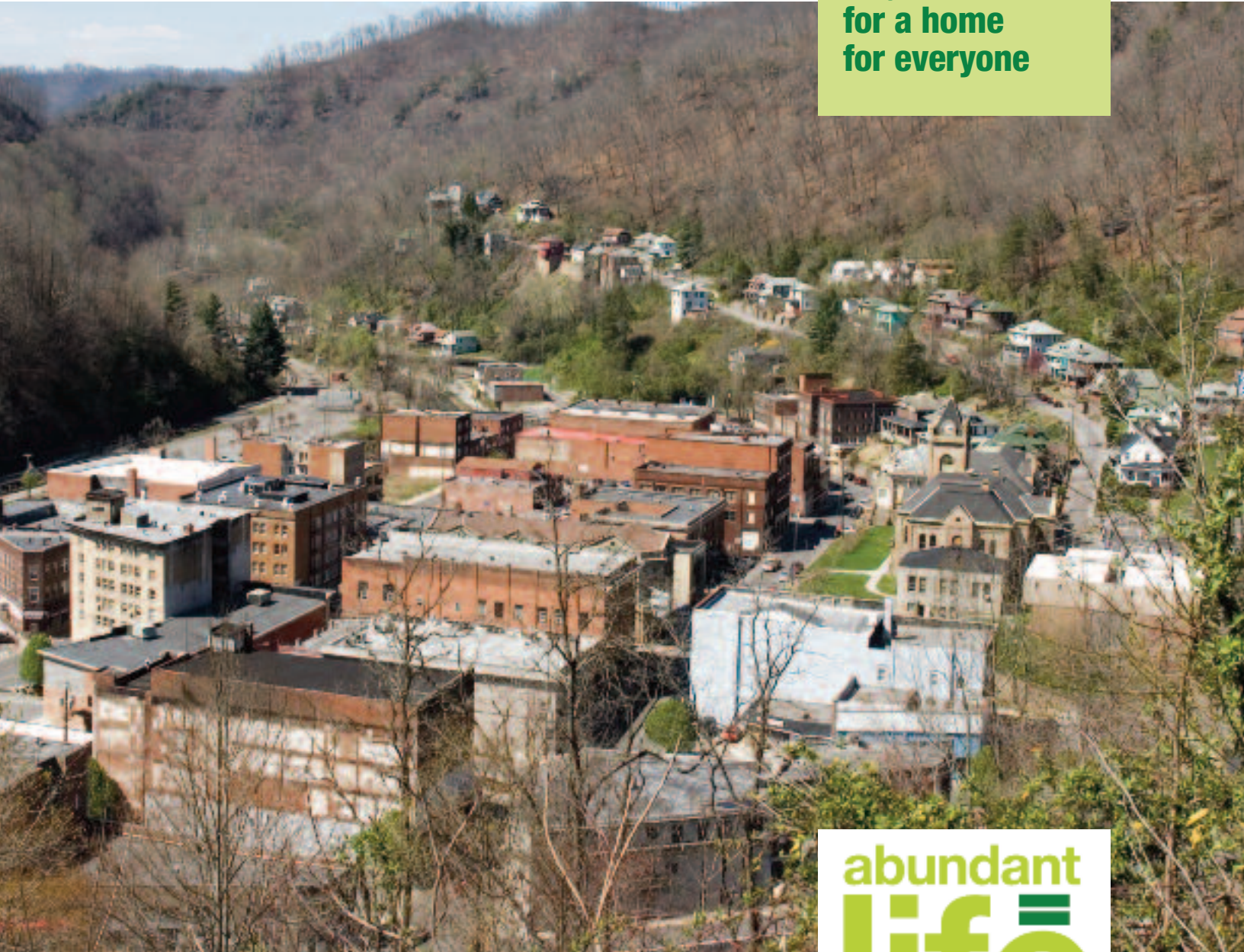
Let justice roll down:
Trade for the common good
Suggested Sunday for action and reflection

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All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

January 31
Pray and act
for a home
for everyone



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abundant
life
economic
justice for all

April 25
Pray and act
for just trade
policy