

July 7, 2011 SUMC [Prayer & Praise](#) Service

Message from Rev. Rick Moser



There is a name for *it*, but I can't remember or recall or even know where to start looking to find *it*. But *it's* choosing any text from the Bible by simply opening and pointing and letting that be your starting point. To speak about homeless, one would simply go to that overworked and underpaid scripture from Matthew about giving food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and clothes to the naked. But homelessness invades our lives on many levels. So I decided to open the Bible and see what was there and relate it to homelessness.

And my Bible opened to [Proverbs 8](#)...which is all about the goodness of wisdom...how it gives to us, how it was part of creation, how we are to seek it. "Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: 'To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. O simple ones, learn prudence, acquire intelligence, you who lack it.'"

When our oldest son got married Rachel and I went to the early communion at Trinity church in Durham. We surprised the pastor who is a good friend of ours and were talking when a truck arrived with beds. I helped unload them and learned that it was the week for Trinity to host the homeless families who were currently in the program. So I asked about it...and, at the time, it seemed overwhelming. As we built our new sanctuary at [Northwoods](#), we began to ask ourselves what other opportunities are going to be open for us. So we began to explore the [Interfaith Hospitality Network](#) which has, since, become Family Promise.

As we began the process, we sent mass mailing to pastors and we had a few responses...and Swansboro was one of them. The Family Promise program has four major areas. The first is having host churches. We need at least 13 churches. We have four currently. Four times a year our churches will host up to 14 people. They are families with children...maybe three or four families. The only commitment from the church is to provide supper, a safe place to sleep, a light breakfast the next day, and transportation to the Day Center. Churches say it costs between 2-300 dollars a week in some food and utility costs. Different entities within the church (Sunday school classes, scouts, youth groups, men's and women's groups) take turns providing meals and nightly activities like fellowship singing or movies or even games. But not late because children have to sleep! This is where churches excel in being the church.

The second area is fund-raising. We will secure pledges from businesses, individuals, foundations, and any other place we can think of. Member churches are not required to contribute. However, without much work, Northwoods has raised close to \$2,000 for Family Promise in the last six months. It was painless. There will be things like concerts to raise money and awareness.

The next area is having a director. This will be a social worker type person who is the heart and soul of the program. This person will run the Day Center, help families apply for jobs, screen families for admission into the program and be the one who helps connect these families to the network of resources available.

The last area is having a Day Center. This can be a house or an old business building or even a new structure. The Day Center is where families will go each morning. From there, children will be picked up for school, parents will head to work, apply for jobs or even learn basic parenting skills. It will have showers (in case the host churches does not) and be a place of comfort for children on days they don't have to be in school.

The cost of all of this is around \$90,000 dollars a year. This pays for the director, Day Center upkeep, and vehicle maintenance.

That's basic information. It's a lot to process and those of more discerning minds will have more questions as they receive more information. What do YOU need to know?

First: Being a host church is the most important thing. Churches that have done this, for the most part, enjoy their weeks of hosting. It gives people a chance to be in ministry and I think the best thing is that we're always surprised at who sits in the wings and waits for opportunities like this to come along. They want to be active in the church but don't know how. This provides a new one.

Second: You can be part of the fund-raising...but it's not up to host churches to raise money. It's up to us to host the families and contribute as we might.

Third: We deal with families. The school administration has identified hundreds of homeless students: they're living with relatives (which a lot of times is intolerable), moving from house to house, living in existing shelters, or living in vehicles.

Fourth: this program frees up room in shelters and restores some family unity and dignity. Parents are either set to work or given skills for parenting.

The reason? We're not wise. People would rather have a large screen TV than pay their water bills. We don't understand that by keeping the house overly cool or overly warm we create higher utility bills. I'll bet that most of you are just like me: you look for every way you can to save a dollar. But not one of you will think twice about walking out of this church and wondering who will turn off the AC!

Some people are homeless because they're not wise. They've made bad choices and now they're trying to make good ones. For some, life has been too hard. They don't mind dying. Any number of them are ashamed they can't do more for their children. Family Promise gives them a chance to make things right, to reclaim their lives, to understand some basic things that we take for granted. But most of all, they know that the church has cared for them.