



URBAN CONNECTIONS

Connecting with Christ, Connecting with People,
Developing our Community Together

OCTOBER 2013

JUSTICE

By Doug Hartman

Justice is an important theme in the Scriptures. In the Law of Moses, God commanded his people to “pursue” justice (Deut. 16:20). The Psalmists worshipped the Lord as the one who “loves justice” (Ps. 11:7, 33:5, 101:1) and spoke of righteousness and justice as the “foundation” of God’s throne (Ps. 89:14). Isaiah spoke of a day when God’s kingdom would be established on earth—a reign, he said, that would be established and upheld by righteousness and justice (Isa. 9:7). Jesus criticized the Pharisees in his day for concerning themselves with trivial matters while ignoring the important stuff like “justice and the love of God” (Luke 11:42). Like love or holiness, justice is who God is, how he rules, and characterizes what he does.

I gather that justice is important to most of us, too. As a father of two girls under the age of 4, it only takes a moment for cackles of laughter to turn into cries for justice. The protests against someone touching a ball or a milk cup can be downright vitriolic. Underlying that silliness is an understanding of justice: *Wait! That’s not fair!* The same is true for us as adults. Perhaps we’re not always aware of it, but we surely know it when it’s gone. *I’ve been waiting here 20 minutes, and he just cut right in front of me!!! I worked on that project for 6 months—and SHE gets the credit?!?* Justice, I believe, is not really something we learn. It seems more instinctual, more like something innate—a concern that bubbles up inside us like hunger or thirst. *(continued on pg 2-3)*



FIFTEEN YEAR INVESTMENT

by Burt Manchester



Fifteen years ago Urban Connections began with a summer VBS in front of a former crack house in the neighborhood. One of the kids who attended was a girl named Rayna.

- She attended regularly for tutoring, Bible Clubs, and outings.
- She received Christ as her Lord and Savior as a teenager.
- After completing her degree at a local university she began working in Columbus.

Two weeks ago she became a volunteer leader at Urban Connections and taught the Bible lesson this past week. One of our hopes and desires is to see more and more of our students returning as leaders at UC and in the community. Your investment counts!

OUR PLACE IN THE SCHOOL

by Cathy Alexander

This year we are blessed to extend our partnerships with the schools. At Fairwood Avenue Elementary, Burt will continue to teach a character class to a select group of students, teaching them traits like integrity and leadership. We are also working on staff support at Ohio Avenue Elementary, working with teachers on things like team building and conflict resolution.

Volunteers are invited to read with 3rd graders at Ohio Avenue - with a goal of spending time one on one with any student who is struggling. Ohio Avenue is also inviting us in to teach enrichment activities to students. If you can read or teach sewing, chess, gardening, or any other craft or activity to enrich kids’ lives one per week, please contact Cathy at cathy@urban-connections.org, or Burt at burt@urban-connections.org, as soon as possible.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

by Burt Manchester

“Under Construction” was our theme for this summer’s Kidz Camps. We focused on spiritual, physical, mental, and relationship building.

“Stan the Builder” (uncle of “Bob the Builder”) made several appearances to introduce the topic of the day. Daily activities involved Bible Talks, crafts, music and games. The first week temps were in the 90’s so water games were a big hit. After lunch we heard from community presenters sharing about Fire Safety, Poison Control, Nutrition and Physical Fitness (kids were able to make smoothies by riding a bike blender). Field trips included visiting “The Turtle Lady” at the neighborhood library, going to the lake and the Scioto Mile Spray Ground, (did I mention temps were in the 90’s), and traveling to Cincinnati to enjoy the Children’s Museum at the old Union Station.

Our third week of camp was a Fitness Camp. Kids rode bikes on the Alum Creek Bike Trail, played tennis and soccer at Wolfe Park, and challenged themselves on the DragonFly Zipline at Hocking Hills. For many it was a growth experience as they overcame their initial fears and stepped off the platforms to enjoy a high flying ride above the ground. The Fitness Camp was partially funded by a Neighborhood Partnership Grant through the United Way. In addition, we had two high school interns during the summer through a partnership with Central Community House.



BETTY'S HOUSE

by Cathy Alexander

Nearly 11 years ago when Cathy & Jason moved into the neighborhood, they had a neighbor named Betty. She was a believer who spent many days chatting with a very pregnant Cathy in the garden or on the porch. Betty be-friending Cathy is one of the reasons others were welcoming to Jason and Cathy. Betty had lived there for years, and was well known in the neighborhood. 10 years ago, Betty passed away after a surgery. For 10 years her house has sat empty. Through squatters, break-ins and thefts of plumbing and appliances, the house has sat empty and neglected. This spring, two of our supporting families purchased Betty’s House. We at UC are excited to partner with the owners to do what we can in the work towards stability for a family in our neighborhood. For our part we will be providing work teams for support. This summer we had our mission teams spend some mornings at the house tearing out all of the first floor’s plaster - 30 cubic yards of rubble!

The house needs plenty of work: plumbing and electrical, landscaping and eventually drywall, flooring, paint and appliances. If you have a group that can assist with any of the work, please call Cathy to arrange a work day.



Justice - continued from pg. 1

The Scriptures often connect the particular difficulties of the poor and vulnerable to justice issues. It can be a difficult to accept when coming from privilege, but social injustices almost always disproportionately affect the poor. Situations that may not even be more than an inconvenience to those in privilege (or indeed situations that can be avoided entirely by using one’s privilege)

prove devastating to the poor. Proverbs 13:23 pictures the poor being swept away by injustice, like a driving rain devastating a field. After years of living and working in our neighborhood, I can only say, “Yes, absolutely!” to that image. Time and time again, we see our friends and neighbors destroyed by situations beyond their control, situations that cry out for justice in our streets.

God’s response to our injustice is so intense at times that we may wonder, “Really, what is the big deal?” The issue that sparks God’s outrage can seem pretty trivial, too: someone’s tunic is taken, people are passed over in food distribution, a field is taken away, someone’s grinding stone was repossessed. But this is to underestimate the dramatic ways we as people can sweep in and bring ruin upon the lives of others. It is different, isn’t it, if that is my only tunic and I might freeze to death without it? Or, if I don’t get to eat today because you skipped me? Or, if that grinding stone is how I feed my family and pay my bills? What would it say about God if he were callous and indifferent to such things?

In our neighborhood, we have more than our fair share of “everyday” injustices. These are things that affect us on a daily basis that we must find ways to deal with and overcome:



- Companies and individuals (from outside the community) buy properties in the neighborhood and abandon them, leaving them unkept for years at a time
- Fathers abandoning their families
- People from outside the community using our neighborhood as a trash dump
- Drug dealers & gangs terrorizing the community
- Negligent landlords
- Poorly performing schools
- Very few opportunities to work
- Sex trade and prostitution

That’s a short list, honestly. Compounding almost every problem further is a lack of enforcement. Things that would never fly in other neighborhoods go on and on unchecked here. It is not that it is legal to dump trash in our community. But you can spot someone in the act, call the police, and the nothing happens. There are many laws & code about maintaining your property. Yet, complaining about 3-foot tall weeds around a burned-out, abandoned building may get the grass mowed (by the city) once a year, but there are few consequences for the property owners. To me it seems that responses to such complaints are meant to pacify the people affected by the issues rather than actually dealing with the underlying

issues in a meaningful way.

The everyday atrocities get personal, too. One of our UC families was recently kicked out of their home. They are homeless now not because of negligence or laziness, but because the home they paid good money for was so poorly maintained by their landlord that it was declared uninhabitable. It wasn’t their fault. They work, they pay rent, but they were forced to move out anyway. And they don’t have the resources to just find another place. This family with two little girls (not much older than my own) is now living in a shelter. They aren’t perfect, but they were trying, making some good choices, doing the right thing, but it didn’t matter. They have been swept away by injustice.



This is why it is so important to not address the issues in neighborhoods like ours just on an individual level, to not only talk about the need to make positive choices and to do “the right thing”—*as important as that is!* We must also think about the systems and structures in our society, to address how the powers and rules in society affect people. If changes are made that don’t work, we need to have the commitment to make more changes until we get it right. Because those systems and structures are important.

When injustice affects us directly, we can react strongly & passionately. We speak out. We protest. *But, but—that’s not fair!* What about when injustice strikes the people around us, particularly, those who are most vulnerable to it? When we witness injustice, it may be less instinctive, less of a gut reaction to object. I think that’s normal. But the Scriptures teach us that addressing injustice is something God develops within us—a trait God grows in his children. “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern,” the Bible says (Prov. 29:7). God loves justice. Surely being Christ-like must involve us learning to love it, too.

I can’t stop thinking of Jesus’ teaching in this context, that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. What would I do if my family were kicked out of our house? How vehemently would I protest? I think we can easily underestimate the influence we can have and the difference we can make, being an advocate, being a



voice for those who have none. I know people who have spoken out at Capital Hill in Washington and at public school meetings, in courtrooms and in the grocery store. In our neighborhood, we surely need some more people who will fight for justice.



WAYS TO HELP URBAN CONNECTIONS

NEEDED ITEMS FOR THE UC HOUSE

- Drink mix
- BBQ Sauce
- Ketchup
- Ranch dressing
- Mac & Cheese
- Pasta
- Spaghetti

SAVES THESE DATES!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

October 21: Pumpkin Patch Field Trip

November 16: Hiking Outing

December 21: Christmas Party

January 18: Roller Skating Field Trip

PLANNING AND PARADING

by Cathy Alexander

For the second consecutive year, the Columbus Children's Parade took place on Main Street, in our neighborhood. We are delighted to participate both in the parade itself and also in the planning. As part of the planning committee, we know how much work the committee does to make the parade happen. We'd like to thank the committee, Central Community House, Hot Times Festival, Traxler Tees, Columbus Police Department, Columbus Fire Department, and the Neighborhood Partnership Grant for all their contributions to the event.

This event continues to be a fun celebration of one of the greatest assets this community has to offer - youth and the organizations that serve them. We invite you to join us next year by volunteering at the parade, walking in the parade with UC, or being a spectator - the kids love to wave to all the people that have come to watch!



**URBAN
CONNECTIONS**

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