

February 2007

# The Poverty Program

## PROGRAM SCHEDULE

**MAR 18, 2 PM BELLEVILLE CHURCH, chairperson Rev. Ross Varney  
EDUCATION AND POVERTY - Movie *BOYS FROM BARAKA***

**APR 15, 2 PM BELLEVILLE CHURCH, chairperson Bob Crofts  
GLOBALIZATION, POVERTY, AND DEBT**

**MAY 20, 2 PM UNITARIAN CHURCH, chairperson Rob Burnham  
HUMAN RIGHTS - Movie *SOLDIER CHILDREN***

**JUN TBA QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, chairperson Sam Baily  
ARMS TRADE - Movie *LORD OF WAR***

**JUL 22, 6:30 PM CONG. AHAVAS ACHIM, chairperson Rabbi Stanley Sadinsky  
GENOCIDE - Movie *DARFUR DIARIES***

**AUG 19, 2PM TBA, chairperson Whitney Erskine  
AIDS/HIV - Movie *FACING AIDS***

**SEP 16, 2 PM BELLEVILLE CHURCH, chairperson Helen Hatcher  
UN TEACE EVENT - Movie *PEACE ONE DAY***

**OCT TBA: Millennium Goals, Volunteer Job Fair**

**NOV TBA: Coming Together Event**

**If you would like to become involved with any of the programs,  
please email [povertyprogram@gmail.com](mailto:povertyprogram@gmail.com).**

## WEBSITE UPDATE

**[povertyprogram.com](http://povertyprogram.com)**

By March 1 we should have a website (designed by Tatiana Harrison) and our email will be [povertyprogram@gmail.com](mailto:povertyprogram@gmail.com). The purpose of the website is three-fold: first to educate and to publicize social and moral issues events that impact poverty here at home and in the world; second, a website for use by the Doyle Center and other service organizations in the area to list their services and their volunteer needs; and third as a central place to list community events that impact issues of poverty and social, moral issues. Check out the website, pass the word and let me know if I missed an organization that we should list or would like an event listed, send us an email.

**Contents:**

*Program Schedule* ..... 1  
*Website Update*..... 1  
*Feb. Program – American Poverty*..... 2  
*Presenters’ Update*..... 4  
*Upcoming Events*..... 4  
*Children’s News* ..... 6  
*USA at the Bottom with Mexico*..... 7

**NEWSLETTER** If you would like to receive the newsletter or stop receiving it: email [povertyprogram@gmail.com](mailto:povertyprogram@gmail.com) or contact Catherine Gould at her home address. Letters to the editor and articles may be submitted by emailing [povertyprogram@gmail.com](mailto:povertyprogram@gmail.com) .

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM -- AMERICAN POVERTY

Margot Siegmann, February Chairperson, provided us with an incredible program. Margot began the presentation talking about her own family's experience with poverty and how the kindness of strangers lifted them out of poverty. Her mother and six brothers, the oldest being 13 and the youngest six weeks, were orphaned in 1918 in Virginia. The Rotary Club of Lynchburg adopted the family and even provided for all seven children to attend college.

Donna Sylvester, Office of Family Development of the Salvation Army spoke of how she grew up in a working family in factory town and how she thought she was rich but wasn't: "Those days everyone who worked did ok" and things were reasonably priced with "doctor's visits costing \$5 and you could afford nutritious food. Things were not always in crisis. People aren't making ends meet now."

She has seen enormous changes in the last 10 years. She talked about poverty here in Newburyport; that the working poor are poorer than they were a few years ago due largely from increases in expenses from housing to medical care while incomes have remained stagnant. The face of poverty now includes middle aged women who've just divorced and two-income college educated families who can't afford to heat their home. She stated that the number one reason for filing for personal bankruptcy is medical costs.

When asked what individuals could do, she replied that donating fresh or frozen fruit and vegetable would be an enormous help in improving the diet of the working poor. She stated that food pantries and soup kitchens are crucial to the working poor but the inadequate nutrition of providing largely starches and few fresh fruits and vegetables is potentially increasing diabetes. Donna went on to say that we need to "be more of a community, offer what you can to others without intruding on their sense of space and privacy. You can't tell who is poor in Newburyport - they might be your neighbors. Poverty in Newburyport is more hidden than in other towns".

Ed Cameron, Associate Executive Director of Division of Housing & Homeless, has worked with the homeless for 20 years from the Pine Street Inn to Mayor Menino's Emergency Group on Homeless, to currently working with the homeless in the Greater Lowell area. He said that the people they see are only the tip of the iceberg and the counted numbers do not include those living in the woods and campgrounds. Massachusetts spends \$100 million on homeless shelters and there are "1,600 families on a given night" in shelters, mostly single mothers with an average of two children. There are over "3,000 single individuals in state funded slots." The causes for family homelessness tend to be economic. Single individuals while also having economic reasons are likely to also have substance abuse or mental health issues.

The number one reason for homelessness is the lack of affordable housing: the medium home price in 1990 was around 175,000, 2000 medium house rose to 314,000. Rental prices in Lawrence and Lowell over \$1,000 for a 2-bedroom. The poverty level of under \$25,000 for a family of 4, based on 30% of income allocated for housing. This translates into low-income families being able to afford only around \$600 for an apartment.

Low income jobs have also changed over the years, adding to the problem as these jobs have gone overseas and uneducated people have fewer job opportunities than they had in the past. The factories have moved overseas; even working at McDonald's now requires some computer skills. Low income, low educated people have fewer job prospects than in the past.

He also stated that over the years, family structure has changed and that there are more children living in single parent households, primarily mothers. The most shocking thing that Ed had to say was how families must apply for shelter through the welfare office; must provide documentation; must not have "caused" their homelessness; and must prove they are below the federal poverty level; whereas single individuals have no screening procedures and if they become homeless over a weekend, single individuals have access to shelters whereas families have to wait until the welfare office is open! Shocking.

Ed ended by saying that "40% of American children living in poverty is a small part of our population, but they are 100% of our future".

During the question period, several items were raised that we as individuals could do.

- Bob Gould brought up the issue of the upcoming election and that the issues of poverty be raised to the candidates for their response. To that end, if you would like to submit a question for candidates in the upcoming election, the Poverty Program will submit to each candidate a selected list of questions and post all the responses on the website. To submit questions, email [povertyprogram@gmail.com](mailto:povertyprogram@gmail.com). Please put "candidate questions" in the subject line.
- A question regarding whether food from area restaurants and farms is being recycled to the food pantry or meal programs. Donna Sylvester did not believe that this was being done. The Poverty Program has emailed Second Harvest to get information on starting a food recycling program in the area.
- A question about regarding the nutrition in the area schools was also raised and the Poverty Program has contacted the Newburyport Superintendent.
- Ed Cameron stated that one thing that people could do to help the homeless would be to call our State Representative, Mike Costello (email: [Rep.MichaelCostello@hou.state.ma.us](mailto:Rep.MichaelCostello@hou.state.ma.us), phone 617-722-2575), and ask him what he is doing about homelessness, increasing affordable low-income housing, section 8 and ask him to take action.

An attendee emailed: "I still think of yesterday afternoon's mtg. and the sense of care and seriousness and dignity with which the topic of poverty in Nbpt. was discussed. Margot gave the 'personal' story and Ed and Donna told us how the 'system' works and their dreams for the future and their restraints under which they work each day." So true.

**Some additional facts done by a study by the Center for Housing Policy (<http://www.nhc.org/index/chp-research-publications>) on contributing factors to homelessness:**

- **Annual income of \$85,000 needed to afford median-priced home.**
- **Median-priced home prices declined 2 %, but mortgage rates rose.**
- **Low - paid employment pay only went up 3%.**
- **A \$500,000 home requires a salary of \$171,000.**
- **A \$250,000 home requires a salary of \$87,000.**
- **A \$85,000 home requires a salary of \$30,000.**
- **Home ownership = ability to pay down payment and 28% of salary towards mortgage, property taxes and insurance.**
- **\$10 an hour, 40 hours week, 52 weeks a year = \$20,800.**
- **Unaffordable housing is the major reason families don't have health insurance.**
  - **Housing prices are vastly different across the country: low-jobs pay the same across the nation.**
- **MA average home price \$350,000, average condo price \$250,000.**

**For information on RAFT, a program mentioned by Ed:**

**<http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/publications/OutsideTheBox-RAFT%20Plus%20-ExecSumm-12-06.pdf>**

**MA State Statistics (<http://www.everychildmatters.org/homelandinsecurity/states-MA.html>)**

- **Children in MA 1,458,036**
- **Children Living in Poverty (2005) - 194,294**
- **Children Not Covered by Health Insurance at Any Time in 2005 - 67,000**
- **Children's Health Care Covered by Government Assistance (2005) - 353,000**

- **Children Reported Abused (2004) - 38,942**
- **2 Year Olds Not Immunized (2004)- 6,769 (8.5%)**
- **Child Abuse Deaths (2000-2004) – 102**
- **3-4 Year Olds Not Enrolled in a nursery school, pre-school, or pre-kindergarten education program (2004) - 63,316 (40.5%)**
- **% of 4th Graders Scoring below Basic Reading Levels (2005) - 22**

**Thanks to the many people who made this program a success!**

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## **PRESENTERS' UPDATE**

Please make note of the following contacts for publicity. Please contact them 14 days prior to the program date:

- Daily News: Sonya Vartabedian - svatabedian@ecnnews.com
- Current: Gage Gagwell - 978-739-8513
- The Town Common - Kisten Davis events@thetowncommon.com
- Amnesty Newsletter: Cynthia Gabriel cgabriel@aiusa.org

Church notices and articles are due by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the prior month. Please contact the individual churches and for Belleville, please email to catherine\_gould@hotmail.com and I will forward.

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **REFUGEES AND CHILD SOLDIERS**

**Special program  
Sunday, Feb. 25, 12 noon  
Unitarian Church**

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### **MARCH ON PENTAGON**

**Saturday, March 17  
Washington, DC**

On March 17, 2007, the 4th anniversary of the start of the invasion of Iraq, tens of thousands of people from around the country will descend on the Pentagon in a mass demonstration to demand: U.S. Out of Iraq Now! **Location:** Pentagon, Washington DC

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## **EDUCATION AND POVERTY**

**Sunday, March 18, 2 pm  
Belleville Church**

Ross Varney, pastor of the Belleville Church and March chairperson, will talk about American education; Sue Heersink will talk about the BEADS for education program in Kenya; Gail Gandolfi will talk about her mission experience teaching English as a second language in Mexico, followed by the documentary The Boys of Baraka (see below for description) and a discussion/question period.

**The Boys of Baraka (2005)**

Baltimore, MD, is a city where crime, drugs, and juvenile delinquency have crippled the African-American community, and it has been estimated that as many as 75 percent of African-American males in Baltimore drop out of high school each year. With this in mind, in the '90s a program was created to help at-risk students from Baltimore with academic promise achieve their potential -- 20 young men each year were sent to the Baraka School, a special institution in Kenya. There, students experience a simpler, more rural lifestyle than they would in the city, while at school they are subject to a degree of discipline and academic rigor unknown at home. Filmmakers Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady followed a group of students to the Baraka School, and Boys of Baraka offers a look at the impoverished circumstances the young men left behind, and the ups and downs of their new lives on another continent. Produced in cooperation with PBS, Boys of Baraka received its world premier at the 2005 South by Southwest Film Festival. ~ Mark Deming, All Movie Guide

Let's all try to attend the March 18<sup>th</sup>  
presentation on Education and Poverty.

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**POVERTY OVERVIEW REPEAT**

We have had a couple of calls requesting a repeat presentation of the poverty overview program, the first presentation in the series. If you missed this presentation and are interested in seeing it, please email or call, and we will let you know when it will be.

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**THE DARFUR/DARFUR EXHIBIT**

**Friday, September 7  
Boston, MA**

**Samantha Powers to speak, Yo-Yo Ma will do a closing piece.**

DARFUR/DARFUR is a traveling exhibit of digitally-projected changing images that provide visual education about the richly multi-cultural region while exposing the horrors of the ongoing humanitarian crisis. [darfurdarfur.org](http://www.thedevilcameonhorseback.com/home.html), <http://www.thedevilcameonhorseback.com/home.html>

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**VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT**

**Next month we will start having a monthly feature focusing on one volunteer opportunity. If you know of a organization that needs volunteers, have them contact us.**

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## CHILDREN'S NEWS

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### NICK 2015

Nickelodeon has joined up with the Millennium Campaign and has a great website for kids: <http://www.nick2015.com/>

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### NEW UNICEF GAME

**Play the new UNICEF game, Ayiti, The Cost of Life. What's it like to be poor? Play the game and find out how hard it is to be poor.**

"It was created by a group of high school students to illustrate how difficult it is for poor families to stay on top of finances, education, and health. It follows four years broken down into sixteen seasons, and you have to assign each of the family members a new task each season. Either they go to work, go to school, go to the hospital, or stay at home to rest. Random events pop up that will affect the family positively or negatively."

[http://www.holymeatballs.org/playing\\_4\\_keeps/](http://www.holymeatballs.org/playing_4_keeps/)

<http://ayiti.newzcrew.org/ayitiunicef/>

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### CHILDREN'S ART COMPETITION

**ART COMPETITION FOR CHILDREN TO DESIGN A UN STAMP ON THE THEME 'WE CAN END POVERTY'**

**DEADLINE JUNE 30, 2007**

**For more information:**

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/art.htm>

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### GREETING CARD CONTEST

**ART CONTEST TO DESIGN UNICEF GREETING CARDS.**

**DEADLINE APRIL 11, 2007**

**For more information:**

[http://www.unicefusa.org/site/c.duLRI8O0H/b.46132/k.DE9F/Greeting\\_Card\\_Contest\\_Youth\\_Action\\_US\\_Fund\\_for\\_UNICEF.htm](http://www.unicefusa.org/site/c.duLRI8O0H/b.46132/k.DE9F/Greeting_Card_Contest_Youth_Action_US_Fund_for_UNICEF.htm)

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## **LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

### **Drink tap water, not bottled water.**

**FACTS:** According to the United Nations, if we took half of what is currently spent on bottled water (approximately \$100 billion annually) and invested it in water infrastructure and treatment, everyone in the world could have access to clean drinking water.

The U.S. EPA sets more stringent quality standards for tap water than the FDA does for bottled water. Approximately 40% of bottled water is actually tap water. It takes 1.5 billion barrels of oil to produce the plastic for water bottles. According to the Container Recycling Institute, only 14% of plastic water bottles are recycled. A water bottle in a landfill will take more than 1000 years to biodegrade.

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## **USA AT THE BOTTOM WITH MEXICO:**

### **Not a record to be proud of**

*by Catherine Yesair Gould*

We like to think of our country as being the best in the world. If only we were when it comes to child poverty statistics. A recent publication by UNICEF on the state of children in the rich, developed world, has some startling facts. Of the rich nations in the world, Norway, Finland and Denmark have the lowest number of children living in poverty - under 3%. The United States on the other hand is at the bottom of the heap with only Mexico having worse child poverty levels!

- UNITED STATES (21.9%) and Mexico (27.7%) of children living in poverty.
- Over the last 10 years, 17 of the 21 nations have seen their child poverty levels rise.
- Percentage of children in the USA living below the medium income:  
50% below = 21.9%, 40% below = 14.1%, 60% below = 30.2%.

It is a sad fact that there are 40-50 million children living in poverty in the richest nations of the world. And even sadder is the close correlation between child poverty and educational under-achievement, poor health, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, criminal behavior, unemployment and long-term welfare dependency. When you look at the costs of society dealing with the results of child poverty, isn't it more cost effective to address the issue of child poverty rather than the long-term costs, not only in terms of money costs but the society costs of child poverty? And poverty is an inherited problem, by addressing child poverty issues and raising these children out poverty, we are not only making a better life for that one child, but for future generations of children. The report states: "child poverty appears to be a consistent and catalytic element in the mix of circumstances that perpetuate such problems from one generation to the next."

How is poverty defined in the United States? The poverty threshold is set at "3 times the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet" times family size and adjusted for inflation. This definition hasn't changed since the 1960's and today the poverty line is under \$20,000 for a family of 4. There has been a lot of rhetoric about reducing child poverty. It is time for a commitment that encompasses not only words but actions on the part of not only the government but a commitment on the part of all individuals. We must do all that we can to raise these children out of poverty - for their sakes, their children's sake but also for the overall improvement of society: "Protecting children from the sharpest edges of poverty during their years of growth and formation is therefore a mark of a civilized society".

The report further goes on to state that "Allowing the kind of poverty that denies a child the kind of opportunities that most children consider normal is a violation of the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of Children... The moving spirit of the Convention on the Rights of Children is that children should have the 'first call' on society's concerns and capacities in order to protect their vital, vulnerable years of growth from the mistakes, misfortunes and vicissitudes of the adult world. Their right to grow up with a level of material resources sufficient to protect their physical and mental development, and to allow their participation in the life of the societies into which they were born, is a right to be protected in good times and in bad."

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**Poverty is the worst form of violence**  
Mahatma Gandhi

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