



Spotlight on...

MT. LEBANON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

By: Holly B. Schultz

I still remember the evening that our pastor, Oden Warman, explained Family Promise (formerly Interfaith Hospitality Network) to the Church and Society Committee at Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church (MLUM). We were spread out around a large square table – and we could see each other's faces. Hearing how the guests move from church to church left us confused. We all had many questions concerning logistics. And typical of many churches, we had our doubts that we had the right kind of space, and especially that we could generate enough volunteers. Pastor Warman presented us with two possibilities: becoming a host congregation or supporting a host church nearby. Those of us in the room got a clear sense that we at MLUM had an unusual opportunity to serve families in need right here in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Mission is a very important component of the United Methodist Church. MLUM has formed relationships with and supports churches in Lithuania, East Germany, hospitals in Sierra Leone and orphanages and schools in Zimbabwe. Though groups within our church volunteer monthly with area missions, food banks and agencies, this commitment would be available to virtually everyone in our church. That is what excited us around that table that evening.

Barbara Watson, our coordinator at MLUM, recalls how she became involved with Family Promise. "When we decided to become a host church, I signed up for dinner prep. Then I was asked to be a co-coordinator. I accepted that reluctantly, relieved I would be an assistant. Well, I became the coordinator by default. .. But being involved, really involved, is pretty much a life changer. Mike Naragon from our church spearheaded our becoming a host church for Family Promise. He's the heart and soul of the program at MLUMC."

"Though it's hard to witness the suffering of families, our church has profited as more and more people discover the program and become involved. We are learning how we can help families cope. And it's very rewarding watching our guests take the steps they need to improve their lives," says Barbara.

By joining the Pittsburgh Circle as a host church, we have been given the chance to do something remarkable with an effort that is doable – and not nearly as overwhelming as it first sounds! We get to meet and maybe even get to know these families, cook for them, give them a safe haven in one of our first-floor Sunday School classrooms, and maybe, just maybe – we can make a tiny difference to someone.

It's been 4 years. My heart tells me we're making an impact in countless ways. And the funny thing is how profoundly MLUMC is being transformed each week we serve Family Promise.