

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers and supporters of Project Understanding



Volume XXV No. 3
(Monthly)

March 2010

Rick Pearson's Farewell Party

Thursday
April 22
4:30 - 7 p.m.

Please see the invitation on page 3. Everyone is invited!

Unemployment rate falls, but rental assistance is still in high demand!

By Ericka Manrique
Housing Case Manager

With the holidays officially over and tax season in full swing, many families are back dealing with the stressfulness of the economy. The unemployment rate fell from 10.0% to 9.7% in January, and nonfarm payroll employment was essentially unchanged, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. Employment fell in construction and in transportation and warehousing, while temporary help services and retail trade added jobs. Even though some jobs have been added to the job market, individuals are not able to afford living expenses, such as housing.

With this in mind the rental assistance program has been in high demand here at Project Understanding. Each day we receive about thirty to forty calls from families inquiring about rental assistance.

The rental assistance program is designed to help those who have suffered a financial

See Eviction on P. 2

New Pantry now open — come see it Open House and Dedication on March 13, 10 a.m. to noon

The Food Pantry has moved from its old location in the Project Understanding building at 43 E. Vince Street to the previous Avenue Tutoring site at the corner of Ventura Avenue and Vince Street.

Come and see the spacious, bright, and airy new Pantry at its Open House and Dedication on Saturday, March 13, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Everyone is invited!



Above: Randy Ringen (L), Pantry coordinator, talks with volunteers.



Right: Randy (C) and volunteer Diana (R) assist Pantry guest (L).



Left: Pantry volunteer Barbee (L), greets the first guest on the opening day.

Eviction

Continued from P. 1

hardship and can not make their rent payment due to a medical expense, car expense, or other unexpected financial hardship.

As of February 17, 2010, we have assisted families with over \$7,000 in rental assistance for the year of 2010. Let me tell you about one of these families.

A single mother came to Project Understanding in need of rental assistance. She does not receive any government assistance for herself or her five-year-old daughter. She is employed full time in the restaurant industry and is entering school for a new employment skill in order to stop living paycheck to paycheck.

The school required a deposit of \$1,000 in order to start the training. This woman thought she would be able to make both rent and the school deposit but due to her daughter getting sick she had to take some days off work. This led to her being short with her rent.

Project Understanding was able to provide her with the rent for the month of February. This allowed this mother to have her stressed relieved and to begin her school. She plans to graduate the program by September of 2010 and will be able to start her career. With the help of Project Understanding she was able to stay housed as well as start her school.

This is one of the many stories of success this program has created, and we here at Project Understanding are blessed to have served these families when they were faced with such harsh situations. ♦

What does God have to do with Project Understanding?

Editors note: The content of the following article is from Nancy's devotion at a recent meeting of the Project Understanding board of directors.

By Nancy Barna, a member of Project Understanding's Board of Directors

What does God have to do with Project Understanding? My answer to that would be "everything." Project Understanding was initiated to fulfill God's response to the poor in Ventura. Seventy-two percent of all people believe that poverty in this country is one of the most serious social problems. Project Understanding exists to address those needs.

The God that we serve has been concerned about meeting his people's needs from the time that he supplied skins to clothe Adam and Eve until the present day. The teaching in the Bible can be summed up as commanding "Love God and love your neighbor." The Bible is clear about its mandate for us to love others, especially the less fortunate.

I believe that the unique role of Project Understanding is to reflect our God by loving our neighbor in need with our heart, mind, strength and soul. We show our heart when we take the time to listen and care for the hurting. We share our mind when we offer solutions to help solve the problems our clients face. Our strength can be seen in the consistent assistance we are able to offer. We are available to those in need when the

needs arise. We love with our soul when we pray with and for our clients. We allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to touch those around us and to address their needs.

I believe that our God sends us every client who comes in our door. They are fulfilling a divine appointment. Many think that they are coming in for food, rental assistance, a shower or maybe to be tutored, but the God of the universe sees their needs much deeper — loneliness, hopelessness, family strife etc. . . . Healing these wounds is the specialty of the great physician. We are the physician's assistants.

Mary came in one day. She was in crisis because her husband had just lost his job. After a brief conversation we prayed. At the end of a tearful prayer she looked up and said, "I don't really need food. Until now I didn't know why I decided to come in this morning. I guess I just needed someone to pray with." Mary went home that day with a renewed sense of hope and a connection with God that was provided through our organization. We have the privilege to be his representatives. ♦

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*Please join us for
a Retirement Celebration
you won't want to miss!*

*Rick Pearson is retiring after 20 years of service
as executive director of Project Understanding.*

*Join us for fun, food, and friends.
Pictures, stories and donations.*

Thursday, April 22, 2010

From 4:30 to 7:00 p.m. (Presentation at 5:15 p.m.)

At the Wedgewood Center

5800 Olivas Park Drive (near Victoria), Ventura

\$15.00 per person

Rick Pearson Celebration

Yes, I want to be a part of the Celebration for Rick Pearson.

Enclosed is \$ _____ for _____ tickets.

Sorry, I can't be there, but here is my gift of \$ _____ in Rick's honor.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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(Please make checks payable to Project Understanding.)



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*“What does the Lord require
of you but to do justice, and to
love kindness, and to walk
humbly with your God?”*

Micah 6:8

Our Mission and Programs

Mission

Project Understanding is a faith-based agency founded and established on the principles and ideals of Judaism and Christianity whose mission is twofold: to do justice by serving the poor, hungry and oppressed with compassion and mercy, and to provide avenues for those who wish to serve others.

Programs

Project Understanding initiates, develops, and maintains special projects pulling together the efforts of individuals, local congregations and groups to meet the needs of the less fortunate. The programs are:

Reception Center

A program that utilizes an intake process with skilled, supportive listeners to minister to and assess the needs of individuals and families in order to make appropriate referrals.

Focus on Food Emergency Food Pantry

A pantry program designed to help homeless and hungry people through times of crisis. The pantry provides recipients with a three-day supply of food.

SARAH (Simply Arranging Real Assistance Here)

A source of basic services for homeless people. Services include shower and laundry facilities, a mail and message center for job seekers, and assistance in attaining food and shelter.

Tutoring Program

To assist economically disadvantaged children, this program provides one hour per week of extra classroom instruction with volunteer tutors in one-to-one interaction at five locations in Ventura and Oxnard.

Religious Coalition for the Homeless

Churches and synagogues join in faith-based action to provide transitional shelter and a voice for the homeless of Ventura County.

SHORE (Supportive Housing Opportunities in a Residential Environment)

Project Understanding provides 15 units of permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless people in the WAV Project in downtown Ventura.

The Bread of Life

Five congregations are working together to prepare and serve meals to hungry people in Oxnard each week.

Jim Grimes retires as SARAH coordinator

■ **Craig Shaw named to fill the position.**

Jim Grimes, coordinator of the SARAH (Simply Arranging Real Assistance Here) program at Project Understanding for the past five years, recently announced his intention to retire.



After five years as the SARAH Center coordinator, Jim Grimes has retired.

Jim began in the SARAH Center as a part-time paid assistant through a Senior Aides program which pays a stipend to seniors who work in nonprofit agencies. He stayed on as a volunteer after the funding through that program ended.

When longtime SARAH co-coordinators Shari Kempton and Renee Hall left in 2005, Jim was named to the position.

Jim has brought a calm and caring spirit to the often chaotic environment that is the SARAH Center, and his presence will be greatly missed.

We wish him the very best in his retirement.

This is what Jim wrote as he prepared to leave the position:

Jim Grimes has left the building.

It is now time for me to move on and prepare for a new life called retirement.

But before leaving Project Understanding I would like to thank the staff and all of the wonderful volunteers that make Project Understanding what it has become, a place that's been there to help anyone in need.

I have learned your faith grows stronger when it is put into practice. This is something I will take with me in the years to come. Farewell and may God be with you.

Meet Craig Shaw, the new SARAH coordinator.

Craig moved to California from Maine to pursue the sport of mountain climbing and settled in the Chatsworth area. For the next thirty years Craig worked as a mountain guide and chimney sweep.



Craig Shaw begins as the new SARAH coordinator.

Since Craig's son Sam has gone on to college, Craig moved to Ventura, a city he always enjoyed. While pursuing employment Craig felt in his heart that he should be involved in helping the homeless. This is what brought him to Project Understanding, where he was a volunteer case assistant.

Craig is now looking forward to carrying on Jim's work in the SARAH Center. ♦

Growing up

Continued from P. 8

line — well into my thirties — I discovered that I could string words together in ways that made some sense.

So, at least one of the things I am going to do is to do what aspiring writers do in the twenty-first century. I am going to blog. Specifically, I am going to blog on the lectionary.

Those of you who are associated with more liturgical traditions of the Christian faith are familiar with the lectionary. For those who are not, the lectionary is a list of scripture texts to be read on each Sunday throughout the Church year.

The so-called “Revised Common Lectionary” is used with minor variations by the Catholic Church and most of the major Protestant traditions (including my own United Methodist Church).

Each week there are four texts — one from the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament), one from the Psalms, one from the Epistles and one from the Gospels. It is my intention to blog on the weekly texts from this lectionary.

Now I am by no means the first to think of blogging on the lectionary texts. But I believe that I do have an approach to the texts that will set mine apart.

I am approaching the texts to see if I can discern what they are saying to the way I actually live my life — what I do.

When people responded to the preaching of John the Baptist and repented, their natural question was “And what should we do?” That is the question I will have constantly before me. If we are to take these texts

See Growing up on P. 7



Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed cash to our program during the month of January:

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 Ojai Presbyterian Church
 Pythian Sisters
 Temple Beth Torah, Ventura
 County Jewish Council
 United Way of Ventura County

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed food and other items to our program in January:

Individuals

Charlene Boxx
 Frank & Dianne Maggio
 Elise Schneider

Churches & Organizations

Church of the Foothills
 Coastline Bible Church
 College United Methodist Church
 CVS Pharmacy
 CVS Pharmacy - Ventura
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 San Buenaventura Women's Club
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Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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Author and researcher George Barna is coming to speak in May

Start planning now to join George Barna, author and researcher, for a dessert and presentation on helping those in need.

Details to be in next month's *Project Understanding News*.

Growing up

Continued from P. 5

seriously my question is not “What should we believe?” or “What should we feel?” but rather, “What should we DO?”

Many of the blogs on the lectionary are intended to help preachers decide what to say. Or to help Christians know what to believe. Or to feel. I certainly hope that what I write will help people do all these things. But I want to help people, including myself, live in ways that make others see God in me.

I am old enough to remember the folk-hymn, “They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love.” I want people to look at the way I live my life and say, “That man is a Christian.” In a society that already considers itself Christian, that may be a tall order.

If you have enjoyed what I have written over the years, I invite you to join me in this new adventure. Maybe we can all grow up to be Christians. ♦

You will find my blog at
www.RhetoRick.com.



Rheto-Rick

When I grow up

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

For the last few months, I have been feeling like I was ten years old again. Ever since I announced that I would be stepping down as executive director, people have been asking me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Well, they may have worded it a little differently but that was the gist of the question.

My decision to leave my position here at Project Understanding was made because I perceived that the gifts and graces that I bring to the agency no longer match what the agency needs to move into new

directions. I knew that as I left the agency I would be looking for new challenges and opportunities, but what those might be were not clearly defined.

So, as I pondered the question of what I want to be when I grow up, I was faced with nearly as many options as when I was ten. And I kept coming back to something that continues to surprise me. I enjoy writing these columns. And even more surprising, there seem to be people who enjoy reading them.

I say this is surprising. To my English teachers in junior high and high school, it would be shocking. I was a math and science kid. My essays in English class did not come back with "great job" written at the top. But somewhere along the

See Growing up on P. 5

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