

# PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers  
and supporters of Project  
Understanding

Volume XXI No. 9  
(Monthly)

September 2006



# \$MILE



**AND HELP A CHILD LEARN TO READ!**

**Saturday, September 9**  
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**Plaza Park**  
Downtown Ventura  
Thompson Blvd. & Fir St.

**JOIN PROJECT UNDERSTANDING IN  
LAYING DOWN A MILE OF DOLLAR BILLS!**

Event Sponsor



For more information,  
see page 3 of this newsletter.

## Project Understanding Is a Lifeline to Many!

By Kay Hoyt  
Program Coordinator

The ring of the phone begins and ends our day. “Hello, this is Project Understanding, How may I help you?” I hear the desperation in her voice, the tears that she is barely able to control, the children’s voices in the background. She chokes out

*Even when we can't help we always have the time to listen and guide them to resources we may not be able to provide.*

the words, “I have just lost my job. I have received a notice that I am being evicted. I have four children. I don’t know what to do. Can you help me?”

Again, the phone rings, Sarah explains that she can no longer live with her parents. “I’m trying to get disability because of my mental stress but the attorney says it will be nine months to a year before we have a determination. I’m on CalWorks now, but can’t keep a job for long because of stress. I don’t receive enough to care for my eight-year-old daughter and find an apartment.” At this point she breaks down crying, “I have just received my Section 8 housing voucher and now I can’t use it because I don’t even have enough money for the

reduced rent.”

Three more calls come in quick succession, some requesting food, all hopefully looking for solutions to their problems. Our phone is truly a lifeline to this community of people in need. Sometimes we can provide the help they need, but even when we can’t, we always have the time to listen and guide them to resources we may not be able to provide.

While our phone is ringing, mothers are wheeling their infants and bringing their toddlers into our small and cramped reception waiting room, the air is charged with the social interaction. Men and women of many cultures enter and greet each other. Spanish and English words intermingle with the laughter and tears of the children. As the energy increases, our case assistants rally to assistance and our receptionist begins the intake process by checking identification cards and pulling case files. The camaraderie of our clients and our staff is wonderful to see.

But I want you to hear it from one of our volunteer case assistants named Brenda.

“I have no special expertise, but as a once weekly food voucher volunteer at Project Understanding for four years, I see more and more scenarios that go like this:

“A person or family with a modest income and modest apartment has an unexpected doctor bill, car repair bill (any unexpected outlay of cash over, say \$300), and is suddenly unable to pay the full month’s rent. The next month, they can’t come up with the rent plus what they’re in arrears for.

“And boom, they’re evicted.

“Although they might be able to find another apartment they could afford, coming up with a first and last month or first plus deposit sum is just insurmountable if you’re barely scraping by.

“For the first time, they’ve become homeless, with the new complications and stress on top of the old ones.

“But this morning, a man with his two young children came in for a food voucher, and he had heartening news. He’s moving his family into an apartment tomorrow because he found a landlord who agreed to let him spread the first and last month cost over three months, which he actually thinks he can handle.”

Over the years, Project Understanding has tried to foster this type of situation, seeking to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution between landlord and tenant.

Brenda, like many of our other volunteer case assistants, is a person with compassion and the ability to listen, encourage and have a heart for people. We are in need of more volunteer case assistants at Project Understanding. Just a few hours a week can make a difference in someone’s life. We hope you will consider volunteering at the Reception Center. You will be trained so that you will be able to empower and guide our clients to the many resources throughout the county as well as those at Project Understanding. Our clients need you, we need you, just a few hours a week.

Excuse me, the phone is ringing. ♦

## Reception Center Volunteers Needed

Each day, the Reception Center is visited by individuals in need of help for shelter, food, medical advice, rental assistance, help with utilities, a need for employment or a visit with a nurse. Sometimes, they arrive in states of fatigue, confusion or anxiety but many

*It will take  
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to read this. It  
could change  
your life (or  
someone else's)!*

times they just need information, a smile and someone to listen. If you feel you would like to make a difference in someone's life, we want to speak to you.

The Reception Center is in need of volunteers who care about people and want to help meet their needs. Some volunteers serve as case assistants on weekday mornings interviewing clients and helping them find the assistance they need. They serve either one morning each week or one morning each month, depending on their availability.

Volunteers are also needed for coverage from 2 to 4 p.m. several afternoons each week. These volunteers will perform a number of tasks in conjunction with the receptionist.

A volunteer's reward comes from the satisfaction of helping meet the needs of those who have nowhere else to turn.

Please call Reception Center coordinator Kay Hoyt at 652-1326. ♦

## Violence

### Continued From Page 8

strong sense that I would agree with his general positions.

But as I read the article I was struck by the statement attributed to Nobel-prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg. Yes, he said, science does have limits. But attributing the unknown to God doesn't advance human knowledge or serve a useful purpose, except to give believers a 'warm, fuzzy, reassuring feeling.'

"And given all the violence done in the name of religion, Weinberg argues that the world is better off without it. 'It's something we have to grow out of,' he said. 'There will always be mystery, always things we don't fully understand. We just have to resign ourselves to that.'

On the one hand, Dr. Weinberg's words did not surprise me. Violence in the name of religion is always one of the first arguments given by people who are opposed to organized religion.

What struck me in this case is that Dr. Weinberg is a physicist. Has he forgotten that the greatest single act of violence in the last century was made possible by a dedicated group of physicists and other scientists working in the deserts of New Mexico? By his standard, would we be better off without physics because of the violence it has produced?

Should we forgo the discoveries of science because they have made possible swords and

spears and gunpowder and bullets and bombs and nuclear explosions?

Neither science nor religion encourages or condones violence. Violence is evil. Violence is sin. If you look back to the beginnings of the book of Genesis, violence is given as the reason that the world was to be destroyed by the flood.

In the mid-1960s, during a discussion of whether the War in Southeast Asia was justified, a good friend of mine suddenly blurted out, "Don't you see! War is the supreme idiocy of the human race."

We can argue, as many have argued for decades, that the actions of the scientists were necessary and moral because of the great violence of the other side. Or we can argue, as many have argued for centuries, that people of faith are justified in fighting against those of another faith in order to defend one's life and family and faith.

But let us never argue that either our faith or our science should be used to justify our violence.

Whether we consider ourselves people of faith or people of science or both, we rely on our most deeply held beliefs to explain and justify our actions. We want to be able to say that all that we think and say and do is done in the name of our core beliefs. Unfortunately, even the evil that we do we want to do in the name of those beliefs and we want to call it good.

Let us be sure that we name the evil in ourselves as clearly as we see the evil in others. ♦

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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

**P**roject 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.

#### Ventura County Hunger Coalition

A network of church and community-based groups and individuals committed to eliminating domestic and world hunger through communications, advocacy, networking, education, and action.

#### Tutoring Station

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

#### Emergency Shelter

Project Understanding is working with a coalition of interested agencies and individuals to provide year-round emergency shelter for homeless people.

#### The Bread of Life

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

## You Can Make a Difference in the Lives That Follow

**L**EAVE A LEGACY® is the public outreach program of National Committee on Planned Giving (NCPG) affiliated



**LEAVE A LEGACY®**

*Make A Difference In The Lives That Follow*

planned giving councils. The goal of the LEAVE A LEGACY® program is to increase the quantity of legacy giving. Project Understanding is a member of the Planned Giving Council of Ventura County. Through your planning, you can make a difference in your community for years or even generations to come.

### The Case for LEAVE A LEGACY®

While most Americans donate to charity during their lives, only a fraction leave legacy gifts. According to the Independent Sector, Giving and Volunteering in the USA 2001, 89 percent of Americans make charitable contributions during their lifetimes. Only 8 percent of Americans who have a will make a bequest to charity. Only around 2 percent of Americans have established a charitable trust according to an NCPG Survey of Donors.

Charities of all sizes are attempting to educate their own constituents about the need and methods for legacy giving. However, their efforts are limited by the financial resources and personnel they can devote to general “marketing.” Many

charities must focus on current needs and current gifts rather than endowment gifts and deferred gifts.

The charitable sector needs a cost-effective way to educate the public about the need for legacy giving and a way to channel general inquiries to the proper sources so gifts can be completed.

### What Can You Do?

Project Understanding encourages all people to leave a legacy. Of course, we hope that you will include Project Understanding in those plans, but, whomever you designate, we believe that, if we all make some gift through our estate, our entire society will benefit.

Neither the size of the estate nor the size of the gift is the important factor. The fact that a gift is made is what matters.

In 1999, Boston College researchers Paul Schervish and John Havens published a new econometric study on intergenerational wealth transfer. They predict that over the 55-year period from 1998 to 2052 the wealth transfer between generations will be \$41 trillion, and may well reach double or triple that amount. The study’s most conservative estimate is that \$6 trillion will be transferred to charity through bequests during the 55-year period.

We can all be a part of this transfer. We encourage you to speak to your financial planner to see how you can leave a legacy both to your heirs and to important nonprofit efforts in our community.

Let’s all leave a legacy. ♦

## Help \$MILE to Lay Down a Mile of Dollar Bills on September 9

**T**he \$MILE event is just around the corner!

Saturday, September 9, is the day that Project Understanding will attempt to lay down a mile’s worth of dollar bills (or at least facsimile dollar bills). Plaza Park in downtown Ventura is the site for this attempt.

If we are successful, it will mean that we have raised more than \$10,000 to help underwrite the costs of the Tutoring Program.

The event is made possible by a generous gift from the event sponsor the County Schools Federal Credit Union.

Whether you come as an individual, as a family or as part of a group, you can be a part of this fun event. Get together with a group from your church, service club or other organization and bring as many dollars as you can raise or donate. You will be given a strip of butcher paper long enough to accommodate your donation.

Not part of a group? Please come anyway. If you have dollars to donate, there will be a place for you to lay them down.

But come even if you have no dollars to donate. We have dollars that have been donated by people who are unable to be present that day, so we will have dollars for everyone to place.

So plan now to join us to see what a mile of dollars looks like. ♦

## 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 July:**

### Individuals

Denise Abdun-Nur  
Judy Alexandre  
Thomas & Laura Andreoli  
William & Dorothy Asano  
Roy & Mary Lou Ash  
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Dr. Bob & Joan Dodge

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In memory of:

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Given by:

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In memory of:

Our son, Michael Collins

Given by:

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**Thank you to the following  
people and groups who  
donated food and other items  
to our program during the  
month of July:**

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Robert & Kenmere Davidson  
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Fellowship  
FOOD Share  
Harbor Community Church  
Kentucky Fried Chicken

National Charity League

Peets Coffee House

San Buenaventura Women's  
Club

Starbucks

Trader Joe's

Trinity Lutheran Church

Unitarian Universalist Church

Ventura Breakfast Club

Vons, Harbor Blvd.

Vons, Telegraph Rd.

Vons, Thompson Blvd.

### Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson



Rheto-Rick

## Doing Violence in the Name of our Core Beliefs

By Richard Pearson  
Executive Director

**D**r. Francis Collins considers himself to be both a scientist and a Christian. He is director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, a federal project with 550 employees, a \$480 million annual budget and a mandate to explore every twist of the DNA that makes us who we are. And he is, by his own description, a born-again Christian. He is frustrated that he's perceived to be an oddity.

Collins has written a new book, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. He expresses his dismay at what he calls "the chasm between science and faith."

"We act as though there's a battle going on," Collins said. "An irreconcilable conflict." In a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times*, the reporter

interviewed both scientists and people from the faith community. It is clear from their responses that, while Collins may not see a conflict, many others do.

But such discussions and disagreements are not new. They have been going on since the Enlightenment. So why am I even bothering to bring it up here? I certainly do not believe that I am going to resolve these issues with a thousand well chosen words in this column.

No, I am writing about it here because of a quote from one of the scientists in the *Times* article.

But before I begin let me say a word or two by way of reminder about myself. As an ordained United Methodist minister, I am certainly not an enemy to the Christian faith and to organized religion. And as a graduate of the school of engineering at UCLA (and the father of a son whose job title on his business card is "scientist"), I am neither ignorant nor opposed to the world of scientific research. While I haven't read Dr. Collins's book, I have a

See Violence, Page 3

## Highlights

**P. 1:** \$MILE and help a child learn to read.

**P. 2:** Project Understanding is a lifeline to many!

**P. 3:** Reception Center volunteers are needed. *It will take you 30 seconds to read this. It could change your life or someone else's.*

**P. 5:** You can make a difference in the lives that follow.

Help \$MILE to lay down a mile of dollars bills on September 9.



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