

Rufus Addison
Deliverance Temple

Chet Boyd III
Downtown Community Fellowship Church

Glenn Doak
First Presbyterian Church

Andy Cooke
First Presbyterian Church

Brenda Burton
Grace Covenant

Benjamin Rivers
Hill First Baptist Church

Edward Bolen
Milledge Avenue Baptist Church

Abraham Mosley
Mount Pleasant Baptist Church

James Washington
New Grove Baptist

Lisa Caine
Oconee Street United Methodist Church

Terre Balof
Unitarian Universalist

Kurt Genteman
Vine Life Ministries

October 2, 2006

TO: ALL Congregational Pastors and Clergy
FROM: Pastor/Clergy Steering Committee with Partners for A Prosperous Athens
RE: Meeting on October 9, 2006
WHEN: 7:00pm – 8:30pm (light refreshments served)
WHERE: Holiday Inn, GA West Ballroom

We would like to invite you to the next meeting of the pastors and clergy in the Athens-Clarke community. We have joined together as a non-denominational group to work with Partners for A Prosperous Athens to break the cycle of poverty in Athens-Clarke County.

Because many ministers in our community are bi-vocational or are unable to meet during the day, this – our third such meeting – is scheduled in the evening. The challenges that our community faces appear overwhelming. Many of you, who work tirelessly to help people escape the clutches of poverty, racism, and underemployment, are skeptical of one more “quick-fix” solution. And we don’t blame you!

We believe, however, that the faith community of Athens is where hope can be kindled. If we can come together across denominational, racial, economic, and social boundaries, then we believe that the pastors and clergy can be a powerful change-agent for our community. It is our prayer that you will join us next week at the Holiday Inn to add your voice and faith to “work together to end persistent poverty.”

If you have more questions, please call James Washington at 706-548-4958 or Edward Bolen at 706-354-0090.

Sincerely,

Pastor/Clergy Steering Committee

Follow-up from Faith Community Pastor and Clergy Meeting October 9, 2006

Edward Bolen welcomed the group. He shared with them that the mission of Partners for a Prosperous Athens was to “Take action to end persistent poverty”. He indicated that this too was the mission of this group. Rev. Bolen expressed his thoughts on the importance of the ministers getting to know one another better, and to understand one another’s viewpoints.

It was emphasized that churches were already playing a major role in addressing the needs of the poor in Athens, but that perhaps through a coordinated effort more could be done.

Chet Boyd then led an invocation.

James Washington then shared some of the benefits he saw for bringing the faith communities together. These included:

- Modeling community-building
- Sharing information on services and resources
- Working together in areas of shared interest.
- Educating our congregations and advocating for the poor

Judge Steve Jones from PPA then addressed the group. Judge Jones commended the group for their efforts and emphasized that PPA was not going to reduce poverty in Athens. The faith community can play the lead role in addressing the key issues and making things happen.

Lisa Caine explained that the next item on the agenda was to break into small groups to discuss “What can the faith community do to take action to end persistent poverty?”

Some of the feedback from the groups included:

Group 1:

- **Support Affordable Housing- Congregations could work with groups like Habitat for Humanity in a variety of ways:**
 1. Donate land for houses.
 2. Churches could provide Habitat supervisors.
 3. Churches could help with Individual Development Accounts.
 4. Provide capital for building the houses.
- **Develop Resource Directory to match the needs of congregations with available resources of congregations.**
- **Provide mentors.**

Group 2

- **It was emphasized that the various congregations are comprised of compassionate people.**

- We need to seek long-term mentors to walk with one another, to learn together.
- We need to trust one another.
- We need to address economic and justice issues, such as fair wages.
- We need to identify employers and those needing jobs and work together to match them.
- Individual congregations could mentor schools.
- We need to also focus on working with the adults/parents with education.
- We need to reach out to prisons and find effective ways to minister and rehabilitate those persons.
- We need to understand the time constraints of the working poor.

Group 3

- We need to focus on real solutions, not band-aid solutions.
- As church leaders we need to model inner transformation. Address the sin issue.
- Perhaps churches could support a letter regarding family friendly wages.
- Make church vans and buses available when they are not in use for transportation to jobs and other transportation needs.
- Help support people by giving second chances and rehabilitation.
- Faith community support needs to be year round, not just at holidays.

Group 4

- It was emphasized that churches are already doing a lot to help the poor.
- Faith communities need to focus on spiritual renewal.
- Faith communities can provide mentorship.
- It's important that industry is brought into the community so that there are good paying jobs. This will help to keep good people here.

Group 5

- We need to focus on empowering the people, starting with our own congregations.
- It is important for the faith based communities to come together.
- Put together a database of resources and needs.

After the groups reported Rev. Bolen asked the group, "What's Next? Do we continue to meet as a group? Some of the responses included:

1. We need to make sure that we have the right jobs here in Athens. We need to bring the right industry. We don't need to meet just to talk about our programs.
2. Yes, we need to meet. There is strength in unity. We do need to have a purpose in meeting. Perhaps pressure the government to help bring the right jobs.
3. We need spiritual renewal. The faith-based community can help lead this.
4. We need to work with released felons who are seeking jobs, and want another chance. Work with employers.

5. Help support adult education programs such as GED.
6. Work with UGA to address their low wages and lack of benefits.
7. It was emphasized that employment is a serious issue, particularly in many of the African American churches.
8. It was mentioned that many local employers go outside Clarke County to hire because of an unskilled local workforce, particularly soft skills.
9. It was mentioned that many high paying people working in Athens live outside the county while the low paying people live here.
10. It was mentioned that many African American congregations are run by pastors who also have other jobs.
11. As a faith community we need to go out and find where the poor are.
12. It was mentioned that our faith community could help develop an economic development plan similar to what Floyd Flake did in New York.
13. It was emphasized that work is holy, not separate from faith.
14. It was mentioned that rather than trying to attract industry from the outside, it would be more profitable to support entrepreneurship and the growth of the businesses we already have here.
15. It was mentioned that the faith leaders have a duty and responsibility to continue to meet because “people are looking to us and modeling our behavior.”

Rev. Bolen asked everyone to complete the Resource/Need Sheet so that we could begin building a Service Directory.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the group to continue meeting on the second Monday of the month, with the next meeting scheduled for Monday, November 14 at 7:00 at the Holiday Inn.

Brenda Burton closed the meeting in prayer.