

**Religious Group Meeting Summary**  
**June 15, 2006**

**The meeting opened with a prayer from Sister Margarita Martin from Oasis Católico Santa Rafaela.**

**Steve Jones gave an overview of Partners for a Prosperous Athens and emphasized the importance of the involvement of the religious community. He welcomed them and a discussion followed. Some of the issues and ideas raised included:**

- 1. Chestnut Grove mentioned that they are hearing good things and had found out about the initiative through a flyer at the East Athens Community Center. They also stated that they had been attending meetings and was part of the education sub-group.**
- 2. Faith Temple stated they had been to the meetings and that a Partnership must be formed. Mentioned that their church is in an area where there are great needs and that sometimes when they try to get resources from the larger community doors are closed. Mentioned some obstacles they faced simply in getting some chairs when asked of UGA. Mentioned that the church/state issue needs to be resolved so that there can be a better partnership. Suggested that meetings be held in the neighborhood. Emphasized the importance of “putting our money where our mouth is” because a lack of trust exists.**

**Indicated that the biggest issue facing her area is JOBS. Said that there are many hard working poor who make \$5.15 per hour. They are not making a living wage and have a strong work ethic, but they have constantly been oppressed. Too often money once received at the local level is not directed to the poor.**

- 3. Tuckston Methodist talked about the unemployment issue. They had visited some employers and they indicated that many workers had a very poor work ethic and had no high school diploma or GED. Indicated that many people in industry were not happy with the applicant pool in Athens Clarke County. Mentioned that the Church must teach truth and integrity.**
- 4. Vine Life Church mentioned that there were 40-60 year olds with great integrity who had been fired because people in authority found out they did not have a high school diploma. Mentioned that her church had an after-school tutoring program. Suggested that there was a great need to revamp the ACC School System. Referred to children who cannot read. Mentioned that there were many successful school models around the country (Chicago specifically mentioned), but our system was not replicating those best practices.**
- 5. New Freedom Christian Center mentioned that it was critical to have people on the steering committee who knew what they were talking about and understood poverty. Emphasized they wanted the project to work, but that many of the right**

people were not involved. Mentioned that UGA was paying low wages to its employees. This contributes to the poverty issue. Mentioned that people with a criminal record who have served their time need to be given a chance after they are released and that the jail lacks rehabilitative services. This is apparently a very big problem. There was mention about men in prison who don't know who their father is?

6. St. Gregory Episcopal talked about the importance of empowering the neighborhood people to help make these critical decisions. Mentioned an example of a housing development (New York City) that became very successful with empowered residents. Sometimes we don't trust the people we are trying to serve. It is important to get community members on the governing boards of some of these organizations.
7. Mt. Pleasant talked about the importance of education (education is "the key"). Mentioned the problem that felons have in getting jobs even when they have reformed. Mentioned that many of the "Big buck" folk who work in Athens do not live in Athens. Suggested that we develop a Mentor Program to help people get and retain jobs.
8. Downtown Community Fellowship Church mentioned the importance of the church to change people's hearts and to bring them to Jesus. Also suggested that the property tax be implemented in such a way as to encourage people to live in Athens. Mentioned that Athens is divided by race and class-even the churches. Mentioned that there was a disconnect between our theology and our practice. The churches need to set the example in developing honesty.
9. St. Paul AME discussed that the working poor have a very difficult time making ends meet. They said the jobs that are no longer in this community will not return, and no one knows what jobs will be needed in the future. Mentioned the importance of education and whether or not we should train the hand, the mind or both.
10. The Sparrow's Nest talked about ministers as change agents and the importance of leading the person in need to Christ, but then providing direct follow-up support to help them get jobs, set goals, help with family. The goal is to help people figure out a way to change their behavior and develop a real life plan. Churches need to help work with service providers to help people in need. We must be aware of the line between enabling and actually helping.
11. Gateway United Methodist talked about the importance of getting to the core of the problem. Suggested that a Family Committee be set up to help keep families intact and to help single moms. Churches need to help build integrity.
12. Milledge Avenue Baptist indicated that in order to work together that perhaps an alliance needed to be formed-even though there were some groups that were already

meeting. Discussed the possibility of an “umbrella” group that would work with the Prosperous Athens initiative.

13. Judge Jones asked if the group felt it would be a good idea for the Prosperous Athens Steering Committee to continue to meet with the religious leaders on a regular basis (maybe quarterly).
14. Faith Temple Outreach Ministry suggested that such get togethers could be held in strategic targeted communities with churches from the area helping to sponsor events like a community day.
15. St. Joseph Catholic Church discussed the possibility of churches offering their facilities for child care centers to serve the poor. Mentioned that churches can help provide mentors and help give access to needed resources. Churches can reach out to the community and be a bridge between the haves and have nots.

#### **SUMMARY:**

1. The Church needs to convert people to Jesus and follow-up with concrete support and help. The Church must teach honesty and integrity.
2. Red tape needs to be erased by governmental groups when working with churches.
3. The poor need to be involved and empowered through this process.
4. People need to be paid a living wage-particularly by the university.
5. Employers need to give past felons a chance to work.
6. Churches could develop a Mentor Program to help people get and retain jobs.
7. Churches need to take the lead in addressing the race and class issues.
8. It was suggested that a Family Committee become a component of Prosperous Athens.
9. It was suggested that some type of expanded association or communication network be established among the churches.
10. Using church facilities to serve child care needs for low income families.
11. Prosperous Athens needs to show more connection with the neighborhoods they want to serve. Come to the communities.

Grace Covenant Community mentioned specifically UGA’s role in the search for answers to poverty in the Athens community. Stated that many children in this community do not see UGA as an institution that they can aspire to or attain. We spoke of the importance of children hearing their entire lives the words “when you graduate from high school” and “when you go to college.”

**Faith Based Attendees 6/15/06:**

Bryson	Vogeltanz	Athens Church
Josh	Jones	Athens Church
Louise	McBee	Athens Church
Kyle	Wise	Athens Vineyard
Amanda	L. Hetton	Beech Haven Baptist- downtown community
Joan	Morris	Catholic Center
Stephanie	Daniel	Chestnut Grove
Laurie	Anderson	Covenant Presbyterian
Rufus	Addison	Deliverance Temple
Chet	Boyd, III	Downtown Community Fellowship Church
Walter	Fleming	Faith Temple Church of God in Christ
Deborah	Lucas	Faith Temple Outreach Ministry
Richard	Washington	First AME Church
Mark	Northcutt	First Assembly of God
Bill	Ross	First Baptist Athens
Frank	Granger	First Baptist Athens
Glenn	Doak	First Presbyterian
Andrea	Williams	Friendship Presbyterian
Jerry	Varnado	Gateway United Methodist
Brenda	Burton	Grace Covenant Community
Ben	Rivers	Hill 1st Baptist
David	Hart	Holy Cross Lutheran
Ronald	Gantt	Maple Spring Baptist Church
Edward	Bolen	Milledge Ave. Baptist Church
Abraham	Mosley	Mt. Pleasant Baptist
Larry	Fort	New Freedom Christian Center
James	Washington, Jr.	New Grove Baptist
Sister	Margarita	Oasis Católico Santa Rafaela
Terry	Jackson	Shiloh Baptist Church
Beth	Long	St. Gregory the Great
Jim	Gardin	St. Joseph Catholic Church
Elinor	Rees	St. Joseph Catholic Church
David	McGuinness	St. Joseph Catholic Church
A.R.	Killian	St. Mark AME
Mark	Tjepkema	St. Mary's Hospital
Keith	Johnson	St. Paul CME Church
Jon	Messarra	SWAT Ministries
Earl	Delmarter	The Sparrow's Nest
Bernard	Turner	Timothy
Ira	Edwards	Timothy Baptist
Tony	Amdur	Tuckston United Methodist
Terre	Balof	Unitarian Universalist
Chris	Cockfield	Unitarian Universalist
Laurel	Genteman	Vine Life Church

**OUTREACH PROGRAMS:**

Program	Contact Person	Contact Number	Description
Housing and Transportation	Rev. Keith Johnson, Rev. Hubert Langston St. James UMC	678-334-1480	credible and tangible access to achieving equity of services
St. Joseph Charities	St. Joseph Catholic Church	706-548-6332	
The Sparrow's Nest	Rev. Earl Delmarter	706-255-7204	D/A counseling, clothes closet, food pantry, homeless day services, at-risk youth work
First Assembly of God	Mark Northcutt	706-548-3409	Drug and alcohol, at-risk youth, women's
Deliverance Temple	Rufus Addison	706-546-5510	mentoring program, prison ministry
Oasis Católico Santa Rafaela	Sister Margarita	706-714-6624	after school program with tutoring, ESOL for mothers, Saint Anthony's Closet, various education projects, advocacy, religious programs, rides to doctor's offices