



Innovations with Youth

Feet to Faith

Responding to Poverty

Marti Burger
Youth and Young Adult Ministries
Evangelical Covenant Church

One hundred and forty young people attended the first-ever Feet to Faith gathering in the North Pacific Conference and gained a better understanding of how they can respond to poverty and other hardships faced by their neighbors and those around the world.

The Story

The 140 youth participated in activities across Seattle that pushed them out of their comfort zones, as well as listened to speakers. Planners hoped the teens “would begin to ponder what God is calling them to do as they gain a holistic view of Matthew 25:14-46,” says Carolyn Potorek, one of the chief organizers and pastor to high school and college students at Trinity Covenant Church in Salem, Oregon.

The event was held August 6-11, 2008 at Seattle University. Each day was devoted to a different facet of compassion and justice:

1. *International Day:* Youth walked one kilometer carrying five-gallon water jugs on their backs. The distance is only one-fifth of what many in the world must walk each morning to retrieve water. Participants also wrote letters to their state senators encouraging them to increase spending for humanitarian aid.
2. *Refugee/Immigration Day:* Youth dressed as refugees and learned how difficult it is to get through various state department, health care, and food check points.
3. *Race Day:* Youth interviewed several people around Seattle to discover where and how people perceive racism and how the church contributes to those perceptions.
4. *Homeless Day:* Youth carried their possessions for twelve hours, purchased dinner with a budget of just three dollars, and slept outside in boxes in the parking lot of Newport Covenant Church.

5. *Creation Care Day:* Youth celebrated the beauty of creation while walking through Discovery Park.

The event also featured speakers that included Jim Sundholm from Covenant World Relief; Ernie Cathcart, director of Casey Family programs and member of Emerald City Bible Fellowship in Seattle; and Edward Sumner, who spoke on homelessness.

Planning for the event began 18 months in advance. “It began when a few of us youth pastors were talking and realizing that oftentimes we take students to help others around the world. But we felt we needed to be more intentional to disciple our students to see that God is calling them to show compassion and justice right in their own neighborhoods,” Potorek says.

Compassion, mercy, and justice are words that seem to be heard over and over again in youth ministry. For years we have done a good job of making youth aware of ministries where we could share compassion and mercy. Youth have been invited to participate in missions in their community, their region, throughout the country, and on an even larger international scale.

We have learned, grown, and benefited from these experiences. We have grown in our understanding of how we can reach out and share the wealth and blessings we have received. We have come away feeling blessed and wondering how we can help more in our own communities. Compassion and mercy have been a stretching and growing edge for us. We come home feeling like we have somehow made a difference and in some small way feel that we have contributed to the world by sharing our time, talent and treasure.

But what about taking time to ask these questions:

- Why do the people in this area suffer from poverty?
- Why don't they have enough food or good housing?
- Why are the roads not well cared for?

- Why is there a difference in the education system?
- Why does where you live impact so much of your life experiences?
- Why are there people who are homeless?
- Why is immigration not working?

Asking these questions has challenged us to think about how we help youth wrestle with issues of injustice. By doing this, our lives become *undone* in many ways, meaning that it is an interesting thing to come in contact with the divine, for God seems to undo the things that we have spent so much of our lives doing. The brilliant thing about that encounter is that after God has undone our work, we are empowered to do all the undone work of the Kingdom.

As we gathered a team together we felt that our challenge was to help students put motion to their faith—to go to the next step in not just wanting to go and help but to ask the questions why—and out of this dream came Feet to Faith. In the summer of 2008 we piloted Feet to Faith in one of our conferences. Our goal was to challenge youth to ask the tough questions. The main focus of this program was exposure to an opportunity; to cause a stirring within each person that necessitates a reaction.

The Project

Mission

To disciple youth by exposing and exploring with them issues of injustice in our world.

Vision

That youth would walk where and with all whom Christ walked—with the hungry, sick, prisoners, homeless, and aliens—showing compassion, mercy, and justice.

Goals

- Youth would begin to ponder what God is calling them to do as they gain a holistic view of Mathew 25:14-46.
- Youth would see new ways that God can use them today and in their future wherever they live.
- Youth would be encouraged to move beyond compassion and helping to seek justice by asking the “why” questions.

Web Resources

- Compassion, mercy, justice: www.covchurch.org/cmj
- Covenant World Relief: www.covchurch.org/cwr
- Creation Care: www.floresta.org/index.html

- International Justice: www.ijm.org
- Racial Righteousness: www.covchurch.org/cmj/ministry/rr
- Water First: www.water1st.org
- World Relief: www.worldrelief.org
- World Vision: www.wvi.org/wvi/wviweb.nsf

The Program

International Day

- Water First Experience: Walk for Water
- Small groups
- Interactive simulations
- Teaching session: World Relief staff
- Bread for the World: Offering of Letters
- Dinner
- Worship

Refugee and Immigration Day

- Cherry Street Market
- Share meal with homeless person
- Refugee Project at World Relief
- Teaching session: World Relief staff
- Small groups
- Dinner
- Worship

Creation Care/Environmental Justice Day

- Worship
- Teaching session: Creation Care
- Small groups
- Hike in the mountains to experience God’s creation
- Dinner
- Small group debriefing
- Worship

Racial Justice Day

- Worship
- Teaching session: Compassion Ministries
- Small Groups
- Afternoon experience
- Dinner
- Small group debriefing
- Concert

Homelessness Day

- Worship
- Teaching session
- Small groups
- Afternoon experience: collect boxes to construct a shelter for the evening
- Dinner: each person receives \$3 for a meal
- Small group debriefing
- Worship

Homelessness and Wrap-Up

- Small group debrief
- Closing worship with slideshow
- Next steps in youth groups