

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

*An expert in the law, “wanting to justify himself,”  
asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)*

## **REACH NEW PEOPLE.**

Who are our neighbors? Where are they (near and far)? What are their needs, both material and spiritual? How do we find those neighbors who are hungry for Good News, waiting for the church to present it in actions and words they can relate to?

## **CULTIVATE SPIRITUAL VITALITY.**

Invite Jesus to “teach us to pray” and learn new ways of recognizing and praying for our neighbors. Combine the spiritual quest of seeking God’s vision for our neighbor with actions that demonstrate God’s love—especially for those whom that society has neglected.



**YOUR CHURCH’S MISSION THIS YEAR: TO REACH NEW PEOPLE AND CULTIVATE SPIRITUAL VITALITY  
BY ASKING THE QUESTION, WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?—AND EXPECTING GOD’S ANSWER.**

## FOLLOWING ARE SOME TOOLS:

### BOOKS

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**CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN DIALOGUE: FACETS OF A RELATIONSHIP** (OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A., 2001).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* This resource encourages American Christians to engage with Muslim neighbors in open, two-way relationships.

**DIFFERENT MEMBERS, ONE BODY: WELCOMING THE DIVERSITY OF ABILITIES IN GOD'S FAMILY**, BY SHARON KUTZ-MELLEM (WITHERSPOON PRESS, 1998).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* This practical, faith-inspired handbook assists churches that take seriously God's call to welcome all into the community of faith. It offers a wealth of information and insight to churches committed to changing the perceptual, attitudinal, and physical barriers that keep people with disabilities from fully participating in our churches.

**EVERYDAY PEOPLE: A MISSION JOURNAL**, BY FRANK NELSON (TALKPOINTS, 2007).

This wire-bound journal provides devotional suggestions and room for reflection by those engaging in off-site mission experiences. It works well for people new to mission trips and grounds them biblically. Suitable for junior high and older.

**GOD'S MISSION, OUR RESPONSE: A MISSION HANDBOOK FOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE LEADERS** (GENERAL BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES, 2009).

This handbook covers virtually every aspect of United Methodist mission, including missionaries, evangelism and church development, mission education, relief and health, mission volunteers, funding for mission, ethnic/racial ministries, mission initiatives, and more. It is available electronically; visit <http://new.gb-gm-umc.org/connections/missioneducation/resources/conferences>.

**GROWING COMPASSIONATE KIDS: HELPING KIDS SEE BEYOND THEIR BACKYARD**, EDITED BY JAN JOHNSON AND JEANNIE CRAWFORD-LEE (UPPER ROOM BOOKS, 2005).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* The authors provide biblical methods for teaching children and teens compassion toward people who live without voice, hope, or Christ. Here are ideas for incorporating social outreach into family life, biblical rationale for introducing children and teens to God's call to help their neighbors, reflection questions, personal and family devotions, and practical ideas for volunteering as a family.

**HELPING FAMILIES CARE** (THE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE, 1989).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Presents practical suggestions for families who want to be more caring and compassionate at home, in their communities, and in the world at large. To prod thought, the book offers games, activities, and stories that foster compassion and caring. This is intended for an intergenerational setting.

**HOLY CONVERSATIONS: STRATEGIC PLANNING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR CONGREGATIONS**, BY GIL RENDLE AND ALICE MANN (ALBAN INSTITUTE, 2003).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* When congregations explore a strategic plan for ministry, they can look at the process less as seeking a solution to a problem and more as a holy conversation of spiritual discernment. “Who is our neighbor?” is a crucial question for the conversation.

**IT’S THE LITTLE THINGS: THE EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS THAT GET UNDER THE SKIN OF BLACKS AND WHITES**, BY LENA WILLIAMS (HARCOURT, 2000).

A black person is taken aback when a stranger uses his first name. A white person fails to recognize a black colleague outside the office. A black executive is followed around a department store and then can’t get a taxi to stop for her. A white person comments in amazement on how articulate an Ivy League professional is—a black Harvard graduate. Although people of different races work together, attend school together, live in integrated neighborhoods, and have developed long-lasting friendships, we’re still undeniably divided. In this fast, funny, smart, and forthright book, *New York Times* reporter Lena Williams opens our eyes to the annoying things we do and explains how to avoid them.

**THREE CUPS OF TEA: ONE MAN’S MISSION TO PROMOTE PEACE . . . ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME**, BY GREG MORTENSON (PENGUIN, 2007).

A story of transformation. Mortenson attempted to climb K2, the world’s second highest mountain. Dangerously ill when he finished his climb in 1993, he was sheltered for seven weeks by a small Pakistani village. In return, he promised to build the impoverished town’s first school. A thrilling, challenging, motivational true story. Suited for high school and above.

**TRANSFORMING VENTURES: A SPIRITUAL GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION**, BY JANE IVES (UPPER ROOM, 2000).

Originally designed for mission trips, this book is easily adapted for local, national, and international mission experiences. It is a must-read for anyone with responsibilities for trips or for mission experiences.

**UNCHRISTIAN: WHAT A NEW GENERATION REALLY THINKS**, BY DAVID KINNAMAN (BAKER PUBLISHING, 2007).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* The perception that most nonbelievers have of Christianity is overwhelmingly negative. This book gives readers practical examples of what a fresh expression of the Christian faith can look like and captures the thoughts of respected Christian leaders on how Christianity can be perceived thirty years from now.

**WHERE ONCE WE FEARED ENEMIES: INCLUSIVE MEMBERSHIP, PROPHETIC VISION, AND THE AMERICAN CHURCH**, EDITED BY GIBSON STROUPE, ET AL. (CSS PUBLISHING 2005).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Whether we are conscious of it or not, we fear difference. That often unwarranted fear leads us to create enemies in our hearts and minds. Growing out of the experience of a multi-cultural congregation in which diversity is both valued and feared, *Where Once We Feared Enemies* offers an uncompromising prophetic vision of the American church’s identity and mission. Stroupe calls us to hear God’s claim on us in our place and time. Underlying his powerful message is the fundamental conviction that the barriers that separate us from our neighbors have been brought down in Jesus Christ.

## FILM / DVD

### **CALLED TO STEP OUTSIDE.** UNITED METHODIST GENERAL BOARD OF DISCIPLESHIP, 2008.

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Shown at the United Methodist General Conference 2008 and at the Minnesota Annual Conference that same year, this short parable portrays a family sitting down to dinner—until the daughter brings a dish to a lonely person outside. Her family follows her with the whole table and invites the neighbors to join them. A nice discussion starter for groups of any size and age range.

### **CRASH.** LIONS GATE ENTERTAINMENT, 2005.

*Crash* reveals human bigotry and racial stereotypes. The story, set in Los Angeles, begins with a multi-car accident. From that point, it moves back to the day before the crash, showing the lives of several characters and the problems each encounters that day. A police officer tries to get medical help for his father but has problems with a black HMO clerk who won't give his father permission to see another doctor. He takes out his frustration on a black couple during a traffic stop. A socialite and district attorney are carjacked at gunpoint by two black teenagers. A woman takes out her anger on a Mexican locksmith who is changing the door locks to her home. Later that night, the locksmith is again robbed of his dignity by a Persian store owner. Many of the characters switch from being bad-person-to-hero in surprising ways. (Rated R)

### **DIFFERENT AND THE SAME.** FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS, 1995.

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* From the producers of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, this series of five children's videos tells stories in which schoolchildren, played by puppets, are aided by a teacher or friend to help them resolve difficult situations by gaining greater understanding and moving toward positive solutions. The themes include name-calling, being excluded, friendships across racial lines, defining who is American, and standing up against prejudice.

### **FACES OF POVERTY.** UMCOM PRODUCTIONS, 1987.

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Challenges perceptions of poverty: "Welfare is ruining the country," "Most poor people live in cities," "Poor people are satisfied to live off welfare." Through interviews and case histories, people in poverty are revealed not as objects of our compassion but as our neighbors—our brothers, sisters, and children.

### **GRAN TORINO.** WARNER HOME VIDEO, 2009.

Walt Kowalski is a widower, Korean War veteran, retired auto worker, and the last white resident of his Detroit side street. It's hard to say who irks him more—his blood kin or the Hmong families who are his new neighbors. Kowalski is a racist, because it has never occurred to him he shouldn't be. Circumstances—and two young people next door, the feisty Sue and her conflicted brother, Thao—contrive to involve Walt with a new community, and anoint him as its hero after he stands up to some ruffians. A mint-condition *Gran Torino*, which Walt helped build in a different decade and continues to preserve, suggests themes of change and grief. Christian concepts of reconciliation and sacrifice are also evident. (Rated R)

**HOMELESS IN PARADISE: MARILYN & CHUCK. NEW DAY FILMS, 2006.**

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* *Homeless in Paradise* follows the journeys of four fascinating people who are homeless. As they survive on the streets, Rick, Donna, Simon, and Faye struggle with addiction and mental illness while receiving support from a city in crisis. Experiencing homelessness through these characters' eyes, viewers will come to understand a political and social system that draws controversy from all sides of the political arena.

**HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG. DREAMWORKS, 2003.**

In this dark but moving story, small mistakes escalate, with tragic necessity, to disaster. Kathy gets evicted from her house for failing to pay a tax she never should have been charged in the first place. The house is swiftly put up for auction and bought by a former military officer from Iran named Behrani. When legal efforts fail her, Kathy turns to a sympathetic cop who wants out of a loveless marriage and who's willing to step over legal boundaries if it might give him a fresh start. The characters are so caught up in their own needs and lives that they cannot see from another's perspective. Their unwillingness to change costs them everything. (Rated R)

**THE NEIGHBOR: A VIDEO TRANSLATION OF LUKE 10:25-37.**

AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY, 2000.

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, a story as compelling and unsettling for contemporary hearers as it was for those who heard it in biblical times. Set within the framework of an adversarial exchange between Jesus and a legal expert of his day, the story draws its power from a dramatic reversal of expected behavior. Includes a leader's guide.

**OFFENSE TAKEN. PRODUCED BY SELF-ADVOCATES OF MINNESOTA (WWW.OFFENSETAKEN.ORG).**

In the spring of 2007, when a Minneapolis theater company put on a show titled *Rise of the Celebretards*, people with disabilities and their allies took action. *Offense Taken* documents this community's organized response to the play title and its use of a derogatory word for people with developmental disabilities. By lifting the voices of a broad range of citizens—people with disabilities, allies, educators, artists, and neutral theatergoers—the documentary also serves as a springboard for discussion about language and asks, Does artistic freedom trump human rights? With the release of this film, a coalition of Minnesota organizations and individuals is launching a campaign to encourage community-wide discussion about disrespectful language and human rights.

**SERVANT OR SUCKER? ECUFILM (UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS), 2008.**

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Someone who is obviously in financial distress approaches you on the street and asks for money. Do you give money knowing there's a good chance it will be used on drugs or alcohol, say no, or even ignore the person? No one wants to be taken advantage of, but at the same time Jesus' call to help the poor echoes in our hearts and minds. This video helps viewers discern appropriate, Christ-centered ways to address poverty on a personal or organizational level. It describes the realities of poverty through the concepts of time, relationships, money, and values; portrays a "poverty tour"; includes interviews with those who are homeless or in poverty and those who have helped and/or have been used; and suggests steps one can take to be an effective servant without getting used. A leader's guide is included.

**TRUTH AND WHOLENESS: REPLACING WHITE PRIVILEGE WITH GOD'S PROMISE.**

UNITED METHODIST GENERAL BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES, 2008.

The third act of repentance by the United Methodist Church—repentance for white privilege—took place at General Conference 2008. It is presented here by the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns in cooperation with the General Commission on Religion and Race.

## CURRICULA / GROUP STUDIES

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### ▶ **ALONG THE WAY: MEETING GOD AND NEIGHBOR IN UNEXPECTED PLACES,**

BY LINDA PICKENS-JONES (ABINGDON, 2001).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Sometimes God's presence is obvious and expected. At other times, we are startled to find God's presence and grace working in a place or situation where we did not expect such an encounter. These Bible stories point out a few of the instances in which God was at work for the benefit of those who did not expect it—but their lives were transformed as a result. (Five sessions.)

### ▶ **JUST NEIGHBORS. FAMILY PROMISE, 2005.**

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Congregations can use this series to explore the questions of who is our neighbor and how we can care for our neighbors in need. Through videos, interactive exercises, scripture, and discussion, participants learn about the struggles of neighbors in need.

### ▶ **WHO ARE THE POOR? THE BEATITUDES AS A CALL TO COMMUNITY,**

BY JOHN S. POBEE (WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, 1987).

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* This study of the beatitudes examines Jesus' dealings with the poor (and with the rich) and concludes that the issue of poverty involves the call to community.

### ▶ **"WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?" DVD CURRICULUM. COLORADO IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COALITION AND THE COLORADO COUNCIL OF CHURCHES.**

(Available from the Resource Center for Churches.)\* Four one-hour sessions feature filmed interviews and facts and statistics on immigration and discussion and activity suggestions. This faith-based curriculum is endorsed by the United Methodist Church's Woman's Division, General Board of Ministries, General Board of Church and Society, and the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

## TRAINING PROGRAMS / CONSULTANTS

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### ★ **RETHINK CHURCH:**

What if *church* were not just a place we go, but something we do? What if we were to go beyond the doors of the church to serve those in the world who are in need? What if we were able to engage the world through our faith? The word "open" in "Open hearts, open minds, and open doors" would no longer be an adjective that describes but a verb that directs—so that together we open hearts, open minds, open doors. Rethink Church urges your congregation to "think outside the doors of the church" to welcome seekers, especially those who are ages 18 through 49 and want to make the world a better place and know a caring God. Rethink Church one-day trainings are fun and thought-provoking and can change the way your church reaches its neighbors. To schedule a training event, contact Victoria Rebeck, Minnesota Conference director of communications, at [victoria.rebeck@minnesotaumc.org](mailto:victoria.rebeck@minnesotaumc.org) or (612) 230-6132.

### **EXTENDING GOD'S LOVE BY SUPPORTING MISSIONS**

Every fall the Minnesota Conference provides training about hosting and supporting missionaries. The conference Missions Ministry Team will consult with churches on how to participate in local, national, and international missions opportunities. For further information contact Rev. Dick Ellis at (763) 473-6968, ext. 19, or [revdickellis@yahoo.com](mailto:revdickellis@yahoo.com).

### **THE MINNESOTA COLLABORATIVE ANTI-RACISM INITIATIVE (MCARI)**

The Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative (MCARI) fosters participation in ongoing racial reconciliation among diverse communities by engaging Minnesota institutions in anti-racism education, training, and organizing to strengthen the capacity to recognize and respond to systemic racism. Experience indicates that racism cannot be “trained” away. Required is a process that organizes systemic and institutional transformation. Key to this is a trained institutional team that has developed an analysis of racism that is relevant to community and systemic transformation. This, in turn, shapes a strategic change process that involves the entire institution in the journey of transformation. For information, contact Carmen L. Valenzuela, 1671 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105; (651) 789-3864; or visit [www.mcari.org](http://www.mcari.org).

### **ANTIRACISM STUDY DIALOGUE CIRCLES**

As a community dedicated to mending the brokenness of racism, ASDIC Alliance fosters wholeness, spins webs of relationship, and untangles knots of oppression. ASDIC is devoted to reducing racism by bringing people together across racial and cultural boundaries to explore the very thing that divides us: the structures of racial domination that create our differing life experiences and that deeply shape us individually and collectively. ASDIC circle members move outward into the community to dismantle the institutional and systemic racism that is embedded in their particular contexts within the Twin Cities, Duluth, and Rochester. These are the long-term barriers that faced the families served by Unity Settlement House and that continue to face Native Americans and immigrants of color today. For information, contact Herbert Perkins, Ph.D., 190 George St., St. Paul, MN 55104; (651) 523-2537; [hperkins01@msn.com](mailto:hperkins01@msn.com).

### **MISSIONS: REV. DICK ELLIS.** Leader, Minnesota Annual Conference Missions Ministry Team.

17805 County Road 6, Plymouth, MN 55447; (763) 473-6968; [dellis@messiahchurch.org](mailto:dellis@messiahchurch.org). The team can help individuals and churches learn about local, national, and international missions opportunities; describe ways to support United Methodist missionaries; and direct churches to individuals engaged in particular mission activities.

### **VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION: LORNA JOST.** Coordinator, North Central Jurisdiction

Volunteers in Mission. 928 Fourth St., Brookings, SD 57006; (605) 692-3390; [umvim-nc@brookings.net](mailto:umvim-nc@brookings.net). NCJVIM can provide information and point to resources for churches or individuals considering Volunteer in Mission projects.

## WEB SITES

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### **RETHINK CHURCH:** [WWW.10THOUSANDDOORS.ORG](http://www.10THOUSANDDOORS.ORG)

What if church wasn't a building, but thousands of doors to opportunities to make a difference in the world? This web site connects seekers to the idea that having faith means acting on the question "Who is my neighbor?"

[WWW.RETHINKCHURCH.ORG](http://WWW.RETHINKCHURCH.ORG) offers resources, a training calendar, and much more to help churches reach 18- to 49-year-olds who seek a loving God who leads people to make the world a better place.

### **MINNESOTA CONFERENCE RESOURCES:** [WWW.MINNESOTAUMC.ORG](http://WWW.MINNESOTAUMC.ORG)

Look under "Missions and Ministries" for outreach news and resources.

### **NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT:** [WWW.NCD-INTERNATIONAL.ORG](http://WWW.NCD-INTERNATIONAL.ORG)

The Institute for Natural Church Development helps churches of all denominations experience qualitative and quantitative growth. On all levels of church life, NCD encourages creativity, authenticity, and diversity. NCD helps Christians and churches discover and develop their individuality by helping them assess their congregational systems and discover effective ways to reach new people and cultivate spiritual vitality. Users will develop a plan to address key growth areas.

### **OC MINISTRIES:** [WWW.OCMINISTRIES.COM](http://WWW.OCMINISTRIES.COM)

OC Ministries plans mission trips and missions support to Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Jamaica.

### **UNITED METHODIST BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES:** [WWW.GBGM-UMC.ORG](http://WWW.GBGM-UMC.ORG)

Find information about Advance projects, missionaries, designated giving, Volunteer in Mission projects, insurance applications for church mission teams, and much more.

### **UNITED METHODIST COMMISSION ON RELIGION AND RACE:** [WWW.GCORR.ORG](http://WWW.GCORR.ORG)

GCORR guides and supports United Methodists at all levels of the church in their quest to achieve racial justice, inclusiveness, and reconciliation.

### **UNITED METHODIST COMMITTEE ON RELIEF:** [WWW.UMCOR.ORG](http://WWW.UMCOR.ORG)

UMCOR is in action around the world, responding to human needs following disasters. Its web site provides rich resources and describes opportunities for large, small, and intergenerational groups and for individuals.

A LONGER LIST WILL APPEAR AT [WWW.MINNESOTAUMC.ORG](http://WWW.MINNESOTAUMC.ORG).

\* The Resource Center for Churches lends books, DVDs, curricula, sheet music, and much more to churches. Visit the center at 122 W. Franklin Ave., Room 2, Minneapolis, MN 55404, or [www.resourcesforthejourney.org](http://www.resourcesforthejourney.org). Contact the staff at (612) 870-0861 (in the metro area), (888) 293-9901 (toll-free from Greater Minnesota), or [info@resourcesforthejourney.org](mailto:info@resourcesforthejourney.org).