

**Park Avenue Faith Community
Collaborative Meeting
August 28, 2008**

Attending:

1. Chris Andersen, *First Presbyterian Church (church & community concerns committee)*
2. RuthAnn Barth, *First Lutheran Church (office manager)*
3. Amanda Chipman, *Mosaic Community Development*
4. Jodi Cooper, *Mosaic Community Development*
5. Elizabeth Day, *Park Avenue Community House*
6. Vicor Aaron Decker, *First Lutheran Church*
7. Kay Lynn Goldner, *First Unitarian Church member*
8. Christian Gray, *Mosaic Community Development*
9. Brittany Hanson, *Mosaic Community Development*
10. Louise Jeffrey, *First Unitarian Church member*
11. Lois Knutzen, *First Lutheran Church member*
12. Robin Laney, *Starfish Ministries*
13. Kevin Marik, *Metropolitan Community Church (member & deacon)*
14. Pastor Kip Mickelson, *First Baptist Church*
15. Karla Oliver, *Metropolitan Community Church (member & deacon)*
16. Phyllis Porter, *First Baptist Church (office manager)*
17. Pastor Judith Rainforth, *First Lutheran Church*
18. Wanda Selzer, *First Lutheran Church member*
19. Stephen Stout, *Good Neighbor Ministries*
20. Roger Werthman, *Mosaic Community Development (board member)*
21. Simone Weber, *First Lutheran Church (music director)*

Overview

Members of the faith community in the Park Avenue area met on August 28, 2008. The meeting was entirely focused on the upcoming Community Meals volunteer training and launch; the group did not break out into task forces. Faith leaders were invited several weeks prior to the meeting to bring along lay leaders and others in their parishes or organizations that have interest in participating in the Meals.

The meeting was held at First Lutheran Church from 11:00 - 1:00 p.m. The meeting was facilitated and notes were taken for reporting back to participants. Twenty-one people participated in the meeting and planning session.

Copies of the meeting's agenda (May 22, 2008) were available, as well as a draft of the Community Meals Volunteer Training Manual. Several newcomers were welcomed and the meeting began with a round of introductions.

Introductions & Community Meal Response

Brittany Hanson reviewed the agenda with the group; she then asked meeting participants to reflect aloud about the responses they have received as they are working to gain support and commitment to the Community Meals initiative within their parishes and organizations. Leaders

have received varying responses; while some have received little response from parish and organization members, others have received better than expected commitment. All were encouraged to continue advocating among their constituencies and throughout the larger Omaha metro faith community.

Volunteer Training & Manual

A brief recap and overview of the foundational ideas that inspired the development of the Community Meals initiative was given: (a) addressing a basic need—hunger and (b) building community. Meeting participants were directed to review the Volunteer Training Manual draft, which would be used as a tool to iron out final details and make preparations for the training on Saturday, September 6.

The group took a few minutes to read through the first section entitled “*Community Context*”, which outlines the background of the Faith Leader Collaboration, neighborhood demographics and the importance of community and social capital. A time for questions and discussion was given. The main concern participants expressed was not with the content, but rather with the fact that the group has not yet identified a formal name for itself. Several ideas were brainstormed, and the pros and cons of using the term “midtown” in the name were discussed. Meeting participants agreed to come to the next meeting with several names or concepts brainstormed.

Both Pr. Rainforth and Pr. Mickelson spoke to the journey the group has traveled together in order to arrive at the launch of the Community Meals, highlighting how good it is to be active in the community and actually doing something together. Several other details were discussed including the semi-monthly “clothing closet”, handicap accessible entrance, gymnasium use, and distribution of Spanish/English flyers in the neighborhood.

The group then moved on to manual section entitled “*Facility Supervision and Guidelines*”. Several indicated the possibility of informally involving the local Police should be explored. Certainly, the police can be made aware of the Community Meals initiative; in addition, local police and city officials could be invited to attend the weekly meals. Some wondered if a police presence might deter attendance; others suggested their presence could be very informal—just coming to build relationships and eat lunch, not necessarily to patrol.

The group talked about how the guidelines would be communicated and enforced at the weekly meals. Several professionally printed posters will both posted throughout the dining hall in both Spanish and English. During a general welcome announcement, a volunteer will vocally communicate the “house rules”. In addition, a few “go-to” volunteers will be strategically placed throughout the dining hall and roaming around the exterior of the building to prevent any major problems. If a conflict arises and some volunteers do not feel comfortable dealing with issue, the “go-to” individuals can assist with conflict mediation and guideline enforcement.

Next, the section entitled “*Volunteer Framework*” was tackled. After reading through the section specific questions or concerns were noted; Brittany Hanson asked whether or not meeting participants perceived their constituencies to be interested in or excited about the relational/community building component of the Meals. Leaders have received varying responses. Pr. Rainforth noted the importance of communicating with volunteers that the aim is not to serve “those” people—we are all in this together and have much to both give and receive. Pr. Mickelson reiterated, encouraging against an “us” and “them” mentality.

The “*Relational Ground Rules*” were quickly discussed. Brittany Hanson observed that, similar to those established for the Block Party in August, it will be important for all faith leaders and volunteers to be on the same page in terms of understating the nature of the collaborative Community Meals initiative. It was agreed that participating faith communities and organizations are welcome to share information about the resources they offer to the neighborhood, but must do so by placing information on a designated Resource Table; information will not be individually distributed to neighbors. In addition, it would be good to have all of the information centrally located in one resource packet; Brittany Hanson is working to put this comprehensive guide together.

Lastly, the group looked over and discussed the final section entitled “Logistics”. Pr. Mickelson reminded the faith leaders that volunteer groups are welcome to use the First Baptist Church kitchen when preparing their respective meal. The Volunteer Training will give folks a better idea of what they will have to work with in the FBC kitchen. The meals will need to be served on paper products because the FBC dish washer is not working.

Robin Laney from Starfish Ministries, a local organization that serves a free weekly meal on the Gene Leahy Mall, shared some advice from her experiences, and will send Brittany some sample menus and recipe converters to distribute to the Food Preparation and Service Volunteer groups. She also suggested estimating out how many paper products will be needed for an entire year, then communicating those figures to the local faith community so folks or churches/organizations can support the program through directly donating some of the products or providing the funds for their purchase.

Wrap-Up

The end of the meeting was approaching and individuals committed to connected with faith leaders who were not present at the meeting (as indicated below). Extra brochures are also available for anyone to use while recruiting and gaining volunteer commitment; please contact Brittany Hanson (brittany@mosaiccd.org) if more are needed.

Louise Jeffrey, *First Unitarian Church* → Fr. Peter Pappas, *St. John’s Greek Orthodox Church*
Pr. Kip Mickelson, *First Baptist Church* → Pr. Carlos Schneider, *Kountze Memorial Church*
Pr. Kip Mickelson, *First Baptist Church* → Pr. Tony Garcia, *Roca de Salvación*
Stephen Stout, *Good Neighbor Ministries* → Grace Lutheran Church
Kevin Marik, *MCC-Omaha* → Fr. Damien Cook, *St. Peter Catholic Church*

The initial Volunteer Training date was restated; details are listed below. More trainings will be conducted as the need arises. In addition, a Google calendar will be created so that folks can see when they have signed up to volunteer, as well as identify weeks that have not yet been assigned.

Date: Saturday, September 6, 2008

Time: 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

Location: First Baptist Church, 421 Park Avenue

The next meeting is on Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008 (11:00 am – 1:00 pm). If interested in hosting a meeting at your location, please contact Brittany Hanson (brittany@mosaiccd.org) for scheduling.