

## **2008 Annual Report**

2008 was a momentous year - where the "Call for Change" resonated with persons across the city and country. Much of the year's debate was about new Presidential leadership for the nation, and Washington, D.C. as the nation's capital was centrally caught up in that debate. The subsequent victory of Barack Obama was seen as a historic moment, with the election of the first African American as President. The city enthusiastically joined in with the rest of the country in celebration and a feeling of great expectation caused by the election.

The city itself reflected many of the challenges facing the nation. Tragic violence continued to plague the city. Homicides rose for the 2<sup>nd</sup> straight year, the first time since 1989 - 1991. Most troubling was the increase in the number of children as victims - with at least 19 having died violently. Since 2001 the number of those victims of violence rose over 40% in the city. The year started with the tragic Banita Jacks' case, where a mother has been accused of killing her children. This case resulted in a surge of reports to Child Protective Services. Nor was the city immune from the stark economic realities that shook the country. Unemployment in DC rose to 8% by November, and forecasts of upwards of 10% by 2010 were made by the city's Chief Financial Officer. The city closed a \$131 million budget gap late in the year by freezing programs for expanding affordable housing, health care and transportation. This came amidst reports of a further \$127 million budget gap for 2009. It was in this context - of a challenged, urban city facing economic upheavals not seen in decades, that local congregations and the Downtown Cluster of Congregations sought to serve.

## **Homeless Outreach**

The Council of Government's 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Homeless survey found about 12,000 persons were in homeless in the metropolitan area - including almost 2,900 children. Over 6,000 were homeless in the city. This study did not account for the rise in the number of persons on the potential verge of homelessness by year's end. A record number - more than 30,000 households - sought energy assistance through the city's **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program**. Demand was so high at a September "**Joint Utility Discount Day**" program that about 1,000 residents had to be turned away. By mid-year, the Cluster staff was finding that basic need requests at congregations was up sharply from prior years; applications for benefits of all types was up, along with basic service needs for mental health care, substance abuse, and other services. The year ended tragically when a homeless man who lived in the Foggy Bottom area was beaten to death. This came on the heels of reports of two other beatings of homeless persons. Given this array of dire, life-threatening needs presented to member congregations, the **Homeless Services Unit** continued its outreach efforts for its 23rd straight year.

The Unit is staffed by 3 full time Outreach Workers. The staff - Julie Turner, Juan Benavides, and Sharon Winfield, have been in their positions at the Cluster for over 20, 15, and 10 years respectively - making them the most experienced outreach team in the city. It is owing in great part to this experience, as well as their bi-lingual, multi-cultural capacity, that has made it possible for them to achieve significant results.

This team rotated between 8 congregation-based sites, as well as canvassed parks, commercial areas, and other public spaces where the homeless live. The staff saw 1,435 persons - 431 women and 1004 men. Women were 30 % of those served. The staff provided over 1700 emergency aid referrals for food, clothing, and shelter. The team was able to provide follow-up, in-depth case-management services to almost 300 persons as well as aid in making over 950 applications for Food Stamps, Social Security Benefits, Medicaid, and other assistance. 635 of these applications were successful; numerous others are pending. 300 persons were referred for substance abuse treatment, of which 122 received treatment. 198 persons were referred for mental health treatment, of which 110 actually received such care. 470 persons were referred for general medical care. More than 400 applications were made for transitional and permanent housing, of which 73 persons were placed into such housing. 366 persons were referred for job training and placement, of which 128 obtained jobs, and 144 received training.

The goal of the **Homeless Services Unit** is to assist each person to **meet life-threatening emergency needs**, while addressing long-term needs in order to **break the cycle of homelessness or poverty**. This is achieved by the **staff forging a working partnership** with each person and family, and allowing them to identify and implement the steps necessary to regain control over their lives.

### **Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF)**

The Downtown Cluster of Congregations, which assisted in the founding of the Fund in 1987, remains a committed investor, seeking to help low-income persons, new immigrants, non-profits and others succeed in getting critically needed capital, and to acquire the economic skills and services necessary to succeed. Since its inception in 1987, WACIF has provided over 215 loans totaling more than \$15 million to an array of housing programs, daycare centers, and local small businesses. Its loans have helped to leverage better than \$125 million in other public and private investment funds. Altogether, over 1,500 units of affordable housing have been preserved or developed as a part of these loan activities. Almost 150 small business have been aided through technical assistance as well, helping to create some 450 full and part time jobs. WACIF provided significant technical assistance in 2008 to individuals and small businesses, child care providers, and community based development organizations - these efforts generated new loans, jobs, housing, and child care slots. In July and September it sponsored free workshops - "**Preventing Foreclosure: How to Save your Home the Right Way**". The Fund is active not just in the city but makes its loans and programs available metropolitan wide.

### **Public Safety Issues**

Improving public awareness of available safety services continued to be a priority for the Downtown Cluster of Congregations. A series of major fires in 2007 and early 2008 - damaging Eastern Market, a public library, and a 5 alarm blaze displacing over 200 low and moderate income residents in Mt. Pleasant in February of 2008 made clear the need for improved fire safety planning and services. The Mt. Pleasant fire, in addition to displacing hundreds of residents, caused tens of millions in damage to an adjacent historic church. The Cluster hosted a meeting with Chief Rubin, distributed contact numbers to member congregations and the community on how to schedule fire safety inspections and how to receive smoke detectors. The

Cluster urged the swift repair of fire hydrants, hundreds of which remained in need of service by year's end. Tragically a horrific fire at the very start of 2009 resulted in 6 deaths - the most from a fire in the District since the 1980's.

The Cluster also continued to call for other public safety efforts - such as improved pedestrian safety. The Executive Director served on the Advisory Committee to the city's **Master Pedestrian Plan**. Many intersections and streets in the downtown seemed designed to favor moving traffic through neighborhoods more than assuring the safety of people crossing. 2007 had ended with a 10 year high with 26 pedestrian fatalities in the city. Cluster staff continued to urge improved sidewalks, better engineering, increased education and traffic enforcement. In early 2008, the city began requiring secured, sheltered walkways by construction sites.

The Cluster reported to local Postal authorities "gang-tagged" equipment in need of cleaning and repair. Gangs remained a very violent and deadly threat in DC's neighborhoods. To that end, the staff also urged the city fund effective programs for evenings and weekends at the city's recreation centers, as a means to engage District youth successfully. Deadly gang violence continued in the region, particularly impacting Columbia Heights.

The Cluster **vigorously opposed proposals at year's end to extend alcohol service hours for the upcoming Presidential Inaugural to 5 am** - concerned that it would result in causing more people to be victims of crime, or become intoxicated. It joined with at least 2 US Senators in urging the city maintain its 2 AM limit on service of alcohol. The City Council moved back from a 5 am to a 4 am last service time for the upcoming Inaugural. The city's legal counsel also maintained that any establishment having a "voluntary agreement" that limited its hours of service would remain in effect during the Inaugural period.

### **Services to Congregations**

Local congregations continued to face uphill struggles in their efforts to operate. **Numerous Capitol Hill congregations were adversely impacted by parking regulations put into effect around the newly opened baseball stadium, limiting parking to 2 hours as early as 7 AM on Sunday mornings.** Many church visitors come for services that go on throughout the morning and into early afternoons. After citing the overwhelming adverse impact this would have on numerous congregations such as the historic African American Ebenezer United Methodist Church, the city amended its parking limitations, lifting its new Sunday restrictions, given that few games occur on Sunday afternoons and that far less demand for parking was generated than was feared.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Church of Christ Scientist continued its efforts to be allowed to raze it's 1970's modernist building that had been declared a historic landmark in late 2007. This poorly designed and poorly constructed building has cost the congregation enormous funds simply to heat and cool properly, much less maintain its walls, roof, and physical structure. The Cluster strongly supported the Church's right to free exercise of religion, as allowed under federal law. The Church of Latter Day Saints was precluded from moving forward with a new chapel as a matter of right at a site on 16<sup>th</sup> Street when a "zoning overlay" was imposed, after the property was purchased and cleared for construction. The Cluster supported congregations' rights to build

appropriate worship facilities in face of these obstacles amidst concerns that these land use regulations were precluding the free exercise of religion.

### **Community Services**

The Cluster sent numerous public service flyers to local congregations for posting and distribution, as well as to the media in order to spread the word on opportunities for assistance, health, and financial education. **Utility Discount Days, Youth Law Fairs, Financial Literacy Fairs, and health care screenings** were amongst the types of events the Cluster sought to make the community aware of given growing needs throughout the city amidst rising unemployment and the widening financial crisis.

### **Economic Revitalization**

The Cluster, as with major underused or vacant publicly-owned sites in the past, continued to urge the government to move forward on re-developing decaying or underused sites. The **Old Post Office Pavilion**, a historic structure that has lost many of its retail tenants and continued to suffer neglect of its structure, was urged to be put out for bid for re-development and historical restoration. The Cluster's Executive Director called for consideration of the construction of a new headquarters for the **FBI Building**, allowing the current several block site in the heart of downtown to be redeveloped for mixed use and providing the FBI with a new, state of the art building, given the out-dated and poor condition of the current site. These projects could generate potentially hundreds of new jobs for District residents, as well as generate tens of millions in new revenues for the city.

Staff continued to aid small businesses and civic groups seeking to revitalize their neighborhoods. These efforts included urging the city to tackle vacant sites, seeking improved lighting to enhance safety, as well as traffic adjustments and improvements to sidewalks to encourage pedestrian activity, shopping and services.

### **Special Recognition**

Special recognition goes to **Rev. John Mack**, who served as Pastor of First Congregational Church, U.C.C. for 23 years, from 1984 to 2007, and was a long-serving officer of the Cluster. He died in January. He helped to expand numerous services for the needy in downtown Washington, his church serving as a central site for a number of homeless programs, as well as being a model for an inclusive church.

The Cluster welcomed as its 44<sup>th</sup> member: **Soka Gakkai International - USA Buddhist Association**. Located on Massachusetts Avenue, NW, it opened in the city in 2007 with great hope and expectation for its ministries. A complete listing of member congregations is on the agency's website at [www.downtowncluster.org](http://www.downtowncluster.org).

### **2008 Officers**

President: Maxine Maye, Lincoln Temple, UCC  
Vice President: Ron Linton, St. Matthew's Cathedral  
Treasurer: Austin Dandridge, Second Baptist Church  
Asst. Treasurer: Annesley Schmidt, Epiphany Episcopal Church  
Secretary: Jack Womeldorf, Church of the Pilgrims, Presbyterian  
Asst. Secretary: Jennie Hunt, First Congregational Church, UCC

### **Staff**

Executive Director: Terrance Lynch; Senior Outreach Worker: Julie Turner; Associate Outreach Worker: Juan Carlos Benavides; and Associate Outreach Worker: Sharon Winfield.

### **Directors and Financial Reports**

A listing of Directors is available upon request. The Downtown Cluster of Congregations is independently audited annually. Such audits are available upon request.