

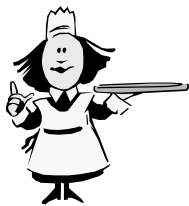
Get to Know Us—



Urban Connections relies on volunteers for most of our daily activities. Volunteers teach kids math, reading, Spelling, and Bible lessons. Volunteers also cook meals and snacks, serving dinner to as many as 25 people in an evening. Volunteers hang out with kids, donate supplies, furniture and appliances (when needed), as well as helping us work on the house, clean up after dinner, play games, mediate during disagreements and shuttle kids home at the end of the night.

I cannot, in one newsletter slot, tell you about each person who comes to work with us. I can tell you that the people who come to be with us have become our friends. The kids have learned to rely on, confide in, trust and look up to these individuals. They are both ordinary and extraordinary. For this month, I'd like to tell you about our cooks. They are all women, all very busy, who are all making time for a very important role.

Pam cooks for our Monday kids. Pam is a stay-at-home mother of three home-school teenagers. She is often taking them for skiing or tai-kwan-do lessons. Two of her three kids have started driving. Very often when she cooks for the ministry kids, she has made enough to also take to families in her church who are in need. The kids have learned that they can tell Pam how it is (last week she tried a different brand of corn bread and they made



sure she knew they weren't happy about it!). They've also learned that she'll remember their favorites, down to remembering who eats salad and who loves bread.

Heather cooks for our Tuesday kids... a rowdy and picky bunch. Heather is a teacher at one of the nearby middle schools, as well as attending a church in our neighborhood (our partner, Hope Christian, in fact) and living just blocks from the ministry house. She is often busy with the kids in her life, but makes time to make the meal on Sunday and give it to Doug and Jill so that they can serve it to the kids on Tuesday. She has won the kids over with casseroles! This is her first year helping at UC, but we are encouraged by her participation and willingness to find a way to serve!

Dorothy often has the role of mom to her grandkids, who are teenagers and an elementary student. She's often watching them, keeping them out of trouble and running



them to the many places they need to go. She has a full-time job at OSU Medical Center and she's also a member of Hope Christian. This is her second year cooking for UC, and has been very willing to let the kids tell her what they do or don't like. Since she has so much experience with kids, she can often anticipate better than us what they'll eat. When she brought fish sticks one day last year, I wasn't sure these picky eaters would be satisfied. But, their biggest problem was that she didn't buy enough!

Kelley is a working woman, who makes special time to cook dinner for our teenagers and their small children who come. She recently got engaged and will be getting married soon. She listens to their requests (which are many) and throws some healthier food in for good measure. She's good at making both and introducing new things they may not have tried. She also chooses to stay, hang out with the teens and help with our Bible study.

There is another special group of "chefs" that help us immensely - our "cookie ladies". This is a group of ladies from First Alliance Church who serve us by providing 3-4 dozen cookies each week. They rotate the job, each taking one week, so that no one is overwhelmed. We love them - and so do the kids!

I praise God for the women who serve by cooking, and am grateful that this is one less thing for our staff to worry about. These volunteers are an enormous blessing to us.

There are less than 20 people who currently volunteer to work with Urban Connections. In our best year, there were as many as 30-40 people who were committed to coming once each week. Our greatest needs are (1) someone to lead Bible club with our 4-8 year olds and (2) people to help with our teens and their kids. If you can serve us in one of these ways, call or email Cathy Alexander at 252-3726 or cathy@urban-connections.org.



Current Needs

Meijer/Kroger gift cards
Pre-sweetened drink mix
(lemonade, fruit punch, etc)
Hand soap (large bottles to refill our smaller ones)
Dishwasher Detergent
Napkins
Paper Towels
ranch dressing
hot sauce

Educational Board Games
Educational Computer Games (Windows XP compatible)

Thank You

Thank you
**Westview Alliance
Church**

for the collection you took
on our behalf. The drive you
held yielded many of our
every day items - and we are
grateful for your generosity.

Volunteer Needs

Our greatest need right now is for additional help on Thursday night. Some of our teenagers have small children, making a need for someone to play with the kids while Bible study goes on. We're also facing a "teen night" with kids ranging from 7th grade to being in their early 20's. We have the desire to create two different groups, either meeting at the same time in different areas or meeting at different times. If you can help with the small children or are interested in helping us have two different teen groups, please call or email Cathy Alexander (information below).

Let us Pray...

- for the kids who come to Bible study. It is our desire that they turn their hearts to Christ and use Him as a role-model for living life.
- for the volunteers who are committed to coming each week. Some have been coming for years, others just started, but please - Praise God for these workers!
- for families who live near us in the neighborhood. Pray they would grow a desire to stay in the neighborhood and see the value of living here as well as seeing hope for the future of our streets.

Urban Connections

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Doug Hartman
Executive Director
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Cathy Alexander
Resource Administrator
252-3726

Want to learn more about the vision, people, needs and events of the ministry? Visit our website...www.urban-connections.org

or email one of the staff:
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cathy@urban-connections.org



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A Challenge from the Word

Previously I have written about the Hebrew Prophets and their staunch protests against injustice (available at www.urban-connections.org/resources). Though justice is not usually a primary concern in many Christian circles, God's (and the prophets') commitment to it is rooted in a concept with which we are more familiar: a God who loves. In biblical thought, justice does not originate from philosophical reflection but from a holy awareness of the victims of injustice. Seeing whole families starve to death while others hoard massive amounts of food has a way of searing the conscience, forming powerful convictions where moments before there were none. Biblical justice is a fruit of love.

The Bible does not so much define justice as picture it in action. To understand what biblical justice we need to consider those situations presented in Scripture and determine how they were meant to work. In Deuteronomy 24, Moses explains and exhorts his people to act justly using situations from everyday life: collateral & defaulting on loans, harvest season, marriage and divorce. Loans functioned in antiquity in much the same way as they do today: they were offered by those with money to those without it (they just did without the intermediary of a bank or financial institution). Also like today, the lender required some sort of collateral or a "pledge" to guarantee loan repayment, and in the event that the borrower defaulted on repayment, the lender took what was offered in pledge.

Moses gives two examples of items that could be used as collateral in antiquity: a millstone (v. 6, used to grind grain) and a cloak (mentioned twice: v. 13, 17). In these examples, the law assumed that the borrower had (for whatever reason) defaulted. So, the lender comes to take possession of the poor person's millstone or cloak. So what does justice look like in these situations? The law's concern is clearly for the borrower, that his or her pledge should be returned that day. This is a bizarre response. Our expectations might be for an appropriate punishment for defaulting on a loan or a repayment scheme. But the biblical law ignores these matters. Its concern is for the borrower's pledge. Why is the law (and God) concerned about a millstone and a cloak?

To understand this concern we must consider two things: (1) the circumstances of those involved and (2) the law's perspective. In the example of a cloak, a poor person would have only one of these garments, so taking one in pledge means taking the only one he or she had. This would be quite literally taking the shirt off his or her back.

The millstone would also be the only one owned, but losing it affected not just the individual borrower but the livelihood of an entire (extended) family. Lenders, however, would have many such things, and they would not be greatly affected by the loss or gain of one millstone or one cloak.

In the loan situation, we might ask, "Is this fair?" Strictly speaking, we would have to say "no". When people borrow money and then defaulted on the repayment, they lose their pledge. That's how it works—it is the whole point of a pledge. But the key is to remember perspective. Biblical justice assumes the perspective of the poor and vulnerable, and thus invites the rest of society to do so. From the perspective of the poor, the loan situation begs for compassion. The poor borrowers are drastically affected by the loss of their pledge, left without even a coat to wear or the basic means to feed and support their families. Viewed objectively, biblical justice begins to sound like Jesus' teaching: "do to others what you would have them do to you," an ethical standard which he said "sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Put another way, biblical justice is fairness infused with compassion. It answers the question, "What is fair?" but only as it is tempered by the particular situation of the vulnerable.

The biblical concept of justice is obviously not a blind, impartial judgment. It expects a compassionate response. But it is not Robin Hood's mantra of "stealing from the rich in order to give to the poor" either. The anticipated response of the wealthy is not forced or imposed but voluntary. Taking the perspective of the poor, the law encourages compassion, because in the end, it is the civility of the wealthy and powerful that makes biblical justice work. This is why the law repeatedly exhorts the people to remember their own history of oppression and slavery (Deut. 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18, 24:22). Only as the wealthier members of society remembered their own history of desperation and need are they in a place to respond appropriately to the situation.

A great example of biblical justice is the story of Ruth. Ruth lost her family and with them all means of supporting herself. She returned with her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem with no hope for life, no conceivable prospect of changing her situation, nor even the basic reassurance of food and shelter. But as a foreigner and a poor widow, she is singled out in the law as one in need of justice. The law said that the wealthy should let the poor harvest their leftover crops. Despite the personal loss, Boaz encouraged Ruth to remain in his fields and

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arranged for her to have access the best of his harvest. The law said that the nearest relative should provide an inheritance for widows. Despite the potential threat to his family's inheritance, Boaz married Ruth and brought her into his own household. It was his willingness to go beyond what is "fair" for him that actually made justice work for her.

In one of their first encounters, Boaz blessed Ruth, picturing God as bird and reminding her of the shelter and protection of his "wings" (Ruth 2:12). Later when Ruth came and proposed marriage to Boaz, she used the same metaphor, suggesting that he provide her the protection of *his* "wings" (3:9). Ruth reminded Boaz that justice in her case was dependant upon his voluntary compliance. To use their imagery, the shelter of God's wings had a decidedly personal application for Boaz. Thus, Boaz illustrates biblical justice for us: we make God's justice real and effectual as we his followers practice it in the difficult situations of everyday life.

Biblical justice is not just an OT concept. One of our beloved "Christmas" stories reveals this understanding of justice. In Matthew 1, Joseph learned of his fiancee Mary's pregnancy. He concluded that she

had been unfaithful and decided to divorce her "in secret" so that she would not be publicly disgraced. Matthew explained this response by saying that Joseph was a "righteous" man (1:19). If we understand "righteous" here in a strict, follow-the-letter-of-the-law way, we would expect public humiliation and death by stoning. But when Matthew called Joseph "righteous", he meant Joseph was as a man who practiced biblical justice. Strict justice may require public humiliation and stoning, but compassion led Joseph to a different response: risking his own reputation and honor, he chose to divorce her quietly. Of course, we know that their story ended differently altogether. It seems that God honored Joseph as he had honored Mary.

It can be easy to pit justice against compassion or love. But the opposite should be the case: it was justice and compassion operating in concert that drove Jesus to the cross. Jesus' parents (and more distant ancestors) likewise prove to be men and women who typify justice infused with compassion. May we continue to think through how we can bring God's transforming, delivering justice to our world.

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