

THE ADVOCATE

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- Shalom Seekers now half off!
- Micah Challenge USA goes to Sierra Leone
- Have you read the Belhar Confession?

SOWING SEEDS & OVERCOMING POVERTY! BY CORY VERNER

Last week I attended [The Gathering 2007](#) in Washington D.C. with several other members of [Christians Ending Poverty](#).

Christians ending poverty is a diverse group of San Diego Christians responding to extreme world poverty by promoting advocacy and personal discipleship. You can find out more about our group [here](#).

The conference was put on by Bread for the World. Over four days, we worshiped together, dialoged, brainstormed, and renewed our commitment to end hunger and poverty around the world.

We attended many helpful sessions including a pre-conference workshop – the CRC Justice Seekers Assembly – put on by the Christian Reformed Church to start a denomination-wide movement focusing on justice in CRC congregations.

As a member of the CRC, this gathering was one of the highlights of the trip because it allowed me to connect with others in our denomination who are also working to end poverty.



It's difficult to summarize an event like this in just a few words. It was inspiring, life changing, yet sobering. I gained a new appreciation for the complexity of our political institutions and legislation and realized how vital it is that we organize on behalf of the poor.

Much of the focus of the conference was centered on the farm bill, an enormous, sweeping piece of legislation that affects not only the poor domestically but those suffering from extreme poverty in the poorest countries around the world.

Story continued on page 3.

ADVOCATE CALENDAR

Micah Challenge Sunday, October 14 2007.

Get your church involved in this international movement of Christians working to cut global poverty and hunger in half by 2015 through the Millennium Development Goals!

The Christian Reformed Church is deeply involved with the Micah Challenge, and synod has encouraged that churches get involved.

So, visit www.micahchallenge.org to learn more (plus, you can get even more at the national campaign websites: www.micahchallenge.us and www.micahchallenge.ca) and the OSJHA will

keep you posted on new resources materials and action steps as we approach October.

And as long as you'll be focused on the MDGs (those eight, great, internationally agreed-upon goals that aim to cut poverty and hunger around the world), why not "Stand Up" for them?

On October 17, you can join people around the world and literally Stand Up against poverty and inequality. Last year's Stand Up events made the Guinness World Record for the largest coordinated mobilization. Learn more at: www.standagainstopoverty.org.

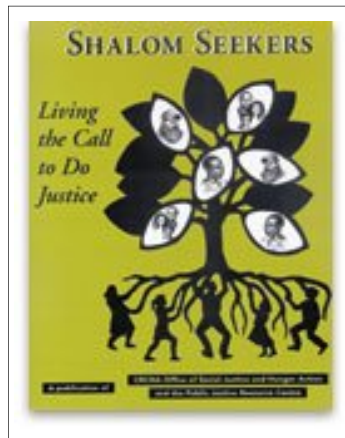
Advocate Calendar continued on page 4.

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Blow the halftime whistle! In 2000, world leaders committed to the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Now it's 2007, the halfway point. We're still in the game—but falling behind. But – this can be a win-win for all – get in the game and help turn things around! The Micah Challenge Canada website has a bunch of cool Blow the Whistle resources for you and your congregation, including a great video, bulletin inserts and more. Visit www.micahchallenge.ca and click on "Blow the Whistle."

Looking for a good read this summer? Look no further; Citizens for Public Justice, a Canadian Christian public policy research and analysis organization, has compiled their annual summer book list. Check out the book reviews at: <http://cpj.ca/otherwork/index.html?ap=1&x=87831>

Get your Shalom Seekers at half price! Shalom Seekers is a handy social justice toolkit created by the friendly folks at the CRC Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action and the Public Justice Resource Centre. It includes biblical reflections, helpful story illustrations, and practical action steps for your fledgling or experienced social justice group or church small group. A must have for your church's library! Contact Meghan to order for only \$10: kraley@crcna.org.



Have you read the Belhar Confession? Written in South Africa in response to apartheid, this reformed confession addresses issues of unity, reconciliation and justice. The synod of the Christian Reformed Church this summer encouraged Christian Reformed Churches to learn more and dialogue about the confession.

You can easily do that by visiting this blog: <http://belhar.blogspot.com/>, which not only includes the text for the confession, but also has posts with further articles and questions for reflection, and a comments section for people to leave their thoughts about the Belhar. For an even more guided approach to the Belhar Confession, Faith Alive Resources has made available a study guide called: Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Study Guide for the Belhar Confession. Visit www.falthaliveresources.com to order.

Hunger for the Word (set of 3 books): With weekly sermon/homily reflections, Hunger for the Word is an invaluable resource for pastors, liturgical ministers, and those interested in justice-oriented Bible study and spiritual growth. Also includes suggestions for musical worship, and ideas for children's sermons to help spread God's Word of activism, compassion, and integrity throughout the congregation. Buy the three book set of Years A, B, C and save, at Bread for the World: www.bread.org (go to the "Store" link at the top of the page, then "Books" in the menu.)

It's Christmas In July – sort of. Alternatives for Simple living have made available their great annual booklet, "Whose Birthday is it, Anyway?" The resource aims to help families, individuals and churches re-center their Christmas celebrations on Christ, and away from shopping, getting, and stress. The booklet includes biblical reflections, tips for simpler celebrations, family activities and much more. The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action has several copies available, so please email us for free copies for you, your family, or your congregation! Contact Meghan at: kraley@crcna.org. Get your copies now so that you can have plenty of time to make some changes in your celebrations this year.

The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action is seeking to support a CRC congregation in testing what could be the three most formative methods for bending hearts toward justice. Will you be our test church? Visit www.crcjustice.org and click on the link ("A Test You'll Want to Take") on the homepage to learn about what is involved.

Each test church will have the support of OSJHA for its questions, materials, and anything else you need! If you would like to learn more about this exciting opportunity, please contact Kate Kooyman: kooymank@crcna.org.

ACTION ALERTS

Canadian Opportunities:

Launch of KAIROS "Re-Energize" campaign in fall 2007

Join with KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives this fall when they launch their newest campaign, "Re-Energize: Time for a Carbon Sabbath."

This three year campaign for personal, community and political change will have all kinds of ideas for fun, engaging and practical things to do as we work together to change ourselves, our churches and our world in our approaches to the environment and climate change.

Check out www.kairoscanada.org for more information as it becomes available.

Actions for **International Day for the Eradication of Poverty** can be found here: <http://www.oct17.org/Count-me-in.html>. Why not tie some of these actions in with Micah Challenge Sunday, October 14?

U.S. Opportunities:

An exciting piece of legislation has just been introduced in the House. **The Jubilee Act** seeks 100% debt cancellation for the sixty-seven countries that need it to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

This legislation can help make strides in the fight against poverty and hunger and supports the goals of the Micah Challenge, of which the CRC is a devoted partner. So, what can you do to support the Jubilee Act?

You can visit www.jubileeusa.org and click on the big "Urge your rep" icon to be taken to a page where you can send an easy email to your representative. Even better, you can use the email text provided to help create your own personal message, and writing a letter by hand gets even more attention.

If you're feeling especially motivated, why not schedule a meeting with your rep during their August recess? You can get help doing this by contacting Jubilee USA at coord@j2000usa.org or 202.783.3566.

SOWING SEEDS, CONT'D

When I joined CEP, I was most interested in doing "things that really mattered" to help the poor. Things like - sending aid, sponsoring a child or a village... Advocacy was certainly a consideration, but it was far down the list below most of the other things I thought could help more.

This conference convinced me though that advocacy IS one of the most important activities in the fight to help the poor. Why? Because the poor don't have the resources necessary to organize, lobby and protect themselves from entities who are primarily interested in promoting self-serving agendas.

Take the cotton lobby for example. This is a highly cohesive, organized, well-financed group that spends millions to make sure that cotton crops continue to be subsidized here in the U.S. But subsidizing cotton in recent years is unfair, not only to the majority of farmers here in the U.S. but especially to those farmers who are unable to make a living now due to the over-production of cotton that has resulted in depressed cotton prices. So what does this really mean, you might be asking?



It means that these subsidies are wrecking entire economies of poor nations and are literally killing thousands and millions of people in these places. As a (now informed) Christian I cannot support policies that are unjust and hurtful to the poor of the world. Visit bread.org to find out more about the farm bill.

But the conference wasn't just about the politics of injustice. It was much more than that. It was true to its name – it was a gathering. It provided a unique opportunity to learn and share, hear stories, even to vent. I learned from Lawrence, a Zambian who ran a prison ministry there with 1000 volunteers that many involved in this movement are as interested in sharing the truth of the gospel as they are in meeting needs.

Meeting so many evangelicals who are concerned for the poor was a great comfort to me. Or the network of small businessmen who are using their expertise to help small business owners in Latin America and Africa adopt best practices that will help their business expand and run more efficiently. So many are using their God given gifts to make the world a different and better place.

It was certainly a trip to remember. I hope some of you will be able to attend in 2009 when the conference is held again.

Cory Verner lives in San Marcos California and attends Crossroads CRC. As well as being a husband and father of 2 boys, ages 5 and 8, he also serves on the board of Christians Ending Poverty, a diverse coalition of Christians in San Diego responding to extreme world poverty by promoting advocacy and personal discipleship. He is also co-founder and publisher of ChristianAudio.com.

JUSTICE AND WORSHIP

At the gathering of CRC members in Washington, D.C., a litany based on Matthew 25:31-46 was read.

A portion of that litany is posted here, but you can obtain a full litany by emailing Kate Kooyman at kooy-mank@crcna.org, and we'll also post it to the OSJHA website at: www.crcjustice.org.

Reader:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, He will sit on his

royal throne and the people of all nations ...

Men: Kenya,

Women: The Philippines,

Men: the United States,

Women: Nicaragua,

Men: Cambodia,

Women: Zambia,

Men: Ecuador,

Reader:

...and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups,

as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will put the righteous people on his right and the others on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right,

Jesus:

Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you before the world began.

Reader:

And when they ask him why, He will tell them,

Jesus: For I was hungry...

NEWS BRIEFS

Micah Challenge takes US students to monitor elections in Sierra Leone

On August 3rd a group of students, including students and graduates from colleges affiliated with the CRC, will journey to Sierra Leone for two weeks to "pursue justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" Micah 6:8. ([Click here to see who is going!](#))

The students have the opportunity to be election monitors in Sierra Leone's upcoming presidential elections. Students will be working hand in hand with Sierra Leonean Christians and others from the international community to help insure a just election.

They will learn about the influence of the Micah Challenge in Sierra Leone, and hear from prominent Christian leaders on the work they are doing to bring about a more just society.

Students will participate in the monitoring of presidential elections scheduled for August 11, 2007.

Visiting students will build on the existing work of the Micah Challenge Sierra Leone by collaborating with church leaders from the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone as well as students from the Fourah Bay College to do workshops on integral mission for churches, Christian university groups, and high school students.

The Micah Challenge is an international movement of Christians seeking to overcome poverty and hunger, specifically through the meeting of the Millennium Development Goals.

Learn more about what the students hope to achieve on this trip by visiting Jason Fileta's blog post, here: <http://micahchallengeexchange.blogspot.com/>

News Briefs Cont'd on page 4.

NEWS BRIEFS

CRC members and friends gather for exciting event in Washington, D.C.!

You read about Cory's experience at the 2007 Bread for the World Gathering: Sowing Seeds on page 1. And you'll notice he mentioned the pre-conference gathering of Christian Reformed folks as a highlight to his time in Washington, D.C. Here's a little about why that CRC gathering was so inspiring!

Forty-five people from around the world attended the CRC pre-conference. About one quarter of the group were CRC partners from countries like Zambia, Ecuador, Cambodia, Australia and others. Another quarter of the group injected some youth and energy – they were students from Dordt and Calvin colleges who were able to share with one another about how to seek and promote justice on their campuses.

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Yet another quarter of the group was made up of Christian Reformed members from congregations around the United States, including California, Iowa, and New Jersey. The remaining participants were guests from the Reformed Church in America, Bread for the World employees, and others who joined the group just because they thought it sounded great!

So what did this diverse group of people do? They learned (through sessions on biblical and theological foundations for justice, dialogue between North American and global participants, and exposure to new and helpful resources for church advocacy and action); they listened (to brave and frank discussions about how often North Americans talk about those who live abroad, rather than hearing directly from those who do development work in their own countries); and they made commitments (by taking newly acquired tools and resources back to home churches to promote communities of faith and justice.)

The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action, the event host and organizer is excited about the relationships formed at the CRC pre-conference, and looks forward to assisting the empowered and energized participants in building just communities back in their home churches and on campuses.

The OSJHA is also pleased to be working with CRWRC and CRWM in pursuing the development of a justice focus among Christian Reformed churches. Want to learn more about how your congregation can get involved? Contact Kate Kooyman: kooymank@crcna.org.

Immigration reform stalled in Senate

CRC Partner Church World Service has been closely following the status of Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation

in Washington. Here is the latest update from CWS:

"On June 28, the U.S. Senate was unable to move forward on Comprehensive Immigration Reform, thereby affirming the status quo, leaving twelve million people living in the shadows and failing the nation on the security concerns that worry many Americans. Church World Service is disappointed that the legislative process has come to a halt and will not move forward to the House of Representatives.

The current immigration system is one that many claim to be broken. Yet our leaders could not reach a consensus on how to move forward with a purposeful, rather than punitive, earned legalization program; a safe and fair worker program; provisions that preserve family reunion as a priority; smart, targeted enforcement; safeguards for asylum seekers, and a mandate that police ensure the safety of all, not serve as immigration officials.

Church World Service will continue to lift up these needed reforms of our immigration system. Our thanks to all who wrote and called their Senate members and expressed support for comprehensive reform." – From www.churchworldservice.org.

G8 fails to deliver in Germany

With the latest G8 meeting wrapped up in Germany, mixed reactions are coming in regarding commitments to fight poverty and move forward with the Millennium Development Goals. Despite announcements of funds for HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the G8 is still not meeting overall promises made in 2005 regarding aid to Africa.

Many of the announcements regarding funding, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS, contained previously pledged money, rather than new commitments. On the issue of climate change, the G8 has affirmed a commitment to a UN process to negotiate a post-2012 deal and make "substantial emissions reductions."

Make Poverty History Canada has released a statement saying that actual Canadian contributions fall short of commitments made, especially on the issue of aid. Even if the government sticks to the current trend of increasing aid by 8% a year, by the year 2010 they will still be less than half-way to the commitment of 0.7% of gross national income.

CALENDAR, CONT'D

And as long as you're marking ahead in your calendar, flip to November and clear the 11th for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church and the 18-25th for Restorative Justice Week.

The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action will direct you to resources and actions for these events next month. Additionally, mark December 1st as World AIDS Day. Perhaps your church can recognize this somber day on the 2nd (a Sunday).

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) has a lot of resources available for your church on HIV/AIDS at www.crwrc.org.