

showing mercy, seeking justice

by Larry Hovis, CBFNC Executive Coordinator

We have just completed a year of our Fellowship's life together exploring the topic of Fit Church. We have examined several dimensions of ecclesial fitness. One dimension we did not address was the admonition of the prophet Micah, "But what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8).

We avoided this dimension, not because it isn't vital to our discipleship but because we are devoting a full year to focus on this critical concept. Our directive for this exploration comes from the 2014 CBFNC Vision Statement, *The Road Ahead*, which identified four "areas of focus" as worthy of exploration. We have already addressed three of these and now turn our attention to "Showing Mercy and Seeking Justice," described in the document as follows:

As we live and share the Good News of God's rule and reign, we will show mercy and seek justice in our local communities and beyond those communities in regional, national, and global contexts. We will respond with compassionate help to people who do not have the fullness of life God intends for them, and we will address systemic causes of injustice. We live in diverse communities which have unique and ever-changing needs. In collaboration with local congregations and other partners, CBFNC will explore, implement, and provide training and resources for ministry initiatives which serve the marginalized and vulnerable, which work for justice, and which seek the restoration of all creation. We commit ourselves to form holy friendships with the people whom we serve, to learn from them, and to raise awareness of their concerns and hopes.

For many years, CBFNC Coordinators have met in retreat in late summer to develop ministry plans for the coming year. Last year, on the campus of Mars Hill University, we studied Scriptures related to this theme. We decided that the injunction to "do justice and love mercy" is not only a prophetic command but was also at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry. We determined that practicing justice and mercy is not optional for those of us who profess Jesus as Lord. Though there are many dimensions of mercy and justice as Jesus-followers, we will give attention to the following in *The Gathering* issues in the coming months:

Love Mercy (May/June)

What is mercy, biblically and theologically? How are churches and the CBFNC community engaged in ministries of mercy, locally and beyond? How do mercy ministries help us and others walk humbly with God?

Do Justice (July/August)

What is justice, biblically and theologically? How are churches and the CBFNC community engaged in ministries of justice, locally and beyond? How do justice ministries help us and others walk humbly with God?

Serving the Marginalized and Vulnerable (September/October)

Who are the vulnerable and marginalized in our communities, state, and world? How are we ministering to these populations? How can churches better recognize and respond to the marginalized and vulnerable in their midst?

Powers and Principalities (November/December)

We have historically been more faithful to engage in ministries of compassion than to address their root causes. We have been more focused on helping individuals than opposing the "powers and principalities" (Ephesians 6:12) that harm God's children and God's creation. How are we (and how can we do more) addressing the systemic causes of suffering in our communities and world?

Holy Friendships (January/February 2019)

The people to whom we administer mercy and justice aren't objects, but human beings. Much of our missions activities and compassion ministries have not led us to establish relationships with those to whom we minister. How can we cultivate holy friendships with those God is calling us to serve?

Awareness and Advocacy (March/April 2019)

How is the CBF community (in NC and beyond) engaging in ministries of advocacy? How can congregations become more involved in advocacy — locally, nationally, and globally — thus helping to address the systemic causes of suffering and injustice? What resources are available to help congregations strengthen their advocacy efforts?

In the current issue, we are exploring what it means to "Love Mercy." The word, "mercy," appears 224 times in the NRSV. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible states:

When applied to God or to Jesus Christ, [mercy] can denote an inner feeling of sympathy or love which is expressed outwardly in helping action. God's ultimate act of mercy was made manifest in his gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus had mercy for people (Mt. 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30-34; Mk. 5:19, 9:22, 10:47; Lk. 17:13).

The well-known parable of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25-37, concludes with Jesus asking the question, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus concluded by saying, "Go and do likewise."

And so must we.