

THE Christian Citizen

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Change for Children:

Seeking God's Kingdom Through **The Penny Project**



VOLUME 1, 2011



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Something Beautiful for God

“Look what we’ve done! Isn’t this beautiful?” With those words, I knew The Penny Project had had a deep and lasting effect on my eldest son’s faith and life.

For several months he and his brothers had participated with other children and youth at University Baptist Church in College Park, Md., collecting over 110,000 pennies in an effort to raise awareness of and support for children impacted by poverty. Their efforts had inspired the congregation and drawn the attention of our local newspaper. In the months that followed, they would meet and decide which local organizations to support with donations from the funds they had raised. They would also travel to Capitol Hill to meet with their representative’s staff to share their concern about child poverty and their hope for more response, including from the government.

But in that moment, following a worship service during which they had wheeled their collection into the sanctuary in an old blue wagon and participated in dedicating the pennies and their efforts to God, I knew something greater than raising money or awareness was at work. My sons don’t often say an experience they’ve had or something they’ve accomplished was “beautiful,” and yet that is just how my eldest son described his involvement with The Penny Project. Others may simply have seen an old beat-up wagon overflowing with coins. My son saw something else.

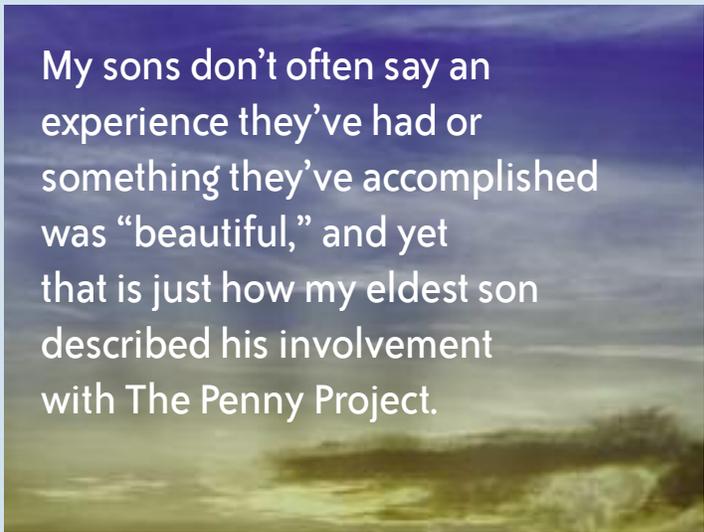
Since the start of The Penny Project, some 209 participating groups have raised more than 5 million pennies as part of the nationwide effort of American Baptist Home Mission Societies to raise 14 million pennies, with each one representing a child impacted by poverty in our mission field, the United States and Puerto Rico. For the most part, monies collected have remained in the communities in which they were raised, as participating groups are encouraged to connect with and support organizations and ministries that are already responding. Participants are also encouraged to share their stories and concern with others in their community and beyond—to meet with community lead-

ers and legislators to share what they are doing and to encourage others to join in the effort to reduce child poverty in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Beyond the support that is raised and the connections that are made is the impact this effort will have on the lives and faith of those participating in the project. As my own son’s words echo in my memory, I am reminded of the story of the woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany, preparing his body for burial. While the disciples objected, Jesus did not. “Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me” (Mark 14:6, ESV). Jesus commended her for her action and said wherever the gospel is proclaimed “what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Mark 14:9, ESV).

Likewise, I commend you. Do something beautiful for God. Participate in The Penny Project. Encourage your neighbors to do the same. Be inspired. Be encouraged. Be grateful, and give thanks to hear the children of your church, and maybe even your own son or daughter, grandson, or granddaughter, proclaim—“Look what we’ve done! Isn’t this beautiful?”

Curtis Ramsey-Lucas is managing director of Resource Development for American Baptist Home Mission Societies.



My sons don’t often say an experience they’ve had or something they’ve accomplished was “beautiful,” and yet that is just how my eldest son described his involvement with The Penny Project.

The Penny Project: Past and Present

Although 209 churches and other organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico have collected and donated pennies to The Penny Project of American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), the initiative originated humbly with the youth of only one church—First Baptist Church of New London, N.H. (FBC). The project seeks to collect 14 million coins to represent and aid the 14 million children, newborn to age 18, who live in poverty or struggle with poverty-related issues in the United States and Puerto Rico.

In 2007, “the youth of FBC New London asked a very important question: ‘What can we do to raise awareness about the number of children suffering from hunger in our state?’ They selected the penny in the hope of making that insignificant and often ignored coin a symbol and reminder of children who live in poverty and are often considered insignificant and ignored in our society,” says the Rev. Lisa R. Harris, national coordinator of the Justice for Children Initiative and Christian Center Relations at ABHMS. She adds, “Not only did they raise money, but they also voiced their concern by meeting with their governor and state legislators.”

FBC youth collected approximately 100,000 pennies by spreading the word in church bulletins, newsletters, the media, and speaking engagements, as well as going door to door and placing collection jars at area businesses. They donated the pennies to food pantries and homeless shelters in their area.

While at a mission conference in October 2008, Harris was approached by the Rev. Cindy Johnson, director of FBC’s Youth and Education program and co-coordinator of their Penny Project. “Cindy shared about the project’s success and the difference it made in the lives of the youth, congregation, and community,” Harris recalls. “She asked me if ABHMS [previously known as National Ministries] could help them take this initiative to the national level.”

The Penny Project was launched nationally on June 6, 2009, at Kimball Union Academy in Meriden, N.H., as

part of the annual meeting of American Baptist Churches of Vermont and New Hampshire. The venue was chosen to acknowledge that the project began at the state level in New Hampshire. In attendance were



First Baptist Church of New London, N.H.

approximately 250 individuals representing about 140 churches in the New Hampshire and Vermont region.

The launch included a 10-minute presentation and a litany written by Harris and led by two FBC youth. In addition, four adult leaders and eight youth received certificates of recognition. Perhaps the litany itself best conveys

the reason the youth were lauded: “We are grateful for youth who have not become victims of the ‘me-first’ culture, but choose the ‘Kingdom-of-God-first’ culture.”

“We are grateful for youth who ask ‘What about them?’ before they ask ‘What about me?’” the litany continues. “Many youth care about the lack of food on their neighbors’ tables as much as they care about the amount of food on their own table.”

Johnson notes that FBC now aims to further raise awareness regarding the number of children in poverty by creating a visual display or art piece in a public setting. A sculptor or other visual artist will be asked to help.

While FBC is not currently focused on raising additional pennies, “money still continues to come to us in Baggies and Tupperware containers,” says Johnson. “We’ve lost count.”

Nadine M. Hasenecz is a communications associate at American Baptist Home Mission Societies.

What if ... ?

I can't believe what I just did," said a member of our congregation, stepping into my office, a little out of breath. "I just stopped traffic on Main Street—to pick up *this*." She held up a coin. "I always thought it was for good luck. Now I think of hungry children."

The coin was a penny—one of the many our congregation and community contributed to help raise awareness of poverty in our state. They were brought in Baggies, plastic containers, and buckets, from bureau tops and store counters. Pennies. Lots of pennies. 60,000, to be exact. These pennies represented the number of children who go to bed hungry in the state of New Hampshire. The eight young people who started The Penny Project asked, "What does 60,000 look like?" They got a sobering answer in the form of three little red wagons filled with pennies. And this was only one small New England state.

Four years later the project has been cast into a wider pool rippling out across the nation. Through partnership with American Baptist Home Mission Societies (previously known as National Ministries), our one little church's dream was realized through a joint venture with 209 other churches. The original 375 pounds of collected pennies now weighs in at over twelve tons! What started out as a football field's length of pennies now spans over four miles long. Five million pennies!

Has collecting pennies really made a difference in the lives of these young people? The original group asked themselves this question, emphatic that the project began as an awareness-raiser, not a fund-raiser. "The Penny Project has had a profound impact on who I am as a person," says Courtney Conner. "It has opened my eyes to a greater purpose in living: to help others. If there is one life lesson this project has taught me, it's that ignorance is not bliss. For me, if I know a problem exists, I find it almost impossible to ignore."

Linnea Harrold adds, "The Penny Project has made me more aware of the integrated nature of the problems in the world. When I hear of an environmental, international, or economic crisis, I recognize the impact

it will have on those in poverty. Yes, The Penny Project has made me aware of people in poverty, but it has also made me aware that everything impacts something else. We are all interconnected."

Interconnected, indeed. The dream of eight young people from New Hampshire wanting to share their vision has been manifested in God's remarkable hand joining us together across the country. This, perhaps, has been our greatest lesson: God can do more than we ask or think. Linnea continues, "It restores my faith in the impact anyone can have—with God's help. We were just a few middle school kids from a small New England town, dreaming 'what if ... ?' Watching 'what if ... ?' turn



into a reality is something that will impact how I look at challenges for the rest of my life. I guess this project has revealed to me that God has a plan for our dreams. Our job is to be faithful and attentive."

Faithful in the little things ... as partners in God's plan to bring healing to a broken world ... one penny at a time. This is how The Penny Project has rippled out and back into our lives.

Rev. Cindy Johnson is on staff at the New London First Baptist Church in New Hampshire. Courtney Conner is a first-year student at Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, and Linnea Harrold is a first-year student at Gordon College in Massachusetts.

From Pennies to Positive Change

In June 2009, the invitation to participate in The Penny Project went forth from the youth of First Baptist Church of New London, N.H., and congregations, community centers, and college campuses have been collecting pennies in containers of various shapes and sizes ever since. We are more than one-third of our way to our goal, but we have a long way to go to reach 14 million pennies—each penny representing one child in poverty in the United States and Puerto Rico.

But the greater goal, beyond the collection of pennies, for The Penny Project is to *make a difference locally* for children and young people in need with the pennies we are collecting. The stories on pages 10-11 and 14-15 share some of the caring and creative ways pennies are being used to raise awareness about poverty, benefit children directly, and communicate to local politicians the urgency of sponsoring and supporting policies that address poverty.

Statistics from the National Center for Children in Poverty (www.nccp.org) and the U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov/) indicate there were 14 million children between the ages of newborn and 18 living in poverty in the United States and Puerto Rico in 2008. This represented one out of every six children. At the start of 2011, the number was closer to one out of every five children. That means one out of five children is not confident there is enough food in his or her home. One of every five children is not sure he or she will graduate from high school or be able to read. One out of five is vulnerable to homelessness. One out of five live in households with an annual income of \$22,350 or less, which was the 2011 federal poverty standard for a family of four. Thankfully, faith communities are gifted and able to step in where others fall short.

The Penny Project is one part of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) Children in Poverty (CIP) initiative, and the vision of the project represents the vision of the initiative. The initiative is designed to inspire and support an increase in the number of American Baptist congregations attentive to the spiritual and material needs of the most vulnerable among us. Its purpose is to encourage congregations to recognize—or pay attention locally to—the growing number of children and families in need; to remember our Lord's calls to compassion in Luke 4:18-19, Luke 10:25-37, and Matthew 25; and to respond boldly and generously. The CIP initiative is one part of the Justice for Children vision of ABHMS. Since 2006, Justice for Children efforts beyond The Penny Project have included:



[T]he greater goal... for The Penny Project is to make a difference locally for children and young people in need with the pennies we are collecting.



- Five issues of *The Christian Citizen* were published to inform, provide resources for advocacy, and motivate action regarding childhood poverty.
- A five-part study, “Children, Poverty, and the Bible,” has been circulating and is still available for use in Christian education classes, retreats, and group studies.
- Eleven American Baptist regions participated in Future Search training—a process of strategic planning that brings community stakeholders together for community transformation; the focus of the training was children in poverty.
- Thirty-five Children in Poverty grants, totaling \$102,000, were awarded in 2009 and 2010, and at least 15 more grants will be awarded in 2011.
- ABHMS joined with the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) to sponsor a CDF summer intern’s focus on the Freedom Schools Program—a summer enrichment program for children in disadvantaged communities.
- ABHMS was a sponsor, with Sojourners, for a three-day conference and day of advocacy with national legislators, called “Mobilization to End Poverty.”
- ABHMS was a partner with the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, to raise awareness on behalf of the poor.

Since its beginning in 1824, ABHMS has been committed to children and young people. We have started schools to address illiteracy, colleges to nurture academic development, neighborhood centers to support communities, and homes for foster children. Much of this care has been to benefit individuals, families, and communities challenged by poverty. All of this care began as the inspiration of one person, one ministry group, or one congregation. The decision in 2006 to promote the CIP initiative was a way to recommit the

American Baptist family to the calling we have had since our beginning—a calling that is extended to every follower of Jesus Christ.

There is still time to participate in The Penny Project (www.14millionpennies.org); ABHMS hopes the connections initiated through the project continue long after it ends. And beyond The Penny Project, we are eager to hear from you about other successful ideas you believe can make a difference for children throughout the nation.

Rev. Lisa R. Harris is national coordinator of the Justice for Children Initiative and Christian Center Relations at American Baptist Home Mission Societies.



THE
Penny
PROJECT

The Children in Poverty Initiative

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

De centavos a un cambio positivo

En Junio del 2009, una invitación para participar en el Proyecto del Centavo (*Penny Project*) fue enviada de parte de la juventud de la Primera Iglesia Bautista de New London, NH, y desde entonces congregaciones, centros comunitarios y campus universitarios han estado recolectando centavos en envases de diversas formas y tamaños. Estamos a un poco más de un tercio del camino a nuestra meta pero aún queda un largo camino por recorrer para llegar a los 14 millones de centavos—cada centavo representa a un niño o niña en situación

de pobreza en Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico. Cada centavo representa a un niño o niña de inestimable valor para Dios.

Pero la gran meta, más allá de la recolección de monedas para el proyecto, es *hacer la diferencia a nivel local* para la niñez y la juventud en necesidad con los centavos que usted está recogiendo. Las historias que aparecen en las páginas 10-11 y 14-15 muestran algunas de de las maneras creativas y humanitarias en las que se están utilizando los centavos para crear conciencia sobre la pobreza, beneficiar directamente a la niñez y comunicar a los políticos locales la urgencia de patrocinar y apoyar políticas que traten sobre pobreza.

Estadísticas del Centro Nacional de la Niñez en Pobreza (www.ncccp.org) y del censo de EE.UU. (www.census.gov) señalan que en 2008 había 14 millones de niños desde recién nacidos hasta 18 años de edad, viviendo en situación de pobreza en Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico. Esto representaba a 1 de cada 6 niños. En 2011, el número está más cerca a 1 de cada 5 niños. Uno de cada cinco niños no sabe si habrá suficiente comida en su casa. Uno de cada cinco niños no sabe si se graduará en la escuela secundaria o si será capaz de aprender a leer. Uno de cada cinco niños es vulnerable a no tener un hogar. Uno de cada cinco niños vive en hogares con un ingreso anual de \$22,350 o menos, que es el estándar federal de pobreza para una familia de cuatro miembros en 2011. Las comunidades de fe tienen la bendición y la capacidad de brindar apoyo donde otros fallan.

El Proyecto del Centavo es parte de la Iniciativa de la Niñez en Pobreza (CiP) de la ABHMS (Sociedades Misioneras Nacionales Bautistas Americanas) y la visión del proyecto representa la visión de la iniciativa. Esta iniciativa está diseñada para inspirar y promover un incremento en el número de congregaciones Bautistas Americanas listas a atender las necesidades espirituales y materiales de los más vulnerables entre nosotros. El propósito de la iniciativa es animar a las congregaciones a reconocer y prestar atención localmente al creciente



La gran meta... para el proyecto, es hacer la diferencia a nivel local para la niñez y la juventud en necesidad con los centavos que usted está recogiendo.



número de niños y de familias en necesidad; a recordar el llamado del Señor a la compasión, en Lucas 4:18-19, Lucas 10:25-37, y Mateo 25; y a responder de manera generosa y valiente. La iniciativa de CiP es parte de la visión de justicia para la niñez, de la ABHMS. Desde 2006, los esfuerzos de justicia para la niñez más allá del Proyecto del Centavo han incluido:

- 5 números de la revista *The Christian Citizen* fueron publicados para informar, ofrecer recursos para abogar, y motivar a la acción respecto a pobreza de la niñez;
- Un estudio de 5 partes, “Niñez, pobreza y la Biblia” (disponible sólo en inglés), ha estado circulando y aún está disponible para su uso en clases de educación cristiana, retiros y grupos de estudio;
- Once regiones Bautistas Americanas participaron en la capacitación de *Future Search*, un proceso de planificación estratégica que reúne a grupos claves de la comunidad para promover transformación. El enfoque de la capacitación estuvo en la niñez en pobreza;
- Durante 2009 y 2010 se concedieron treinta y cinco ayudas financieras para la niñez en pobreza que sumaron \$102,000. Por lo menos 15 ayudas más serán concedidas en 2011.
- ABHMS se unió al Fondo para la Defensa de los Niños (CDF) para patrocinar un internado de verano que se enfocará en un programa conocido como *Freedom Schools*, para beneficiar a niños y niñas de comunidades en desventaja.
- ABHMS patrocinó, junto con *Sojourners*, una conferencia de tres días y un día de abogacía con

legisladores nacionales llamada: “Movilización para terminar con la pobreza”.

- ABHMS se asoció con la conferencia Samuel DeWitt Proctor, para impulsar la toma de conciencia en nombre de los pobres.

Desde sus inicios en 1824, la ABHMS ha tenido un compromiso con la niñez y la juventud. Empezamos escuelas para combatir el analfabetismo, universidades para consolidar el desarrollo académico, centros en los vecindarios para apoyar comunidades, y hogares para niños y niñas desamparados. Gran parte de esta tarea ha beneficiado a personas, familias y comunidades desafiadas por la pobreza. Pero esta tarea comenzó con una persona, un grupo ministerial o una congregación. La decisión de promover la Iniciativa de la Niñez en Pobreza en 2006 fue una manera de volver a comprometer a la familia Bautista Americana con el llamado que hemos tenido desde nuestros inicios, un llamado que se extiende a cada seguidor y seguidora de Jesucristo.

Todavía hay tiempo de participar en el Proyecto del Centavo (www.14millionpennies.org). ABHMS espera que las conexiones iniciadas a través del proyecto continúen después que éste termine. Y más allá del Proyecto del Centavo, lo que nos interesa es oír de usted ideas que dan resultado y que considere que pueden hacer la diferencia para la niñez en esta nación.

La Rvda. Lisa R. Harris sirve a las Sociedades Misioneras Nacionales Bautistas Americanas como coordinadora nacional de la iniciativa de justicia para la niñez y también de los centros comunitarios.

Jackson Girl's Penny Project Raising Money for Children Living in Poverty

Seeing the sadness of people losing their homes made nine-year-old Kylen Rowland decide she “needed to make a change in the world.” She consulted her mother, the Rev. Gretchen Sanewsky, who is pastor of First Baptist Church in Jackson, Mich., and together they learned about their denomination’s “Penny Project”—a way to raise money to help children in poverty. It struck a chord with Kylen, who launched her own Penny Project a year ago with the goal of raising one penny for every poor child in Michigan: 486,400.

Today, she is 65 percent of the way toward achieving that \$4,864 goal, but she’s not waiting to put that

money to use. In November 2010, she gave the Jackson Child Care Center a check for \$2,600 at First Baptist’s morning worship service. “It was awesome and couldn’t have come at a better time,” said Liz Colegrove, director of the center, which on weekdays uses the church at 201 S. Jackson Street.

Colegrove said the school enrolls between 75 and 95 students most years, but because of state cuts and the economy—people out of jobs don’t necessarily need child care—only 42 students are currently enrolled. This meant the center went from five to three classrooms and let go of several teachers. Kylen, a fourth grader at Frost Elementary School in Jackson, attended the Child Care Center as a toddler—it accepts children ages two to five—and still attends the summer program geared to children up to age 12.

She collects pennies in jars before each worship service, and some members have taken jars to work. Kylen also had “penny wars” between day care classes and between Sunday school classes, challenging them to see who could collect the most. One day in July 2010, they took The Penny Project to Sam’s Club and raised \$229.05.

Kylen counted and rolled the pennies at her Jackson home, then put the rolls in boxes so heavy they needed to be wheeled in carts into the Bank of America branch next to the church, where the church does its banking. “This gives me more faith in people’s willingness to help others,” said the Rev. Sanewsky, who also said they will continue collecting pennies until the goal is reached.

Monetta Harr is a columnist for the Jackson Citizen Patriot in Jackson, Mich. This article was published in the Patriot on Wednesday November 17, 2010.

Kylen Rowland of First Baptist Church, Jackson, Mich., launched her own Penny Project.

Photo courtesy of the Jackson Citizen Patriot



Children Investing in the Kingdom

The spirit of giving to meet the needs of others is alive and well in Madison, Wis. The Mt. Zion Baptist Church has been involved in The Penny Project since learning about it at the 2010 Orientation to ABC Life Conference in Orlando, Fla. Our initial meeting with the members of the Mt. Zion Children's Choir to explain the project was met with excitement and enthusiasm. The children were given old prescription bottles with Penny Project labels on them, and they were eager to begin collecting pennies. Each week, we witness the children's selfless giving as they come forward with their pennies, alongside tithing adults, during the "Investing in the Kingdom" portion of the worship service.

Initially, The Penny Project was a children's activity intended to teach them about extending love to others through giving. However, the project has reached beyond the children to inspire the entire congregation and ignite community support. Adults in the congregation also began collecting pennies, and by the beginning of May 2010 the jar was completely full. As coordinators of the project, Rev. Melva Bishop and Min. Jacqueline Colbert planned to meet with the children early in that month to end the project and discuss where they wanted the funds to go. But before that meeting could take place, the penny jar was stolen. Jadon, an ambassador for The Penny Project, wondered, "Why would someone take our money? Why would they take money from the church? Well, they must have needed it. I hope God helps them." That spirit of compassion filled the hearts of the entire church, and the congregation began praying for the person responsible for the theft. The person eventually confessed and received assistance from the church.

Even though the congregation was devastated and the children were very disappointed by the theft, there was never an attitude of defeat. The children and the entire church decided to put the negative experience behind them and begin again. A local newspaper reported on the story, and area businesses became involved. The Penny Project began to thrive, not only in Mt. Zion,

but throughout the Madison community. What a wonderful witness to the overcoming power of God!

The children continue to demonstrate a powerful commitment to The Penny Project. They asked the senior pastor if they can retain the project, keeping their efforts separate from the community's contributions. To date, they have collected 130,400 pennies, or \$1,304—not including donations from the community at large. They plan to distribute funds to deserving organizations, such as the Academic Learning Center (a children's literacy program), Respite Center (a child abuse prevention program), the Catholic Multicultural Center Food Pantry, and The Salvation Army, on a quarterly basis. Through The Penny Project, the children of Mt. Zion Baptist Church have become cheerful givers who provide an ongoing reminder to the entire congregation that to bless others through our time, talents, and treasures is to be blessed ourselves. In their own words:

"It makes me feel good to give to other people—because God has blessed me."
(Destiny)

"The Penny Project is a fun and good way to get kids to donate money and to feel involved."
(Antonia)

"It's nice to invest money to help other people."
(Gary)

Our prayer is that through our gifts we can restore some hope in some seemingly hopeless places, and that the children can be a vessel through which God's light and love shine in some dark places.

Rev. Melva Bishop and Min. Jacqueline Colbert coordinate The Penny Project at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Madison, Wis. Erica Olson is the mother of a Penny Project participant.

A Penny for Your Thoughts [part one]

**Laine Julian, English pastor
Chevy Chase Baptist Church, Glendale, Calif.**

We collected pennies for our Vacation Bible School and children's ministries. The church is not large, but it supported this project. I set out an empty water jug, put a little note in a newsletter, and people started to unload their pennies—10,186 of them. We gave the money to Faith in Christ Ministries, an American Baptist mission that has a Saturday program for children, some of whom may live on the streets. We may not have changed the world but our community, especially our children, certainly felt the impact.

**Cliff Johnson, senior pastor
Shiloh Baptist Church, Wilmington, Del.**

There is great excitement about this project. The children decided where our efforts would be directed. The decision was made to work with a homeless shelter in our city that has a special program for parents and their children. In addition to raising funds, our intention is to be an advocate and become involved in activities for the children at the shelter.

**Douglas Valentine, senior pastor
First Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.**

Our youth led The Penny Project in 2009. The pennies were donated to the Child Abuse Prevention Association in Kansas City, Mo. Simultaneously, 13 of the youth were preparing for a mission trip to Japan and decided to carry The Penny Project vision to youth there, where it morphed into The Yen Project!



**Joseph Huse,
former interim pastor
Grace Baptist Church,
Kansas City, Mo.**

The Grace Baptist Day Care adopted The Penny Project for its annual Christmas project. The day care children brought their penny boxes each Wednesday morning and deposited them in a large jug. The pennies were donated to a food backpack program at a local middle school. The Grace

Baptist children will be visiting the packing site to see how food is packed to be sent home with children for the weekend, when they cannot access free meals at school.

**Cindy McCarty, American Baptist Women's Ministries
First Baptist Church, Seattle, Wash.**

Last year, we planned to raise 60,000 pennies and later upped the goal to 80,000! We reached our goal in nine months. The funds were given to provide Burmese children



coming to the Seattle area with new coats and clothes. Youth from Burma came to an American Baptist Women's Ministries luncheon, where we shared the amount we

had raised. We resumed the project after that, designating the pennies for a local organization that rescues youth from prostitution and life on the street by providing housing and education. With the blessing of God and the generosity of our congregation, we will again exceed our goal.

**Carol Russell
First Baptist Church, Dover, Del.**

Our commitment to children in poverty is lived out in a variety of ministries. Since 2008, our members have taken over 40 homeless children back-to-school shop-



ping, provided over 100 Christmas care boxes through Samaritan's Purse, purchased winter coats and clothing for 20 children, and men-

tored a homeless family toward financial security. The Penny Project is just another venue for our commitment. The pennies collected will be donated to two local shelters for homeless mothers and their children. (See page 19 for a sample Penny Project calendar based on the one developed by First Baptist Church of Dover.)

Kim Terry
First Baptist Church, Clinton, Ind.

We discussed with children in our church different kinds of poverty in our community and the various groups that help people in poverty; the children wanted



to help. We raised over 57,000 pennies and donated half the money to purchase bikes as birthday gifts for five children through the Kid Kare Project. The other half went to

Clothe A Child to help with back-to-school shopping. A photo and small article appeared in our local newspaper, *The Daily Clintonian*, and in *The Baptist Observer*.

Jordan Dingle, Baptist Student Fellowship
Andover Newton Theological School,
Newton Centre, Mass.

We set a goal to raise 150,000 pennies and in March presented a check for \$155 to the City Mission Society of Boston. We anticipate visiting the site during the school year. The Baptist Fellowship (which includes a variety of Baptists) has spread the word about The



Penny Project and has been raising awareness among Andover Newton students (who represent several different denominations and faith traditions) about children in

poverty, the work of City Mission Society of Boston, and what each person can do on a daily basis to reduce poverty. Our hope is that Andover Newton students will take the news back home to their churches, families, and friends.

Diane Badger, pastor
Community Baptist Church, Marion, Mass.

Community Baptist has been participating in The Penny Project since September 2009, when we set a goal of 202,300 pennies (\$2,023), which represents one cent for each child living in poverty in Massachusetts. Collection banks were made from miniature Chinese food containers and given out to members of the congregation who, in turn, shared them with friends, family, and co-workers. Each Sunday people would drop their change into a collection jar that was placed on the communion table. By the end of February we had exceeded our goal, and on Sunday March 21, 2010, Community Baptist present-

ed grants to two local agencies and two local elementary schools. (Go to www.abhms.org>Penny Project for the full story.)

Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, Maine

The idea of The Penny Project was brought to us by Haley, a fourth grader in our Sunday school, who had learned about the project at Baptist Youth Camp in Charlotte, Maine. Haley not only remembered to bring the brochure home with her, she remembered to bring it to church the following Sunday! We decided to adopt The Penny Project as our Vacation Bible School mission, and \$103.48 was brought in by the children in the community. The proceeds were given to the Emmaus Homeless Shelter in Ellsworth, Maine. It has



truly blessed our church family to be a part of The Penny Project, and participation has made us aware of needs in our immediate com-

munity. Our teens have also been motivated to do random acts of kindness for various low-income families in our community, delivering food, gas cards, and gifts at unexpected times. (Go to www.abhms.org>Penny Project for the full story.)

Kelly Cederholm
First Baptist Church, Torrington, Wyo.

Ever since hearing about The Penny Project at an annual gathering of the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountains, our small, small-town church has been collecting pennies. We made it a contest, creating penny jars for the age ranges of 0-20, 21-40, 41-60, and 61-100, which was a great success. The 60-plus group won a meal cooked by my husband, Pastor Rick, and me. In spring 2010 our penny jar, which weighed approximately 150 pounds, was stolen from our church. Our winter Vacation Bible School children, who had been collecting pennies for nearly 10 weeks, were devastated; many were in tears, worried about children and their lack of food. We filed a report with the local police department and wrote a letter to the editor of our local newspaper. The letter resulted in \$209 in donations from readers, and we have since raised an additional \$50 in pennies from church members and spring Vacation Bible School children, so we were actually blessed. An additional blessing came in the summer of 2010 when Rick and I were able to visit First Baptist Church in New London, N.H., where The Penny Project began!

American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island Respond to Children in Poverty

The American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island (ABCORI) have maintained their commitment to the ABHMS Justice for Children Initiative since it began in 2006. We participated in the Future Search training in May 2007—a process of strategic planning that brings together a cross-section of community stakeholders—and we decided to use that training to develop a comprehensive plan to address the issues related to children in poverty in our state.

Two years after that training, in 2009, we facilitated the “Fighting Poverty with Faith” conference in Rhode Island, where 225 people came together to focus on



issues of poverty in the state. The attendees represented various public sectors, including education, health, government, business and finance, faith communi-

ties, and social service agencies. The one-day conference began with an interfaith breakfast, where we discussed sacred texts of different faith traditions that address poverty. The day continued with presentations by four different social and advocacy agencies, a dramatic presentation, and a working lunch.

In our afternoon workshops and brainstorming sessions, we engaged with challenging questions such as: “How can we mitigate the pain of poverty among our neighbors?” and “What can we do, as communities of faith and deliverers of direct services, to change things around us?” The sessions concluded with the formation of the Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition for Fighting Poverty with Faith, which we have all been members of ever since.

According to the 2010 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, between 2006 and 2008, 16.1% (or 36,970) of

the state’s 228,980 children under age 18 with known poverty status lived in households with incomes below the federal poverty threshold. The vast majority of these children are growing up poor even though they live in households with working parents. Under-employment in our state means that even children from two-income households live below the poverty level.

And there are other problems. Our state’s broken education system, including the closings of a number of Head Start programs, means our children do not graduate from high school with the skills to go to college and better their futures. Scores of children end up in the foster care system while their parents go in and out of incarceration. Many children do not have healthcare, and some go hungry for too long.

ABCORI remains dedicated to our children. Thirty of our 75 churches participate in The Penny Project, and we have more than reached our goal of raising \$369.70—a penny for every child in poverty in our state.

In October 2009, we hosted a 5K Race/Walk and raised \$2,000, which we turned into grants for churches in our region with poverty relief programs. We repeated the 5K Race in 2010 and used the money collected to create a “campership” fund for children of low-income families so they can participate in our summer camp program. On the first convening day of the state legislature in 2009, 2010, and 2011, we were at the Rhode Island State House to pray for lawmakers to do what is right for the poor. We’ll continue to be there every year.

We have learned the value of being there for children in poverty through our participation in The Penny Project. Those pennies remind us that we cannot ignore the work in front of us. This is prophetic work for the least fortunate and most vulnerable in our society. Jesus called us to feed his sheep; children in poverty need hope and love demonstrated by action.

Dr. Liliana Da Valle was the executive minister of American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island from 2007 to 2011, after serving as an area minister in Massachusetts for 10 years.

Pennies and Change in Nebraska

For the last several years, American Baptist Churches of Nebraska (ABC/NE) has been looking for ways to engage our churches in social ministry together. There are abundant food pantries and other helping ministries at individual churches, but we haven't had much success with identifying social justice and outreach projects churches can do together. The region has also emphasized accomplishing change by taking one small, easy step at a time. These two threads have come together for us in a powerful way through our participation in The Penny Project.

We first heard about the project's concept of collecting one penny for each child affected by poverty in the United States and Puerto Rico in early 2009, and our imaginations were captured by the idea that we could do that for each child in poverty in Nebraska. It is a way to do social ministry together, and it consists of the small, easy steps of collecting one penny at a time.

In September 2009, we "rolled out" the idea at our state convention, which we call our "Family Reunion." Before the convention, I had done some research about poverty in our state at the demographic Web sites recommended by The Penny Project organizers and shared what I found with members of the ABC/NE Mission Department. Together, we presented to convention attendees the surprising information that there were over 63,000 children living at or below the federal poverty guideline in Nebraska. We also told them the perplexing fact that the federal guideline understated the amount of money that people need to live, and there were 153,000 children living in real need statewide.

After doing the math, we told the people at the Family Reunion that, to meet our basic goal of raising one penny for each of the children in poverty in Nebraska, we would need 6 1/2 gallons of pennies. Our goal to collect those 63,000 pennies would have yielded \$630, but we have raised much more than that so far.

People took word about the project back to their churches, and marvelous things began to happen. The

congregation of the First Baptist Church of North Platte, Neb., for example, donated Penny Project funds to the Connection Homeless Shelter, which was then in the final stages of constructing a new building. The pennies went toward providing a room that would become an indoor play, craft, and reading space for the children at the shelter.

One ABC/NE woman received a donation for our Penny Project while traveling through Oklahoma as part of our White Cross Convoy to donate needed supplies to American Baptist home missions. She had stopped to



buy a bottle of water at a convenience store. The clerk started to take a penny out of the penny cup to help pay the exact amount, but the traveler requested

change instead and explained that we were collecting pennies to help children in poverty. After hearing this, the clerk reached into the cup and gave all the pennies to her for our project.

As of this writing, Nebraska churches have achieved 576 percent of their original goal. And in their August meeting the ABC/NE Mission Department voted to revise our Regional Penny Project goal upward to a dime for each Nebraska child in poverty. We are calling this new initiative "The Penny Project Phase 2: A Dime for change."

The Mission Department also voted to continue The Penny Project indefinitely. So far, \$3,639.55 has been donated to projects supporting children in poverty. Money collected a penny at a time has accomplished great things in Nebraska.

Dave Lundholm is associate executive minister of American Baptist Churches of Nebraska.

A Penny for Your Thoughts [part two]

Joyce Duerr, pastor
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Hope, R.I.

It is a joy to be part of a congregation that welcomes the active participation of children. I heard about The Penny Project through an American Baptist Home Mission Societies newsletter. The location of the church featured in the newsletter article—New London, N.H.—caught my eye, as at one time I lived in a nearby com-



munity, where two of my children were born. I saw an opportunity to engage children at Tabernacle Baptist in mission. We decided on the theme “Change for Children”

because we did not want to limit the offering to pennies. Loose change came from many pockets! One parishioner, after collecting prize money from a bowling group competition, told her bowling buddies of her plans to donate her winnings to Change for Children. In the weeks that followed, her bowling partners added their bags of pennies to the jar. At the end of summer 2010, one of our children hosted an “End of Summer” party in lieu of a birthday party. She told her friends about Change for Children and invited them to bring some change for the jar at church. The following Sunday she shared this story and presented a plastic bag containing \$75 in coins with the words, “It wasn’t a big party. It’s just that everyone was very generous.”



Nancy Dodge
West Acton Baptist Church,
Acton, Mass.

The Sunday after the children at the West Acton Baptist Church (WABC) learned about The Penny Project, five-year-old Zachary and his little sister, Abby, came to church

with a box filled with pennies from their banks. This act inspired the congregation to get involved. One member

counted and rolled 20,000 pennies—121 pounds! Heading out to make the first penny deposit, the WABC Women’s treasurer tossed the bag of coins in her front passenger seat and backed out of the driveway. As she started down the street, the seat belt alarm went off—set off by the weight of the bag of pennies—so she had to stop and secure the bag with the seatbelt!

Peoria Friendship House, Peoria, Ill.

Our children are using this campaign as part of a service-learning project on poverty, the economy, and money. We use Facebook, e-mail and the Web to raise



funds through “fans” of Friendship House. The children themselves live at or below the poverty level, but are encouraged to give back to the community.

We’ve used math skills to count the pennies (10,000 so far) and to plot the graph and figure out the glide path of the project. The children drew promotional posters and brainstormed slogans, such as “Pennies to Help Make Life a Little Brighter” and “Pennies for Pampers.” We’ve tried to relate this effort to the services provided at Peoria Friendship House.

Sandborn Baptist Church, Sandborn, Ind.

Our youth group had a flying disc toss-a-thon and got pledges from church members, raising \$80. They also placed a bucket in the church for contributions, bringing the total to \$184. A variety show was held in March 2011 that included a puppet show they developed themselves, about youth in need. They are hoping to begin a partnership with the other church youth in our town. Since our youth group includes young people from two different counties, we are planning to split the donations between those counties, with part going to a food pantry and the rest to social ministries in our area.



Mary Tellis, associate
pastor and ministry staff
American Baptist
Churches of the Rocky
Mountains

Colorado experienced the nation’s largest rate of growth in the number of

impoverished children between the years 2000 and 2006, according to a study reported in the *Colorado Springs Gazette* (April 10, 2010). The congregation at Solomon Temple has been informed about the rapid growth of poverty in our community. The Penny Project money was donated to Stedman Elementary School in Denver, which has a very high poverty rate, to support underserved and underprivileged families in the Park Hill neighborhood, a community largely made up of single-parent homes.

Asian Pastors/Seminarians/Young Adults Conference and Asian American Baptist Caucus Convocation in Chicago, Ill.

In 2010, Asian leaders came together in worship, prayer, education, and support. Many of them serve in communities that include children in poverty, and they are aware of the challenges faced by these children and their families. The group's Penny Project offering was contributed to American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, the host location of the conference, which has a demonstrated commitment to American Baptist Home Mission Societies' Justice for Children Initiative.



**Siegrid Belden
Lower Providence Baptist Church, Eagleville, Pa.**

We have raised our congregation's awareness of child poverty through the collection of Penny Project funds, through newsletter articles, and posters made by our children. To promote the issue in our community, the collection was highlighted in our local newspaper. A



Norristown Times Herald article featured a picture of our children with the penny jar to promote our church's Bicentennial Celebration events, which

included a concert that was open to the public and Penny Project flying discs for children who brought pennies. Our collection is being divided between Baptist Children's Ministries in our area and the Kodiak Baptist Mission in Alaska, where some of our members served as volunteers.



Join the Effort!

Visit 14millionpennies.org for the resources, tools, and information you need to help your church begin your Penny Project poverty awareness and collection effort. From brochures to posters to sample articles for your church bulletin or newsletter, you'll find everything you need to get started. Register to join the list of participating groups and churches, and add your total to the national total, as together we seek to raise awareness of and support for children impacted by poverty, one penny at a time.

What a Penny Can Do

The adage “See a penny, pick it up ...” now has a new meaning. At an American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ) regional staff meeting in early 2010, the Rev. Lisa R. Harris, national coordinator of the Justice for Children Initiative and Christian Center Relations at ABHMS, described The Penny Project—a vision promoted by American Baptist Home Mission Societies. The goal of The Penny Project is to collect 14 million pennies, or one for every child living in poverty in the United States and Puerto Rico. Churches are encouraged to gather as many pennies as they desire, as long as the money is used locally for a project related to the needs of children in poverty.

Our executive minister, the Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, immediately set up a penny jar on the front desk at our regional office and encouraged the ABCNJ staff to get involved in the project. As a staff member who attended the meeting, I heard the message about The Penny

Project and felt compelled to bring it back to my church, Living Word Baptist Church in Toms River, N.J. After I shared it with my congregation, we also joined in. Our goal was to collect 19,000 pennies to represent the approximate number of children in Ocean County, N.J., living at or below the poverty level.

Each family in our congregation was given a plastic piggy bank with the words “Penny Project” written on the side. Every Communion Sunday, we brought our piggy banks to the altar and dedicated them. They were then emptied into a large jar. Excitement grew as the jar became almost too heavy to carry. When we reached our September 2010 target date, the pennies were emptied onto the altar. What a sight! We had never seen that many pennies before. At first, the project seemed a challenge for our small church. However, six months after we started we surpassed our goal by collecting 26,000 pennies!

The \$260 we raised went to the Backpack Program. This program, sponsored by The FoodBank of

Monmouth and Ocean Counties, feeds chronically hungry children in those counties in New Jersey. These children often arrive at school on Monday mornings with headaches and bellyaches from not eating enough at

The Penny Project is appealing to our congregation because everyone can participate regardless of race or religion; the focus is on children in need.

home over the weekends. The program provides a weekly backpack filled with a supply of food to sustain the children throughout the weekend and during school vacations. The backpacks are filled on Fridays and returned empty on Mondays. The cost to fill one backpack is \$5. There are currently seven local schools involved in the program, and this year 100 students received backpacks.

The Penny Project is appealing to our congregation because everyone can participate regardless of race or religion; the focus is on children in need. Our students got other students from their schools involved. Adult church members encouraged their coworkers to participate, and folks were stopping to pick up that penny lying on the sidewalk. Suddenly, a simple copper coin took on great meaning as it came to represent feeding a hungry child. Our seniors, “The Prime-Timers,” have taken ownership of the project. They donate to The Penny Project at their monthly meetings and continue giving the money to the Backpack Program.

We are grateful that our eyes have been opened to the needs of hungry children in New Jersey and that we have been challenged to get involved. We encourage other churches to get involved, too. It is amazing what a penny can do.

Rev. Susan Royle is associate regional pastor for ABCNJ Go Global and pastor of Living Word Baptist Church in Toms River, N.J.

Reflections on a Visit With Our Congressman

In November 2010, a group of young people from University Baptist Church (UBC) in College Park, Md., visited Rep. Steny Hoyer's Washington, DC, office. He represents the 5th Congressional District of Maryland and currently serves as the House Minority Whip. At the time of the group's visit, Rep. Hoyer served as House Majority Leader. In addition to sharing information about the UBC and ABHMS Penny Projects and the local organizations that have benefited from the support of the UBC Penny Project, the youth encouraged Rep. Hoyer to support setting a national goal for the reduction of child poverty. Noah Ramsey-Lucas and Jacob Burns, who were part of the group, share their reflections of that memorable meeting.

Noah

On Labor Day in 2010 my family and I went to a party at a neighbor's house. We knew our congressman, Steny Hoyer, was going to be there, so I was prepared to talk with him about The Penny Project. I brought copies



Noah Ramsey-Lucas, 12, meets Rep. Steny Hoyer.

of an article from the *Prince George's County Gazette* and another from the *Associated Baptist Press* that tell the story of our church's role in The Penny Project.

I must admit, I was a bit nervous. But I started to feel better as I realized that Rep. Hoyer was interested in what I had to say.

He surprised me with a donation of \$10 and asked me how many pennies that was. His question caught me off guard, but I answered it correctly—1,000 pennies.

I asked him if he would meet with me and a group of youth from UBC, to hear more about The Penny Project and our concerns. He said he would love to! It was great meeting Rep. Hoyer that day, and I looked forward to seeing him again soon.

Jacob

On Friday, November 12, 2010, a group of 6- to 12-year-olds from University Baptist Church went to Rep. Steny Hoyer's office to lobby for a cause which we feel strongly about. The group consisted of Jonah, Samuel, Noah, Shawn, Matthew, Joanna, and me. We went because we feel that, in order to eliminate child poverty in the United States, we need more help than a single church or even a whole group of churches can offer on their own, so we went to the U.S. government.

Our meeting in Rep. Hoyer's office was brief, but to the point. We got to meet with Amy Shultz, his senior aide, and she gave us wonderful ideas. Ms. Shultz listened to us the whole way through and seemed to really relate to what we were saying.

I hope that our trip was not in vain, and that something will be done to eliminate child poverty.

Noah Ramsey-Lucas is a member of University Baptist Church in College Park, Md., and a seventh-grade student in Edgewater, Md. Jacob Burns is also a member of University Baptist Church, and he is a seventh-grade student in Hyattsville, Md.



UBC Penny Project youth on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

AB GIRLS and **The Penny Project**

In July 2009, during The National Gathering for Girls, AB GIRLS made a commitment to bring The Penny Project back to their home communities. They were inspired, in part, by having spent one day during the conference serving at Friendship House in Peoria, Ill., and learning about that Christian center's outreach to individuals and families struggling with the limitations of poverty. Here are a couple of stories about AB GIRLS' involvement in The Penny Project.

First Baptist Church—Salt Lake City, Utah

This church's AB GIRLS collected pennies for six months. On February 28, 2010, they, along with other youth and their leaders, delivered jars of pennies to the Utah Capitol. They went to encourage lawmakers to make decisions on behalf of the 94,000 children in Utah who, according to the National Center for Children and Poverty, are most vulnerable. A couple of the girls commented that, "Our goal to raise 94,000 coins was a daunting challenge at first. ... but little by little it adds up. Pennies aren't worth a lot by themselves, but when you add them all together they can make a good dent in a big issue."

In the end, the group raised 101,786 pennies, or \$1,017.86, which they donated to the Crossroads Urban Center in Salt Lake City. According to Karen Carter, First Baptist's AB GIRLS leader, "When I'm with my grandsons, ages three and one, I'm reminded of those small ones who often have no home and no hope due to circumstances beyond their control. Our gift will benefit many of those infants and children."

Bethel Baptist Church—Casper, Wyo.

After Bethel Baptist's "token" teenager, Grace, heard about The Penny Project, she spent several months energizing her congregation to collect as many pennies as possible. She was on the local radio station twice—once being interviewed while she was standing in the cold wind holding a cardboard box. She collected more than pennies from passersby. Someone gave her a \$100 bill!

"It was a challenge I thought needed to be addressed in my neighborhood," Grace said. "And God never lets me down." She added that the project was more work than she expected, but more than worth it. Through her leadership and the participation of others in the community, by Christmas 2009 Bethel Baptist surpassed her goal of collecting 100,000 pennies by raising \$1,562.75—or 156,275 pennies! Grace chose to divide the offering between the Natrona County School



District homeless student project in Casper, Wyo., and the Haven of Rest shelter in Midwest, Wyo.

Helen Schindler, senior pastor of Bethel Baptist, said, "Grace is an example

of what can be accomplished when just one person steps out and says, 'Here I am, Lord. Use me.'" Grace is one teenager from one small church who has one very big heart for helping children in poverty.

At The National Gathering for Girls in 2010, AB GIRLS contributed funds from 25,000 pennies they had collected during the year to the Dayton Christian Center in Ohio. For Grace, "It was amazing to see, when everyone gives a little, how much it can do to help others. Not only did I see our pennies used in my own community, but also at the Christian Center. As youth, we need to continue to share our blessings with others."

Rev. Sandra DeMott Hasenauer is associate executive director of American Baptist Women's Ministries.

AB GIRLS (American Baptist Girls In Relationship, Leadership, and Service) is a ministry of American Baptist Women's Ministries that focuses on meeting the spiritual needs of girls as they grow into womanhood. For more information, visit www.abwministries.org/girls. For more stories of AB GIRLS' involvement in The Penny Project, visit 14millionpennies.org.

November 2011 “Penny Project” Calendar

This calendar follows the model developed by First Baptist church, Dover, Del., for November 2010.

We invite you to photocopy and distribute this calendar during the month of November, or to create your own for a month or season that makes sense in your church. An introductory paragraph might include your goal for the month and the organizations or projects to which you will donate the money collected, as well as any information on advocacy activities you have planned.

NOVEMBER 2011

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
Give 1¢ for...		1 Each pair of shoes you own.	2 Each photo in your wallet.	3 Every book you have read this year.	4 Each computer you own.	5 Each year of school you have completed.
6 Each room in your house.	7 Each Bible in your house.	8 Each pair of glasses or contacts you own.	9 Each telephone in your house.	10 Each of your children.	11 Each car your family owns.	12 Each ring you own.
13 Every sweater you wore this week.	14 Each person who helped lead you to Christ.	15 Each bed in your house.	16 Each television in your house.	17 Each bank account you have.	18 Each musical instrument in your house.	19 Each warm coat in your closet.
20 Each time you dined out this week.	21 Each person you prayed for today.	22 Each watch you own.	23 Each piece of fruit in your refrigerator.	24 Each of your grandchildren.	25 Each healthy meal you ate today.	26 Each doctor you have visited this year.
27 Each time you bathed or showered this week.	28 Each hug you gave today.	29 Each glass of water you drank today.	30 Each job you have had in the past 10 years.			

Join the Effort!

Visit 14millionpennies.org for the resources, tools, and information you need to help your church begin your Penny Project poverty awareness and collection effort. From brochures to posters to sample articles for your church bulletin or newsletter, you'll find everything you need to get started. Register to join the list of participating groups and churches, and add your total to the national total, as together we seek to raise awareness of and support for children impacted by poverty, one penny at a time.

Seeing God's Mission Through Children

Beyond our first conversion of understanding God's love for us and receiving the gift of a restored relationship through Jesus Christ, Christians continue to experience expanding revelations of God throughout their lifetimes. I had one of these experiences while worshipping at the American Baptist Women's Ministries National Conference in 2009. As we sang about God's goodness, prayed for hearts bent toward service, and reflected upon Scripture, a series of pictures of children from various American Baptist ministries was displayed on the large video screen at the front of the room, and suddenly my heart opened to see God's mission among us in a new way.

When we regularly experience the ravages of hurt and disease in our society, our hearts can begin to shrink and we can develop "compassion fatigue." But upon seeing those images at the conference that day, I



realized the wisdom of focusing our ministries on children and that we cannot fail to care for these little ones in need. If we neglect them, we do so at our own peril. Children help us to see and feel the heartbeat of God and to understand anew the great love that pours from his presence. This creates a capacity within us to care again. Helping to fill the world with children who know the love of God is a mission that stirs the heart and moves the weary soul to continue serving. I believe that

once we see the world through children's eyes, we will be moved to care about everyone else around us as well.

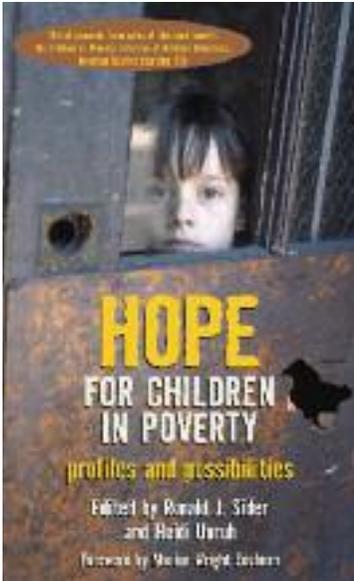
For me, this revelation came at a good time, as all things do in Christ. One of my roles at the conference was to facilitate the Missional Church Learning Experience (MCLE), the national program which seeks to equip churches to become involved in God's mission in their communities. It struck me as important to provide others with the healing touch I received when I saw those pictures of children's faces during the worship. If we can imagine our participation with God as bringing hope and goodness to the children around us, it would help us regain strength for service. Seeing the world as a safe place for children—what a picture of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven!

Many of the churches involved in the MCLE have chosen community projects that impact children. These projects help them practice missional principles that increase the effectiveness of their ministry and raise their awareness of children in need—just as The Penny Project does. Some participating churches have gotten involved with their local schools through reading or mentoring programs. Others have worked with the community to make sure the children have nutritious food to take home from school for the weekends. One church in Iowa inspired the community to host a family fair to help parents find resources to provide for their children. A church in the Denver area developed a campaign with the community to give winter coats to children.

There is just something about children that brings us together and motivates us to work a little harder to make sure they know God's love. And once our hearts are opened, we begin to see other possibilities. In a time when the problems of our culture may overwhelm us and make us want to give up, children inspire us outward into God's mission of saving the world with God's love. And each act declares the Kingdom of God among us.

Rev. Glynis LaBarre, transformation strategist for American Baptist Home Mission Societies, directs the Missional Church Learning Experience.

Offering Hope



Hope for Children in Poverty: Profiles and Possibilities

Edited by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh; Foreword by Marian Wright Edelman

10% of proceeds from sales of this book will go to the Children in Poverty Initiative, American Baptist Home Mission Societies

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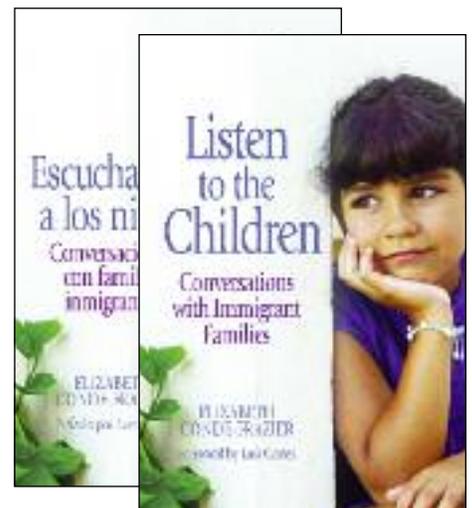
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Elizabeth Conde-Frazier; Foreword by Luís Cortes

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ROMANS 12:1-2

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