



## Grace Walking

The Transformational Ministries of Rising Hope  
United Methodist Church

Published on Wednesday, April 7, 2010

***Matthew 25 tells us 'As you do unto the least of these you do unto me.' I desire to serve Christ... therefore I serve the poor. It can't be any more simply stated for the faithful. - Reverend Keary Kincannon, interview 4/10***

As a leader and an innovator, Rev. Keary Kincannon is guiding the church to follow Jesus' mandate to serve the poor and marginalized members of the community.

Fifteen years ago, he founded Rising Hope Mission Church, a United Methodist congregation, out of his car with the mission of bringing the power of Christ and the support of the church to the least, the lost, the lonely, and the left out living along the impoverished Route 1 Corridor of Fairfax County, Virginia.

"Pastor Dude", as Keary is affectionately called, has built this small congregation of about 125 into a center of healing and transformation for the entire community. Amazingly two-thirds of the congregation have been or are homeless. In partnership with other congregations in the area, Rising Hope is empowering poor and marginalized members of the community. Keary says, "We love it when others join us in worship and we love it when others join us in serving the community. Yet our ministry with the community is one with and flows out of our worshipping life. We are simply a congregation that tries to be Grace with skin on."

"And this work of Grace is amazing to see. In the course of a year, Rising Hope makes nearly 125,000 direct service assists to over 8,000 needy individuals in the community through its ministries of mercy and justice. The food pantry serves over 2,000 families, and the kitchen serves nearly 20,000 hot meals to the hungry. The congregation's Ministries of Mercy also include a clothes closet, an emergency assistance referral program and a hypothermia shelter, which is open during the four coldest months of the year providing 125 different individuals, over the course of the winter, with a warm place to sleep.



Additionally, through its Ministries of Justice, Rising Hope is a founding congregation of VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement) a faith-based community action organization that is advocating for affordable housing, healthcare and immigration reforms. "VOICE is 'giving voice' to the disenfranchised members of our community as we empower them to meet with our political leaders, business leaders, and community decision-makers to effect the change they see needed in the community."

Inviting those who find themselves drawn to these vital ministries, Keary says, "There are many ministry initiatives going on at Rising Hope and we welcome volunteers from the community who are passionate about working side by side with people of diverse contexts. In addition to the food and clothing ministries, we have bible studies both at the church and on the street, as well as more clerical opportunities for service and fellowship. Come and offer the ministry of presence, to be with people as we talk through our suffering and get to the crux of the need. This is a tremendous endeavor. We absolutely could not do it without volunteers."

Rising Hope's ministry is a testimony to the grace of God in Keary's life. Having flunked out of American University because of a life-style of illegal drug use, small time dealing, and running the streets, Keary had an encounter with Christ that changed his life forever. "I remember the turn-around so vividly. I was a hardcore hippie. I bought into the philosophy, worldview, and lifestyle lock-stock-and-barrel. Our openness to all people and our questioning authority was a good thing. What was not good was the widespread use of illegal drugs. That led me down an erroneous path. I was at an outdoors rock concert at Rosecroft Raceway in Maryland. Leo Kottke, Sly and the Family Stone, and a host of great bands were playing. Yet, I was totally depressed. I felt that my life was going down a wrong path and wandered purposelessly in the crowd. I overheard some people, I would have called Jesus freaks, going about Jesus. Normally I would have passed by but this day, in my funk, I listened. I didn't buy into all of their theology, which was very conservative, but I did see life there - a meaning and vibrancy that I didn't have. And when I started thinking through it, I really connected with the message and philosophy of Jesus on the point of peace. I was (and continue to be) a big admirer of



Gandhi and King. What they preached makes sense. You've got to 'be' the change you want to see in the world. If you want peace, you need to be peaceable. The convergence of these messages grabbed a hold of me and I moved from a 'maybe Jesus' frame of mind to a 'yes Jesus' one. All that doubt and despair I felt buried under just lifted. Looking back, I would call it the Holy Spirit."



Keary returned to school, graduated from Virginia Wesleyan College, then went on to attend Wesley Theological Seminary, graduating in 1981 with a Master of

Divinity. "What I appreciated most in my first experience with Wesley was the sense of community among the students, faculty and staff. We shared Christ and shared life. The married students bought groceries together through a food coop/sharing program; we volunteered together to help Mitch Snyder of CCNV and Rev. John Steinbruck of Luther Place Memorial Church start the first volunteer/church-based shelters in DC. We shared meals in each other's apartments, in the refectory, and in the homes of professors who lived within walking distance of the seminary. I especially appreciated how professors like Phil Wogaman, Bruce Birch, and Larry Rasmussen guided our Gospel engagement in a hurting world.

While in seminary Keary developed a friendship with the Rev. Jim Wallis of Sojourners where he served as an inner-city community organizer. He was successful in helping many low-income tenants secure repairs from unscrupulous landlords and in some cases he assisted them in the



purchase and renovation of their apartment complexes as tenant owned cooperatives. Additionally he helped organize campaigns that secured Rent Control and Repair and Deduct laws from the DC City Council. Keary also served as an early Executive Director of the DC Coalition for the Homeless. He then founded and served as Executive Director of The Churches Conference on Shelter and Housing, a church-based resource for the development of affordable housing and homeless ministries, where he directed the writing and publication of 3 ministry manuals.

Keary returned to Wesley in 2007 to engage the Doctor of Ministry Track on *John Wesley and the Poor*. "What I appreciate now as a DMin student continues to be a sense of community as well as the top notch faculty that challenge us to make the Gospel real in the world. I did not enroll in the DMin program to get another degree. I enrolled because the 'Wesley and the Poor' track allows me an opportunity to learn ways to connect my Wesleyan heritage with my current work with the poor. I have not been disappointed!"

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*In 2007 Keary Kincannon received Wesley Theological Seminary's 'Society of John Wesley Award of Merit' for sacrificial leadership and a high standard of commitment and devotion to God, the Church and Wesley Theological Seminary. He lives and serves along the Route One Corridor of Fairfax County, Virginia with Judy, his wife for 20 years, and their daughter*

*Kaitlyn (17 years old).*

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