

## FAITH

# 15 Years of Raising Hope

BY THE REV. KEARY KINCANNON  
RISING HOPE  
UNITED METHODIST MISSION CHURCH

In 1995, after nearly two decades of working with Sojourners and the inner-city poor of Washington D.C., Bishop Thomas Stockton appointed me to explore starting a church among the poor and marginalized living along the Route 1 corridor south of Alexandria. In June of 1996 Dr. F. Douglas Dillard, the Alexandria District Superintendent, and I chartered a new congregation in the community room of the West Ford public housing project. We had 11 members and named this congregation Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church.

Our mission has always been to bring the power of Christ and the support of the church to the least, the lost, the lonely, and the left out of our community. As a result we have drawn our membership from the many homeless, formerly homeless, disabled, and working poor members of our community as well as a number of middle-class families called to serve God among the least of these.

Today our small congregation has grown, not so much in membership, but in impact. With 100 active members, two-thirds of whom have been homeless, we serve the needs of 8,000 impoverished people in our community annually with our food pantry, soup kitchen, clothing closet, hypothermia shelter, recovery programs, job programs, and emergency assistance.

We may do a number of things that look like a social service agency but the core of our life at Rising Hope is our worship of the God made known in Jesus Christ. And it is His power that drives all our outreach into the community. We access that power regularly through disciplined times of worship, prayer, and Bible study. We worship together five times a week. Sunday morning is our central celebration but we also come together in a shorter celebration at noon every Tuesday through Friday.

I have always taken Jesus' words to reach out to the least among us very seriously. But Jesus is not content that we should simply feed the hungry. He was transforming lives by welcoming traitorous tax collectors, revolutionary zealots, prostitutes, and sin-



The Rev. Keary Kincannon



**Aceline Bapthelus, Dwayne Sands and Deborah Johnson are Rising Hope volunteers/members who come from the community to help others. Bapthelus is a Haitian immigrant who works as a domestic; she volunteers many hours in the food pantry and clothing closet. Johnson is a single mom with a teenage daughter still at home; she is a certified food handler unemployed in this recession; she volunteers as our cook about 30 hours a week. Sands first came to the hypothermia shelter the church operates in partnership with Ventures in Community; since then he has found housing and he volunteers nearly full time at Rising Hope assisting all who come into the building.**

ners into his inner circle. When criticized for eating with them he replied, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' [a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-12). If Jesus invited the most disreputable members of society to become his disciples can we do any less? The Gospel is both challenging and life changing.

As I reflect on Rising Hope's 15 years, one thing we got right was insisting that we empower the poor and not simply serve them. Our food pantry depends on the many volunteers from area churches and their generous donations of food.

With their support we serve over 300 families every week. Yet equally important is the empowerment of dozens of people volunteering from the community in need. We put them to work stacking the shelves, making deliveries, and welcoming the patrons who come desperate for assistance with their food budgets. By offering everyone an opportunity to volunteer we are giving dignity to even the most destitute of individuals. Rising Hope is not about a "free hand-out." Neither are we about the wealthy sharing their surplus with poor souls who have so little. Rising Hope has a much greater goal in mind. We want to manifest the Kingdom of God where rich and poor, black and white, privileged and disadvantaged come together to be empowered to live out our highest potential and humbled to serve even the most underserving. Love demands nothing less. That is what God did

for us in Jesus Christ and that is what God is calling us to do.

The work of Rising Hope will be recog-



### THE CHURCH OF NO LOST CAUSES

A little Methodist church has a big heart for the left out and the lonely in the shadow of the nation's capital.

A FEW YEARS ago a woman was getting off the bus on Route 1 in northern Virginia, just across the river from Washington, D.C. She remembers feeling a little lost. The bus driver noticed and asked what she was looking for. She thought for a moment, then answered, "God." The driver pointed across a parking lot and said, "God's right over there." She looked at the nearly empty office park and saw a large sign: "Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church."

Methodist it was, but it wasn't much of a church by traditional standards. It was a former insurance office, and despite a few dozen folding chairs and a piano, it still looked like a place you'd go sheepishly to explain a car accident you hoped was covered. But this was a marked improvement over the station wagon that pastor and founder Rev. Keary Kincannon had used only a few years previously to reach out to the poor and suffering in the wealthiest of places: Fairfax County, one of the wealthiest areas in the United States.

With a median household income of \$106,000, Fairfax County in northern Virginia might not be the first choice for an idealistic Methodist seminarian who wanted to serve the poor. But having grown up in the region, Kincannon knew there was an invisible underside to the prosperity. He had long felt a calling to what he describes as "transformed ministry, in a church for the lost, the lonely, and the least of these. That storefront church was part of a journey that has culminated in an established and well-recognized ministry. After years of organizing and fund raising, Rising

**Sojourners Magazine, a social justice religious magazine with national and international distribution, has published a four-page article on Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church.**

nized from June 2011 to June 2012 with a year of "15th Anniversary Celebrations" designed to lift up and support our work.

❖ The first will be a simple service of gratitude on Sunday evening June 26, 7 p.m. at Rising Hope.

❖ On Friday Sept. 30, the "Friends of Rising Hope" are sponsoring a fundraising dinner, dance and auction at the Mount Vernon Country Club, Mount Vernon.

❖ Nationally acclaimed Christian comedian Scott Davis will present two benefit concerts for Rising Hope at Springfield UMC on Sunday evening Oct. 23.

❖ At a date and time to be arranged in early 2012, Jeff Majors (Gospel and jazz musician, recording artist, radio and TV personality) will host a "HopeFest" with great musicians and preaching to culminate our year of celebration. Please join us for one or more of these celebrations as we give thanks to God for God's presence in our work.

For more information go to [www.risinghopeumc.org](http://www.risinghopeumc.org).