

Strapped Network Seeks Grace
by Kris Kattmann
Board Chair, Guilford Interfaith Hospitality Network

Many families and companies have struggled with the economic turmoil that began in 2008 and GIHN has not been spared from the same ill effects. The GIHN Board has held a fall fundraising banquet and silent auction for 9 years and a spring golf charity event for the last 4 years. While these were historically successful events, in the last three years these fundraisers have had fewer participants and raised less funds. The 5th annual golf event, scheduled for May 20th, will continue as planned and we continue to pray for its success. At the same time, assistance available from government sources and private foundations has decreased. To supplement the drop in revenue from our traditional sources, the GIHN Board sponsored various concerts and sold honor cards during the Christmas season. Last fall the GIHN Board sent an emergency plea to the community requesting financial support immediately in order to keep the network open and many of you responded.

Recognizing the declining revenues, the GIHN Board squeezed as much expense out of the organization as possible over the last 24 months. Currently GIHN operates rotations in High Point and Greensboro with a single executive director and one part-time case worker. A part-time case worker is not able to provide the level of service needed to help our guests across both the High Point and Greensboro locations.

The events of the latest recession didn't hit GIHN immediately which probably lulled the board into a false sense of security. With steadily declining funding, the board now finds itself in dire financial straits. As a matter of fact, we had to borrow against our line of credit in order to make payroll on 4/14. The network costs approximately \$8000 a month to operate with our current staffing model of an executive director and a part-time case worker.

At a special meeting the board voted to give our staff their notice to avoid additional borrowing. With the dissolution of the network staring the board in the face we contacted our regional IHN director, Donna Lawson. Her response has been swift and encouraging. There are presently 162 networks operating nationwide and several have experienced the same mid-life crisis that we are now experiencing. Without hesitation Donna made plans to fly to Guilford County to meet with the board to work through an alternative to disbanding the network.

The alternative suggested by Donna is for our network to take a 4-6 month hiatus from hosting homeless families. During this time we will build the infrastructure to sustain the organization and fulfill our mission to help homeless families regain independence. The real tragedy of this situation is that the churches have been doing their job - hosting, feeding, and loving our homeless families. The board has now identified the areas it needs to address.

We need to work on a solid four-fold funding plan that will include applying for grants, holding 2 major fundraisers each year, approaching corporations for contributions and asking our network churches to support the network financially to whatever extent each congregation is able. We need to increase the size and scope of our board. We need to evaluate our budget

and staffing. We need to look at our intake procedures and referral agencies to see how we can serve more families. We need to establish a speakers' bureau to get our ministry more widely known. There may be other areas that will need our attention.

I know that many of you will be disappointed by this decision to suspend the network operation but I hope you will consider this time as an opportunity for us to bring about a rebirth, a resurrection, the very essence of our faith--something good, even great, coming from something heartbreakingly sad.

Coordinators, pastors, and volunteers from the network churches are invited to attend one of two meetings being held with the GIHN Board and our regional director, Donna Lawson. The meeting in Greensboro will be held on May 7th from 10-11am at Starmount Presbyterian Church. The meeting in High Point will be held on May 7th from 4-5pm at Forest Hills Presbyterian Church. Please attend the meeting most convenient for you. The goal of these meetings is to keep the enthusiasm alive for this ministry and address any questions or concerns you may have.

The board promises to keep in touch with you. We urge you to communicate your thoughts and ideas to us (president@gihn.org, 392-9135-cell). We ask you for your patience, your prayers, your continued commitment to GIHN, your support of the upcoming golf event and your grace.