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Donations:

Although we charge our clientele on a sliding financial scale in order to bring ownership to the process, this ministry is not self-sustaining. Our budget for 2014 is \$150,000. To date we have raised nearly \$50,000 toward our budget. The majority of our support requires the partnership of God's people to financially enter in, take up the cause and give generously.

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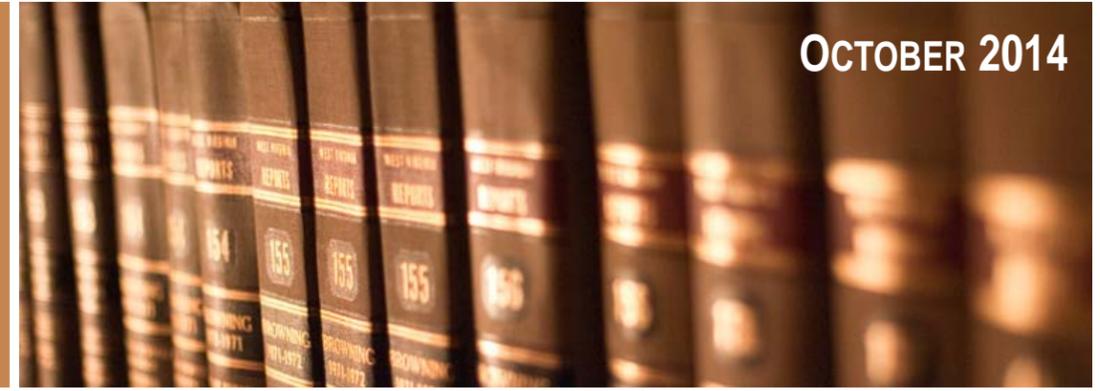
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URBAN JUSTICE

newsletter

A publication of New Covenant Legal Services

volunteer...

New Covenant relies on volunteers including attorneys and paralegals who are willing to help the urban poor work through legal issues. The St. Louis Christian legal community is blessed with an extraordinary number of talented and experienced law professionals and part of our mission is to engage and coordinate these legal resources.



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A Death in Ferguson by Len Scruggs

In August, Metropolitan St. Louis experienced some of the worst urban unrest in its history. The rioting, property destruction and armed police action that took place over several days recalled the riots of the late 1960's in major urban centers such as Detroit, Los Angeles and Cleveland. This summer's firestorm was sparked by the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18 year old black male in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. With reports of teenage killings in the St. Louis area being frequent, what made this killing a watershed event was that it involved a Ferguson police officer firing at least six times at Michael while he was reportedly in the posture of surrender – with his hands raised above his head.



Al Johnson, Ferguson Panel Discussion

The urban unrest that followed this apparently senseless killing evoked many accusations of racism leveled at police officer Darren Wilson, the police department of Ferguson and the governments of that township and of St. Louis County. It was within this context that many public forums on race and police brutality took place then, in August, and that continue into October at this writing.

On the evening of September 7, New Covenant Legal Services (NCLS), a ministry of New City Fellowship Church (NCF), presented a public forum to discuss issues of race and racial reconciliation within our community. The forum's panel participants were: Anthony Gray, attorney for the Michael Brown family; Atty. Al W. Johnson, Executive Director of NCLS; Atty. Lauren Grady, NCLS Advisory Board member; Pastor Michael Higgins, South City Church and Dean of Students, Covenant Theological Seminary; Officer Jeremy Henning, Maplewood Police Department; and Leonard Scruggs, NCLS Board member. The moderator for the forum was Tony Myles, Associate Pastor, NCF. The format consisted of opening remarks given by Attys. Anthony Gray and Al Johnson. These remarks were followed by answers from the panel members to three questions posed by the moderator. At the end of the forum, a number of questions were posed to the panel members by the audience concerning issues relating to the initial questions and/or the panel's perspectives regarding racial reconciliation.

The responses and counter remarks that were heard during the nearly two-hour long event

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New Covenant Legal Services is a ministry of Restore St. Louis

Restore St Louis promotes a network of Christian ministries that seek to show God's love to the poor, widow, orphan, immigrant/refugee and afflicted in St. Louis, and operates under the oversight of New City Fellowship St. Louis.





Ministry Activity

Since we started New Covenant Legal Services on June 1, 2013, we have officially opened 40 files, and we have closed 20 of these files. In addition to these cases, we've had over 100 requests for brief phone consults with ministry leaders, pastors and church members, along with dozens of face-to-face consultations with ministry leaders and staff. Finally, as of June 1, 2014 we have been overseeing a legal aid clinic at Jubilee Fellowship in North City that was previously overseen and staffed by Christian Legal Aid of St. Louis. We have a group of 8-10 attorney volunteers that meet with individuals with legal needs and provide counsel and occasional litigation support. Since June 1st we have provided legal counsel to 18 separate individuals. Several of these matters involve situations where we have opened formal case files, although the majority of them are not, as we have only provided advice.

Over half of the cases we have taken have involved litigation where we were either required to defend or file active lawsuits. For example, NCLS has already expended over 40 hours on the Lisa Thornton case, and I anticipate another 80-100 hours on it, as we are just starting the judicial review process. In late June we received a decision from a Department of Social Services Hearing Officer upholding the agency's denial of benefits to J.S. and M.H., two children that Lisa voluntarily assumed care and custody for back in 2011. This case was featured in our last issue of the Urban Justice Newsletter.

Some of the other current cases we are handling include the following:

A young woman who works for Harambee Youth Training Program was wrongfully sued by a previous landlord for supposed past due rent. Among other things, the attorney for the landlord wrongfully obtained sensitive financial information regarding this young woman through the use of subpoenas before the young woman was given an opportunity to obtain legal counsel. We aggressively defended the case and filed counterclaims against the landlord. We are in the process of settling this case and we will recoup our costs plus some of our fees.

We have had numerous domestic cases referred to us, many of them from outside churches. NCLS has obtained attorneys

who either fully volunteer their time or work at a low cost to assist these individuals. We have also obtained financial assistance from the referring churches to assist in the process. One case involves an abusive ex-husband who is involved in a religious cult and has filed a motion to modify a divorce decree to obtain full custody of his teenage son. An NCLS volunteer attorney is representing the mother. The referring church is assisting the mother with paying out-of-pocket expenses and a token amount of legal fees.

A number of our non-litigation cases have required a fair amount of work over a short period of time, but have generally not been as time or money intensive as our litigation cases. For example, Lauren Grady, an attorney and NCLS Board Member, worked with me to review and revise the employment policies and practices of a local Christian school.

Finances

In 2014, we have raised more than \$60,000 for NCLS so far. Approximately one-half of this amount came through legal fees that we obtained on several separate cases. I have received my full check of \$6,500 a month since the beginning of the year. This amount offsets approximately 80% of my office overhead and staffing but provides no salary. We currently have approximately \$4,000 in reserve.

Future Ministry Direction

It is our goal to have NCLS funded to the point that we could have a director operating virtually full time as well as administrative/clerical staffing in place by early in 2015. We also would like to move to a separate office space that could house NCLS in the near future. Obviously, that will require additional funding

and some additional financial development before we can seriously consider this move. The good news is that we can run NCLS with a full time director and one administrative staff member all housed in its own office space for approximately \$150,000 a year.

Thus far, NCLS has proved to be a ministry that not only benefits our clients but also benefits churches and para-church ministries throughout the St. Louis area. Our work at NCLS has allowed us to challenge local church leadership to engage with us in both helping with the financial burden of legal representation, and develop a deeper understanding of the legal needs of the urban poor.

As the only faith-based legal service ministry to the urban poor in St. Louis, NCLS has many challenges ahead of it. But thankfully, we also have limitless potential to advance the gospel by being advocates for justice in our community.

“Open your mouth, judge righteously; defend the rights of the poor and the needy.”

-Proverbs 31:9

Learn to do right; seek justice,

defend the oppressed,

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow. Isaiah 1:17



Terry Jones is one of the longest serving and most faithful attorney volunteers for Christian Legal Aid of St. Louis, a ministry which operates out of several churches in St. Louis City, and has recently been turned over to New Covenant Legal Services for continuing oversight.

Terry is a 1981 graduate of Washington University Law School and has been engaged in the private practice of law since that time. His primary area of practice is family law, but he is also involved in a full range of legal services including contracts, wills, and commercial litigation. He has served as a board member for a number of ministries including Fresh Start Seminars, Inc., a national divorce ministry, and Crossroads Christian Counseling in St. Louis. Terry and his wife, Irene, have been married since 1973 and have three children. He is a long-term church leader who currently attends and serves at Twin Oaks Presbyterian Church.

Terry summarizes his experience with Christian Legal Aid as follows:

The legal clinic ministry began around seven years ago, and I routinely signed up for one Friday afternoon a month. Frankly, I

do my best to be out of the office on Friday afternoons, heading to north St. Louis to meet with folks who would have a hard time getting to my office. I find this to be more productive than sitting at my desk trying to make a few extra bucks. Many of the folks have presented issues that stretch my thinking and expertise, but I often end up talking family law issues with people who face legal problems but don't have the money to talk with a lawyer. I usually let folks know that the lawyers who come over on Friday afternoons share a common faith in Christ as their savior and see their law practices as extensions of who they are as Christians. Though most advice is limited to counseling in the clinic office, over the years I have had the privilege of appearing in court, intervening via letters and phones calls, or taking other steps to help the client "outside" the clinic office. Often, there are times when it is clear the client needs "hands-on" help.

What's rewarding about all of this? It is more—and it must be more—than merely "feeling good" about what I'm doing. My vanity needs plenty of care and the Lord regularly lets me know I can do nothing without His grace. The rewarding aspect of this ministry, as with all ministry, is we are made to be "other-oriented" for the sake of Christ. The clinic orients me towards others and helps me live out a response to Jesus' challenging question in the Parable of the Good Samaritan: "Which one of these...proved to be a neighbor" to the one in need?

A Death in Ferguson Continued from page 1

set the stage for future forums of this kind to be hosted by NCLS and NCF. While a resolution of the perceived problems was not expected to be achieved at the close of the forum, there was a consensus within the group of panel participants that a continuing dialogue is critical to any reconciliation progress. This dialogue is necessary between those parties that can directly influence, and are influenced by, citizens, community organizations and governmental administrations. The importance of the role that the church can play in this dialogue cannot be overstated. With the majority, ethnic population of evangelicals not being historically engaged in issues of justice and reconciliation, the opportunity to reverse the effects of such denominational isolation presents itself today. We, the church, cannot afford to miss this opportunity to be first in reconciling

across denominational lines, cultural division, and racial barriers, The world is watching!



Participants in Ferguson Panel Discussion



NCLS Advisory Board members (L-R): Odetta Fields, Lynn Beckemeier, Leonard Scruggs, Richard Harvey, Kathy Woodard, Lauren Grady, Hal Bush

our mission >>>

New Covenant Legal Services ("NCLS") provides legal services to needy individuals and groups in Metropolitan St. Louis, including the urban poor, refugees and immigrants. Our mission is to demonstrate that Jesus Christ's love and justice are sovereign in the world. This mission will be accomplished through a Christ-centered approach to solving legal problems and achieving social justice, in partnership with Christian churches in the St. Louis area.