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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 2015-16 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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DECEMBER 2015



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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Negligent Shopping Mall Found Liable by Al Johnson

Jeremy Blanchard is someone that you never hear about on the 10 o'clock local news, where sensationalized urban crime stories tend to dominate. He grew up in a fatherless home and when his mother was unable to care for him, he lived first with his grandmother and finally with an older sister. Despite these significant disadvantages, Jeremy graduated from high school with good grades. He is currently enrolled at a local community college with the hope that he can eventually fulfill his dream of obtaining a college degree in engineering.

On June 28th of this year Jeremy went with a friend to the St. Louis Galleria for dinner. He parked his car on the mall parking lot. While he was in the restaurant, a storm dumped inches of rain in a short amount of time on Metro St. Louis. Jeremy's car was ruined when several feet of water accumulated on the mall's parking lot as he ate his dinner. Our young friend went to the shopping mall's general offices and attempted to make a claim, but was told that it was not the shopping mall's problem. That's when Jeremy contacted NCLS. After an investigation, I forwarded a letter to the general manager of the shopping mall advising him that Jeremy had a legitimate claim,

and requesting that the Galleria settle with Jeremy out of court. A week later we received a letter from the mall's insurance carrier claiming the rainstorm was an "act of God" and denying any liability. Isn't it amazing how quickly some people acknowledge the truth and reality of God when it is to their financial advantage to do so?



The St. Louis Galleria parking lot in question

This is a typical scenario that we see at NCLS: a young man, struggling to play by the rules and succeed in life, is treated with a dismissive and contemptuous attitude by a large business that makes millions of dollars each year from him and hundreds of thousands of other young people like him who patronize the mall. NCLS walked with Jeremy through the biblical steps for dispute resolution. Having exhausted all settlement efforts, we assisted

Jeremy in filing a lawsuit in Small Claims Court against the Galleria, claiming that the mall was negligent in the design of their drainage system and in not warning their patrons once the rain water began to flood the premises.

Jeremy's day in court came on November 4, 2015. Before court, Jeremy invested approximately ten hours of his own time documenting the value of

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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.



“That’s Not Fair!” by Hal Bush, Chair of the Board of NCLS

One of the most common complaints a teacher will hear, from the kindergarten level up to the final years of college and even in graduate school, is that something or other is not “fair.” On the playgrounds of America, children complain about “fairness.” On teacher evaluation forms, we usually have a question about whether the instructor was “fair.” And in the sports world, students learn early that winning and losing often depend on fairness: umpires determine balls and strikes; hit balls are either fair or foul; and in most sports the word “foul” simply means some act is not “fair.” Sports, like grading, are a formative arena for learning about “fairness”—but also, a place for learning that people can often disagree violently about how to define what’s “fair.”

With final grades on the horizon, my students line up for office hours, making their case for what they consider to be a “fair” grade on a paper or exam. Fairness is a big topic when the grades are due. It’s always interesting to try and turn such topics into a teachable moment for my students. I might ask, what **IS** Fairness? Or, how can we as humans determine what is fair, and what is unfair? But for many students, “fairness” is often about challenging a teacher’s interpretation of student success or output: they simply did not get the evaluation they wanted. It’s my judgment against theirs. “Fairness” is basically a human construction: one negotiates fairness, for it does not exist outside of ourselves, they say.

But according to C. S. Lewis, the very human appeal to an order of moral fairness is a signal of transcendence: it is a sensibility programmed into us as humans created in God’s image, one that suggests there is order in the universe, designed by God and outside, or above, the human mind. Lewis called this the “moral law,” a law that can lead us directly to the One Who created it. So whenever a student appeals to “fairness,” it almost goes without saying that they are appealing, whether they notice it or not, to some outside arbiter who is looking down on us. Their appeals imply that fairness, somehow, must conform to some arbiter’s “true” evaluation.

The human appeal to “fairness,” and the righteous indignation that comes when we feel that we’ve been treated unfairly, both explain a lot of my personal commitment to the ministry of New Covenant Legal Service. As chair of the Advisory Board of the NCLS, I take very seriously what I believe is our joint, divine call as Christians to serve on earth as some kind of spokesperson, or advocate, for what we perceive to be God’s sense of fairness. This advocacy is especially crucial when it comes to those with little or no voice in our contemporary society. It is well-known that the gap between the wealthy and the poor is expanding rapidly in America. As this gap widens, it seems that the gap between fair balls and foul balls is also widening.

Unfortunately, unlike Major League Baseball or the NFL, there is usually no instant replay for most underprivileged Americans. Or at least, many people don’t realize that they have the right to call a time out to review the video; or if they do, they feel they cannot afford to hire a lawyer to begin the process of instant replay. Corporations and other entities just seem too powerful to challenge. For many Americans, even the rules of engagement seem unfair.

But at NCLS, we see ourselves as a resource where the poor and disenfranchised are empowered to get a fair review of the evidence. The legal process in this sense is a lot like the instant replays on television every Sunday. But more important: this advocacy, we believe, is a sign and symbol of the Great Judge who rules and reigns over the universe, fairly and impartially.

It may seem at times like many things in our lives are “not fair.” But NCLS has been established because we think fairness is due to all citizens; and we believe fairness to be also an aspect of God, the One who is always fair. We hold that “God is fair and just; He corrects the misdirected, Sends them in the right direction” (Psalm 25:8). We try to mirror that aid. As more “fairness” appears in our world, God will be further glorified.

And so, as we build for the future of “fairness” in greater St. Louis, we welcome your commitment and support!

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

Proverbs 31:9

Introducing Brandi Miller, New NCLS Board Member



Brandi Miller, Advisor, NCLS

New Covenant Legal Services welcomes St. Louis attorney Brandi Miller to the NCLS Advisory Board! Brandi grew up in a household with a single parent in the St. Louis suburb of Richmond Heights. Although her mother sometimes had to work long hours to

make ends meet, she placed a high priority on education. This conviction allowed Brandi to attend private schools in most of her formative years. Brandi graduated from the University of Missouri – St. Louis in 2001.

Brandi became interested in law when NCLS Director Al Johnson, who was then in private practice, offered her a job as a legal assistant while she was attending UMSL. Encouraged by Al, Brandi eventually applied for and was accepted to the University of Missouri – Columbia Law School. She earned her law degree in 2004.

Since graduation from law school, Brandi has been engaged in the private practice of law as an associate for a law firm in University City. Her practice consists of general litigation, including family law, criminal law, and business law. Al Johnson and Brandi have remained in close touch throughout the years and a little over a year ago Brandi began volunteering on a regular basis at the NCLS Clinic at Jubilee Church. She is currently a volunteer attorney on several NCLS cases.

NCLS Director Al Johnson praises Brandi as a young woman who is not only an outstanding attorney but one who maintains an active Christian faith and who has done a phenomenal job of integrating her faith with her legal practice. Despite her tremendous success, Brandi has never forgotten where she came from; she will be a tremendous addition to the NCLS Board!

**“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

Negligent Shopping Mall Found Liable *Continued from page 1*

his car as well as taking pictures of the mall parking lot. Using his engineering skills, he helped us develop our theory of liability and present it in court. The mall’s general manager appeared and testified that the drain quickly became covered with debris inhibiting drainage. NCLS was also assisted in the case by Andrea Brown, a recent volunteer with NCLS, who obtained information from the National Weather Service regarding the amount of rain that fell that day. This report was a critical piece of evidence, because the mall’s representative claimed that the rainfall was much more severe than the official figures available from the National Weather Service.

The judge who heard the case ruled in Jeremy’s favor, awarding him \$5,000, which was the car’s value that we submitted into evidence. Jeremy’s comments after hearing the verdict were as follows: “I am thankful for New Covenant Legal Services and the help I received from Attorney Al Johnson and from Ms. Andrea Brown. I know I never could have taken on a big corporation like the St. Louis Galleria on my own.” At this writing, we are attempting to collect the monies from the insurance carrier for the Galleria.



Jeremy Blanchard

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.