

‘Called to Serve’

The Episcopal Church responds to domestic poverty

More than 170 Episcopalians, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson and others involved in social service ministries gathered in Newark, New Jersey, April 28-30 for “Called to Serve: The Episcopal Church Responds to Domestic Poverty,” a conference designed to explore the nature of domestic poverty and the church’s role in addressing it.

“Healing the worst of the poverty in this nation is intrinsically connected to restoring human beings to right relationship with the rest of creation,” said Jefferts Schori in a keynote address that touched on almost every factor – shelter, food, environment, health care, employment and economics – that plays a role in domestic poverty.

The conference was supported by Jubilee Ministries, Episcopal Community Services in America and National Episcopal Health Ministries.

“We’re here to do justice, and love mercy,” Jefferts Schori said. “We’re here to walk humbly with God and bring good news to the poor.



Jefferts Schori

That good news of justice and mercy looks like the ancient visions of the commonweal of God where everyone has enough to eat, no one goes thirsty or homeless, all have access to meaningful employment and health care, the wealthy and powerful do not exploit the weak, and no one studies war any more. It includes the work of building community and caring for the earth, both of which are essential to the health of a spiritually rooted person, in right relationship with God and neighbor.”

The Episcopal Church, with “its partners both sacred and secular, is part of that mission of God’s to bring that holy dream to reality,” the presiding bishop said. “How can all the people of this nation participate in the abundance which is already here?”

Jefferts Schori provided examples of how the Episcopal Church combats poverty — from churches and schools converting outdoor space into produce-growing gardens, to congregations partnering with Habitat for Humanity to build homes for low-income residents, to support for dioceses and parishes wishing to start a credit union or micro-lending program, and school and day-care programs becoming educational innovators.

House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson, in an interview at the conference, said she sees to it that deputies are made aware of the church’s ad-



Lynette Wilson

Angela Cabanban, right, of the Episcopal Church’s Diversity, Social and Environmental Team works the Jubilee Ministries table at the “Called to Serve” conference.

vocacy work and encourages them to join the Episcopal Public Policy Network.

Many of the factors that influence poverty, rural and urban, are intrinsically the same, Charles W. Fluharty, president and CEO of the Rural Policy Research Institute, told the conference. “If I look at rural America today I would really argue that the church is one of the few anchor institutions that is left and I would argue in urban areas that is also the case,” he said. “I would argue that if God’s church could unite rural and urban poverty people together to move God’s kingdom forward, domestic policy would look different in the United States. The church could do that.”

Jay Lehnertz, chair of the Episcopal Community Services in America board, pointed to an attitude in recent years that the Episcopal Church has “lost its institutional voice in regard to poverty within our own national borders ... what should be a balance of domestic and international has tipped toward international,” he said.

In 2009, General Convention passed resolutions calling for the establishment of a program to address domestic poverty (A155) and calling on Executive Council to continue efforts in the church to address domestic poverty in the next triennium (A140).

“Jubilee,” a documentary about the 12-year relationship that transformed both an affluent Dallas parish and a high-crime neighborhood, produced by the Episcopal Church’s Office of Communication, debuted at the conference April 28. The documentary is available to view at www.episcopalchurch.org/multimedia/jubilee.

—Reported by Lynette Wilson of *Episcopal News Service*. For more about the domestic poverty conference, visit ENS online at www.episcopalchurch.org/ens

For more about domestic poverty and The Episcopal Church:

Jubilee Ministries • www.episcopalchurch.org/109342_ENG_HTML.htm

Episcopal Community Services in America • www.ecsamerica.org

Episcopal Health Ministries • www.episcopalhealthministries.org

Episcopal Public Policy Network • www.episcopalchurch.org/109350_ENG_HTML.htm