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Learning how to give

Advocate for the poor Beth Templeton helps strike balance between wisdom, compassion

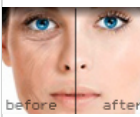
CHERYL P. ALLEN STAFF WRITER CALLEN@GREENVILLENEWS.COM • MAY 18, 2009

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In 26-plus years of working with and for the poor, Beth Templeton has seen more than her share of dire situations – from homeless victims of abuse to mentally ill people living under bridges to a woman who was convinced she was born to be a prostitute.

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In today's fragile economy, she's seeing more people who once were on the other end of the spectrum: educated professionals who are suddenly unemployed.

"And that's difficult," said Templeton, an ordained minister and former executive director of United Ministries, a non-profit that helps people in need.

Now executive director of Our Eyes Were Opened, an outreach of United Ministries, Templeton is working to sensitize people with resources to issues of poverty so they can reach out to the poor wisely and compassionately.

"I think many people don't believe we really have problems of poverty in Greenville because it is so well hidden," Templeton said, citing numbers that show more than 50,000 Greenville residents live below federal poverty guidelines. "One of the remarks we often hear on our poverty tour as we drive into neighborhoods that are only one or two blocks off major thoroughfares is: 'I had no idea that this was here and I drive this way daily!'"

One of the tools she is using to bridge the gap between those with resources and those without is her recently published book, "Loving Our Neighbor: A Thoughtful Approach to Helping People in Poverty," and a new DVD produced through the United Methodist Church, "Servant or Sucker," in which she is featured as a poverty expert.

She's held presentations at churches and for community groups, college students and

professionals. Her aim is to teach people how to give while debunking myths and stereotypes of the poor.

"What I'm trying to do is help people understand people who are poor so they will continue to want to help," Templeton said.



Beth Templeton, executive director of Our Eyes Were Opened, conducts a poverty simulation workshop at Greenville Technical College. (GEORGE GARDNER/Staff)



In the poverty simulation, workshop participants race against time to pay bills while dealing with job loss and other stressors. (GEORGE GARDNER/Staff)



In the poverty simulation, workshop participants race to pay bills while dealing with stresses such as job loss and child care. (GEORGE GARDNER/Staff)

LEARN MORE

- Our Eyes Were Opened, 864-232-6463, 2204
- www.oureyeswereopened.org • www.lovingourneighborbook.com
- www.ecufilm.org

"A lot of the material in the book grew directly from questions people would ask me through the years," she said. "I know people want to help and also know that people sometimes need help knowing how to help." The key is striking a balance between wisdom and compassion.

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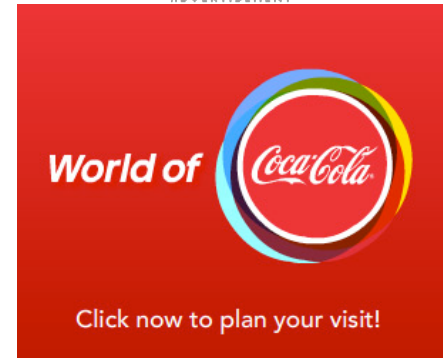
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