

# The Amherst Survival Center

*The Amherst Unitarian Universalist Newsletter*  
January, 2009

*The Social Justice Spotlight is a piece written monthly by individual Social Justice Committee members. This month's Spotlight comes to us from **Chad Johnson**.*

Just as the Open Pantry in Springfield deserves our support (see November 2008 Spotlight), so too does the Amherst Survival Center in North Amherst. Why? Because the Center is helping over 3000 families and individuals annually to meet their basic needs. The Center provides hot lunches, groceries, clothing and household goods. Also available is free medical care Monday and Thursday as well as advice for the homeless and mentally ill on Thursday. A new program is Family Night on Thursday for families with children. And vitally important to those receiving – and providing – these services is a sense of community.

The recent and continuing upsurge in poverty in Hampshire County – from 11% in 2006 to 12.5% and undoubtedly higher in 2008 – has meant big crowds and long lines at the Center as demand for basic services intensifies. Lunches served have increased from 700 to 1000 per month. The numbers of people obtaining groceries have increased from 70 to 100 per week. Accordingly, increased donations are badly needed, especially soup, tuna, peanut butter, winter coats, socks, boots and blankets – and cash!

Our Society is assisting the Center by donating to it a portion of the Sunday plate collection as well as food brought to the sanctuary for deposit in the "Just One Thing" basket one Sunday per month. The Social Justice Committee encourages the congregation to contribute to the Center food, clothing and/or volunteer service. The Center's address is 1200 N. Pleasant St., N. Amherst MA 01059-9629. Donations can also be made through the website:

<http://www.people.umass.edu/support/asc/onlinegift.html>.

On Christmas Eve, the UU Society of Amherst, along with many other churches in our valley, donated a portion (\$200) of the combined offerings from both of our services to support a new Amherst Survival Center project called Empty Bowls. The first annual Empty Bowls Dinner, to be held on January 27 at The Pub in Amherst, should be a fine community-building event as well as one more way in which the growing need for food is being addressed in our community. (For details, see the article under "For Your Information" in this newsletter.)

We are thankful for the financial generosity of our members, friends and visitors on Christmas Eve, and also for the large collection of mittens, scarves and gloves that they placed on our Mitten Tree. These gifts will also be helpful to the Survival Center.