

# ASUMC Emerging Issues -- Overview

Total one-on-ones reported: 28

Insider/outsider ratio: 50% / 50%

Gender ratio: 43% male / 57% female

Other: 1 youth and 1 homeless person included

## 1. CREATING COMMUNITY

- a. Fostering a sense of belonging to both the immediate community and the larger community of Philadelphia, including a sense of civility and courtesy towards others.
- b. Bridging barriers and creating dialogue both within and across communities, where people are often divided by factors such as race, age, social class, etc.
- c. Establishing a community in and around our church through partnership with others in the local area and by being a church that really cares about the people whom it serves.

## 2. ISSUES IN EDUCATION

- a. Battling racial segregation and inequality among different schools and neighborhoods.
- b. Creating awareness and dialogue about charter vs. public schools so that we can work together to improve education for all.
- c. Fighting to give teachers voice and agency in their profession.
- d. Getting involved in other issues to improve the educational experiences of children and youth, such as safety, special education services, etc.

## 3. HOMELESSNESS

- a. Correcting misrepresentations and misguided views on the homeless in general and in the local community where the homeless reside.
- b. Developing services for the homeless that really help them and include their voice to understand what they truly need.

## 4. SAFETY & DRUGS IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS

- a. Fighting neighborhood violence and fostering safety.
- b. Interrupting cycle of youth involvement in drugs and combating feelings of helplessness.

## 5. CITY DEVELOPMENT

- a. Casinos -- Combating casinos and corrupt government that encourages their development while also taking care of those affected by existing casinos in the meantime.
- b. Development of the city in general to make use of empty buildings and lots and make the city cleaner and greener.

## 6. IMMIGRATION

- a. Correcting views of immigrants as "illegal" and seeing them as "undocumented" instead.
- b. Other issues in immigration reform.

# ASUMC Emerging Issues -- Details

## 1. CREATING COMMUNITYSHIP

### ○ **Fostering a sense of belonging to the community**

- Several people said that they value certain communities that they belong to and see how important they are.
- People in Philadelphia don't seem to care much about its health, environment, and development as a community.
- People tend to care only about issues that affect them directly – it is more difficult to get people involved in matters that affect the community at large.
- Some experience a general lack of courtesy and kindness towards strangers that they encounter.
  - *STORY: Rev Pittman shared about two instances in which he offered a "Good evening, sir, how are you doing tonight?" and the response he got back was, "Do you know me? Leave me alone. Don't speak to me again."*

### ○ **Bridging barriers across and within communities**

- There is a need for dialogue across communities. Oftentimes, communities are very much divided by race and social class, even if they are near each other, and there is little understanding among them.
- There is also a need for dialogue within communities. Sometimes people from diverse demographics (age, race, etc.) can live in the same building but there is very little communication, sense of community, and understanding between different groups. Instead, there seems to be much fear.
  - *STORY: Yvonne shared about how she learned a great deal by just doing a one-on-one with a Latina woman who recently moved to the area. She learned about how they are really just trying to survive and are focused on family primarily before they can think about going further. This is an excellent illustration of dialogue that can create a bridge for understanding.*
  - *STORY: Rev Pittman shared about how he feels scared of packs of youth while walking home from the bus.*
- Homophobia is also an important problem that requires more dialogue and understanding to remedy.

### ○ **Specifically, creating a community in and around our church.**

- There is a lack of a defined community near the church, specifically the area west of Chinatown and east of the museums. This leads to issues such as a lack of established communication to the community about happenings in the area, such as the passing of the zoning bill for the development of the garage next door. There is great opportunity to rally together and establish ourselves a community that includes the church, museums, vendors, and residents in the area.

- We need church to be a more caring presence in the larger community outside of the church. Perhaps with an associate pastor, we can get more accomplished and be able to spend more time and energy not just hosting events but truly caring for the people we serve in this local community.

## 2. EDUCATION

### ○ Segregation and inequality among schools

- There is apparent racial segregation in schools, even if segregation was legally abolished.
  - *STORY: An educator recalls witnessing student leave from two schools right next to each other – one private and one public – and noticing that the students in the private school were all white while the students in the public school were of color.*
- Not all schools have the same resources, and people have different access to different schools because of money, location, and differential access to knowledge about the school application process.
  - *STORY: An educator tutored two boys, cousins who lived in the same house, who attended different high schools—one charter and one not. The boy attending the charter school had challenging, conceptual homework, while the other boy had no homework. The boy attending the charter school only knew about this school because someone from his church had connected him – his parents were not aware of the choices prior to this.*

### ○ The charter vs. public schools debate

- There is a general public lack of understanding of the role of charter schools as the answers to the problems in education, especially since the release of “Waiting for Superman” (a documentary) and all the buzz around it.
- There is even a lack of understanding and collaboration between public and charter schools -- need for more dialogue toward a unified goal to improve education and serve students.

### ○ Teacher voice and agency

- Teachers are often blamed for school failures but not given a voice or agency in decisions inside their school and sometimes even in their classroom.
  - *STORY: In “empowerment schools,” or schools who did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress and is now under the control of the district, teachers often have scripted curricula where they are to read a script of exactly what to say. Sometimes, these curricula even incorporate the use of a bell to signal students to chime in with a coordinated response, like training a dog!*
- The union is powerful but doesn’t really represent the voices of the teachers and what they really want on a daily basis. Teacher voice and agency

### ○ Other issues

- General improvement of schools
- Safety getting to schools (i.e. establishing safe routes to get to school).
- Support for special education in schools.

## 3. HOMELESS

### ○ Views of the homeless.

- The homeless are misrepresented and need a platform to tell their stories. Public perception is that homelessness is related to drug abuse but this is not always the case. For example, many young women are homeless because they go off with older men, sometimes have children, and then are dumped and left homeless. Perhaps a documentary could be a good step towards this goal.
- There is a new homeless shelter at 13<sup>th</sup> and Market, which is wonderful for servicing the homeless, but it can lead to resident concerns about perceptions of the neighborhood. Need a way to address this.
- **Services for the homeless**
  - There are not enough “bridge” services to help the homeless to become part of society in a more traditional sense – need more coaching/mentoring.
  - The voice of the homeless would also be valuable in understanding what the homeless really need. For example, one homeless person expressed that she needs more than just a place to stay for the night – she needs something permanent, so a homeless shelter is often not enough.

#### 4. DRUGS & SAFETY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

- **General Safety.**
  - Residents in different neighborhoods expressed a concern about neighborhood crime and safety issues.
- **Drugs**
  - Children and youth living in poverty, oftentimes going into the drug business because they feel that this is the way it is and there is no way to change it. Adults in communities who are complacent about the drug situation and sometimes participate in perpetuating it.
    - *STORY: One youth had a tattoo "DREAM" which stood for "Drugs Rule Everything Around Me" and it was paid for by his mom who knew the tattoo's meaning.*

#### 5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY

- **Casinos**
  - How do we work to both limit the existing casinos and, if possible, push them to close?
  - How do we take care of the people who are going to be affected by it?
  - There is a specific issue of signage around Philadelphia that includes the casino along with historical landmarks.
- **General development of the city**
  - People are encouraged by development in the city, such as on Avenue of the Arts, and want to continue seeing further developments to making Philadelphia cleaner, greener, and more beautiful.
  - Developing abandoned buildings and empty lots – for example turning empty lots into green spaces.

#### 6. IMMIGRATION

- **Views of immigrants**
  - Use of the word “illegal” is problematic – better to use “undocumented.”
- **Immigration reform**