

# News

*from Center Church on the Green in New Haven, United Church of Christ*

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## **Center Church on the Green Reaches Out to Increasing Numbers of Homeless and Poor by Serving Meals & Participating in “Cook and Care Walk-A-Thon” on October 19**

**NEW HAVEN, CT** (October 2008) – While economic turmoil continues to wreck havoc across the country, members of New Haven’s Center Church on the Green are making a difference locally by reaching out to the dramatically increasing number of poor and homeless frequenting the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK), which is housed in the church’s Parish House basement.

To help raise funds for DESK, as well as three other community organizations, Center Church and other organizations are participating in The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Cook and Care Walk-A-Thon at 1 pm Sunday, October 19. The Walk-A-Thon will help raise funds for DESK as well as Interfaith Volunteer Care Givers, Community Soup Kitchen and FISH of Greater New Haven. The Walk begins at Edgerton Park, at the corner of Whitney Ave. and Cliff St., in New Haven. The church also helps serve weekly meals at DESK.

“Our church has always made a commitment to support those in need in our community, especially the homeless, but we are just astounded at the rapidly rising numbers of those who are in need of a meal,” said Center Church’s pastor, the Rev. Sandra Olsen. Center Church, which was one of three churches on the New Haven green which served food to the homeless and poor when DESK started in 1987, offered its Parish House basement to DESK in 2007 so the organization could centralize its food service operations. Center Church, a registered New Haven Connecticut Landmark, is a congregation of the United Church of Christ.

“It used to be, that at the beginning of the month, numbers of patrons to DESK were small -- maybe 60 or 70 -- and then throughout the month, as the monthly check ran out, those numbers

would climb. But now, even at the month's beginning, we have noticed the long lines and by the middle of the month, we are seeing numbers approaching 200. It is a sad reflection of our economy," Olsen said.

To lend a hand, members of Center Church help serve meals once a week at DESK. In 2007, DESK, with the help of dozens of volunteers from throughout the community, provided more than 72,000 daily hot evening meals, 24,000 weekly food pantry bags, and 6,800 bag lunches to the working poor. DESK serves evening meals six nights a week, operates a food pantry once weekly and provides daily bag lunches to the working poor.

The most recent statewide Point-In-Time Count of homeless residents of Connecticut indicates a 13% increase in homeless families across the state and a 21% increase of sheltered families, a finding consistent with Connecticut's growing shortage of affordable housing and with survey responses indicating that rent problems have led to homelessness, according to the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, the Reaching Home Campaign and the Corporation for Supportive Housing.

Center Church on the Green, a congregation of the United Church of Christ (UCC), has been located on the New Haven Green for the past 370 years and is a registered New Haven Connecticut Landmark. The Church is well known for its crypt, which is built over a small portion of the town's burial ground and includes 137 famous gravestones of New Haven's founders and earliest citizens dating back to 1687. The Church is actively involved in its community, offering space and assistance to the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, as well as involved in Columbus House, Hill Health Center's The Baby's Closet, and Christian Community Action & AIDS Interfaith Network. For more information about the church or services, visit [NewHavenCenterChurch.org](http://NewHavenCenterChurch.org) or call 203-787-0121.