

“You shall
LOVE your
NEIGHBOR
as **YOURSELF.**”

MATTHEW 22:39



America for CHRIST OFFERING 2020

Impacting and Transforming Lives Across America and Puerto Rico:
The Love Thy Neighbor Campaign

www.abhms.org/afc



American Baptist Home Mission Societies
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LEADER'S GUIDE

America for CHRIST OFFERING 2020

“You shall
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Dear Mission Partner,

Thanks to your America for Christ (AFC) Offering contributions, American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) ministers to families who have lost homes to floods, to children living lives of limitation in poverty, to seminarians preparing to devote their lives to sharing the Good News, and many more. We have been answering God's call to heal broken families and communities—as well as cultivate strong Christian leaders and equip passionate disciples—since 1832.

The world's needs today are as great as they were close to two centuries ago. We are extending our ministry by awarding grants to mission partners across the United States and Puerto Rico—partners who are also doing the work of empowering Christian leaders, nurturing disciples and intercultural awareness, and transforming congregations and communities with the healing power of God's love.

By contributing to the AFC Offering, you increase our capacity to fulfill the biblical mandate in Matthew 22:39: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

In 2019, ABHMS awarded more than \$300,000 to ministries carried out by our mission partners. These are just a few examples of the impact our partners are making across our mission field:

In the Cultivating Leaders and Discipleship categories, \$8,400 was awarded to the Los Angeles-based Innovative Space for Asian American Christianity (ISAAC) to help fund its “Imagining A More Equal Pulpit” initiative, including a Gender Summit that addressed the challenges faced by women of color in ministry.

In the Healing and Transforming Communities category, \$115,000 included support to Heart Reach Neighborhood Ministries, Campbell, Ohio, for the purchase of mattresses above and beyond the 104 already delivered to prevent children and teens from sleeping on the floors, couches and piles of clothing in its three housing developments.

In the Intercultural Ministries category, \$15,300 included support to Iglesia Bautista Betesda, Indianapolis, Ind., and its “Walking With the Immigrant” project, which has helped 60 families, including a family that senior pastor the Rev. Jaime Flores and a church brother accompanied to immigration court in Miami, Fla.

On behalf of ABHMS, thank you for your past generous support of our transformational mission. Our ministries—along with the ministries of our mission partners—are making a difference in the lives of so many individuals and families. With your help, we can bring God's healing touch to so many more.

May we count on your generosity once again?



With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Haggray".

Dr. Jeffrey Haggray
Executive Director
American Baptist Home Mission Societies

A Biblical Reflection: On Being a Good Neighbor

I was born and raised in the city of New York in the borough of Brooklyn—a rather large community filled with neighborhoods. While some of the neighborhoods were diverse, the majority of them were populated by people of similar ethnicities.

The intriguing factor was that each neighborhood was representative of people that expressed great value in what we call “being a good neighbor.” This value was exhibited by sharing goods, caring for those that required health assistance, encouraging and motivating young people, protecting individuals from harm and participating in social justice issues.

It is most interesting to note that a person’s neighborhood values often spilled over to other existing neighborhoods in the manner in which we were taught. For us, while there was a separation of neighborhoods, the act of being a good neighbor and hospitality was the premier action any time and in any place. These actions were not new but a carryover from the cultures that most people in the community had brought with them from their place of origin.

The act of being a good neighbor and practicing hospitality is not new. The Harper Bible Dictionary states: “In the ancient Near East, hospitality was the process of ‘receiving’ outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests.” Hospitality, thus, differed from entertaining family and friends. Strangers were not to be entirely ignored—or worse, either physically or socially neglected.

Being a good neighbor is important for healthy living. While some may be struggling with the concept of who is our neighbor, Jesus helps us in the parable of the Good Samaritan, wherein Jesus asks, “Which of these three men was neighbor to the victim?” That question can be interpreted as “To

whom can I be a neighbor?” The response is one that emphasizes that “neighbor” has nothing to do with geography, citizenship or race. As followers of Jesus Christ, wherever people need us, there we can be neighbors and, like Jesus Christ, show mercy. Jesus taught that the love of our neighbor must transcend all natural or human boundaries, such as race, nationality, religion, and economic or educational status.

In some sense, as humans in this current generation, we have lost our sense of practicing what it means to be a good neighbor. The whole world would be a better place if there was a resurgence of the act of and focus on being good neighbors. We must recognize that each person has value and holds the potential for great contributions to this world. Many of the troubling circumstances that we are confronted with in our society would improve if people of faith drew together as neighbors and gave life to its meaning. It is a truth that people of good character have an inner strength that, when shared through love of the other, will serve to help those who are struggling to survive the social and economic issues of our times.

We have an opportunity to be good neighbors and make a valuable impact on the present and future human condition. Jesus says, “Go and do thou likewise.” Let each of us accept this as our marching orders and seize each opportunity to do so.



Rev. Dr. Clifford I. Johnson

Dr. Clifford I. Johnson
President, Board of Directors
American Baptist Home
Mission Societies

You can find additional worship, children and youth activity resources on the ABHMS website at abhms.org/afc.

Sample Congregational Letter

America for CHRIST OFFERING 2020

Dear _____,

Jesus teaches us to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Our church follows the teaching of Jesus by reaching out to the community and providing for our neighbors’ needs, physical and spiritual alike.

Our church’s efforts are supported by American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), which provides resources for cultivating leaders, equipping disciples, and healing and transforming communities. Through ABHMS, we serve neighbors in Puerto Rico and other places in the United States in long-term recovery after natural disasters. Indeed, ABHMS provides many ways to help our church love our many neighbors, near and far!

Our church supports this work through our generous gifts to the America for Christ (AFC) Offering. Each dollar given increases the ministry and impact of ABHMS to serve neighbors with ministries incarnating Christ’s love, justice and compassion. Further, a portion of this offering (29%) will be shared with our American Baptist Churches region for strengthening local church leaders through programming, pastoral search support and other efforts to help our local church thrive, especially in these times when North America is its own challenging mission field!

In 2019, our church’s AFC gifts supported the following ministries:

- “Rebuilding, Restoring, Renewing Puerto Rico” — rebuilding the island one church and one building at a time.
- Scholarships and Emerging Leaders — providing scholarships to students to help ease the debilitating effects of excessive student-loan debt.
- Immigration and Refugee Resettlement — partnering with organizations that have resettled more than 100,000 displaced persons from across the world.
- Rizpah’s Children — partnering with agencies that provide support to children living in poverty.

Additional supported ministries included Disaster Response, Volunteer Mobilization, Prisoner Re-Entry and Community Outreach Ministries.

AFC 2020 empowers our local and national efforts to “love our neighbor.” I ask you to join me in giving generously to this year’s AFC Offering and help us to reach our goal, as we partner with ABHMS to love our neighbors and share the gospel!

Your Pastor,

For an editable Word document of this letter, visit abhms.org/afc.

Promoting the AFC Offering 2020 in your Church

1. Gather a team or taskforce for the America for Christ (AFC) 2020 home mission offering.
2. Determine a three-month schedule for promotions.
3. Review the enclosed materials. Then visit abhms.org/afc to access the AFC video and other downloadable resources. If you need more printed materials, please call 610.768.2413 to speak with the Development office.
4. Set a goal to assist American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) in raising \$1,000,000 that supports home mission throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Use the goal chart enclosed in this packet, and place in a prominent, high-traffic location that will encourage giving. Gather an AFC offering prayer team and meet once weekly before worship for five minutes of prayer.
5. Meet with the pastor and/or church's leadership team to share the promotions schedule.
6. Incorporate "Mission Moments" into worship. Each Sunday for a month, take three to five minutes during worship to present a Mission Moment, which can include showing the AFC video, reading an insert or allowing testimony from individuals who have volunteered for a home mission team or participated in any other kind of training or workshop.
7. Invite a home mission staff member as a speaker to your church. Please visit abhms.org/afc to download the speaker-request form, or call the Development office at 610.768.2413.
8. Involve the children and youth during a Mission Moment. Ask the children and youth to help pick up the offering during worship and distribute AFC bulletin inserts. While inserts can be included in the bulletin, you may, instead, want to highlight them during the Mission Moment, allowing the youth to distribute them to the congregation. Coin boxes previously placed at the front of the church should be picked up immediately following the Mission Moment.
9. Have fun. Design an AFC Offering 2020 bulletin board. Include materials from the offering packet. Allow the children and youth to add to the board additional art that conveys ideas from the "Love Thy Neighbor" theme.
10. Record and celebrate your progress. Use a Sunday in March to hold a celebration and to THANK the congregation for their generous support and for meeting the goal!
11. Complete the AFC evaluation form and return it to ABHMS.



Transforming the Lives of Children, Families Affected by Poverty

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) Rizpah's Children Freedom School program is a literacy program that serves kindergarten through second-grade students who may not otherwise have access to books and structured learning opportunities. Freedom Schools use an integrated reading curriculum that reduces summer learning loss and prepares students to enter the school year at or above the reading level of their peers.



The program's five essential components are as follows:

- high-quality academic enrichment;
- parent and family development;
- civic engagement and social action;
- intergenerational servant-leadership development; and
- nutrition, health and mental health.

The Freedom School program's impact on young scholars is apparent. One 9-year-old boy said, "The future I want is for the world to be a better place," while another said, "You can be like a mustard seed and move a mountain."

Your gifts to America for Christ support ABHMS' Rizpah's Children, a network focused on strategically addressing childhood poverty in the United States and Puerto Rico.

ABHMS is licensed to sponsor and operate CDF Freedom Schools.

Reproduce and use as a bulletin insert.

America for **CHRIST OFFERING 2020**

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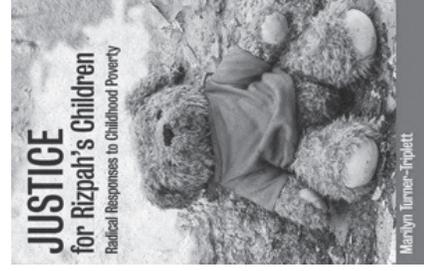
MATTHEW 22:39



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"Justice for Rizpah's Children: Radical Responses to Childhood Poverty"



Poverty is the greatest threat to a child's welfare. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, approximately 15 million children in the United States live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold. What is God calling you to do about children who experience poverty? In "Justice for Rizpah's Children: Radical Responses to Childhood Poverty," the Rev. Dr. Marilyn P. Turner-Triplett inspires us to action.

Grounded in a sermon delivered by Turner-Triplett about the biblical Rizpah, who advocated for the seven slain children of Saul (2 Samuel 21:1-10), this book urges readers to follow Rizpah's example, refusing to remain idle while children are consumed by systems that prey upon the poor.

978-0-8170-1798-9 paperback 168 pages \$15.99

Available from Judson Press 800-458-3766 www.judsonpress.com

**Rizpah's Children Freedom School,
Somerset Academy graduation 2019**

**“Don't let anyone tell you that you
can't be what you want.”**

— Renown abstract artist Moe Brooker, who spoke during the 2019 Rizpah's Children Freedom School, Somerset Academy graduation at American Baptist Home Mission Societies' Leadership and Mission Building, King of Prussia, Pa.



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“God's Graffiti: Inspiring Stories for Teens”



Highlighting noted “at-risk” youth in the Bible and sharing his own story of growing up in poverty amid crime and violence, the Rev. Romal Tune details how obstacles can become opportunities through faith. This Bible study celebrates men and women in Scripture who left troubled pasts behind to claim purpose-filled futures!

978-0-8170-1733-0
paperback 184 pages \$13.99

JUDSON PRESS
PUBLISHERS SINCE 1824

Available from Judson Press 800-458-3766 www.judsonpress.com

Puerto Rico Urgently Needs our Support!

The daily struggle in Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria is astounding. Some recent statistics provide a snapshot of what Puerto Ricans are facing:

- 70,000 homes were destroyed.
- 250,000 homes have partial damage.
- 48 American Baptist churches were damaged.
- Approximately 30,000 people are without jobs.
- Approximately 50% of the houses are not covered by insurance.



Unbelievably, there are tens of thousands of homes in Puerto Rico still covered by blue tarps. In addition, that means tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters live day-to-day with leaky roofs and buckets in their living rooms to catch the rain, always worrying about the next cloudy day or pending tropical storms.

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) is currently providing funds for repairing roofs in Puerto Rico.

“Life was hard before [the roof was fixed]; we were saving and trying to make it, but it was hard. ... The house kept getting wet with every rain.” — Magaly Figueroa

“My life is so much happier now. I don’t have to keep putting towels and buckets on the floor if it rains. ... I can finally sleep in peace.” — Mary Luz Jiménez

Your gifts to America for Christ support ABHMS funds for repairing homes and Volunteer-mobilization Ministries teams.

Reproduce and use as a bulletin insert.

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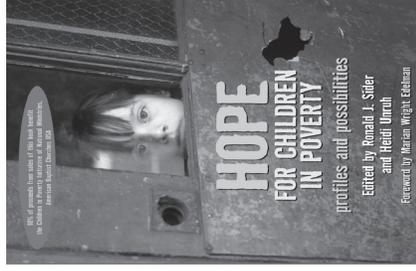
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“Hope for Children in Poverty: Profiles and Possibilities”



This comprehensive reader does more than just analyze the problems of poverty and the issues that typically accompany it. It takes a giant step forward in exploring real solutions through public policy and faith-based organizations.

978-0-8170-1505-3
paperback 200 pages \$16

JUDSON PRESS
PUBLISHERS SINCE 1824

Available from Judson Press 800-458-3766 www.judsonpress.com

Puerto Rico: Restoring a Life with the Light of Christ!

Numerous stories are similar to Yaira Cuevas and Luis Rodríguez of Arecibo, Puerto Rico. They are parents to two children with autism. And Cuevas lost a baby about one year before the visit of American Baptist Home Mission Societies' (ABHMS) Volunteer-mobilization Ministries team.

Like many mothers on the island, Cuevas suffered severe depression because of the loss of her baby and the urgent need to take care of her two children after the hurricane. The ABHMS volunteer team was assigned to clean and seal the roof as well as to scrape and paint the inside of the roof. According to Cuevas, the team did more than restore a house; they became the light of Christ in the darkness she was living because of the depression in the hurricane's aftermath.

Progress in Puerto Rico has been relatively stalled since only a small fraction of the federally approved funds has been disbursed. In light of not having a stable infrastructure and government support, Puerto Rican families have been resilient.

Your America for Christ support will respond to the needs of families like Cuevas' and Rodríguez's to provide hope in the midst of hardship. Let us be the light of Christ in the darkness.

Reproduce and use as a bulletin insert.

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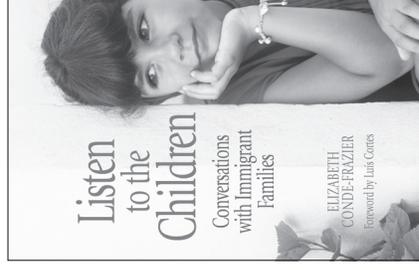


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Listen to the Children: Conversations with Immigrant Families

(Escuchemos a los niños: Conversaciones con familias inmigrantes)



This unique resource brings human realities to life as it invites the reader to eavesdrop on fictionalized conversations between immigrant parents, their children and their caregivers. It offers insight into the emotions and perceptions of immigrant families and how the reader can support these children in our churches, schools and communities.

978-0-8170-1661-6
paperback 168 pages \$13.99

JUDSON PRESS
PUBLISHERS SINCE 1824

Available from Judson Press 800-458-3766 www.judsonpress.com

Activity for Children

Instructions:

Make copies of the picture below for the children to color. Explain that the words mean *neighbor* in various languages.

You can find additional worship, children and youth activity resources on the ABHMS website at abhms.org/afc.



“You shall LOVE your NEIGHBOR as YOURSELF.” —MATTHEW 22:39

Activity for Youth

Instructions: The focus of the America for Christ Offering 2020 is “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Use the following skit to introduce the idea of loving one’s neighbors.

Characters: Chris and Sage (both teenagers)

Setting: Standing around, as if waiting for a ride after a youth meeting

Chris (pacing, wringing hands): Ugh, this day was the worst. THE. WORST.

Sage (looking up from phone, putting hand on Chris’ shoulder to stop pacing): Whoa, what’s up, Chris? We just had a great meeting in there! It was really helpful and encouraging to me.

Chris (looking at Sage, then to the ground): Sure, to you maybe. Of course you would think that.

Sage (puzzled): What do you mean?

Chris (stammering): Well, uh, everything’s good for you, right? I mean, it’s probably a lot easier to love your neighbor when you have a life like yours.

Sage (indignant): What on Earth could you even mean by that?

Chris: Well, Pastor Pat was going on and on about “loving your neighbor as yourself.” Blah blah blah. That’s got to be a lot easier when you’re popular at school. You live in the best neighborhood. You never hear anything horrible about yourself, so... (shrugs).

Sage (shocked): Wait, do you think it’s always easy for me? I mean, it’s not all sunshine here. Everybody has issues...don’t even. It doesn’t sound like you have a problem with Pastor Pat. It sounds like you have a problem with what Jesus had to say.

Chris: Well, yeah, sure. Maybe I do. I get that you’re supposed to be loving toward people. But what about when they are not loving? Or what if you don’t love yourself?

Sage (thoughtfully): Loving yourself...I think I see what you mean. It’s hard sometimes to understand how you might love yourself. The world says you’re too thin, too fat, too tall, too short, too smart, too dumb, too weird, or just plain blah. Loving yourself is something more than just taking pride in appearance and things. It’s recognizing deep inside that—through all of that—you’re a loved child of God, just like everyone else.

Chris (sarcastically): Just like everyone else? Like, that mean neighbor who called the cops on me for walking through his yard? That guy is a beloved child of God?

Sage: Yes, just like you and me. Because we all have problems. We all have problems AND gifts. Our gifts

can help take other people’s problems away, if we just let God use us.

Chris: Let God use us? Like how?

Sage: Well, what gifts do you have?

Chris (thinking a moment): Well, I’m pretty strong, and I’m good with my hands.

Sage: And how can you help someone with that?

Chris (thinking): I have a mower, and that neighbor’s yard is always a bit of a mess...

Sage: SEE? There’s something right there!

Chris: What?

Sage: What if you mowed his lawn, no strings attached? Do you think that might change his tune?

Chris (doubtful): Dunno...Maybe? What if it didn’t? What if I do it for nothing?

Sage: No act of kindness is ever for nothing. If nothing else, you’ll feel better for having tried. (pause) ... Say, it’s really clear to me that you could use a friend—a neighbor—to help you out for a while. Maybe we could get together and see if we can’t help out a few more neighbors around us?

Chris: To be honest, I guess I could use a friend.

Sage: Honestly, me, too. That’s part of why I come all the time to hear about Jesus—he always loves us, and that’s why I want to show his love to others. Why don’t we get together this week and think of all the ways we can help our neighbors in need, no matter where we find them?

Chris: That’s actually a good idea. Same time next week?

Sage: Absolutely! See you then. Looks like our rides are here! Bye!

Chris: Later!

(Both exit, as if heading to cars.)

You can find additional worship,
children and youth activity resources
on the ABHMS website at
abhms.org/afc.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the national goal?

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) is promoting the America for Christ (AFC) Offering 2020, which seeks to raise \$1,000,000 to support American Baptist mission and ministry across the United States and Puerto Rico.

What is the AFC 2020 theme?

The theme for the AFC 2020 Offering is “Love Thy Neighbor” based on Matthew 22:39: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

How can I support AFC 2020?

You can give during the congregational offering Sunday at your church, or you can give an individual gift online by visiting abhms.org/afcnw. Also, consider encouraging your congregation’s Mission Committee to include an America for Christ Offering contribution in its annual budget.

How is my gift making a difference?

Your generous AFC gifts support our mission—connecting our partners to cultivate leaders and equip disciples who bring healing and transformation to communities across our nation and Puerto Rico. Your contributions share God’s love by:

- Cultivating Leaders — Strong leaders advance the mission of faith communities.
- Equipping Disciples — Broadening the understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- Healing Communities — We believe the power of Christian love can—and will—change the world.

How is the AFC offering used?

The offering is distributed in three parts:

- 59% supports the ministries of ABHMS;
- 12% supports the offering’s promotional and deputation costs; and
- 29% supports regional ministries (ABHMS is the only mission board to share its offering with American Baptist Churches USA regions).

Whom do I contact for more materials or if I have a general question?

Contact personnel in ABHMS’ Development office:

- Kim Wilkins, Development Coordinator, 610.768.2413
- Vincent Dent, Chief Development Officer, 610.768.2420

Where do I find the electronic versions of AFC 2020 materials to download?

Visit abhms.org/afc for downloadable items and the opportunity to show the video directly from the Internet.

MISSION MOMENTS: America for Christ Offering Video

A video is available online that tells the story of just one American Baptist Home Mission Societies’ ministry that lives out loving our neighbors. Use the 30-second or 2½-minute video during a “Mission Moment” in worship or in a small group setting to illustrate how America for Christ Offering contributions impact and transform lives across America and Puerto Rico. **Go to abhms.org/afc to download the video.**

America for Christ Litany

Leader: We must work unceasingly to uplift this nation that we love to a higher destiny, to a higher plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humanness (Martin Luther King Jr., p. 154).

Response: Jesus, give us courage to love as you love.

Leader: Sometimes, events around us call us not only to mourn, but also to question and in the midst of questioning to new attitudes and action.

Response: Let us seek a way forward in this time and place as we lay before God our confession.

Leader: God of all people, we confess all the times we divided this community into “us” and “them.” We confess the times when we thought that we were somehow, automatically, better than others. We confess the times when we tried to find a reason to distance ourselves from “those people.”

Response: Jesus, help us answer your call to come closer to you and closer to one another.

Leader: We confess the times when we spoke without thinking of the hurt we might cause; let a hate-filled remark go unchallenged; missed the opportunity to support the struggling, and turned our back on your call to radical love.

Response: Forgive us; draw us into one human community; reunite us as your beloved children. Jesus, give us courage to love as you love (Beth W. Johnston, p. 221).

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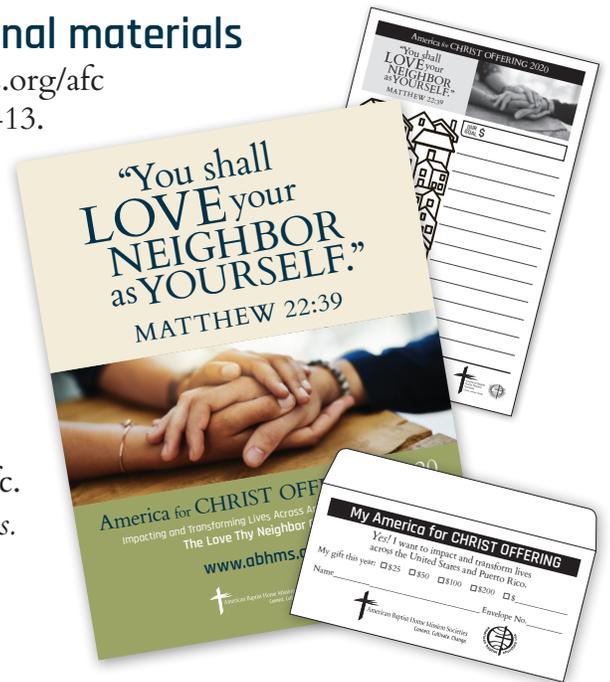
The Love Thy Neighbor Campaign

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America for Christ Offering 2020 | Promotional materials

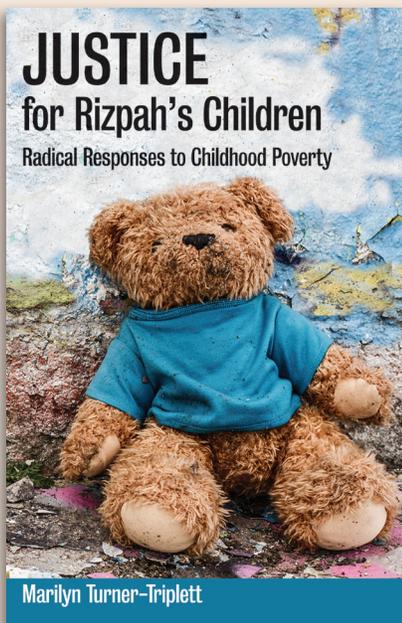
Obtain downloadable promotional materials by visiting abhms.org/afc or call American Baptist Home Mission Societies at 610.768.2413.

- Posters
- Leader's Guides (available in English and Spanish)
NOTE: Bulletin inserts are inside the Leader's Guide.
- Offering envelopes
- Coin boxes (bilingual—English and Spanish)
- Evaluation form, included in your America for Christ packet or may be completed online by visiting abhms.org/afc.
Your comments are taken seriously as we plan for succeeding years. Feedback is appreciated!
- Goal charts
- Video, available online at abhms.org/afc.



Justice for Rizpah's Children | Marilyn Turner-Triplett

What is God calling you to do about children who experience poverty?



National studies make it clear: poverty is the greatest threat to a child's welfare. And while the issues concerning childhood poverty may seem too complex to tackle, *Justice for Rizpah's Children* provides concerned readers with a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the issues, as well as a biblically based roadmap for taking practical action.

Grounded in a sermon about the biblical account of Rizpah (2 Samuel 21:1-10), who advocated for the seven slain children of Saul, this book urges readers to follow Rizpah's example, refusing to remain idle while children are consumed by systems that prey upon the poor.

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