

Community Forum on Economic Issues

Sponsored by [Lake Forest Park Presbyterian Church](#)

February 8, 2009 – 7-9:00 PM

The Community Forum focused on three questions:

1. What are you hearing/seeing in the communities around you, as the economic crisis takes hold more and more?
2. What are the fears/anxieties you sense people are living with, and what evidence of those fears/anxieties do you see?
3. What encouraging/hopeful LOCAL ideas and/or resources to address the growing needs have you heard about, seen, want to suggest, or want others to be aware of?

As it turned out, many of the responses to question #1 bled over into #2, thus explaining the relatively few responses to #2. Below are the responses from each of the round tables involved in the discussion, without respect to order or sense of priority and importance. Please forgive me if you don't recognize your own responses, as I've done my best to write as accurately as possible what was written down. (In a few cases, I couldn't quite decipher the writing or the meaning...sorry!)

1. *What are you hearing/seeing in the communities around you, as the economic crisis takes hold more and more?*

- Stress of job loss;
- Donations down at Third Place Commons, and the use of free Wi-Fi and the facility is up;
- Police reports: more mid-day burglaries are occurring;
- Food banks: while there is more willingness to volunteer, there are less food donations;
- Tent city at Calvin Presbyterian Church (Shoreline) is up until Feb. 28;
- Inability to find a new job when laid off;
- Senior are missing or skipping need meds;
- Rotary medical clinic is very busy;
- People are relying more and more on families and friends for help;
- Seniors are missing meals;
- Management positions are being laid off;
- Seniors are having to make the difficult choice between prescriptions, food, and rent;
- The City of LFP and surrounding city governments are losing taxes which impacts availability of services (i.e., Shoreline Senior Center, Market, etc.);
- More reliance on others;
- Taxes and utility bills are not coming down;
- If you don't pay your sewer bill, you can get a lean against your property;
- People are in need of money and food;

- Forced carpooling;
- Long periods of unemployment;
- “As an engineer (and employer of 20 people), I’ve had nothing to do for the last three months.”
- Even people in “stable” jobs in city governments are feeling the effects, and worrying about their jobs;
- Retail hours have been drastically cut (one person: “From 16-20 per week, to 3”);
- Retail stores are not hiring, and are laying off;
- Retail customer service is taking a dive as staff is spread too thin;
- 401k solvency is drying up;
- Lack of confidence that older parents are able to help their young adult or middle-aged kids when in financial crisis, and vice versa;
- Massive drops in equity over a very short period of time;
- No new construction, and current projects left derelict;
- Major personal belt-tightening;
- Witnessing many families combining resources;
- For the first time, seeing non-hispanic people looking for work in Home Depot parking lot;
- More time on peoples’ hands, but translating that time to service doesn’t pay the bills;
- People unable to pay daycare.

2. *What are the fears/anxieties you sense people are living with, and what evidence of those fears/anxieties do you see?*

- Working with 3rd graders, no person has watched them crying in class in anticipation of coming home to news that their respective fathers lost their jobs;
- People are finding more and more time on their hands, with pent up energy (also applies to question #3 in a positive way).
- Hearing people talk about radical cultural change away from instant gratification;
- More people are coming to the conclusion that they need to help their neighbors;
- Delayed retirements;
- Sandwich generation is feeling squeezed even more than before;
- Fear of not knowing what to say or do;
- Anxiety over the need to “fix” the situation, but not knowing how;
- “Will I have enough to live on?”
- “Will I lose my job?”
- “I’m waiting for the other shot to drop;”
- Many people are feeling very isolated;
- “I don’t know what my next step should be...”

3. What encouraging/hopeful LOCAL ideas and/or resources to address the growing needs have you heard about, seen, want to suggest, or want others to be aware of?

- When people are aware of needs, they come forward;
- Volunteerism is up;
- “Block Watch” may be a means of linking neighbors, and making more neighborhood connections;
- Create a local center for community resources;
- Hold “stone soup” dinners, and potlucks at the church every week;
- Create a “Job Connection Day” each week;
- Create a bank of “financial advisors” for people needing advice on budgeting, debt-elimination, etc.;
- Find ways to sell crafts, etc., at Women’s Bazaar;
- Create “Rummage Bucks” for shopping at LFPPC’s annual rummage sale;
- Post jobs/tasks needed for businesses and personal sources;
- Encourage friends and families to rely more on each other;
- “Talk Therapy” – asking people how we can support them, with an emphasis on listening over solutions;
- Share resources and skills, such as assisting people to write resumes, get networked, etc.;
- Have more community meetings;
- Create/designate a central location for assistance and information;
- Use Third Place Commons as a gathering place for a weekly meeting;
- Have a “Job Connection Night” with information on:
 - a. honing skills for writing resumes;
 - b. availability of jobs;
 - c. learning how to use Shoreline library computers;
 - d. getting help from financial advisors;
- Create an opportunity for people to sell their crafts, as in cottage industry;
- Create a central list (perhaps at the church) of available skills to help those who can’t afford to pay for them, and then mobilize them to help;
- Create online means through the church of bartering skills;
- Post “needs” on the church bulletin board for those not “online;”
- Increase visibility of the Rota-Care free clinic in Lake City;
- Hire people from your neighborhood for house jobs (cleaning, yard work, etc.);
- Hold more community meetings with specific “topics” posted for the night’s theme;
- Hold a “brainstorming night;”
- Develop a way for specific neighborhoods to do what we have done at this Community Forum;
- Work at “normalizing” our mutual need so that people are less stigmatized by expressing it (without creating a downward spiral of self-fulfilling prophecy);
- Help people find out EXACTLY how little we are able to live on;

- Learn how to have our mortgages covered, and barter for everything else;
- Have older folks in the congregation and community teach “domestic arts” to those who may not have learned them;
- Encourage families/neighbors to buy bulk foods together at discount;
- Create community gardens – “Pea Patch” gardens;
- Have people who know how to change oil and do basic mechanical things help out (for free) those who need them done but can’t afford it.

The above represents my best effort to transcribe the discussions around each table. There was a great deal of positive energy involved, and very doable ideas put forward.

Kudos to the many participants (from the community, the church, the City of LFP, and The Enterprise, for taking the time to do a “first run” at this! May this be the first of many community efforts at coming together in addressing this very serious economic situation.

Tom Patterson

Pastor – Lake Forest Park Presbyterian Church