



## Los Gatos' Faith Communities Reach Out

Efforts include social justice ministry and helping feed the poor.

By [David B. Bowman](#) | [Email the author](#) | April 3, 2011

A Baptist theologian, [Ron Sider](#) renders a modern parable. A faith community sat above

a descending road with hairpin turns. Drivers often missed the turns, causing injurious accidents. The congregation maintained a budget to call for emergency service. Then someone had an idea: Why not persuade the constituted authority to put up barricades at the dangerous curves or to straighten out the road? Done! The consequence: Fewer accidents, fewer injuries.

Faith communities often call out the ambulance. Let me mention two examples in the Los Gatos community.

[Faith Lutheran Church](#) in Los Gatos gathers food and financial support for the [Lord's Pantry](#), located in the Alum Rock area of San Jose. Once a month, a huge truck load of food goes from the church to the pantry. Some 800 families per month receive assistance.

Since 1987, [St. Luke's Episcopal Church](#), also in Los Gatos, has provided food donations and Tuesday lunches for those who drop in. The Rector David Breuer says some have criticized the program as a mere enabling of irresponsible life styles. He says they considered the criticism and have continued on anyway. As pastor there since 1993, he has seen lives put back on track, in part, through the caring of that program.

Complications ensue when faith communities move from charity to social action. Perhaps a halfway station along that route is the justly famous [Habitat for Humanity](#), the ecumenical Christian endeavor that gives not a hand out, but a hand up. Habitat's carefully chosen families, with good track records but a lack of sufficient funds, do "sweat equity" in lieu of a down payment and then pay a monthly mortgage to the organization.

An [All Faith's House](#) is planned for Cupertino. Liaison persons from faith communities in Los Gatos prepare to join in the effort. These include the following: Dave Wolf of [Los Gatos United Methodist](#), Mark Goldman of [Shir Hadash](#), Carol Thornton of [St. Mary's Catholic](#), John Lynch of the [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#), and this columnist, who ministers to [Faith Lutheran Church](#).

Then there is the complexity and controversy of social action. Such activity aims not at the symptoms of need but rather seeks to address the underlying causes. Sometimes outside people want the faithful to return to their sanctuaries. Sometimes, too, strife occurs within a faith community when no consensus exists about goals and methodologies.

The [Interfaith Council of the Greater San Jose](#) area seeks to address economic injustice, calling for living wages, health care benefits and the right for employees to organize.

Even as I write, the Interfaith Council pursues justice with a company in this area, which resists the right of workers to organize and makes life difficult for those seeking to organize.

This columnist photographed one such worker who lives in the Los Gatos area, but we refrain from printing the name and photograph for fear of reprisal. This is no paranoia.

Faith and social concern/reform have proceeded in concert for centuries on this continent. Now, right in our midst, the beat goes on, putting prayer and action toward God's requirement "to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with God." (Bible, Micah 6:8)

What do you think of faith communities becoming involved in social justice issues? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

**About this column:**

Faith at Large is a weekly religion column focusing on spirituality, ethics and philosophy and the work of the interfaith community in Los Gatos, including the Los Gatos Clergy Association.