

VOLUNTEER VIEW

A Knock at the Door

For a while I had prayed that God would show us a way to become more relevant to the needs of the community outside the walls of our church. Nevertheless when that opportunity presented itself through the FISH Hospitality Program, my initial reaction was hesitation. How does a church our size (averaging 75 regular attendants) respond to such a challenge? How many of our members would be prepared to leave the comfort of their beds at night? Would we really have enough volunteers to cover all those shifts, and all those meals? Occasional visits to a soup kitchen or making donations to a thrift store is one thing. This was not just an excursion into the land of the needy, but a commitment to remain on "Jericho Road" in a manner of speaking. The one ingredient missing from my reasoning was that compassion is a gift placed by God Himself in the heart of believers, and not something we achieve through our own efforts.

I soon discovered how wrong I was by the overwhelming response from our church members. Over fifty percent of our membership volunteered at first, and by our second time of hosting the families, that had grown to over seventy five percent. This past month was our third time hosting, and now what once to me promised to be difficult is now a smooth and routine operation. This reinforces a truth I read recently that "God's work, done God's way, will receive God's supply."

I soon realized that volunteering was not so much about me "doing something for the Church," but more a God-given opportunity for spiritual growth. It challenged my tendency to view persons through the lens of a label (like homeless) rather than seeing them as individuals, each with a different story as we struggle along life's journey. My wife Joy, who volunteered overnight with me on two occasions, was also moved by her interactions with our guests and the daily challenges they face. So recently she donated the cost of a shower to our church so that the guests stay would be a bit more comfortable. (Insisting that it not be "any old shower" but something of quality).

It is amazing what can be accomplished by Christians simply responding as Christians to the challenges of our society.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock"..... (Rev 3:20). What a tragedy it would have been if "New Beginnings Church" had failed to open our doors.

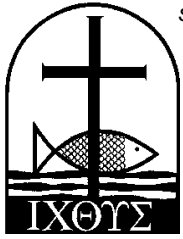
Joy and I remain grateful for this opportunity to serve.

Thanks
Verity and Joy Robertson

New Beginnings Church of the Nazarene
Edison, New Jersey

FROM A FORMER GUEST

The mission of FISH Hospitality Program is to serve homeless women and families by providing shelter and meals, and such other assistance as we are able, in order to give them a new opportunity to live independently in their communities as respected families and individuals. FHP does assist and enable our guests to obtain housing, jobs, medical services and other assistance to which they are entitled, as far as resources allow. FHP serves people in need without regard to race, religion, national origin or disability.



UPCOMING EVENTS

July 15th Board of Directors meeting 7:30 pm
Wesley United Methodist Church,
1500 Plainfield Ave., South Plainfield, NJ

Oct 7th Coordinators meeting 7:30 pm New Dover
United Methodist Church 687, New Dover
Road, Edison NJ

Service Statistics

January 1, 2008 – April 30, 2008

Persons sheltered – 25
Family Units – 11
Number of adults sheltered – 12
Number of children sheltered – 13
Bed nights provided - 1370

GUEST SUCCESSES

Alice- moved into a very nice shared living residence. She gave this feedback "Your program is very very good. I hope the Lord may continue with many more years. God bless you all. You've covered everything in your program. I thank you very very much."

A special thanks goes to Tammy Newbold from Bound Brook Presbyterian Church who went above the call of duty and helped Alice sort out and organize her belongings.

Phebi - Moved into a room close to her job.

Donna - and her daughters moved into a spacious apartment. The girls were very happy to be living in their own place. Donna gave the following feedback with regards to the volunteers, "They (volunteers) are very nice and welcoming. They were there when you needed something and gave support and understanding."

On September 7, 2007, my family and I welcomed my daughter into the world. My fourth child. Eight days later, we were homeless.

Facing eviction for the umpteenth time, I had finally run out of resources to get out of the red with my landlord. Uncertain and unsure of what to do and where to go to make sure that we would have a safe place, I went to social services office to see if I would be eligible for emergency assistance. After waiting in line with my newborn, I was told by the person at the window that I did not qualify for any assistance because I was not receiving public assistance. I was handed a sheet of paper which held the names and numbers to numerous organizations. I said a prayer and earnestly asked God to intervene on my situation. I dialed each number explaining my situation to every one that would listen. At the end of the multitude of phone calls I made, all but one turned me down for the help I was seeking - a safe place for myself and now four children.

That one organization was FISH Hospitality Program.

After placing a phone call to FISH, I was able to leave a message with an unknown but kind gentleman that advised someone would get in touch with me the following day. I was disheartened as I had heard, "We will call you back" numerous times that week from other organizations.

On the day following my phone call to FISH Hospitality (the day before my eviction date) I was preparing for my last night in my apartment. Packing what I could and filled with concern about what the next day would bring, I received a phone call from Susan Baybutt of FISH. After a few background questions, she asked me if I would be able to come in to see her that day.

With my older children Elizabeth 10, Kenya 8, and Jihad 6, in school I gathered myself and new baby and went to the FISH office. Susan spoke with me in regards to my situation and what had led up to my current dilemma. With silent empathy she listened as I reiterated the same story I had given so many in the days before. One that I am sure she has heard many times. However, she made me feel as if mine was the only one of its kind and showed a genuine understanding. After our conversation, Susan explained to me what FISH Hospitality was and how the revolving shelter program worked, then asked me how soon I would be able to gather myself and my children to begin my

stay. With much relief I advised her that the following day was my eviction date and I would be able to enter the program that evening after I had picked up the children from school. We arranged to meet at the FISH office so that Susan could lead me to the church where we would be spending our first week.

Although I was a bit apprehensive about the set up as I had never been in a shelter before and had no idea of what to expect, we were warmly welcomed by the church volunteers and guests already in the program. We were shown our "living space" for that particular week and given a moment to settle in. At that instance the realization that we were homeless had started to sink in, and my normal reaction of crying and tears did not come. Instead, I was filled with relief that my situation, while it had just began, would be alright.

Shortly after we had arrived at the church, my children oblivious to the circumstances, fell right into place, as there were games, puzzles, and friendly volunteers that were eager to help them feel "at home" helping with homework and putting a puzzle together while I attended to my newborn. Within an hour of being at our new dwelling, dinner was brought hot and ready to eat. It was like being home as we ate together at the table as one big family, guests, volunteers and church staff.

There was a place to shower and freshen up, a station to iron clothes in preparation for the next day, a television for viewing, a refrigerator with food and drinks for the week including lunch and breakfast for the next day.

This was the routine we had and could rely on from the first day of our stay to our last. In every church we were welcomed and treated to a hospitable stay with them. In times of ambiguity there was an assurance of safe and warm surroundings.

In addition to our shelter, there was an abundance of support that was given by awesome individuals, like budgeting assistance, laundry allowances, and

transportation to and from appointments or work and even the day facility.

Our stay with the FISH Hospitality Program lasted from the months of September 2007 to November 2007. In that time I met some amazingly compassionate people who helped to make my difficult and daunting circumstances easier and less frightening. Not once during our stay were we ever referred to as anything less than a guest. That has always stayed with me.

Always encouraging and always willing to think of the guest's interest first, FISH truly was the answer to the prayer I had given. After a short stay, Susan referred my family to a transitional housing program that we currently still reside in.

When it was time to end our stay with FISH Hospitality we were given a remembrance gift of a quilt that I was able to pick from many that had been lovingly made for that purpose. That quilt is adorned on the side of my daughters crib. Although it is a visual reminder of our stay, there are firm memories that we have and will keep always as FISH Hospitality has become part of our life and our story of who we are and the journey that we are taking as a family.

Before being homeless I never knew programs like FISH Hospitality existed, but I am grateful that they do.

Nichole - Former FISH Hospitality Guest

THANKS TO...

Rev. David Taylor, organist Joan Biel and the congregation of Trinity Reformed Church, North Plainfield for hosting the FISH Hospitality Program Third Winter Concert

The following performers at the FHP Winter Concert:
H.E.R.I.T.A.G.E. Children's Choir, Quartet from the Hunterdon Harmonizers, Frank Glaz, Trinity Reformed Church Choir, St Paul's Episcopal Church Choir

St John the Evangelist R.C. Church, Dunellen for the use of their school property for the FISH Hospitality Flea Market/Yard Sale

All the wonderful volunteers and those who donated items for sale at the Yard Sale/Flea Market

Girl Scout Troop # 13 N. Plainfield who prepared and served dinner to our guests at Trinity Reformed Church N. Plainfield

Girl Scout Troop # 424 Piscataway who prepared and served dinner to our guests at Christ United Methodist Church, Piscataway

Housing Facts from the Housing and Community Development Network of NJ

- New Jersey is the fifth most expensive state in the U.S. for renters, with only Hawaii, California, New York, and Massachusetts more expensive. The least expensive states for renters are North Dakota, West Virginia and South Dakota.
- The hourly wage in New Jersey for a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent (FMR) in 2008 is \$22.25. This wage has risen 42.6 percent since 2000.
- Numerous occupations in New Jersey – preschool teachers, social service workers, dental lab techs, emergency dispatchers, accounting clerks, child care workers, home health aides, school bus drivers, security guards, janitors, hairstylists, receptionists, cashiers and others – pay less than the housing wage.
- The mean wage for a New Jersey renter is \$16.45 an hour, below the housing wage for a modest two-bedroom. At the mean wage, an individual would have to work 54 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment at FMR.
- At minimum wage - \$7.15 an hour – a New Jersey worker would have to work 124 hours a week or over three full jobs a week to afford a two bedroom at FMR.
- Hunterdon, Middlesex and Somerset counties are the most expensive for rentals, with a modest two-bedroom at fair market rent going for a monthly average of \$1,340.

WISH LIST

**Laundry detergent Q-Tips
Shampoo Conditioner
Baby Powder
Children's table and chairs
Zippered plastic laundry bags**

