

A TYPICAL DAY AT THE CHRISTIAN CARING CENTER

JUNE 26, 2008

My day begins at the Pemberton post office picking up the mail, where I am greeted by a gentleman walking to his sister's home nearby. He is going to see if he can eat and get a ride to the Christian Caring Center. Since he spots my van, he comes in to speak to me about the lack of food in his home and overdue his electric bill; he is about to be turned off. The meter reader has given him until noon to come up with the money or he will have no choice but to turn RS (the man speaking to me) off. RS hops in the van and we drive to the CCC.

As we enter the parking lot, a volunteer comes over to help unload my van full of food donations from the visit to a church Vacation Bible School in Delanco that I visited last night. As all three of us carry in the goodies, we are approached by RS and two other clients for the boxes of cereal sticking out the top of the bags. I assure them they will be helped. "Come on in and park with us before we open up", I tell them.

At devotion time the Community Lunch room at the Center is packed with volunteers, staff, 55 plus & Experienced Works Job trainees, Welfare-to-Work participants, and clients waiting for help. Everyone listens intently to the devotion, Pastor Debbie asks for prayer requests, and Olivia closes with a hymn. Everyone is ready for their day of service to Jesus at 10am. All three staff people are immediately approached with special needs of help from RS with utility needs and another with two prescriptions that need to be filled- asking when the Good Shepherd Clinic comes again because he has an abscessed tooth. Pastor Andreas has brought a homeless man in for help that was allowed to sleep in his church last night, there are two people waiting for food, and we just learned that the interviewer scheduled for today is sick. Debbie, Shirley and I decide that Debbie will interview, Shirley will go up to the Thrift Store and help Pearl count out the register, because Marion, our Thrift Store manager is out with a foot operation for a few weeks. Cheryl, the Community Lunch Manager, takes her helper into the kitchen and begins to prepare the lunch and Margurite, a 76-year-old volunteer, takes her two volunteers to help pack the food bags as two others help get needed supplies from the trailers outside to stock the empty shelves. Two others begin to bring in dropped-off donations to the thrift store.

I begin to unravel the homeless man that the Reverend has brought in. DD just got out of County Jail for a lack of child support payments after he lost his job a year ago as a CBS News producer. After he lost his job and his unemployment ran out, it only took 2 months to lose his apartment; but he still had his car. DD could still look for a job and apply for welfare. They were able to help him with a motel room in Bordentown and a job at Shoprite, but then lost his assistance from welfare because he had a job. He tried to pay for his room, but was picked up for child support. Now he has lost his job after being in jail for 2 weeks and he has to start all over again. We were able to get him a room for a few nights, he called Shop rite to mail his last check to the CCC, which he will use to pay for his own room. He now has a window of two weeks to find another job to continue to keep him in a motel. It took until 11:45am to place DD. DD sees that we need help as the room is filled to standing-room-only and he begins to help serve lunch.

In the meantime, Debbie has interviewed and helped six households with food and clothing, Shirley is working with two more homeless families. They both are single moms, working part time, who are not eligible for help from the welfare because their income is too high (over \$322/Month for one adult and one child). She is able to place them in a motel and set up an interview for placement at Interfaith Hospitality Network Shelter for Saturday. Cheryl brings out the lunch to serve and about five homeless people that are living in various places come in for their hot cooked lunch of pork chops, mashed potatoes & string beans. It is an extra special day because it is Thursday and Whole Foods has donated sandwiches & wraps that can be taken out for dinner. The three staff converse over lunch about the case management that has been done for the homeless so far and people coming in for food and utilities.

By the time lunch is over, two working people have come in to make NJ Share applications for utility help on their lunch hours, two people come in for help on their back rent, and we have five people waiting to be interviewed for emergency food pantry bags. My receptionist is telling me that I have four phone messages to call back to other agencies and a reporter for the Philadelphia Daily News wants to come in tomorrow to do a story on the homeless. It is 1pm and Debbie is telling me she really needs to get on the computer to input the clients helped into a database that is mandated by a grant we receive- the HIMIS system.

By 2:45pm, Debbie has interviewed and prayed with nineteen households for food, we have placed three homeless households in local motels and set up interviews for continued help, three NJ Shares applications have been placed, forty-seven lunches have been served, two Salvation Army vouchers have been written for utilities and prescriptions, and two households have been helped with past due rents and set up for interviews with other agencies for the rest of the back rents that our funds could not cover. Many of the nineteen households went up stairs to see if they could get needed clothing for their family. All the people today were prayed with, some were already Christians, one asked me to pick them up for church on Sunday, and one person, in all the emergency-room type chaos, was led to the Lord Jesus and accepted what He did on the cross as payment for their sins.

At the end of day, I still have tons of paperwork and phone calls that I didn't get to. Debbie is taking home her HIMIS computer work to do in the evening, but we all are rejoicing with the angels in heaven over the one soul ushered into Lamb's Book of Eternal Life. I'll try and call back the people on the way home, so I can spend some quality time with my husband and kids, before he leaves at 7pm to lead bible study at the men's shelter tonight.

This is just one among many days we serve our Lord through our time and effort at the Christian Caring Center. Perhaps my "real-life" story has touched you in some way, moved you to think about what you might be able to do to help. You can contact us whenever you're ready... ☺

Abiding in Him,
Madelyn C. Mears-Sheldon