

# GMC NEWS

The Newsletter of the Georgetown Ministry Center



## Sisyphus' Solution

It was more than 20 years ago that I started hearing about Bert from some of the other guys I visited on the street. Bert was a loner. I heard that he slept on an abandoned entrance to the old unfinished I-66 freeway that rose out of the dirt on the east side of the Rock Creek Parkway. I finally met Bert one day when I was exploring the ramp which had become a hidden encampment to many homeless people. He was bundled up, sleeping about 40 feet from the entrance to the busy Whitehurst Freeway.



Over the next 20 years I got to know this gentle man who pushed a cart around Georgetown, West End and downtown. He kept to himself but I would regularly come upon him in parks or on street corners where he would either be relaxing, reading, listening to the radio, or most often, repairing the wheels on his cart which he had assembled from scrounged parts from the trash.

Bert was a tall, thin, weathered man, slightly bent from years of pushing his cart — like Sisyphus pushing the rock, doomed to retracing his steps each day.

And, just like Sisyphus' story from Greek mythology, Bert did perceive his life as a curse for untold evil thoughts or deeds from the past. He would not accept anything from another's hand. Not money, not food, not even a fresh Starbucks latte for fear that his curse would pass on like a virus to the purveyor. We became friends but I could never move beyond this first course of engagement.

And so it went for Bert for more than twenty years, until he met Megan from Pathways to Housing D.C. Her persistence paid off and Bert began to work with Megan. He signed documents and waited in the park expectantly for Megan at the appointed times. However, progress seemed

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## After 40 Years, A Place to Call Home

Alfred Ricketts, 70, sits on a metal stool opposite his Case Manager, Sabrina Burrell, in her tiny office in the back of Georgetown Ministry Center (GMC). From the black ball cap on his head to the woven sandals on his feet, his entire outfit is brand new, all purchased on a recent shopping trip. Alfred began coming to the Center regularly almost two years ago and since his first meeting with Sabrina, she saw him wear the same clothing every single day.

That is, until today. Today, Alfred's outfit is new, but it is perhaps the least of what he has to newly celebrate. The week prior, Sabrina presented Alfred with keys to his very own apartment: a place to call home after spending more than 40 years without one.

When asked how he felt upon receiving the keys, he pauses, shakes his head in momentary bewilderment, and says, "I was, like, in a state of shock. I didn't think it would happen that quickly after being homeless so long."

Forty years is a long time — half a lifetime for most, if we're lucky. For Alfred, it's been more than half a lifetime spent living in homeless shelters, subway cars and on street corners. Originally from New York, he made his way to DC in 1985, but it wouldn't be until 2015 that he'd begin visiting GMC regularly and connect with Sabrina. The meeting had been a long time coming, but it would prove to be a turning point in his life.



*Alfred and Case Manager, Sabrina*

Sabrina's advocacy played a vital role in Alfred being housed in a very timely manner: less than 2 months from the day he was matched with a Permanent Supportive Housing Program to the day he moved in. Since being housed, he's

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limited. Eventually Bert became clearly ill. GMC's Dr. Crosland visited, but he only gave her the most limited access. A group of people who had engaged with Bert finally decided, when he was too sick to move, to involuntarily hospitalize him. Cancer was discovered. Surgery was performed. He stayed in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for over a year. He became comfortable there.

Eventually I learned that Megan was escorting him back to his native Switzerland where he would be able to live out his remaining years near family in a nursing home. In his last message to me through Megan, he seemed content, even happy. I know Bert does not have long to live but I hope that his last days are peaceful and comfortable. He deserves it after suffering all of his life for mankind.

—*Gunther Stern*

## Mark Your Calendars ...



### ... For These Upcoming Events Supporting GMC!

#### **September 17th – Conversation on Faith**

A Q&A and book signing with Sally Quinn, author, journalist and host of the 2017 Spirit of Georgetown. The discussion will touch upon how our various faiths unite us and shape our views on how to care for people less fortunate, as is GMC's mission. Visit [gmcgt.org/events](http://gmcgt.org/events) for more info & to RSVP.

#### **September 24th – Taste of Georgetown**

DC's most anticipated epicurean festival supporting GMC celebrates its 24th year with creative tastes from more than 30 restaurants. Purchase tickets at [tasteofgeorgetown.com](http://tasteofgeorgetown.com).

#### **October 7th – Christ Church Concert**

The first in the 2017-18 3-part concert series, a performance by the Inscape Chamber Orchestra will take place in the Church, followed by a reception in Keith Hall. A free-will offering will benefit GMC.

**October 19th – Spirit of Georgetown:** The 2017 benefit, hosted by author, journalist & longtime Washingtonian, Sally Quinn, will honor Mayor Bowser for her efforts to eradicate homelessness in the

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spent time visiting art galleries and museums (the Udvar-Hazy Air & Space has been a favorite), taking “quiet strolls” (enjoying nature, the sky, the clouds, trees, rocks and animals), and reading books (ones on architecture are his favorite).

“I look back on how far I came,” Alfred reflects, “I never thought I’d get this far.”

— *Carolyn Landes*

*You can find the full version of this story on GMC's website.*

## GMC is Turning 30 & Getting a Facelift!

Exciting renovation plans are in the works! Last fall, the Share Fund offered to help Georgetown Ministry Center drastically improve its space. With additional support from the Arcana Foundation and Georgetown University's Office of Campus Ministry, construction plans are approved and will begin in early October.

This idea came about because every day 50 to 70 vulnerable homeless people visit our well-worn space. Our 13 year old shower has a cracked floor, our hot water heater doesn't keep up with the demand in the winter, our roof leaks during heavy rainstorms, and the center is often standing room only.

To improve the quality of our services, an architecture firm came up with a plan to expand our space in an ingenious way. Their plans include the installation of higher efficiency equipment, the ability to do more loads of laundry and offer warmer showers in the winter, the addition of one bathroom, the improvement of storage space for supplies, and the transformation of an office into a medical clinic for our consulting psychiatrists and doctors.

While this project will dramatically improve our program it will require us to close for about 7 weeks. We can't thank the Share Fund enough for making this possible. We look forward to keeping you updated on the progress and are eager to return to an improved day center!





*"Helping nonprofits tell better stories through film"*

Lights! Camera! GMC! Thanks to Stone Soup Films, an organization that helps other nonprofits tell better stories through film, Georgetown Ministry Center will soon have a professional, compelling film that paints an accurate picture of our guests and our programs. Please stay tuned for the release so you can watch and share. Thank you for being our ambassadors and advocates in the community!

## GMC Prepares for 2017 Winter Shelter



2017 will mark the 27th year that GMC, in cooperation with Georgetown congregations, will operate its Winter Shelter program. Participating churches in the neighborhood will alternate weeks hosting guests during the coldest months of the winter season, providing a warm meal and safe, overnight

sleeping accommodations for 10 shelter residents beginning Sunday, November 5.

The shelter program relies heavily on volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering with this year's shelter, contact GMC Case Manager, Sabrina Burrell, at [sabrina@gmcgt.org](mailto:sabrina@gmcgt.org). We're always happy to have new volunteers to prepare meals, eat with guests, or spend the night. An important function of the shelter program is to offer its guests not just a meal and a place to stay, but a community of camaraderie and respect. A smiling face and listening ear can sometimes offer much-needed nourishment that a meal can't provide. Consider joining us this season at the shelter!

*Thank you to our community partners!*



## Board of Directors

*Christ Church, Georgetown* - Richard Johnson  
*Dumbarton United Methodist Church* - Jennifer Whatley  
*Epiphany Roman Catholic Church* - Chris Rowe  
*First Baptist Church, Georgetown* - Pam Straughn-Harris  
*Georgetown Lutheran Church* - Connie Baker  
*Georgetown Presbyterian Church* - Pat Davies  
*Georgetown University* - Ray Shiu  
*Grace Episcopal Church* - John Graham, Ex Officio  
*Holy Trinity Catholic Church* - Ron Castaldi  
*Kesher Israel, Georgetown Synagogue* - Amy Kauffman  
*Mt. Zion United Methodist Church* - Deborah Owens  
*St. John's Episcopal Church* - Jocelyn Dyer  
*St. Paul's K Street* - Jeremiah Cassidy  
*St. Stephen the Martyr* - Laura Wilson

### From the Community

*Citizens Association of Georgetown* - Page Robinson  
*Georgetown Business Association* - Elizabeth Webster  
*Georgetown BID* - John Wiebenson  
*Georgetown Clergy Association* - Mary Kay Totty  
*Treatment Advocacy Center* - John Snook  
*Other Community Representatives* - Page Evans, James P. Jordan, Dorothy Preston, Sara Lemke-von Ammon, Carol Cooke, Nancy Taylor Bubes, Jamie Meidhof, Richard Lordhal

### Officers

**President** - Alexander Bullock  
**Vice President** - Jeremiah Cassidy  
**Treasurer** - John Lange  
**Secretary** - Page Robinson

### Staff

**Executive Director** - Gunther Stern  
**Case Manager** - Sabrina Burrell, MSW  
**Program Manager** - Ashley Lane  
**Program Coordinators** - Titilayo Adegoke, Will Jay, Tanisha Turner  
**Volunteer Coordinator** - Joel Hanson  
**Development Manager** - Sarah Hartley  
**Communications Manager** - Carolyn Landes  
**Human Resources Specialist** - Dymenn Venzor

### Consulting Physicians

*Psychiatry*  
Ron Koshes, M.D.  
John Tarim M.D.; Psychiatric Resident (GWU)  
*Family Practice*  
Catherine Crosland, M.D. (Unity Health Care)





## You are invited to the 2017 Spirit of Georgetown!

Georgetown Ministry Center's annual celebratory benefit will be held on October 19th from 6:30 - 8:30 pm. This 30th Anniversary celebration will be hosted by author, journalist, television commentator, and longtime Washingtonian, Sally Quinn, in her beautiful Georgetown home and will honor Mayor Muriel Bowser for her leadership on issues of homelessness.

Join us for an evening of spirits, savories, and celebrating 30 years of ending homelessness, one person at a time. For sponsorship information or to purchase tickets, please visit [gmcgt.org/events](http://gmcgt.org/events). You may also mail a check to: Georgetown Ministry Center, 1041 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20007.

*Please join these generous sponsors in supporting GMC at the Spirit of Georgetown this fall.*



Georgetown Ministry Center  
1041 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
[www.georgetownministrycenter.org](http://www.georgetownministrycenter.org)



### Curious what this is all about?

GMC was accepted into the 2017-2018 class of the Catalogue for Philanthropy. After an extensive review process, we met the Catalogue's high standards and were named one of the best small nonprofits in DC.



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