

# GMC NEWS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGETOWN MINISTRY CENTER

## CENTER REOPENING

Our grand reopening was a smash. We had a great crowd on short notice. The space once closed off with cubicles now wide open.

There were two people from the current, a reporter from the Georgetown Patch and the Georgetown Dish. As the reporters peppered us with questions I began to realize that this was an evolution of thinking. How did we come to this expansion?

A few years ago the new condos in the West End began to fill with affluent new residents who found the conditions in the library at 24th and L uncomfortable at best. Rules were made. Only one bag per person. And there was a size limit. No duffel bags. Soon the homeless who had found the library to be a hospitable respite from the heat and the cold were no longer feeling welcome.

My own reaction to this was a mix of understanding the feelings of the new community members and wanting to do something for the homeless people. Thus began our quest to build an alternative to the library. At first we conceived a cafe.

We realized that our space was inadequate for the purpose. First we went out looking for a larger space in the community for our cafe/clubhouse. Churches had no space to spare. Landlords did not want a homeless program in their space. We realized we can't move our program space but our administrative needs were a different story. So we moved admin out and there was a lot more space to work with. Before we could find an architect a design team from HOK just across the street stepped forward to volunteer their services. Chloe Hiyu, Nita Tuveesson, Esther Simon, Ming Hu, took the time to understand what we needed and conceived the perfect plan for our project. When we needed additional help they brought in META Engineers, Paul MacDonald, Cindy Ladewig who volunteered engineering services.

It is never easy to envision the finished product looking at drawings. Often the drawings look better than the finished space (in my opinion). When Kadcon turned the space back over to us a week in mid July we could not believe how great the transformation was. It is amazing. Come by and check it out. [Everyone is welcome!](#)

—*Gunther Stern*



## GREGORY

It was almost five years ago when Gregory died. He had been sick. We had been talking to him about going to the hospital but he refused. We had been discussing an involuntary hospitalization. He had been throwing up, he was weak and not eating. He left one morning and never came back. We soon learned that he had passed away. My recollection is that I went to the medical examiners office and identified the body. How jaded is that. I can't remember if he was one of the ones I have identified. It is the grimmest of duties. Even if you are a regular you have to meet with the grief counselor. He is solemn as he goes over your options for counseling, even though you assure him you have been there before and know the drill...and anyway, "I'm not family". Nothing really prepares you for the picture they show you, the disembodied head, body completely covered, wrapped in a shocking white sheet. The hair is neatly combed in a way it was never in life. It takes a few seconds to process the visage, distorted by death and the unfamiliar hairstyle. In the end the features that are Greg emerge. Yes that is him.

All this comes flooding back in a coffee shop in Wheaton recently, where I am meeting the two adult children and their families. Matthew and his wife and Annie, her husband and a young son and daughter. They are so normal. They are here to appreciate the support Gregory got from GMC in the last days of his life and perhaps to understand their father. They are well adjusted, articulate, smart, thoughtful people. They exemplify the success their father should have had.

They new him well. Though they were young when he left, they had talked to him by phone and visited him in the different places as he moved around the country trying to escape his demons. Gregory was a constitutional lawyer who's career was derailed by a raging depression and the resulting psychosis. He learned that alcohol deadened the symptoms, quieted the voices, raging, disparaging and condescending inside his brain. Though it might be hard to understand for his children, he was not running away from them. He was saving them from the demons within him.

It was often easy to see the torturous thoughts that were contorting his face as he sat there glassy eyed on his favorite bench by the C&O canal. The bench from which he was picked up by the paramedics in his final hours. The smile on his face was the kind of smile that one has while enduring a verbal assault and can do nothing but endure. The kind of smile that is an embarrassed, humiliated and what else can I do but smile. The attack comes from invisible assailants. His very private battle is contained in his brain, silent to the many passerbys.

When he was revived at the hospital he was told he needed an operation that would save his life and that he could not live without it. He refused the surgery. Perhaps he was deliberately choosing to end this lifetime of torture. Perhaps he really did not understand the consequences of his decision.

As we sat there talking, Matthew asked at one point if there were something that the family could have done to have relieved him from his tortured odyssey. Annie wondered what responsibility Greg had for his condition.

What occurred to me at that moment is that they needed to blame themselves or him or somebody for what was nothing other than an unavoidable tragedy. A one man natural disaster. A family tsunami. There was nothing that anyone could have done differently. He could not be saved by himself because he had very little insight into his illness. He could not have been saved by his family because our laws make it very difficult to intervene.

In the end it is our society that has failed to make the connection between the dirty, disheveled homeless man and the person he should have been. We have created laws that protect the right of someone with little or no insight into their illness to make poor decisions that lead to a tortured existence on the street. The next time you see a homeless man or woman on the street try not to avert your eyes. Look into his or her eyes and think about what might have been had there been an earlier intervention. Think about the children, the wives, and mothers, husbands and fathers left behind. We can do better.

*When I think about these things I invariably think of the **Treatment Advocacy Center** in Arlington, Virginia which advocates for more aggressive treatment of people with mental illness. <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org>*

## NEW STAFF MEMBERS

This summer brings two new employees to the Georgetown Ministry Center: Dymenn Sasser, GMC's Business Manager, and Stephanie Chan, Program Coordinator. Dymenn, who graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, joined Georgetown Ministry Center in March to handle the broad details of the business side of GMC, including payroll, fundraising events such as Help the Homeless, and our sandwich calendar. Her organizational skills not only keep the administrative side of GMC running smoothly, but also allow other staff members to focus on outreach and programming.

Stephanie, who started with GMC in July, was brought aboard to manage GMC's new Clubhouse. A recent graduate from Trinity College in Hartford, CT, Stephanie spent the past three summers working in a homeless shelter in her hometown of Boston. There, she did everything from prepping hot meals, working in development, and teaching a knitting and crocheting class. As Program Coordinator, Stephanie leads the center's morning meetings and weekly house meeting (to gather feedback and discuss issues relating to day-to-day operations), as well plans events and programming for the center, such as a Scrabble tournament and a Know Your Rights workshop. Additionally, she is training members to assist in maintaining the cleanliness of the center by creating task groups to monitor the kitchen area, operate the laundry machines, and clean at the end of the day. With Stephanie on board, the GMC vision of a Clubhouse model is slowly falling into place.

## Club House Model

Georgetown Ministry Center has always viewed itself as a community and family. Strong relationships have been built between staff and participants and we are continually focused on empowering people to move to the next level. We are currently working to apply different aspects of a Clubhouse rehabilitation model in order to help us further develop programming that reflects these core elements of GMC.

Clubhouses exist throughout the world and have proven to be an exemplar model for psychiatric rehabilitation. Official Clubhouses are certified by the International Center for Clubhouse Development and while GMC is unlikely to seek certification any time soon, we are working to implement some of the key principles of a clubhouse model to our center.

Participants in a Clubhouse are called members, and membership is completely voluntary. Those who choose membership are invited to be involved in key decision making processes for the organization. On Tuesdays at 2:30, we have started holding House Meetings, which is a time when staff and members come together to discuss different programs and other concerns of the organization.

Members, like Christine, appreciate that "you can just walk in here and be a member. ... Everyone can treat this like a home." Another one of our members, Nhiahi, thinks the house meetings are a great addition to the GMC and that "it's [the center] improving, because y'all are ... letting us make some decisions. We don't always have to get what we want, but at least we get our foot in the door."

With a clubhouse model, staff and members work side by side to complete the day-to-day operations of the organization. Everyday, staff and members work together mop, clean the bathrooms, and maintain the cleanliness of the kitchen. We are also beginning the training process to have members run the shower and laundry program. Additionally, we are beginning a technology group where members will train one another on different aspects of the computer. The shared responsibility and joint work will continue to expand over time.

Training members on how to clean the center effectively results in not only new skill sets, but also pride in the space where guests and members come to be a family. While discussing cleaning up at the end of the day during a house meeting, Nhiahi explained why she enjoys staying to help staff clean the GMC: "When I have my own place, I want to be able to do what I put in here. If I don't learn anything else, I'll know how to mop the floors, do the dishes, do some dusting, put the dishes away. ... This is a stepping stone. If you're going to do it here, when you get your own home, you're going to do it there."

Members have the right to be informed and have their needs met. To this end, GMC staff member Tobias, a current law student, will lead a Know Your Rights workshop, and we are trying to line others up to do presentations about housing options in DC, getting medical insurance, and other issues that directly impact our members.

Finally, we believe in having fun! We have a Scrabble tournament scheduled, will have monthly birthday celebrations, and expect to do many more activities together that strengthen social skills and build relationships. First and foremost, however, is creating a safe, welcoming environment for everybody. The Clubhouse is "a place to meet different types of people," says

Clarence. "A lot is going to happen [on the streets] to everyone in here, but this is a place to come and collect your thoughts. It's a warm place to come to, it really is."

—Stephanie Chan

## WINTER SHELTER

The Winter Shelter is scheduled to reopen on Sunday November 6, 2011. In case you don't know this is a community based shelter that would not be without the generosity and concern of the supporting congregations. GMC brings the cots, staff and residents, chosen for their ability to get along in a small community. They are vulnerable and resist the bigger tougher shelters in the area. As it turns out, our residents have complemented the volunteers from the congregations with lively chatter about current events and life. Please let us know if you would like to be part of this effort. We will always need dinner volunteers to contribute some part of the dinner, overnight volunteers to support the staff person and drivers to move the shelter on the Sundays that they move. You can email me at [Roy@gmcgt.org](mailto:Roy@gmcgt.org)

—Roy Witherspoon

## TASTE OF GEORGETOWN

The 18th Annual Taste of Georgetown will showcase the spectacular cuisine of thirty of Washington, D.C.'s finest restaurants, highlighting Georgetown's culinary personalities and feature nearly sixty delectable dishes to sample, as well as wine pairings and the jazz talents of Blues Alley.

The Taste of Georgetown has become the premier food and wine festival of D.C. benefiting Georgetown Ministry Center's (GMC) services supporting the homeless.

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## SPIRIT OF GEORGETOWN

If you did not get your invitation then we made a mistake or the post office did but we want to get one to you. Just give me a call or email and I will get one out to right away. You can also log onto [spiritofgeorgetown.org](http://spiritofgeorgetown.org) and register in one quick moment. 2011 Spirit of Georgetown Benefit will honor Page & Howard Smith on Thursday, October 13, 2011 and will be hosted at the lovely home of Nancy Jacobson and Mark Penn. Please consider supporting us with your attendance at this great annual event.

## TO PAYPAL OR NOT TO PAYPAL

We have taken credit cards through *Network for Good* for several years now but it is very expensive. **Paypal** does not charge us a monthly fee and charges a discounted fee on donations. **Paypal** does encourage you to open a **Paypal** account but you don't have to and you can very quickly navigate around the offer and get on with the donation. On the otherhand, if you have a **Paypal** account, well you would know, it's a breeze.

## Board of Directors

<i>Christ Church, Georgetown</i>	Catherine Ballinger Elizabeth Bluhm
<i>Dumbarton United Methodist Church</i>	Martha Dickey Ester Dijkstra
<i>Epiphany Roman Catholic Church</i>	Susan Gschwendner Won Park
<i>First Baptist Church, Georgetown</i>	Barbara Hargroves Vinette Saunders
<i>Georgetown Lutheran Church</i>	Connie Baker Christine Traugott
<i>Georgetown Presbyterian Church</i>	Alexander Bullock Tracy Davis
<i>Georgetown University</i>	Linda Greenan
<i>Grace Episcopal Church</i>	Drew Davis Kimberly Ludwig
<i>Holy Trinity Catholic Church</i>	Linda Formella Joe Ryan
<i>Keshet Israel, Georgetown Synagogue</i>	Jessica Ribner
<i>Mt. Zion United Methodist Church</i>	Essie Page
<i>St. John's Episcopal Church</i>	Jocelyn Dyer
<i>St. Luke's United Methodist Church</i>	Dorothy Preston
<i>St. Paul's K Street</i>	Eric Lobsinger
<i>St. Stephen the Martyr</i>	Jackie Durham

### And from the community...

<i>Citizens Association of Georgetown</i>	Dick Stoll
<i>Community Representative</i>	Beth Neilsen
<i>Georgetown Business Association</i>	Rokas Beresniovas
<i>Georgetown BID</i>	James Bracco
<i>Georgetown Clergy Association</i>	John Graham

## Officers

<b>President</b>	Joe Ryan
<b>Vice President</b>	Dick Stoll
<b>Treasurer</b>	John Lange
<b>Secretary</b>	Jocelyn Dyer

## Staff

<b>Executive Director</b>	Gunther Stern
<b>Outreach Director</b>	Roy Witherspoon
<b>Business Manager</b>	Dymenn Sasser
<b>Program Coordinator</b>	Malini Suri
<b>Outreach Staff</b>	Nathan Clark
<b>Shower Program Manager</b>	Tobias Brown
<b>Consulting Psychiatrist</b>	Ron Koshes, M.D.
<b>Development Director</b>	Claire Spencer-Spears

## HELP THE HOMELESS

Last year we raised \$174,000 through the Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Walk. This year we hope to match or better this amount. There are many ways that you can participate or help. We need walkers and sponsors and donors. Walkers can walk at the big walk on the Mall on November 19th or you can come to the official GMC Mini-Walk at Grace Church, or if you have kids at Hyde Addison or Stoddert Elementary Schools you can get involved in the public school mini walk. Public school elementary students don't have to pay to count. They just bring in the permission slip which will be sent home with each student. There is no donation required to participate. On the other hand, walkers joining our mini-walk at Grace Church or on the mall will be required a small donation of \$20 for those 25 and under and \$30 for those over \$25 in order to count in the Fannie Mae incentive awards. Everyone gets a t-shirt.

Fannie Mae want as many walkers as possible out there to show force in the fight against homelessness. They are encouraging us to get as many walks as possible with walker incentive awards. Our goal is 850 walkers in all of our mini-walks and the big walk on the mall. If we are eligible for an additional \$15,000.

Public School Walks - If you have kids or know kids at Stoddert or Hyde Elementary Schools please help us make the school mini-walks a success. We want 100% cooperation. There is no cost to the students and everyone counts toward our goal of 850; as long as they have their permission sheets signed and turned in!

This is a great way to leverage additional support for GMC with a small personal investment.

Georgetown Ministry Center  
1041 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20007



## Save The Date! Sunday, September 25th

Grace Church, 12:00 P.M. to 3:30 P.M.

Help the Homeless Georgetown Community Walk

Come enjoy the warm weather of September on the lawn of Grace Church (1041 Wisconsin Ave., NW). This event is for the whole family. We are planning to have a variety of activities. If you or anyone you know would like to help out, have ideas for activities, or know of musicians who would like to perform, please contact Dymenn Sasser at [dymenn@gmcgt.org](mailto:dymenn@gmcgt.org) or 202-640-1309.

To register for this event, simply fill out the form on the back of this page or call 202-338-8301. The cost is \$30 per adult (26 and over), \$20 per youth—register one or all of your family members, or register at the event! **Register by September 9th to receive a T-shirt at the event!** (If you register at the event, you will receive a T-shirt at a later date.) Help us reach our goal this year of 350 community mini-walk participants! This event will be held instead of the congregation mini-walks so please plan on coming. Maybe your congregation could walk to our event. We will reward you with treats and fun activities!

Or you can register (and attend) the BIG WALK on the national mall on November 19th, 2011, it will take about an hour and you will feel great because you will have exercised and supported a great cause! You can go online at [www.helpthehomelessdc.org](http://www.helpthehomelessdc.org) and register. Make sure you use our beneficiary designation number DC037.

Finally, if you can't do anything else you can support us as a Virtual Walker. Go online and sign up. Unfortunately you will not count as a walker toward our goal of 850 walkers but your donation will still support the work of Georgetown Ministry Center.

—Dymenn Sasser



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SHARE US ON FACEBOOK  
HELP SPREAD THE WORD



31661 on the CFC

9635 on the United Way