

GMC NEWS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGETOWN MINISTRY CENTER

RECESSION EFFECTS

Last year, in the aftermath of the collapse of the U.S. financial system, the response from Georgetowners was nothing less than inspirational with respect to GMC. Donations were up, not just from our usual supporters—new donations came pouring in. I can't tell you how amazed we are with Georgetowners. While we were nervous about the economy in general, we were reassured that things would not be too bad for GMC and our clients.

This year we are feeling the effects. In October, DC announced a \$20 million cutback in services to the homeless for the coming year, dramatically reducing budgets for shelters and other programs. The modest support we receive from the city was cut about 20 percent. Donations are off as well, not dramatically but noticeably.

So far we are okay. We have reserves, and we are optimistic that recovery is around the corner. We don't yet know how we will be affected, but there is no doubt there will be more need and fewer resources for the coming year. In response, GMC plans to expand services, doing more with less in FY2010. (See café article.)

WINTER SHELTER

GMC operates a rotating congregation-based winter shelter program from November through March, which provides 10-12 vulnerable homeless members of the Georgetown community a warm place to sleep. The shelter also provides an opportunity for residents to develop nurturing and supportive relationships with shelter staff, volunteers, and each other. This has undoubtedly contributed to the shelter's success in helping some residents to form attachments that have enabled them move off the street.

The shelter moves from congregation to congregation throughout the winter. The congregants, with some outside help, prepare and serve dinner and then join our residents, staff, and other volunteers for dinner.

We are constantly in need of dinner volunteers (groups and individuals) to prepare and serve dinners, and individuals who would like to spend the night in the shelter supporting the staff person. Please call us at (202) 338-8301.

NEW CAFÉ SPACE!

I was horrified last winter when there was a community effort to drive homeless people out of the library. These are homeless people who have used the library for years for its intended purpose, but at the same time made it difficult for others to use the library. Some smelled bad, others brought huge bags in and consumed much of the space, but there were also behavior



problems. People with mental illnesses don't behave the way they should. It is not their fault and it is not something they can control, but it is disturbing to the people around them.

Actually when I think about it I get a little mad. How elitist is it to think that some library users have less of a right to use it than anyone else. Really, how un-American is that? Everyday at the library the reading room tables are filled with homeless men and women doing exactly what they are supposed to do in the library: read books (even if they were occasionally held upside down), research issues, or explore the world on the computers—and of course take up all the chairs at all the tables. A vocal minority in the community took up the cause to reclaim the library, and after many meetings the outcome was a size limitation to the bags brought in, which included cellos belonging to middle schoolers from the nearby school up the street, and behavior expectations were posted prominently at each table.

Immediately the number of homeless people dropped dramatically. I thought, these people really need a place where they are welcome, can feel safe during the day, and are able to read and research topics of their own choosing.

To be perfectly honest, I understand the response. The desire for access to the library in the neighborhood is not unreasonable. And the expectation that all patrons behave within reasonable bounds is absolutely valid.

(Café, cont. on p. 2)

MEDICAL OUTREACH

A couple of years ago we began to get weekly visits from the Unity Health Care van at our office. The van would pull up every week and our clients would be encouraged to walk out to the street where the van was parked. As hard as it is to believe, it was often hard to get even sick people to make the short trek to the street.

Last year we were offered the opportunity to meet the van instead on Thursday evenings at Washington Circle where GMC staff would try to corral patients. We had varying levels of success, but one would expect that homeless people with serious health issues would be much more willing to go to the medical van than they were.

We continue to work with the van on Thursday nights, but this summer Dr. Danielle Robertshaw began to join me or other GMC staff on Thursday morning walkabouts with a backpack full of medical supplies and medicine. Danielle moved on to Baltimore's Health Care for the Homeless and has been replaced by Dr. Catherine Crosland, who also loves walking. We have moved from twice monthly sessions to weekly sessions.

I am struck by how important this work is. I can honestly say that we have saved at least one life, and we certainly intervene in a serious health crisis weekly. Having a doctor willing to walk into the campsites, under the bridges, and on the street corners is huge.

I just came back from walking for three hours with Catherine. We visited three people under the Whitehurst Freeway, all suffering from the flu. One reported having been diagnosed with walking pneumonia. Catherine was able to offer medicine and a medical referral. As we left she assured them she would contact the medical van staff and make sure they had medicine for nausea available when they come tonight.

It is amazing to see how well this works!

—*Gunther Stern*



Dr. Crosland, checking her bag for medicine.

(Café, cont. from p. 1)

On the other hand, trying to make these people to go away does not solve the problem. The huge number of homeless people in the library is a problem for everyone, even the homeless people. They are often mentally ill people who have nowhere else to go. It will not stop being a problem until the community recognizes that these are people who are victims of their own disabilities, seeking refuge. We need to make places for these people and not treat them the same way we would treat a rodent problem.

Even as cutbacks are being reported all around, GMC plans a dramatic expansion in services this year, a new one we believe will make a big difference in the community: a cafe/clubhouse for our homeless clients. We went looking for space around the area, but we found no room available for the purpose. We were getting discouraged when it occurred to us that we already have the space. All we need to do is move some staff. That makes it easy, and it will really help us clarify roles and mission. Right now the director and the business manager sit right there in the middle of chaos.

I am hoping that by the new year we will have space for 10 homeless people, or anyone else who cares to come by, to use our facility. I realize already that this will be a drop in the bucket compared to the need, but we will have four computers available for resume writing, contacting family via email, or just surfing the web. We will have to limit the time the way the library does. There will be tables where others can sit and read and maybe drink a cup of coffee. The one thing our little library will have that the public library does not have is an information specialist who knows about shelters, housing programs, and disability benefits, and who is very comfortable with homeless, mentally ill people.

We will still offer showers and laundry services, and people will still be able to receive mail at our address and make phone calls when they need to. We will not be able to offer clothes anymore; there just isn't space. We think in the end a place to belong is going to be much more important.

Meanwhile our staff will be facing homelessness. We still don't know exactly what we will be doing for office space, but at this moment I am typing this newsletter article on a Netbook in an experiment to see how much we can downsize our office footprint. My plan is to issue the inexpensive mini-laptops to outreach staff who can then maintain our client data on the run in libraries and coffee shops with free wireless Internet.

At the same time we are moving more and more of our resources to the web. Our accounting program and our donor database as well as our client database are on secure, professionally maintained web servers (in "the cloud"—call me if you don't know what that is, and I'd be glad to tell you all about it). I am writing this newsletter in a Google doc that I can share with the editor and my collaborators. Slowly, the office is becoming less and less important, and so the amount of space the staff needs is dramatically smaller than it might have been a few years ago. You would not believe how many file cabinets will fit on a disk drive. A lot.

It is really exciting to see how much more we will be able to do for our homeless clients within our limited space.

—*Gunther Stern*



Come walk with us at the 22nd annual Help the Homeless Walk on the Mall on Saturday, November 21, 2009.

Plan on being there before 8:30 to pick up your shirt and join our group.

Come join the throngs making a statement about homelessness in Washington, DC, and helping the local agencies they support. Come support the work of Georgetown Ministry Center.

Designate Georgetown Ministry Center: DC037.

This year every walker is so much more important because Fannie Mae has raised the bar. We need 850 walkers to get the additional \$15,000 incentive funds from Fannie Mae. Each walker who signs to walk with GMC counts towards this goal. You have to be there on Saturday, November 21. It will be cold, I am sure, but we always have a great time. Please join us at the start under the Giant G for GMC!

Register Online... Preregister online until 5 p.m., Thursday, November 19 at www.helpthehomelessdc.org

Fee: \$25 adult, \$15 youth (age 25 and younger).

Print your registration confirmation and bring it with you to the Preregistration Check-in area on the National Mall between 12th and 14th Streets, NW, on Walkathon day, pick up your T-shirt, and you are ready to walk.

To preregister online, select DC037 for Georgetown Ministry Center from the menu, then click the *Go!* button.

Register on the Day of the Event... Bring your form to the Walk, Saturday, November 21

Fee: \$30 adult, \$15 youth (age 25 and younger).

On the day of the Walkathon, bring the completed, signed registration form, obtainable online at www.helpthehomelessdc.org, along with payment, to Event Day Registration.

Please call me if you have any questions.

Gunther Stern (202)338-8301

MINI-WALKS

The big walk on the Mall is coming up on November 21st, but as I write this we have completed half the mini-walks, shorter walks with local schools and congregations to raise awareness about homelessness. Fannie Mae paired us with the two local public elementary schools in Georgetown, Hyde and Stoddert. The kids could not have been cuter in their oversized T-shirts as they walked around each school. On Friday, October 23rd, GMC staff and volunteers converged on Hyde Elementary School for our first DCPS mini-walk. Volunteers spread out to the various classes to read "A Shelter in Our Car" by Monica Gunning and illustrated by Elaine Pedlar. The book dramatically illustrates the plight of a homeless mom and daughter for the young students. We then engaged the kids in a sometimes lively discussion about what it means to be homeless. The following Tuesday we repeated the performance at Stoddert Elementary School. They were both great experiences for everyone.

The two school mini-walks sandwiched a weekend with two mini-walks at our supporting congregations. St. John's Church had a mini-walk at 10 a.m. Sunday morning, organized by Jocelyn Dyer, who represents the church on the GMC board. At 11 a.m. Epiphany Church started their march through Georgetown.

We have three more walks planned for November 8th. Holy Trinity Church, Dumbarton United Methodist Church, and Georgetown Presbyterian Church will each hold a walk that day. Our very first mini-walk of the year was at Grace Church on October 18th. The Grace walk was expertly organized by Lenore Reid, who represents Grace on the GMC board of directors. Grace members walked down to the GMC office where they were met by GMC staff member Saeed Woodall for a tour of our center.

The mini-walks are all part of the big push by Fannie Mae to raise awareness about homelessness which continues to be a pressing problem throughout the United States and the world.

If you weren't able to participate in one of the mini-walks, please consider joining us on November 21st for the big walk on the Mall.



Mini-Walk at Stoddert Elementary School

PETER

I have seen many homeless people die over the years, but Peter is up there with some of the dearest. Honestly, I didn't get to know him too well, and neither did anyone else, I suppose. Arguably he was mildly retarded with a generally sweet disposition and the innocence of a child. His needs were as simple as his thoughts.

Peter ate too much. It was no doubt related to his disabilities and mental illness, but he spent his day walking from place to place in search of a food. We often felt guilty giving him a sandwich. He was about 260 pounds and 5 feet 6 inches, but we are sure he would have been much bigger if he didn't walk, toting his big bag, an estimated 10 miles a day in search of food.

Peter was a loyal friend to everyone he knew. I never heard him say a negative thing about anyone. He was so much like a child that the other homeless guys tended to act more as parents to him than friends.

The group around Washington Circle took good care of him. It was Dexter who noticed that Peter was unconscious and called an ambulance. The group watched as paramedics tied up traffic on Washington Circle for more than a half hour while they were attending to Peter. They watched, aghast, when the ambulance that finally took Peter drove out of the circle and away from the George Washington University Hospital Emergency Room across the street. Peter was taken to Georgetown University Hospital's ER.

The supervising nurse on duty said over the phone that Peter was fine and would be released shortly. An hour later he was found unresponsive at the foot of Key Bridge, where we assume he was starting to make his way back to his friends at Washington Circle. Ironically, he was pronounced dead at Sibley Hospital, still farther from his beloved Washington Circle.

Services were held at St. Stephen the Martyr Catholic Church just outside of Washington Circle. Father Jack Wintermyer, who retired from Unity Health Care a couple of years ago and knew Peter well, presided. Jack's job for Unity was Physician's Assistant on the same medical van that often provided treatment and medication to Peter over the years. Peter's funeral was well attended by the many people who had come to know and love him, homeless and housed.

—*Gunther Stern*

COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN

Georgetown Ministry Center is represented on the Combined Federal Campaign. If you are a federal employee then you know what this is. Please look for us in your official Combined Federal Campaign of the National Capital Area *Catalogue of Caring* or in the online searchable database on the website at <http://cfcnca.org>. Just type Georgetown Ministry Center into the search. GMC is 31661 in the Combined Federal Campaign.

Please make us part of your giving plan.

TASTE OF GEORGETOWN

On October 10th, Wisconsin Avenue was closed to traffic between Blues Alley and South Street for the 16th annual Taste of Georgetown event. The fall food festival featured the phenomenal cuisine of 30 of Georgetown's top eateries, including 1789, Hook, Mie N Yu, Baked & Wired, and many more. The restaurants served sample portions of their signature dishes, and proceeds benefited Georgetown Ministry Center. With nearly 60 mouth-watering dishes to sample, wine pairings, and live jazz music, the Taste has become one of the largest and most popular food and wine festivals in DC.

Long-time members of Grace Church described Taste's history as a Grace Church fundraiser for GMC. It was



Marshall Keys, Mike Bowie, and Brian Gilmore, representing Grace Church's jazz and poetry series, perform on the Grace lawn.

originally organized by former Grace Rector David Bird and Robert Egger, a local chef and church member who went on to organize the DC Central Kitchen. The event was held in the churchyard, and the participating restaurants served from tables without the luxury of tents. Consequentially, good weather was very important! There was music on the lawn, face painting for children, organ demonstrations, and a raffle. Tickets were sold at each gate to the churchyard, and the volunteers were Grace parishioners.

Taste was so successful that it grew beyond the capacity of Grace members and volunteers. An alliance with the Georgetown Business Improvement District (BID) was formed. With the help of the BID's professional staff, the event has grown while remaining well organized. This year over 70 volunteers—many of them Grace Church members—set up, sold tickets, and cleaned up, making sure the event ran smoothly.

This year rain dampened the morning turnout, but by afternoon the Taste of Georgetown was crowded with hungry people. Judges sampled the food and chose the winners: olive-oil-poached octopus from soon-to-open Morso, Clyde's lobster roll, and Bourbon Steak's butterscotch pudding.

Taste offers Georgetown the opportunity to show off its many unique restaurants, raises money for GMC to help the homeless in the area, and is a day of food and fun for all who attend. Needless to say, this year's Taste was a great success.

—Jessica Colman, with help from Grace's Catherine Aselford, Helen Buhr, and Janet Sale

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>Grace Episcopal Church</i>	John Graham Lenore Reid
<i>Holy Trinity Catholic Church</i>	Linda Formella Joe Ryan
<i>Kesher Israel, Georgetown Synagogue</i>	Nathan Lesser
<i>Mt. Zion United Methodist Church</i>	Essie Page
<i>St. Paul's K Street</i>	Joe Manson
<i>St. John's Episcopal Church</i>	Nick Elgin Jocelyn Dyer
<i>St. Luke's United Methodist Church</i>	Dorothy Preston
<i>St. Stephen the Martyr</i>	Patrick Cody

And from the community...

<i>Citizens Association of Georgetown</i>	Catherine Shaw
<i>Community Representative</i>	Beth Neilsen
<i>Georgetown Business Association</i>	Rokas Beresnievas
<i>Georgetown BID</i>	James Bracco

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Administrative Support	Jessica Colman
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Shower Program Manager	Saeed Woodall
Consulting Psychiatrist	Ron Koshes, M.D.
Development Director	Claire Spencer-Spears

SPIRIT OF GEORGETOWN

On October 19th, Georgetown Ministry Center hosted the 15th annual Spirit of Georgetown event. The benefit, which honored Jonda and Robert McFarlane, was held at the historic home of Dr. Tina Alster and Paul Frazer, and was co-chaired by Shannon Pryor and Maral Skelsey. The event raised close to \$40,000, a great success in light of the current economic conditions. The money will be used to support Georgetown Ministry Center's ever-expanding work in the community.

The McFarlanes were chosen as the honorees in recognition of their service to the community over the last 22 years. Among other things, Jonda played an integral role in the creation of the Francis Scott Key Park and the Georgetown Business Improvement District. The McFarlanes have also been involved with and served on the boards of many other groups centered around strengthening the Georgetown community, including the Georgetown Waterfront Commission, Friends of Georgetown Waterfront Park, and the DC Advisory Neighborhood Commission. Their philanthropic work extends beyond

Georgetown as well, to political and social causes in the larger DC area. At the event, both Robert and Jonda spoke eloquently about Georgetown and the role GMC plays in the community. It was truly an honor to have such an accomplished and generous couple there supporting GMC's cause.



Gunther Stern, Frida Burling, and our host, Dr. Tina Alster

The home of Dr. Tina Alster and Paul Frazer was built in 1810 and is the original Smith's House of the famed Smith Row in Georgetown. It was recently renovated by world-renowned architect and Georgetown resident Hugh Newell Jacobsen. It was the perfect setting for the event, adding an element of beauty and sophistication to the affair.

Thanks to the generosity and hard work of the co-chairs, hosts, volunteers, and contributors, the event was both an enjoyable social event and a very successful fundraiser. We look forward to continuing what

has become a wonderful tradition next year, and we are exceptionally grateful to the community for its support.

—Jessica Colman

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

See inside:

New Café Space
Medical Outreach
Nov. 21 Walkathon
Combined Federal Campaign #31661

22 Years of Service to Georgetown