



## GMC NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGETOWN MINISTRY CENTER

### THE 2004 TEN-YEAR PLAN

I was thinking about the Mayor's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness by the year 2014. It struck me it really is almost 2014. Two more years to end homelessness. How are we doing? When I look around me at work I don't see much difference from 21 years ago when I started working with the homeless here in Georgetown. The faces have changed. Some have found their way off the street, but too many have died on the street, victims of their circumstances: hit by a car, stabbed by a friend in a drunken rage, or just worn out from a hard life. And some have just gotten older...like me. I don't know if the number who have found their way off the street is more or less than the number who have died, but the depressing thought is that there seems to be just as many people living on the street now as there were in 2004.

Don't get me wrong, much has been done over the years. Housing has been developed and people have been housed. The Continuum of Care provided more coordinated services to thousands of people.

Housing First offered hundreds of units of housing to people without the expectation that they have to submit to treatment to qualify. There have always been mentally ill and addicted people who just couldn't make it in the world. It is only in the last 30 years that there was no sort of housing for them. Rooming houses and flophouses have given way to fancy condos and expensive restaurants. Tougher zoning rules have made it impossible for landlords to operate at the edge of society, the place where marginally functional people



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### A LIFE CHANGED

In the span of one year, MB went from being an unemployed homeless man on the streets of DC to being employed and living in his own apartment. On June 6, 2011, MB showed up at our door asking for help. He said that his life had fallen apart. He had lost a career job working with Prince George's County, and at the same time his mother became very ill. MB then went on to say that his mother had died, and he had lost the family home he grew up in. He became depressed and found himself sleeping in the parks around Georgetown, and it was there on a park bench that someone told him about GMC.

In the beginning, all I could do was just be a listening ear to MB as he purged himself of all the guilt and shame that he was feeling. We started to work together and form a plan to first get him off the streets. The plan was to get him into St. Luke's, which is a shelter/transition program that GMC partners with. There would be a bed opening in less than a month, and MB was willing to wait. In the meantime he was referred to one of the city shelters. Soon after entering St. Luke's, MB was able to find a job and save his money. His days were now filled with something positive, and his attitude towards life was slowly changing for the better. For MB, February 6, 2012, was more than just an ordinary Monday, and more than just another day. MB felt like his entire life had completely turned around. He was finally able to put his key into his very own door.

MB is still employed and is again very excited about life today. Finding housing was an immense relief for MB, but a lot of people like him are victims of circumstance and some are not as fortunate to find the help that they need. MB exemplifies the human potential to succeed.

—Roy Witherspoon

### SAVE THE DATE FOR TASTE!

The Taste has moved to spring! The 19th Annual Taste of Georgetown be held on June 2, 2012, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The festivities will be located on lower Wisconsin Avenue between M and K Streets. The Taste features over 30 of Georgetown's premier restaurants, wine pairing, and great live entertainment. But wait, there's more... The Taste will be counted as one of GMC's Help the Homeless community events! If you register for Help the Homeless at The Taste you will receive three Taste tickets and a T-shirt. Mark your calendar and check out our website for details.



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have found housing in the past. We are limited in what we can do to push people toward housing.

To be fair, the only part of homelessness that I truly understand is the chronically homeless people who live on our streets: the most disabled, vulnerable, and withdrawn. Families and working homeless who are usually homeless for short periods are not part of my experience, and for all I know we could be making great strides toward ending homelessness for them.

Each day though, I pass Nate who looks no different from the first time I passed him 21 years ago. He is such a colorful character. In the 90s he wore his trademark top hat. He would wear watches scavenged from the trash or given to him by passersby amused by his obvious interest in timepieces. He looked as if he were selling them, though if you asked him for one (I never did), he would just give it to you. I remember passing him at Wisconsin and M on the



fateful day that terrorists flew an airplane into the Pentagon. His glasses were askew on his head giving him a crazed look. “Another one’s coming,” he said frantically as he waited patiently for the walk signal.

Nate is such a charming character but he has been resolutely opposed to finding a place to live. I can’t tell you how many times I have tried to convince him.

And there is the woman for whom we had two separate places lined up. The building managers loved her. They recognized her eccentricities and were willing to work with her. Only a week before she was to move in, she changed her mind. “I don’t think so,” she said. She needed her freedom.

Add to this the dozens of people so mentally ill that it is difficult to even talk to them. We have been visiting one man for years at 24th and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. As we approach he calls out, “No approaches” and then warns, “Australian control zone.” In more receptive moments we learn that he is waiting for a craft, I guess from outer space, to whisk him away to a better place. We talk about an involuntary hospitalization for him but really he does not meet the criteria. This winter we thought maybe if it gets really cold we could try based on poor self-care...but it never got really cold this winter.

Last year one of our regulars was FD12’d (the legal process in D.C. to have a person considered for involuntary hospitalization) three times. The third was a charm. He ended up in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. He was reunited with his family but he refuses treatment which may be ineffective anyway because of his state of decompensation. A year later he still languishes in the hospital with nowhere to go.

I was doubtful when I first heard about the ten-year plan because in the end the only solution I see for many of the people who still populate the street is coercion. We as a society are going to have to take responsibility for them. We are going to have to recognize that a decision to live on the street because of a delusion is not a competent decision. Living on the street is neither safe nor healthy. Let’s make sure there are good alternatives, and then let’s stop accepting that people with severe mental illness live on the street.

—*Gunther Stern*

## JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

We’ve been busy these past few months! Every other Wednesday, tai chi master Nick Gracenin comes to lead a tai chi workshop. We are excited that spring is here, because warm weather means that we can move our class outside where there is more space and where we can soak up some sun. I see the members who participate in the class practicing the mindful movements here and there, and it’s great to see the progress they’ve made!

Our House Meetings are also progressing and evolving. When we first started having them, guests would run out the door or stare at us with blank faces. Now, members make it a point to be in the Center on Tuesdays at 12:30 and to discuss sensitive subjects with respect and open ears. Our members have voted issues such as the length of bar for guests who have not followed the rules, as well as voted to readmit other guests who had been barred for minor infractions. I am proud that our members are slowly taking ownership of the Center, and slowly shaping the environment of the Center’s community.

Georgetown Ministry Center’s community also includes our donors and volunteers, and I applaud the effort and time our volunteers and sandwich donors give. If you follow our blog, you probably read that one of our members, Pierre, first heard about GMC because another man on the street scoffed at the sandwich Pierre had and stated, “I can get better sandwiches at GMC.” Thank you for making GMC’s sandwich reputation so great! We’ve seen an increase in the variety of sandwiches, including egg salad, BLTs, honey and butter, tuna, tomato and cheese, and the addition of lettuce to regular meat and cheese sandwiches. Our guests also weigh the pb&j sandwiches in their hands and comment on the left; these are not skimpy pb&j sandwiches that our sandwich donors bring us.

Friends in the community have gotten involved in other creative ways as well. Jeanne, a sandwich donor, has started hosting a monthly bingo tournament in our Center, which is a big hit. Anthropologie, the clothing store, and Kelly, a friend of GMC, have both donated foods that were parts of displays. Anthropologie donated many, many cans of tomato soup that made up one of the store’s displays, and Kelly donated 80 green apples that she used in centerpieces for an event.

If you or anyone you know is searching for an easy, low-key way to become involved, consider joining GMC’s new Walking Group. A few times each month, members of GMC and the Georgetown community come together for a nice, easy stroll through the neighborhood. It is a great way to learn about homelessness and interact with those it affects, to strengthen the community via engaging conversation, and to meet others who call Georgetown “home.” We announce the upcoming walks on our blog, Facebook, Twitter, and the Georgetown Patch. Come and walk with us!

—*Stephanie Chan*

## NEWS IN MANY FORMS

Last November, a group of our members stayed after closing to help the staff stuff, seal, stamp, and label our most recent newsletter mailing. Everyone had so much fun, and we will continue to write and mail out our paper newsletter for some time. For those of you who want more up-to-date news about what's going on at GMC (and we hope you do!), many other opportunities exist.

For the quickest, most up-to-date GMC happenings, become our fan on Facebook (/GeorgetownMinistryCenter), follow us on Twitter (/gmcgt), and subscribe to our blog on our website. Liking our posts or sharing our stories is another way for you to help us, since it is a form of word-of-mouth; it increases our visibility within the internet community.

We will also soon release a monthly electronic newsletter, and we hope all our paper newsletter readers will also sign up for it on our website. If anyone in the community is hesitant about this new technology, fret not! We will be holding workshops on Facebook and Twitter for beginners in our Center. Just keep an eye out for these announcements on our blog and through Georgetown news avenues like the Patch. In the meantime, thank you so much for reading!

—Stephanie Chan

## HAVE A HEART LUNCHEON

On February 14, The Washington Club honored Georgetown Ministry Center at their annual Have a Heart Luncheon. GMC received a Community Service Award for its caring street outreach and unconditional positive regard for the homeless.



Arden Batch with GMC Executive Director Gunther Stern

Event chair Arden Batch presented GMC with the award and was pleasantly surprised by GMC's giving her a Humanitarian Award in the shape of a heart.

Keynote speaker Dr. Ron Koshes spoke on the history of homelessness and gave attendees insight into why mental illness is so prevalent among the homeless population. A video presented by Nelson Cuellar illustrated the invaluable service GMC provides at their Clubhouse and the different levels of community involvement.

A huge thank you to: Lee Elliott and Arden Batch for ensuring the afternoon ran smoothly, Club President Corie Stewart and The Washington Club staff for having us, our sponsors: Foley & Lardner and Friends of Christ Church, as well as all who took time out of their busy day to join us. The luncheon was excellent, and all attendees seemed very pleased. Well done to everyone involved.

—Dymenn Sasser

## Board of Directors

<i>Christ Church, Georgetown</i>	Catherine Ballinger Elizabeth Bluhm
<i>Dumbarton United Methodist Church</i>	Martha Dickey
<i>Epiphany Roman Catholic Church</i>	Susan Gschwendtner Won Park
<i>First Baptist Church, Georgetown</i>	Barbara Hargroves Vinette Saunders
<i>Georgetown Lutheran Church</i>	Connie Baker
<i>Georgetown Presbyterian Church</i>	Alexander Bullock Pat Davies
<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>Kesher 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>	Laura Wilson

### And from the community...

<i>Citizens Association of Georgetown</i>	Dick Stoll
<i>Community Representative</i>	Pierre Moye Beth Neilsen
<i>Georgetown Business Association</i>	Elizabeth Webster
<i>Georgetown BID</i>	James Bracco
<i>Georgetown Clergy Association</i>	John Graham

## Officers

<b>President</b>	Jocelyn Dyer
<b>Vice President</b>	Dick Stoll
<b>Treasurer</b>	John Lange
<b>Secretary</b>	Martha Dickey

## Staff

<b>Executive Director</b>	Gunther Stern
<b>Outreach Director</b>	Roy Witherspoon
<b>Business Manager</b>	Dymenn Sasser
<b>Program Coordinator</b>	Stephanie Chan
<b>Shower Program Manager</b>	Tobias Brown William Jenkins Karen Dickenson
<b>Consulting Psychiatrist</b>	Ron Koshes, M.D.
<b>Development Director</b>	Claire Spencer-Spears



## BIG CHANGES IN FANNIE MAE'S HELP THE HOMELESS PROGRAM

Fannie Mae announced early last year that they would no longer hold the National Mall walk. This year each event will be held in the community, organized by the beneficiary organizations or their supporters. That's right, you can hold an event for us! Maybe it is your book club or your exercise class, a homeless-themed movie night, a softball game, or anything else you can possibly think of. The sky is the limit.

As in the past, all of the event fees go directly to the beneficiary organization. If you have an idea for an event let us know. We can help you organize it. If you have people who want to participate but can't afford it, we will find sponsors for them.

GMC will be organizing some events starting with a special event at the Taste of Georgetown on June 2 (see Taste on page 1). You can support Georgetown Ministry Center twice in one day. Come to the Taste which supports us and then sign up for the Help the Homeless event and support us again. You will be able to register in advance and stop by our Center during the Taste to pick up your T-shirt plus we will treat you to three

complimentary Taste tickets. Registration for Help the Homeless is \$20 for those 25 and under and \$30 for those over 25. Advance registration will be available using a link from our website at [www.gmcgt.org](http://www.gmcgt.org). Look under events.

We need your ideas! For 2012 to be a successful year, we will have to get our creative juices flowing and come up with events that will spark the interest of our community. We also need your participation and support.

We will keep you updated on Help the Homeless events and plans on our website, on our Facebook page, and via Twitter.

If you have not done so already, please like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, or just send us your email address so we can update you on our events this year.

— *Dymenn Sasser*

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