

GMC NEWS

The Newsletter of the Georgetown Ministry Center



From GMC's New Executive Director

As I sit in our Drop-In Center this morning, I look around and have to smile to myself. After all the years that I have



Executive Director, Lissa Ramsepaul

worked with vulnerable and disenfranchised populations, I am still amazed at the level of hospitality I experience in this community. In a lot of ways, this is where I feel the most welcomed, the most comfortable. This morning, as I look around, several guests help someone with her bags as people press through the doors to

escape the cold, blustery morning air. Someone immediately begins helping to set up chairs, inviting individuals to take their favorite place to sit in the Center. One guest stands in our kitchenette making breakfast plates for other guests from donations that came in early this morning. Someone else pours coffee and passes it around, seemingly knowing how everyone takes it without needing to ask even one time. As he presses a steaming cup into my own hand, I smile and say "thank you," then immediately avert my eyes so no one sees the tears of gratitude welling in them. Our guests waste no opportunity to serve each other and I am touched and humbled that they include me so easily into their community. I came here to serve our guests, our staff, the greater Georgetown community. Yet, every day I learn a little more about the true meaning of community. The give and take that teaches us each to bear with each other, how to serve each other better, and the healing impact of community.

Community is really a funny concept. It is defined as "a unified body of individuals," according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary. The definition goes on to specify various circumstances, beliefs, etc. that may create unity among people leading to a sense of community. The list goes on, but it never provides an adequate description for the depth of compassion, commitment, and tolerance that unfolds before

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Center Reopens After Major Renovations

After undergoing months of renovation, Georgetown Ministry Center reopened its doors on March 19 to a new and improved Drop-in Center space!

After 13 years of serving thousands of men and women experiencing homelessness in our space beneath Grace Church, our well-worn Drop-In Center was in need of repair. Our oft-used shower had a cracked floor, our hot water heater didn't keep up with the demand in the winter, our roof leaked during heavy rainstorms and our space was often standing-room capacity only.

Working with two foundations (the Share Fund and the Arcana Foundation) and an architecture firm (Stoiber & Associates), the plans and the majority of funding for a much-needed Drop-in Center renovation project came together. A capital campaign successfully raised the remaining dollars needed for the project, which included a



A guest cuts the ribbon at GMC's reopening.

major mold remediation. The completed renovation has resulted in expanded square footage, a new, ADA-compliant shower, twice the number of washers and dryers and updated amenities throughout the Center.

Before the doors officially reopened on the morning of March 19, a group of GMC guests, staff and supporters gathered before the Center's entryway. Rev. Sarah Motley of Grace Church said a prayer. GMC's Board President, Jerry Cassidy, said a few words. A GMC guest cut a red ribbon tied over the threshold. And GMC's new Executive Director, Lissa Ramsepaul, held open the door and warmly greeted guests as they entered the newly redesigned space.

We are looking forward to better serving GMC guests in our new and improved Drop-In Center for years to come!

— Carolyn Landes



my eyes this morning. As I reflect on places in which I have lived, worked, visited, or helped create, I am struck by the healing that can happen in the context of community. As a young, social work student, someone once told me “we don’t experience trauma outside of the context of relationships, so why do we think that we can heal from trauma outside of the context of relationships?” This advice stayed with me over the years and created a drive in me to use my relationship with others intentionally – to be mindful of not re-traumatizing others, and to offer whatever stability, kindness, and compassion I am able because we never know what role we may play in helping someone heal. As I look around at all of the little ways that this community serves and ministers to each other, I am reminded that in community, everyone has something to contribute, no matter how great or small. No matter what someone’s strengths or weaknesses, health or infirmities, wealth or poverty, there is always something inside of us that we can offer others. I am also reminded of the healing power of having a safe, friendly environment in which to belong. I am deeply moved by the invitation and welcome I received to join this community and look forward to working with you all to deepen our commitment to each other in service to the GMC community.

— Lissa Ramsepaal

Winter Shelter Ends, One Guest Housed

The 27th winter shelter concluded on April 8 after another successful season that began in early November of last year. Once again, it was the generous hospitality and support of several neighborhood congregations, community groups and individual volunteers in conjunction with GMC staff that helped make its success possible.



Winter Shelter Volunteers on St. Patrick's Day

for a group of individuals experiencing homelessness. Volunteers worked, not just to provide the basics of food and shelter, but to bring hope and spirit to the shelter community. During the holidays, a Girl Scout troop from Holy Trinity Catholic Church sang Christmas Carols. On St. Patrick's Day, GMC supporter Beth Crimmins and her band of volunteers threw a festively themed dinner party. GMC's goal is to provide shelter for shelter residents during the winter months and to assist in moving them toward more permanent housing solutions. One of this year's original shelter participants made an early exit from this year's program because he entered housing, inhabiting his own apartment in Northwest DC! A second shelter resident received a housing voucher and is anticipated to move into a unit by May or June of this year.

— Carolyn Landes

The Other Man in That Joe Biden Photo

It was the photo that went viral within hours of being posted on Facebook last month: former VP Joe Biden’s well-known face captured on a bystander’s cell phone camera as he shared an exchange with a man experiencing homelessness on the steps of a Georgetown movie theater. Within days, the image was shared by media outlets across the globe and the social media sphere went into a frenzy as the picture racked up hundreds of thousands of reactions online.



Joe Biden & Rashid. Photo by Caleb Baca

The stark juxtaposition within the photo -- a man who for 8 years called Number One Observatory Circle home showing compassion toward a man who has no home -- tugged at the heartstrings of many. And while it is a powerful thing for Americans to see elected leaders exhibit traits like kindness, decency and compassion, there is another, perhaps even greater takeaway to the story, if we’ll pause long enough to receive it. Who is the other man in the photo, the one sitting on the stone steps of the theater that chilly evening whose face is almost completely shielded by the hood pulled over his head?

His name is Rashid and he is sometimes a guest at GMC, frequenting the Center for services like showers and laundry. Like Biden, he has also served his country; an Air Force veteran, he traveled the globe during the Vietnam war, drawing maps and bomb plots to support US troops in the heat of battle. “I was honored and proud to serve,” Rashid says of his time in service.

Rashid has experienced homelessness for some time now and when he saw Biden exiting the movie theater last Thursday evening, he asked him for some money so he could buy a sandwich.

Biden obliged -- and then he stayed to talk.

“He didn’t think I recognized him,” Rashid said of the former dignitary. As they spoke, Rashid shared of the struggles he has been experiencing in receiving assistance from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, specifically with procuring a housing voucher that would enable him to receive decent, safe and sanitary housing -- leaving behind a life on the streets.

It was then that Biden went back into the theater for a pen and paper and jotted down a phone number. It was a personal contact who could assist in facilitating help for Rashid. As he handed him the slip of paper, a bystander snapped a photo on his phone's camera -- and the rest, as they say in our digital age, is recent history.

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It's wonderful that a person -- whether they be Joe Biden or Joe Schmoe -- would take the time to help another in need; we all need to do more of that. And it's inspiring to see a public figure displaying compassion and generosity; we also need to see more of that. But what if we forced ourselves to sit with this story a little longer? What if we looked past the famous face and the warm-and-fuzzy feeling we get from seeing the good deed captured on camera and asked ourselves: what happened after the marquee lights went out?

Chronic homelessness is a plague on our modern-day society. In the city of Washington, DC, alone, there are over 7,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given day. Every person has their own story and reason for experiencing homelessness, and no matter what the stories or reasons may be, every person deserves the dignity of a home -- especially those, like Rashid, who have served valiantly to allow the rest of us to enjoy the safety and security of our own homes each day and night.

What will it take for our communities and our governments to stand up and fight valiantly for the most vulnerable among us? What will it take for the rest of us to serve those like Rashid?

If a picture is worth 1,000 words, then this viral photo is an opportunity for a 1,000-word conversation-starter. It's now up to all of us to lean in and join the discussion.

— Carolyn Landes

Bombas Donates 2,000 Socks to GMC



A GU student holds donated socks.

Georgetown Ministry Center has been selected by Georgetown University as the recipient of 2,000 pairs of donated socks for men and women experiencing homelessness in DC from sock company, Bombas! The university and the socially-conscious sock label are seeking to highlight the plight of those experiencing homelessness and support GMC's services through the donation of the specially-engineered

socks designed to specifically meet the needs of people who don't have the luxury of putting on a clean pair of socks every day. An antimicrobial treatment ensures the socks don't need to be washed as often, and reinforced seams and darker colors give them greater durability with less visible wear.

Inspired by a Salvation Army press release quote that said that socks are the most requested clothing item at homeless shelters in the U.S., Bombas' co-founder and GU alum, Randy Goldberg, started Bombas with the goal of donating a pair of socks for every pair sold.

GMC is grateful to Georgetown University and Bombas for their commitment to making an impact on our community!

— Carolyn Landes

Board of Directors

Christ Church, Georgetown - Richard Johnson, John Lange
Compass Pro Bono Volunteers - Richard Lordahl, Jamie Meidhof

Dumbarton United Methodist Church - Jennifer Whatley

Epiphany Roman Catholic Church - Chris Rowe

First Baptist Church, Georgetown - Pam Straugn

Georgetown Lutheran Church - Connie Baker

Georgetown Presbyterian Church - Alex Bullock, Victoria Tigwell

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, Sara Lemke-von Ammon, Dorothy Preston, Carol Cooke, Nancy Taylor Bubes

Officers

President - Jeremiah Cassidy

Vice President - John Wiebenson

Treasurer - John Lange

Secretary - Page Robinson

Staff

Executive Director - Lissa Ramsepaul, MSW, LICSW

Case Manager - Sabrina Burrell, MSW

Program Manager - Ashley Lane, MPH

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)

Goodbye, and Good Luck, Sarah!



Sarah Hartley

After two years at GMC, our Development Manager, Sarah Hartley, will be leaving the organization at the end of this month as she prepares for a move to Colorado! Sarah successfully revamped GMC's development strategy and fundraising initiatives during her tenure, raising record-setting amounts to support GMC's programs.

Having moved to DC from Oklahoma a little over two years ago, Sarah was struck and saddened by the number of men and women she witnessed experiencing homelessness in our nation's capital. She saw the job opportunity at GMC as a way to play a part in serving those individuals. When asked what has been most gratifying about her time working here, she cites two things: witnessing the generosity of GMC's community of donors and seeing the impact their generosity has had on GMC's guests. "Whether someone gives a little or a lot doesn't matter," Sarah says. "Seeing people give what they can has been really inspiring."

Sarah will be sorely missed but we are grateful for her contributions to GMC during her time here. She shares, "the lessons I've learned, professionally, of course, but also what I've learned about other human beings -- resilience, generosity -- that will all stick with me."

Please join us in thanking Sarah for her contributions to GMC and wishing her well with all her future endeavors!

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