

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.

Vol. 17, No. 4, June 2010

Faith in Action:

Friends Respond to Hunger and Homelessness

by Martha Morris

We see them often: people in our communities wearing old clothes not recently washed, carrying bundles of belongings, eyes downcast. We are concerned that they have no home, don't get adequate food and medical care, and feel abandoned by the rest of society. We're not sure how to help, except to donate money to a charity. We feel overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the need.

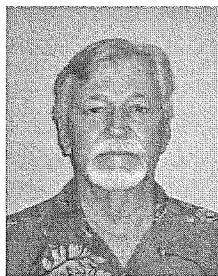
In addition, we worry about all the people who have someplace to sleep at night, but don't have adequate nutrition. Not surprisingly, meetings of all sizes across the country have developed ways to help needy people in their area. This article will introduce some of those meetings and their work, as well as some of the things they have learned.

One factor common to most programs is that the meeting works in conjunction with other religious groups in the community. Feeding the hungry every night may seem impossible, but one

night a month is manageable. And where the meeting does not have facilities to cook for or serve a large group, a neighborhood church may have that capacity. Participants have found that doing useful work together helps to unify the meeting, a 21st century version of Amish barn-raising. Working hand in hand with other groups can also help Quakers to know and relate to people from other religions.

Meet the Authors

Martha Morris practiced law in suburban Philadelphia before moving to central Florida to assist her elderly parents. There she earned a master's degree in mental health counseling and worked as a hospice counselor, from which job she is now retired. Though a member of Winter Park Meeting, once a month she cooks with Orlando Meeting Friends for Fresh Start, the residential program for formerly homeless men run by the local Christian Service Center.



Ed Hotchkiss, an advocate for the homeless for several years, first experienced "an overwhelming presence within, as if I could hear a voice instructing me as to which path I should follow" at Pendle Hill in 2007. Back in St. Petersburg, Ed read of an opening at Pinellas Hope and has been employed there ever since. A member at St. Petersburg MM for five years, Ed believes, "I have been a Quaker at heart for most of my life."

Feeding the Hungry

Tiny Lubbock (TX) Meeting has been preparing dinners for about 100 hungry people once a month for 10 years, according to member Senja Collins. "There are 10 of us: three members, four attenders and our three children!" The meeting began by joining area churches to prepare meals for a food pantry. Some churches left. "At one point, we were the only church group doing it," Senja notes.

Nowadays, after conferring by phone

about the menu, four of the meeting adults cook the **"Mom's Meals"** at home. They load up their cars with giant pans of food, drive to a local church and all 10 Quakers spend about two hours transferring the dinners into individual take-out containers to be picked up by those in need. The 10 eat together that evening.

"We're a small and close-knit meeting," Senja observed. "Mom's Meals are the heart of our meeting," summarizes her husband, meeting clerk Brent Collins.

Participation in **Hope Dining Room, Newark, Delaware**, has allowed Friends there to cooperate with other churches and civic organizations to feed the hungry, observes Shelley Hastings. The various groups take turns preparing lunch each weekday. About four times a year, eight to twelve Quakers from **Newark Friends Meeting** gather to cook and serve lunch at the local Methodist Church.

"We get there at 9:30 a.m. and start cooking. We generally prepare a ground beef and rice casserole and bring homemade cakes. We keep the same menu so that the other groups know what we're serving and the guests don't get meat loaf three days running," says Shelley.

The program has a paid coordinator and also makes a contribution to the church for the extra electricity and trash. The Methodist Church was chosen because it is near a state building offering various services to the needy and because it is on a bus line. Shelley notes the importance of having a location the guests can easily reach.

She explains that the meeting has been participating for most of the program's 25 or so years. "I want to make sure that everybody has enough to eat," Shelley says, "but the Hope Dining Room also deepens our feelings for each other."

Across the continent, **Claremont (California) Monthly Meeting** works with about 10 faith groups, including a synagogue and a Hindu temple, to provide hot meals to the hungry three Sundays a month, according to attender Jan Reed. Although Claremont is an up-scale college town, it has two schools with a number of low-income children, she says. The principals open up the school lunch rooms on Sundays so that 100 guests may eat. Participants from that week's responsible congregation cook at home, each bringing, for example, chicken for 25 in disposable pans.

Jan encourages meetings wishing to assist needy neighbors to be patient. The idea to help originally

came from the local **Interfaith Council**, she says. A year passed between the time of the first discussion and the serving of the first meal. "That first time, we prepared a meal for 100 and not one person came," Jan exclaims. But the group persisted, taking flyers out to mobile home parks and getting help from contact people within the schools. Now the program is well established. Jan has several additional suggestions for starting such a program:

- Consider working with other groups. A side benefit is getting to know wonderful people from the various churches;
- Start small;
- Don't be discouraged if the program takes awhile to get going;
- Have regular debriefing meetings (to analyze how to improve);
- Get good advice from an insider, such as a social worker or a school principal;
- Put together a resource book so that Friends will know where to refer guests for help.

Housing the Homeless

The significant work involved in providing overnight shelter seems, according to the informal and very unscientific research carried out for this article, to result in fewer meetings offering this service than those that offer meals. Those who do offer housing in some way seem to be among the larger meetings. The **15th Street Meeting** in Manhattan has been offering beds to New York's homeless since the early 1980s, according to shelter committee clerk Sylvia Friedman. Meeting members and attenders started by bringing blankets and food to people living in the park across the street. The then-mayor of New York began recruiting churches and synagogues to address the issue of homelessness, and the meeting joined the program.

The city's involvement has changed over the years, says Sylvia. Candidates for shelter are now chosen by social workers at the city's drop-in centers. A dozen, including both men and women, arrive at the meetinghouse by bus from the drop-in center at about 8:30 each evening. Two volunteers, who might be Quakers or others from the community, greet them and offer a substantial evening snack (they will have already eaten an early supper at the drop-in center).

All 14 people, homeless and volunteers, spend the night in the meetinghouse on cots. After a light, early

breakfast, the visitors return by bus to the drop-in center the next morning before 7 a.m. The volunteers then have time to straighten the meetinghouse before leaving for their activities of the day.

Sylvia notes that the drop-in center's involvement is invaluable. Social workers screen candidates so that they arrive at the meetinghouse free from tuberculosis and not under the influence of alcohol, for example. The meeting asks to be sent the same guests night after night when possible.

This shelter is the meeting's major outreach program, Sylvia notes. It gives members, even those who don't serve as volunteers, a sense that the meeting is contributing to the community. And all ages are involved. At Christmas, the First Day School young people make book marks to sell. With the proceeds they buy movie tickets for the homeless guests (a welcome change from practical gifts such as socks and mufflers, though those items are needed, too). All the volunteers, the children and the homeless visitors unite for a Christmas party.

The program allows the meeting to become more deeply involved with other religious groups. Members of a small nearby synagogue act as overnight volunteers, as do Mennonites who worship in the meetinghouse Sunday evenings. Sylvia is proud of the fact that the guests are treated well. When comparing the various overnight locations, the visitors gave 15th Street Meeting top marks. "We run a five-star shelter," she laughed. "I think it's because Quakers recognize divinity in all people."

Chestnut Hill Friends Meeting in Philadelphia is one of the few Quaker congregations to participate in the nationwide **Interfaith Hospitality Network**. That program generally proposes housing small numbers of homeless families in church buildings, the families moving from church to church each week.

"We did house them in the meetinghouse for a number of years," says Chestnut Hill Friend Mickey Abraham. "But we have no showers or laundry facilities, no air conditioning and only one bathroom with hot water. The conditions were not ideal. Now we buddy with other congregations," she notes.

The local IHN program evolved as participants discovered that some churches had much better physical facilities for overnight stays than did others,

so the guests now stay in only one or a few churches.

"The families can stay put for several weeks," reports Mickey. Chestnut Hill Meeting provides volunteers and support services to welcome and feed the families and to stay with them overnight, for one week at a time, at whichever church is physically housing them.

Paid staff at the local IHN (including a director and a social worker) screen applicants. After families are accepted, the staff continues to work with the families to help them overcome obstacles to finding and maintaining more permanent housing. Even after families "graduate" to an independent home, they continue to stay in touch with IHN staff and churches, relying on their support, according to Mickey.

For Pastoral Caregivers

The pastoral caregivers in a meeting may be called upon to sense the meeting's yearning to assist local hungry and homeless people, and to help the meeting find how it is led to respond. Threshing sessions, contacts with other meetings across the country, discussions with other religious and service groups in the community may all be of use in helping the meeting find its way forward. From our Quaker history, we know the power of deeply felt causes undertaken by meetings. We trust that the spirit will guide us to where our gifts will be of the most use.

Often, however, pastoral caregivers can be most useful when one or more passionate members call upon the meeting to join in their chosen service. In these cases, caregivers face a different challenge, needing to encourage the meeting to take its time to discern whether the suggested activity is truly a leading for the entire meeting.

Part of our faith is that we will be highly effective when we act according to our deep leadings, but less persistent and less effective when we take part in work that simply seems worthwhile from an analytical standpoint.

Following a leading will help others and strengthen our meeting; following a merely intellectual decision may become a burden and be abandoned. Using our energies in uninspired ways may also drain us so that we are unable to respond to true leadings.

At times, passionate individual members may

need the loving support of the pastoral caregivers to understand that the meeting, if not led to undertake the project, is rejecting neither project nor proponent.

Meetings often offer financial or spiritual support for the work of individual members, and may wish to hold this work and the Quakers involved in the light of their love. Other individual members may find that they, too, are led to become involved in the project, which also may help the original proponent accept that the meeting as a whole is not led that way.

Finally, pastoral caregivers may be very helpful in pointing out when the fire seems to have gone out of a meeting project. Perhaps the original proponents are no longer involved, fewer volunteers are available to work, meeting finances have changed,

the needs of the greater community are different, or key volunteers may be experiencing “compassion fatigue.” (See the following article and Resources, p.6)

When caregivers notice that a project seems to be lumbering along out of inertia alone, they may call on the meeting to re-examine its leading. Does the meeting wish to recommit itself, to modify the project, or even to lay it down?

Thus, working together on projects we deeply value nourishes the recipients, the workers and the meeting. The loving support and wise discernment of our pastoral caregivers, at all stages of the journey, can help the meeting to thrive and to grow in its work.

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Friends Can Help the Homeless in Many Ways

by Ed Hotchkiss

Homelessness in America is on the rise. In these tough economic times, while many cities and counties have had to cut funding to meet the countless needs of the homeless, organizations and providers need even more resources than before to address the needs of the homeless and the causes of homelessness.

As Quakers, although we may follow many different paths, our common ministry is to walk cheerfully over the earth, answering that of God in every one. When you meet with those who live on the street, you begin to understand their loss of self-respect and to recognize their need to know that others love them and care about what happens to them. You begin to realize the depth of their pain and suffering

People become homeless for a variety of reasons. For many—especially now—it is loss of job. For others it is addictive disorders (alcoholism, drug addictions). Many people on the streets suffer mental illness. Veterans represent approximately 40 percent of homeless men. The number of homeless families with children has risen over the past decade and has accelerated in the current economic decline. (For more general information about homelessness, see Resources, p. 6.)

In this climate, city and county governments

cannot address all the needs of the homeless. This is where the faith communities can step in to help. Friends can help the homeless in many ways. I believe it is our moral obligation to care for these unfortunate ones. When meeting members feel led to this work, they need the love and support of their meeting.

Getting Involved

My meeting, the **St. Petersburg (Florida) Monthly Meeting** is deeply involved with the issue of homelessness. A few meeting members first became active by joining the local **“Food Not Bombs”** organization that was feeding homeless people in a downtown park. During a special plea for help at Christmastime, my wife and I decided we could help, too.

Initially, all monies collected were held by the meeting’s treasurer and given out as needed. As the work went on, our meeting decided to form a homeless committee, which would have its own line item in the meeting’s budget. The committee was to discuss how funds would be spent and bring recommendations to the Meeting for Business. Immediate expenses up to \$200 would not need the meeting’s approval.

These decisions represented an expression of love and compassion and have not engendered any

negative reactions.

The system is simple and has worked well. It brings the entire meeting into the decision process and helps to keep members informed. Many people have seen Quakers in action for the first time through this ministry and some have joined us at Meeting for Worship.

Faith Groups Join Hands

Because the city officials were not amenable to the use of a public park for the feeding project, we were able to move to the grounds of the Universalist United Church of St. Petersburg (UUC) and the joint project grew. Together, Quakers and UUC members currently are providing the homeless with a meal every Friday night of the year at 7 p.m. Food is cooked at members' homes and brought to the event to be set up banquet style. The event always takes place on the church grounds so the homeless know where we are.

Volunteers from both groups work side by side. Members of both faith groups donate all of the food. Any food left over is taken to other soup kitchens in the area. Six picnic tables are available, while some may sit on the grass or curbing. Candles on the tables have a calming effect on many who come to eat.

During the mealtime, some members engage in conversation with our guests. We learn much about their lives and how they became homeless. We also hear of any special needs they might have. These conversations bring us to a deeper understanding of the wide range of causes that lock these persons into their current state of being. Two people from our meeting are members of Celebrate Outreach which offers a Saturday morning breakfast which the meeting also supports.

Other meeting members make up ditty bags (toiletory kits) to pass out to the homeless at mealtimes. These kits might include socks and underwear, much needed by those living on the street. When we have the funds, we also provide bus passes for those who are trying to get back to family. Some fundraising events are collaborative, others are solely generated from our Quaker meeting.

We organized a dinner (light finger foods) to raise money for the homeless fund. We showed the movie, "The Soloist" and even had one of the homeless, a classically trained pianist, play the piano. He really wowed the crowd. Tickets were \$10 and the piano player had a tip jar. He made over \$150 in tips which helped him pay for needed dental work.

The homeless fund event was a rousing success and made over \$600 that night. The only publicity was word of mouth and a small ad in the local newsletter. Other fundraisers have consisted of a car wash and a garage sale. The meeting also has a fund box into which members and visitors can donate if they wish.

Helping without Judging

In working with the homeless, we must remember to do so in a non-judgmental way. We are not capable of deciding who is deserving of our help. Homeless people suffer on a daily basis with street life and the factors that placed them there.

When members of your meeting come across the homeless on the streets, encourage members to reach out. A simple hello from a stranger can brighten the day of a homeless person. Acknowledge the homeless as brothers and sisters of the human race and treat them with respect.

Learn about the many ways you might be able to help through your meeting or through a collaborative

Questions for reflection:

1. How can our meeting determine the extent of hunger and homelessness in our region?
2. How are we called as Friends to care for the homeless and hungry?
3. What is our meeting doing right now in this effort?
4. What more could be done?
5. How will we reach a "sense of the meeting" on this issue?
6. What members of our meeting are especially interested in this work?
7. What role should pastoral care givers play in supporting the spiritual and emotional health of volunteers?
8. What does our meeting have in available resources—commitment, time, money, facilities, and volunteers?
9. With what other meetings or faith groups might our meeting join to share this ministry?

effort among faith and community groups.

When working with the homeless over a long period of time, volunteers may “burn out” or suffer from compassion fatigue, overwhelmed by the problems homeless people endure. Pastoral care givers can serve committed volunteers by recommending a clearness committee to help a member determine if he or she is still being led to this ministry.

The member who is truly called will be refreshed by this concern and may benefit from recommendations about time management, sharing responsibilities or scheduling a break from regular duties.

Resources

Homeless Shelter Directory (Philadelphia area)

<http://www.homelessshelterdirectory.org>

Friends Shelter (Manhattan) <http://www.friendsshelter.org>

<http://www.friendsshelter.org>

National Alliance to End Homelessness <http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/housingfirst>

www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/housingfirst

National Coalition for the Homeless, <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>

www.nationalhomeless.org/

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development, Homeless Assistance

programs <http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/topics/homelessness>

<http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/topics/homelessness>

United States Interagency Council on

Homelessness, <http://www.ich.gov/>

SHORE, a New York state interfaith

organization, <http://www.shelteringthehomeless.org/>

[shelteringthehomeless.org/](http://www.shelteringthehomeless.org/)

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans,

<http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm>

Coates, Robert C., *A Street Is Not A Home:*

Solving America's Homeless Dilemma,

Prometheus, 1990, Philadelphia Yearly

Meeting Library.

Kroloff, Charles, *Fifty-Four Ways You Can Help*

The Homeless, West Orange NJ. Behrman

House. 1993, PYM Library

Compassion fatigue information: www.compassionfatigue.org/

[compassionfatigue.org/](http://www.compassionfatigue.org/)

The pastoral care committee can help in other ways—offering spiritual guidance and counsel, keeping in close touch, inquiring about a caregiver’s own need for rest or extra help. A meeting might appoint “buddies” to check in regularly with those involved with the project.

I work for Catholic Charities as an intake specialist at Pinellas Hope, a homeless camp that accommodates up to 300 people living in tents. Feeling burned out at times (compassion fatigue) goes with the territory.

Being present at Meeting for Worship every week helps me to prepare for the upcoming challenges in each week ahead. I take small breaks during the day to sit in silence so that the Spirit within can help to guide me. I truly feel that this is the work I am led to do.

One of my favorite quotes is from Quaker Elizabeth Watson, who said,

“The only real security in the end is the love we have given and the love we have received. All else can be taken from us. So pour out your love and friendship and do not board it, and don’t delay or hesitate in standing up to be counted with the oppressed.”

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Pastoral Care Newsletter is published quarterly by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and distributed by subscription to meetings and individuals throughout North America and beyond. Editorial Committee: Susan Heath, clerk, Suzanne Day, Martha Morris, Clara Diaz, and Jean-Marie Barch. Editor: Carol J. Suplee. Please do not duplicate without permission. Subscriptions and back issues information: contact Jill Tafoya at (215) 241-7211, email jillt@pym.org or write to PCN, 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102-1479.