

[] Servant's Heart

The newsletter of the Christian Service Center

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A Story of Amazing Grace

By Gwenell Hall

Christian Service Center Case Worker

One day a young man came through our doors who I will never forget... his name is Michael. He came hungry and beaten up, searching for love, peace and acceptance.

Michael was broken on the outside but inside, he possessed an incredible Hope that led him to befriend Mary Ann, a Christian Service Center volunteer.

Michael became a frequent visitor of the Center as he and Mary Ann spent time together sharing their life stories, talking about Jesus and praying. Christ's love has the incredible power to change lives far beyond intellect or human strength. I witnessed this power first hand through Michael's story.

Although Michael's physical body was injured and weak, his mind gained strength and his heart grew encouraged each day. As he overcame

barriers, he grew a great heart of appreciation. Michael wanted to give back to Mary Ann and his friends at the Center so one day he brought fresh flowers for all the women who were volunteering. He began picking up trash around the facility and cleaning the office floors.

This labor of love quickly found the attention of Tommy, a local church custodian, who let Michael sleep in his church's loft during the cold winter nights. You see, Michael was homeless and had no other place to go.

Today Michael is a living example of how grace abounds. He is employed as an assistant custodian, where he can utilize his gift as a jack of all trades and lend a helping hand wherever people need him around the church.

Michael followed the light, though it may have been dim, and found Hope.





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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR...

Over the past few months, I hope you have noticed an exciting and compelling new direction in which the Christian Service Center is heading. This new direction is one that is founded in our faith as much as in our soul... it represents a community where neighbors genuinely care about one another.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" He replied, "Love God with everything you have, and the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself."

But what does loving your neighbor look like? Jesus addressed this question by telling the great parable of the Good Samaritan. It is God's call to serve Him and serve others. We see this call lived out every day at the Center. We see it in the faithful hands that serve our clients in Orlando, Winter Park and the West Orange community.

- ... They serve a meal to someone who is hungry.
- ... They encourage a man trying to get back on his feet.
- ... They help a child finish her homework.
- ... They pack groceries for a family struggling with this economy.

How is God calling your hands to serve? Please take a minute to check out volunteer opportunities on our recently updated website (www.ChristianServiceCenter.org) and join the Christian Service Center as we serve our neighbors in need. Meanwhile, remember the simple yet powerful command that Christ gave our troubled world, "Love God and love others."

Serving together,

Robert F. Stuart

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The Christian Service Center Vision

Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ, the Christian Service Center seeks to mobilize the Central Florida community under one common mission to eradicate poverty through the provision of services and resources that foster hope, well-being and empowerment. The work of the Christian Service Center and those serving on its behalf shall be a living testament to Christ's example – clothed in compassion, humility and servanthood; radiating grace, hope, love and above all, bringing glory to God.



Christian Service Center Serves the **Winter Park** Community

Did you know the Christian Service Center has a Winter Park location?

In 1989 the Winter Park Council of Churches and Synagogues recognized a need for assistance that was not being met in some of the impoverished and low-income pockets of Winter Park and its surrounding communities of Eatonville and Maitland. Families in this area were in need of a place to go for help within close enough proximity to access by way of public transportation or walking. The greatest need in this area was not necessarily for homeless services, but emergency assistance for those living in poverty - those who, due to a life circumstance or crisis, were fighting to stay in their homes, to pay their bills and to put food on the table. This is the precise need that led to the development of the Christian Service Center's Family Emergency Services (FES) program in Downtown Orlando 18 years prior.

When the Christian Service Center was invited to expand its FES services into the Winter Park community to help meet this demand, it was greeted with enthusiasm and integral support from many local churches including those who spearheaded the effort: St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, All Saints Episcopal Church, First United Methodist Church of Winter Park and First Congregational Church of Winter Park.

A shared mission caught spirit and the Center opened its doors to the Winter Park community, offering FES services from a downtown Winter Park bank building.

Over the years the mission of the Christian Service Center in Winter Park has remained steady and continues to gain strength and community support. Last year, over 2,500 people received direct help. FES provides immediate emergency assistance and relief to families and individuals who are faced with an unexpected financial crisis. This assistance takes the form of bill payment, groceries, transportation assistance, program referrals and even clothing vouchers, thanks to a partnership with the Junior League's Bargain Box shop.

Current operations take place from within St. John Lutheran, whose congregation has opened its facility to the Center for the past two years. 2010 will bring yet another historical milestone, as the Winter Park office prepares to transition to a new home at Redeemer Lutheran Church. The Center feels blessed beyond measure to collaborate with our ministry partners and we look forward to discovering how God will continue to work through us as we work together to serve our neighbors in need.



Volunteer Spotlight

Alice McMahon

Alice has been a Winter Park resident for 53 years and a volunteer at the Christian Service Center for the past 11 years. After 30 years of working as a legal administrator and running a political campaign, Alice retired and sought a meaningful way to spend her time. She noticed an ad for the Christian Service Center in her church bulletin at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church.

Today, 11 years later, she remains a faithful volunteer, committing two full days every week to stock the food pantry, pack grocery bags, manage the inventory and prepare shopping lists for local churches. When asked what keeps her coming back, Alice replied, "Serving here is very rewarding. When you carry a bag of groceries out to someone and they burst into tears of gratitude, how can you not come back after that?"

Alice's favorite thing about volunteering at the Christian Service Center is the feeling that she is surrounded by family: the Center's staff, her fellow volunteers and the clients she befriends on a daily basis.

Alice recalls an early memory at the Center that had an impact on her, "Some time ago, a great big guy came in and told me he left his home that morning and didn't have any food in his house. He was out looking for a job all day with no luck. He told me he could not go back home and face his wife without having something positive to bring her. It stunned me to see such a big, tough man who used to be a football player and now he was afraid to face his wife." Alice was able to provide groceries for this man and his family. "Everyone has a story to tell; they are all unique and they all deserve our attention. We might be the only happy loving face someone sees in a day."

Alice recognizes that there are many diverse needs in our community, but to make even the smallest difference – just giving someone the chance to have their story heard – is worth it. "You go home at night knowing you have done something worthwhile."

Thank you, Alice, for your tireless commitment and your servant's heart.

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808 W. Central Blvd. Orlando, FL 32805
www.ChristianServiceCenter.org



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