

## Seeing CHRIST in the CRISIS!

Food Banks! Hungry people in the Ohio Valley-No Way! God has really been trying to open my eyes to the needy this week. On Sunday I signed a volunteer sheet at church to work at the local soup kitchen. A few hours later I made my way to my office and encountered three homeless young men looking for work. It was then that I realized that I did not know the provider for Sunday meals. Then again late Monday evening I found two other homeless persons. Fortunately I was able to raid my refrigerator and cabinets and find them a few snacks and warm cocoa. None of these people were begging for help-they were just in the normal course of their day and mine.

This unsettled me to say the least. I am a former college counselor. I have experience in JTPA. I'm usually pretty well informed about agency resources and local job openings, but this has gotten me thinking. I hate to not have a referral source for people that really want to work. I understand unemployment personally. My own husband became unemployed when my baby was just ten days old and we ended up moving out of state to find work twenty two years ago. Unfortunately this crisis is much more severe than it was years ago.

Over the last few weeks I have been hearing similar stories from other ministries. They have all been getting hit harder than usual. Their pantry supplies are dwindling. Some are being heavily tapped for utility assistance as well. In fact for utility assistance clients often have to go from agency to agency seeking support since bills are only partially covered. Support is often times limited to one time yearly. Sometimes these agencies are hit so hard that their funding is gone in the first few days of each month. (That was even before the current economic crisis)

I was in shock to learn that these homeless guys were looking forward to maybe finding an opening at the Salvation Army for lodging. You would have thought that they wanted to find a night at the Hilton. Sleeping quarters are something often taken for granted. Fortunately, Catholic Charities offers a day sleeping room with recliners for those who were unable to find a good night's sleep the evening before. Other homeless have been known to hang out in libraries and hospital waiting rooms when they must leave the shelters during the day. Sadly many office buildings and restaurants limit the use of their restrooms to paying clients. It is difficult enough when you are poor, but to have to have money to relieve yourself! Even with our challenges, research has confirmed that Wheeling is still known as the "friendly city" for the needy. People come from out of the area for our services. What an opportunity to show the love of Christ.

Romans 8:28 reminds us that all things work together for good to those that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose. This current crisis will provide an excellent way for Christians to show the love of Christ and minister to the needy. It will also provide an avenue to reach past denominational barriers and to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. These pantries and kitchens service hungry needy people-not just people from their specific denominations. It is up to us to reach in and help regardless of our denomination.

Matthew 25:34-46 (Message)

"Then the King will say to those on his right, Enter, you are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in the kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me.

I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,

I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.”

“Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I am telling you the solemn truth: whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

“Then he will turn to the ‘goats,’ the ones on his left, and say, ‘Get out, you worthless goats! You’re good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, Sick and in prison, and you never visited.’”

“Then those ‘goats’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick and in prison and didn’t help?

“He will answer them, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth; Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.

“Then those ‘goats’ will be herded to their eternal doom, but the ‘sheep’ to their eternal reward.”

These teachings remind us that Christ cares about the needy in our communities. He expects us to be his arms and mouth. I encourage you to learn about services in your communities. Maybe there needs to be a source for listings of what your church offers for the needy. Do we know what resources are available for those living outside of Wheeling without resources to come to town? I have an “updated list” of services which is used by professionals in our community and very few churches are listed. That concerns me!!!

I encourage you to prayerfully take a hard look at your communities and to regularly communicate with its ministry leaders. They have great expertise in serving the needy. We have some fantastic resources but they desperately need our help. Does your church need to do a canned food drive weekly? Could your church house individuals in the face of a crisis? Do you need to add a shower etc. to your church basement? Could you donate time to package groceries? Do you have used containers and bags? What else do you have that could be a blessing? Obviously we all have time for the powerful gift of prayer! Do we need to start putting together an all-night coffee house for the homeless to have a place to gather and stay warm late at night? Let them see CHRIST in this crisis