



Good Samaritan Center in Excelsior Springs, Missouri

Hope for Homeless: Good Samaritan Center

by Denise Murrow, PBRS Director and Martha Buckman, Good Samaritan Center Director

As my journey continues with the ministry of Precious Blood Resource Services (PBRS), I realize how important it is for social service agencies to work side by side with each other to ensure that those in need receive optimal services to lead them to independence and don't fall through the cracks. I reflect on Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." I firmly believe collaboration works and territorialism is an attitude of the past. During my extensive networking with many agencies that provide a multitude of services, I have witnessed dedication to the poor and homeless through admirable collaborative efforts. These agencies not only provide services, but also provide heart and compassion to go with it. One of the agencies PBRS has been blessed to collaborate with is the Good Samaritan Center.

The Good Samaritan Center is located in Excelsior Springs in rural Clay and Ray counties, 30 miles northeast of Kansas City, Missouri. My

first experience with Good Samaritan Center was four years ago when I was an abuse and neglect investigator with the Missouri Division of Senior and Disability Services. I had received a hotline call from Excelsior Springs regarding a homeless man who was missing. As I drove to the call, I wondered how I was going to find a homeless man and help him if he didn't want to be found. My first resource was Good Samaritan Center. I was aware they provided advocacy and assistance to those families and individuals in need.

When I arrived at the center I was greeted by Jennifer Chappell, a very concerned and compassionate caseworker. I observed the staff and volunteers to be dedicated to serving the homeless population, which had become a growing concern in the area. Often people don't realize homelessness exists in rural communities. Jennifer was genuinely worried about the missing man. She showed me the facility and the woods behind the Center where the homeless community

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would often sleep. She educated me on the locations in the city that the homeless would congregate. She also had information on his family. With the information provided to me I was able to locate his family and eventually him. The family re-united and agreed he could stay with them as long as he would accept their support and stay on his medication. There are never any guarantees that these agreements are kept, but I knew that the Good Samaritan Center would be there for him if he needed services.

I am now able to collaborate with the Good Samaritan Center through the ministry of Precious Blood Resource Services. PBRS volunteer and Companion Mary George and volunteer Kathy Wilmes represent PBRS in this new collaboration.

Director Martha Buckman tells the story of The Good Samaritan Center as follows.

Good Samaritan Center began as a response from a single congregation, St. Ann Catholic Church in Excelsior Springs, to assist community members in meeting their food, rent, and utility needs.

Founder Fr. Larry Speichinger recognized that the families coming to the rectory door needed more than a handout. His vision was to have a place where people in need could walk into a compassionate, welcoming site that offered a hand up instead of just a handout. In November of 1986, and with the cooperation of the St. Vincent De Paul Society, Good Samaritan Center was able to open their doors to serve the poor. The group incorporated and received nonprofit status in 1989, allowing the entire community to take ownership in the organization. St. Ann Parish still remains a very strong supporter.

The Excelsior Springs community has a rich history of healing mineral waters and served as a hub for clinics with large boarding houses for people to rent when they would come to this town for treatment. When medical science changed and there was a lack of trust in the springs' health benefits, the town was left with an abundance of low rent housing. The number of low-income people drawn to this housing caused many of the problems that follow families who are struggling to survive each day. Thus was the need for helping the poor.

The original location was on Broadway Street in Excelsior Springs in a small store front, which was a perfect location to serve the poor many who have no transportation. Three years later when the center incorporated, a larger building was purchased just one block away. In a few years, a thrift store was opened to provide financial support to for GSC, and also to offer an inexpensive shopping experience in this low-income neighborhood.

In 1996, property was donated and renovated by volunteers to provide a three-unit apartment building for transitional housing directly behind GSC. This remained one of our programs for about 10 years until our organization made the decision to offer more assistance and case management within our emergency assistance program. I served as director of this program for close to 10 years. Walking so closely with families who are trying to overcome huge barriers, I built relationships that continue to this day. Some clients return to visit, full of pride as they share their accomplishments and occasional setbacks. On my wall hangs a print of the Lion and the Lamb given to me by a client as she was leaving the program.

In 2005, the opportunity arose to purchase an old church and education building, also located on Broadway. This allowed Good Samaritan Center to consolidate all of our programs into one location, and to expand programs and life skill classes, as well as to bring in outside services that were difficult for our clients to access.

From the first day, Good Samaritan Center's spiritual guidance to staff and volunteers has been totally focused on how we serve. To this day, I feel Christ's presence in the building as we strive to welcome all who walk through the doors of Good Samaritan Center. I clearly remember Fr. Larry's advice, "Always look for the face of Christ in every person that walks through our doors; no matter how ugly the person may act."

We continue, with two full-time, seven part-time, and close to 350 volunteer staff to fight homelessness and hunger by providing basic life needs and access to life skills. ✠