

ASSOCIATION OF FAITH COMMUNITIES

NEWSLETTER

Voices of our 'Houseless' Neighbors

'Address?' I ask the new client, healthy and robust, red-cheeked, attractive young mother with toddler in her arms; with husband & 3 yr old daughter outside.

"We live in our van. There's really no place to park. We move around a lot."

I could hardly believe her cheerful manner, given the desperate situation.

"Income?"

"Nothing but my husband interviewed yesterday and may be able to start a job tomorrow in Scotts Valley. We're hoping. But then, where do we park? They drive you away."

"I am no longer afraid for my own safety nor hesitant to commit myself to the family of people within the shelter. And I am far less uncomfortable walking through the neighborhoods of each shelter. Maybe our community can make a difference simply by our being here and becoming a part of this." -Jeanie

"It's not a perfect community, but show me one that is. We are part of an organic process and every day brings its challenges. But I know that we can be a working and successful model that other shelters can follow." -Clive



Hungry... for Humanity: Ryan Althaus: "Sweaty Sheep Ministries"

Wow, I thought, taking a deep breath of bbq rich air during my stroll in the harbor. The smell from the grill was intoxicating! In the heart of the vegan capital of Santa Cruz someone was grilling a cow and the aroma was dancing pleasantly from the stern mounted grill of a 40-foot yacht to the musical accompaniment Jimmy Buffett's "*Cheeseburger in Paradise*."

"Man do you have it all figured out," I commented with a twinge of jealousy to the spatula and margarita clad captain, tending the cockpit of the large and luxurious sailboat.

To the passerby he most certainly did! On a sunny 70 degree day, burgers to fill his belly, and a stiff coastal breeze to fill his sails he was bound for a blissful sunset voyage alongside the dolphins; however, his overwrought eyes and hesitant tone told a different story as he muttered:

"Yeah, 'life is good...' I guess."

He didn't have to say another word, I knew far too well how he felt as I piddled around paradise equally alone, preparing to share another beautiful pacific sunset with, well, my dog Chewbacca.

And so we found ourselves standing in a sunny paradise, but dancing with darkness; in the company of a full and sizzling grill, but fighting an insatiable hunger; and listening to festive happy hour hymns of Jimmy Buffett, but humming something more along the lines of Lennon's lonely lyrics of the song "*Nowhere Man*."

*'He Doesn't have a point of view,
Knows not where he's going to,
Isn't he a bit like you and me...'*

We are Hungry. but the question is, "for what?" In reality it'd be hard to starve in Santa Cruz. Amidst so many berry farms, lemon trees, organic fields of all things green, and orchards nearly 40% of our food is thrown away! As a fruit lover, I've been so enthralled with the foods that I can pick from neighbor's trees (with their approval of course) that my skin-tone has taken on a citrus shade.

Work in nonprofit program development has found me in meetings at FACEBOOK and lunches at GOOGLE and the wandering between silicon valley and homeless shelters has revealed an interesting conclusion. The homeless seem to have the advantage. They can't afford "things" (such as 40 foot yachts) to mask their hunger. Without a television it is hard to drown out the voices of their deeper cravings, without a home there is no door to shut out the world, and with no job there is ample free time for self reflection, but our thoughts can be very scary. ...Continued on Page 4

Given the Opportunity to Give!

"I have some new coats," said Nathan McCall of High Street Community Church. "Could you use them?"

"Um, YES!" There are certain things that you never turn down in our

Shelter schedule

Monday: Calvary Episcopal Church & Salvation Army

Tuesday: St John's Episcopal Church & Resurrection Catholic Church

Wednesday: Trinity Presbyterian

Thursday: Shrine of St. Joseph

Friday: First United Methodist Church

Saturday: St Phillips Episcopal Church

Sunday: Peace United Church of Christ

Upcoming Events:

-Open Meeting 1st Thursday of every month, 5pm at Calvary Episcopal Church.

-Yoga with the Homeless at the Homeless Garden Project Farm: Tuesday's 10=2pm open garden volunteering & 2pm Yoga!

Needs:

Volunteers, Socks, Meals, financial support, Pro Bono organizational/marketing/fundraising/etc.

Contact:

Web: www.afcsantacruz.org

Email: scott@afcsantacruz.org

Submit an article, interview, poem or art piece for print in our newsletter! Send inquires to ryan@sweatyshoop.com!

The Association of Faith communities is a volunteer lead network of Santa Cruz Faith Communities and Churches providing a rotating shelter, meals, and community for those struggling with homelessness in our city.

line of work, and coats (new or previously loved) top the list. However, when Nathan pulled up to the Homeless Garden Project (HGP) Farm with a van full of almost 200 beautiful pressed overcoats, things got a little interesting!

Enlisting HGP's homeless trainees to help in unloading, I left to contact a few agencies and find a good home for the coats, only to return to a van overflowing with laughter, excitement, and smiles of trainees who were proudly flaunting their new, very stylish, attire. The coats were beautiful, but the smiles on the faces of individuals, often overlooked by society, but gifted with the opportunity to dress the part of a Facebook Executive, were magnificent!!!

This was fun, but it didn't solve the problem of where to send the excess coats. As it turns out, we didn't need to! Instinctually, the HGP trainees started grabbing up the excess so that they could distribute them to others throughout the community who, like them, deserved a dignifying outfit and smile. Within the week the Garden Project's trainees had found homes for each and every jacket and demonstrated the love and camaraderie of the "house-less" community.

The experience was rich in playfulness as the trainees, who returned to pulling weeds in their prom-worthy attire, brought to light a dire issue... Homelessness is a very serious situation in our city. However, we need not forget that along with shelter and food, we are called to share laughter and joy with our neighbors. By watching the trainees of HGP that day, and listening to their excited stories of distributing the coats throughout the community, it is evident that that in them we have an amazing source of wisdom. It is the prayer of AFC that we build a community that transcends living situation and allows for that wisdom to be shared, love to thrive, and nurture to meet every soul.

Probation Officer "Retires" into Director Role

Debbie Bates retired as a Probation Officer in 2009 and after working a mental health caseload for the last 12 years of her 33 year career. She has always been passionate about working with people, both during her service as a case manager and now as the shelter Director at Santa Cruz Faith Community Shelter.

Taking on the director roll this past year, Debbie's past job experiences are being put to great use as she works to promote the shelters mission to help those in need of transitional housing find shelter, support, and community in Santa Cruz. Debbie helps lead the screening process for the AFC, attends weekly meetings with different housing work groups, and consistently works towards finding new means of creating a safe and welcoming sanctuary from the vulnerabilities of houselessness for families, individuals, and children striving to overcome the barriers of housing in the County.

Debbie alludes to the unique level of engagement the faith community shelter program offers; an "admirable" dynamic that develops between the communities who form relationships built on storytelling, communal meals, and organic conversations with their neighbors. Seeing the solidarity and mutual acceptance of the people who come to the shelter is

a true reward for her.

In years past, many church shelters simply provided day to day shelter, overlooking needs for additional support services that create pathways to longer term housing. Smart Solutions salutes Debbie and the Faith Community Shelter for its embrace of their more comprehensive approach that engages the holistic needs of the homeless community and allows our congregations an opportunity to walk with, not “serve” individuals who happen to have found themselves without a roof.

Faith Communities Build Community -Steve Piech

The Association of Faith Communities (AFC) of Santa Cruz County established the Faith Community Shelters Program in 2012 with board representatives from Calvary Episcopal Church, Trinity Presbyterian Church, The Circle Church, Peace United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church. The shelter program currently provides meals, shelter, and community to 20-23 people each night of the week. Local churches provide an evening meal, often part of an ongoing community meal, and take-out breakfast for the overnight guests.

The mission goes beyond providing overnight shelter, seeking instead to form “communities” of people experiencing homelessness within the program itself; “home” for the houseless. Father Joel Miller, Pastor of Calvary Episcopal Church explains it this way: *“One of the great teachings of faith is the value of ‘gathering together.’ In our shelters, we want to create an atmosphere of coming together for the common good and for the support of the entire group.”*

The provision of safe shelter is a cornerstone of the program; however, the evening meal served provides a demonstration of communion and opportunity to create an even broader community of faith and hope. Mel Nunes, one of three coordinators for the program, believes that a nurturing and supportive community can also open the door for participation by the community at large, and the broader community’s participation is essential to the growth and sustainability of the program.

“Members of the community have been incredibly generous in bringing and serving food for our evening meals,” states Nune. *“But our hope is that people who live in the neighborhoods surrounding each nightly shelter will feel comfortable enough to come by and ‘take a meal’ with our community – actually take the time to sit and talk to the people in our shelter program about the challenges of homelessness. But this is not a one-way conversation. Just as important are the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the neighbors themselves. In this way, we can form the broader community that is the foundation of understanding.”*

The community formed through AFC is truly a “coat of many colors” spanning generations, race, gender, religion, and ethnicity. These diverse members unite through mutual participation in the whole, preparing meals, maintaining parish halls, and sharing the multitude of day-to-day chores.

Ten of these programs could shelter, feed and support as many as 200 currently unsheltered residents in Santa Cruz County; 20 could shelter as many as 400. That is still a long way from the dream of providing shelter for all those who want and need it in our community, but it would be a significant step in that direction. “The people in our shelter program are receiving from us the gift of support and community,” says Pastor Steve Defields-Gambrel . *“But they are also giving us the gift of hope – hope that want and need can be transformed into joy and generosity.... and the hope, perhaps the prayer, that this gathering can truly bring us all together as a community.”*



Homeless Garden Hiring!!! 831-426-3609

Do you know someone in need of support, structure, nutritious meals, and a PAID JOB ALONGSIDE A TEAM OF SOCIAL WORK INTERNS? Individuals struggling with/at risk of homelessness are invited to volunteer and interview for the paid transitional employment program Tues-Fri, 9am-2pm at Natural Bridges farm: Delaware & Schaffer rd.

“Hungry” Continued from Pg. 1:

...In college I took up painting, but an empty wallet called me to recycle canvases. Our painting a fulfilling life requires a clear the canvas, and the less we have to begin with, the easier it is to see the empty spaces.

“There is more than enough free food” said one “trainee” from the Homeless Garden Project. *“Between churches, shelters, and food kitchens you could feast all day long; but each free meal leaves me emptier. Standing in that line is painful because I know that, to the person scooping potatoes, I’m nobody.”*

His words were synonymous with writer Craig Stone, who recollects on his homeless past:

“I wanted to avoid people because the only thing worse than being homeless is people who aren’t knowing that you are. Without the sleeping bag I’m somebody up early in the morning, sitting under a tree. With the sleeping bag I’m nobody up early, sitting under a tree: a slight, but important difference in how I’ll be perceived.”

Hunger doesn't discriminate. The homeless man on the park bench and the wealthy yachtsman in the harbor share the cravings for meaning, purpose, engagement, love... “food” is simply the metaphor, but “communion” is rooted in community. More than anyone else the Prophets knew what it was like to be lonely and we can see why by read through Isaiah’s opening chapter:

“Rebels and sinners” he labels his audience, “you will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish... You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water.”

Those lines aren’t going to make many friends, so today we look at Isaiah’s more pleasant call in chapter 55:

“Ho, All who thirst! Come to the waters! You who have no money, come, buy, eat!”

The command, “Ho,” was actually used during funeral laments to call to the deceased back to life. Thus, “Ho, all who thirst,” is a call to us (you and I) to wake up to life, because though an empty belly is indeed unpleasant, an empty soul is deadly!

“Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and labor for that which does not satisfy?”

We aren’t talking about literal wine and bread, sorry to spoil, this is a foreshadowing of the eternal body and blood of Christ. This passage, often referred to as the “Call to Abundance,” sets the stage for Jesus’ ministry and call in John 10:10, “I came so that they may have life, and have it in abundance.” Isaiah asks a simple, but difficult question. “Why fill ourselves with that which does not serve us?” Food and breath keep us alive, but we hunger for much more.

“Listen carefully to me” the passage continues, Eat what is good, delight yourselves in rich food.”

Isaiah doesn’t merely say “eat what is good,” he calls us to **DELIGHT** in that which is **RICH!** Again we find a parallel to Jesus’ “I came so that they may have life” (life is good), and have it in abundance!” Delight in a rich life. As an Association of Faith Communities we are called to provide a “home” to the houseless, but ‘home’ is much more than a building, so we invite you to help us provide a richer life, a sanctuary of refuge; community; and love to all who find themselves “hungry.” We hope you will embrace our mission and satiate your hunger for fellowship, family and purpose by opening your heart, as we open up the doors of our churches, to those in need. The richest foods are found in community, regardless of our housing situation and we are faithfully called to dine on the abundance of this life alongside our neighbors in need.

Community News:

SPIN uses existing church clothing, food distribution outlets & meal sites to collect and distribute socks...

We have distributed over 20,000+ pairs of new socks & YOU can help double that #... Contact Pat Lorenzo (708-2068).

pat.lorenzo@yahoo.com



Yard or Garden Work?

Hire a
trainee!!!



The
**HOMELESS
GARDEN
PROJECT**

Contact Lindsay at
LindsayA@homelessgardenproject.org

or 831-426-3609

Have a spare room in your house, an open mind & heart, & desire to change a life? We'd love to work with you in finding a matching “houseless” neighbor who will fill your home and soul with gracious joy:
scott@afcsantacruz.org