Your Support Serves Growing Number of Guests in Need of Meals, Bicycles, and Other Assistance

Meals
We served an average of 500 meals a week, for a total of almost 26,000 meals. This represents an increase of almost 10 percent from 2010 and almost 50 percent from 2005. It takes 3+ tons of food each month to serve all these meals. The photo above shows a typical weekly pick-up at Foodlink, the local food bank where we procure most of our food.

Volunteers
Volunteer participation has grown to more than 250 people. Volunteers range in age from 9-80+, and come from all walks of life. Jeanne Rowe explains why she has served for the past 10+ years. “I started out because it seemed like a worthwhile way to give back and to meet new people. ... The best part is waiting on the guests and talking with them. By now, some of them see me as a mother or grandmother figure. I like to kid around with the guests and give them a pat on the back. ... It gives me great pleasure to feel like I’ve touched someone and made their day a little better.”

Bike Ministry
Tony Burgio and his volunteer crew repaired and distributed bikes to 780 people, up from 600 in 2010, to help with their transportation needs. Harder to quantify is the impact of the strong sense of community that develops among bike crew volunteers, many of whom are recovering from long-term substance abuse and working very hard to rebuild productive lives.

Hair Care Ministry
Guests received more than 500 free hair cuts thanks to our hair care professionals led by Cathy Bracht, Owner of Make Waves Salon. From the beginning, Cathy created the hair care ministry to be a self-esteem ministry. “An ICU nurse once told me that she knew a patient would recover if she or he began to care about their appearance. That act of self-care begins a positive upward spiral. ... We have a lot of men who are down and out. If we can help them get cleaned up and they know they look good, we can start that same positive upward spiral. ...”

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A Place of Peace, Patience, Potential
by Carol Trout

We are blessed on Wednesdays here at the Dining & Caring Center to have some very special volunteers from East House, BOCES, Mary Caridi, and Elmwood Transitional Residence, who come and assist with serving lunch. They are people who face both mental and physical challenges. These volunteers come to gain experience in working with others in order to help them prepare for future employment. They work hard and even help to clean up. Our lunch volunteers enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the kitchen and dining room and appreciate the kindness shown by our guests as they distribute the meal.

Just before lunch service begins, our team forms a circle with elbows touching (no holding hands which are gloved and ready for serving the meal) and take a moment to express our gratitude for the food, the hospitality, and the community that is the Dining & Caring Center.

As we formed our circle of gratitude one recent Wednesday, I asked if anyone would like to lead our blessing. A young man called Mike said he would like to do so. Mike has difficulty communicating. He often repeats what is spoken to him. It can be challenging and frustrating for him and others to understand what he is saying.

How could this person lead us in grace? Could we see the look of concern on the face of the teaching assistant who brings Mike that this moment had the potential to cause stress for Mike and make him feel confused and embarrassed that he could not verbalize his thoughts the way he wanted to. All of us in the circle tensed up a bit. We did not want this moment to go badly for him. Mike began to speak and then became still. Rather than someone else offering to take over and lead us in grace, everyone remained quiet and waited patiently for whatever would come. In this atmosphere of gentle encouragement, the words did come forth from Mike. He began again, and we could see the struggle on his face as he paused to gather his thoughts. Again, everyone waited. Slowly, more words came—a beautiful prayer. I looked across the circle at his teaching assistant and there were tears in her eyes, as there were in ours.

In the midst of meetings, action plans, long term goals and objectives, financial balance sheets, and all the other concerns that must be met by any active non-profit organization, it is easy to get caught up in administration and forget the mission. A moment such as this is a gentle, yet powerful, reminder of what we are about. Our doors are open, ready to receive the least, the lost, and the challenged. Poverty can be experienced in many ways, not just economic. Lack of listening, lack of trusting, lack of caring, and lack of identity are all forms of poverty. The Asbury Dining & Center offers encouragement to those that are struggling, a hot meal to those who are hungry, and a warm welcome to those who need some hope. It is a place of peace, of patience, of potential. There is no hurry. We have plenty of time.

On behalf of the Board, staff, and volunteers of the AD&CC, I thank you for your continued, generous support through your volunteer hours given, financial gifts shared, and by telling others about the good work that happens here. We look forward to 2012 knowing that together, we truly can make this world a better place, moment by patient moment. There is always a way.

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Dining Center Guests Give Generously to Sponsor Kenyan Boy

Guest’s Donations Allow Michael to Attend School, a Safe Haven for Him

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Inspired by Asbury First member and Dining Center volunteer Virginia Duffy’s stories of her work with African children, for the past year the Dining Center’s guests have faithfully pooled their meager resources to donate at least $30 a month to sponsor Michael, an 11 year old Kenyan boy.

The sponsorship has impacted both Michael and our guests. After her recent visit to the Chazon Children’s Center, a school for orphans and destitute children in Molo, Kenya, Virginia reported that, “After much turmoil in his life and living on the streets he has finally settled down. During the school break he spent a lot of time at the home of Pastor Lucy and Pastor Samuel, the directors of the Chazon Children’s Center, which has become his haven. He has not been roaming the streets as he has done in the past. During last term he did well with his marks and was number 10 out of 46 in his class!”

For Christmas, the guests collected an additional $150 to buy gifts for Michael, including clothes for him and his siblings, a soccer ball, and even a chicken, whose eggs will provide on-going nutrition for him.

The guests benefit, also. Dining Center Executive Director Michele Cooley explains that, “The powerful connection between the guests and Michael has been a wonderful surprise. Everyone needs to feel that they are contributing to something and this has been such a positive vehicle for our guests to make a difference.”

Holiday Donations at Work

Your Gifts Keep Guests Warm

Many of you responded to the challenge in our last newsletter and made donations of $30 (often to celebrate special people in your lives) so we could buy sleeping bags to distribute to our homeless guests. Below, guests Mike and Eugene proudly display the newly delivered sleeping bags, which have since been given to our guests in greatest need.

At Asbury First United Methodist Church’s Thanksgiving giving worship service many of you donated socks, gloves, hats and personal hygiene items. Thanks to your generosity, we assembled the items into 140 gift bags that we distributed at our annual Christmas dinner, as pictured below.

Thank you for celebrating the recent holiday season by sharing with our guests. All of us appreciate warm, clean socks and snug places to sleep. Our guests, who know so few creature comforts, appreciate them more than most of us will ever realize. So, again, thank you.