

My Personal Ministry

a testimony by Sheila Madden

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Connection >> *the sharing center volunteer*

Medium >> *testimony*

Since working as intake/receptionist at The Christian Sharing Center, there have been many memorable people I have met and unusual events taking place; the first being my first day on 9/11.

One of my biggest apprehensions was working with the homeless. Never having known a homeless person, I only feared the stereotype I had heard about: mentally deranged, violent, criminally inclined. Of course, if my first day was not confusing enough, a few homeless men came in for food. Not only were they warm-hearted, they were veterans from the Vietnam War and were more than ready to serve their country again after listening to the radio reports of the disasters of that day.

Many hurting people have walked through our doors over the years. Here are a few clients I have encountered as memorable:

A few weeks before Christmas, a homeless man came in asking for clothes because cold weather was predicted and he was living in a tent in the woods. After shopping an hour, he was ready to check out with four or five nice sweaters and one very used fleece vest. When I told him he would be needing those sweaters in a few days because it was going to be cold. He smiled and held up the odd-colored fleece vest, saying "this is for me. The sweaters are Christmas presents for my friends."

An elderly man on a low fixed-income needed some clothes. He was given a clothing voucher for our thrift store. When checking out, he said he was very grateful for the help. Packing up his shirts and pants, I saw that the last item was a black suit. I jokingly asked him if he was going dancing tonight in his new suit. Very seriously, he said, "no, I'm saving it for my funeral."

When one of our "regular" homeless men came in on a cold day, I asked where he was staying. He replied that he had made up with his ex-wife and moved back with her, but their apartment had burned down a few days ago. Then he brightened and said excitedly, "I was on TV!" I asked what he would do now, and he replied matter of factly, "I guess I'm homeless again."

A few years ago, a husband, wife and their teenage son were accompanied to The Sharing Center by a minister. They have just arrived from Eastern Europe, spoke no English and had few possessions. The man became a "regular" for food and clothes. Although communication was difficult, his smile and warmth

spoke volumes. Now, he comes only occasionally for some food, and is able to communicate in English the gratefulness that was always in his smile.

Christmas week, a man came in humbly asking for food, but afraid that he wouldn't be given any because he had received food a few times in the past year. When he was assured that he could have food, he broke down and cried. He said The Sharing Center had kept him alive the past year.

Another homeless man that I met on my first day used to come in often, but not for himself. He would bring other homeless people. They live in the woods which they call "Camp David," and there definitely is a fraternity among these men. The man who introduced the others to eh Sharing Center has since died, but his actions have left a mark on my life. Perhaps some homeless people are violent and mentally deranged, but that has not been my experience with the people we serve.

What started out as a volunteer job at The Sharing Center has become a ministry for me. The poor will always be with us, and Jesus will always be with them.

Sheila Madden has been a volunteer Receptionist at The Sharing Center since September 11, 2001

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