

The New Direction for The Loaves and Fishes Project

The Loaves and Fishes Project began working under such name in the Fall of 2005, providing food, toiletries and such to people in need. We were initially open on Wednesdays and Sundays from 1 P.M. until 5 P.M. Sundays were by far the busier days so, because of the lack of volunteers available on Wednesdays, we decided to only be open on Sunday afternoons. The hours soon thereafter were shortened to 1 until 4 because of the need for our volunteers to be able to go to shepherding group and other activities like small groups.

We've known for a while that simply giving people food and other free things by itself was not producing what we were looking for. On the contrary, it was doing, sometimes, more harm than good. We were not necessarily expecting people to "be so grateful they'd want to come to church". We were, however, desiring more of a relationship with the people who were coming to us.

Our food pantry was just one aspect of the Loaves and Fishes Project. What some may not know is that within the sphere of the Project, we have assisted people in finding shelter from domestic violence, had vehicles donated and in turn given them to people in need, located medical services for people who needed them, found adoption services for women who needed to place their child with a two-parent household, found homes for the homeless, jobs for the jobless, furniture for those in need of such, and other household items too varied to keep up with. We continue to do these things for people in need.

For a while Ray Griffin has been the ministry leader for our benevolence aspect. He was a VERY busy man, many times coming to the building to meet prospective recipients several times a day. Some times they would show and many times they were prevented from showing and he would then reschedule the appointment time for another day. We know this is a very mentally and physically "taxing" position.

The Loaves and Fishes Project will now encompass all aspects of benevolence including food, resource services, and financial assistance. Ray Griffin will continue to be the ministry leader and Tanya Leckie will serve alongside with a team of volunteers.

Food given away means very little unless it has a relationship attached to it, so that's where our Downtown family comes into play. As the video clip portrayed on Sunday, October 21, 2007, if we search for people in need, this will be a wonderfully productive ministry.

Let's say you meet somebody at a restaurant. Perhaps she's your hostess. She tells you that she just moved here with her boyfriend but he was violent so she's living at a shelter. Hopefully your antennae will begin "buzzing" like mine did when this happened to me a few months ago. We exchanged phone numbers and (long story short) within 2 weeks, through The Loaves and Fishes Project, we'd supplied her with food, some furniture, dishes, bedding, towels, and money for rent deposit. That's how this is SUPPOSED to go.

Now let's say you meet somebody at work and they say they work part time but really need some extra cash to be able to buy gas to go visit their grandmother. There goes your antennae. Then would be a great time to ask them if they are willing to do some extra work for cash. If so, call one of the Loaves and Fishes team members and ask if there's any jobs available at that time. Perhaps there's a yard that needs mowed or somebody needs help loading hay bales on a trailer or ANYTHING. Through your relationship with them and being able to assist without enabling, you may bring them one step closer to giving glory to God.

Retaining dignity is something we'd like to help people do. Instead of simply giving out money, we'd like to provide jobs, be it long-term or short, so they can earn the funds for what they need. A "job board" type of system is what we have in mind. Now all we need for this are people who need to hire somebody. Continually having jobs available is important to keeping this process working properly.

In the past, people who needed food were sent to the building, mostly on Sundays when we were officially "open". *NOW* we are urging you as our church family to be willing to take the food to those you know that are in need. Call a Loaves and Fishes team member and make plans to pick up the food and supplies you need. The team member will go to the pantry and gather up the items.

We have such a variety of items and it changes so often, it is a challenge (to say the least) to keep up with what we actually have on hand. Loaves and Fishes team members will, ideally, have a grip on what we have to offer. From large appliances like washers and dryers to small ones like microwaves or toaster ovens, bedding, bath linens, furniture like sofas, chairs, therapeutic lift beds, office furniture, televisions, and odd items like books, toys, and rugs. Be willing to call and ask us if we have any items you might want for anybody in need.

As we are beginning to revise this program, one of the first challenges we face is staffing Loaves and Fishes with the proper volunteers. Loaves and Fishes team members will need to be organized, resourceful, and flexible. Organized in the sense that they'll need to keep up with items we have to offer, keep up with jobs that are being offered to people willing to work, and keep up with people in need of specific items or jobs. Resourceful in the sense that they need be ever on the lookout for new items that people might eventually need, jobs listed in places like the newspapers, on storefronts or marquees, or hearing about them by word of mouth, housing available, or anything else we might use to help people. Flexible in the sense that sometimes church family might call and need to pick up food for somebody within a few hours. In that case they need to be willing to go to the building to pack up groceries. In the end, Loaves and Fishes team members will be some of the most servant-hearted people who work behind the scenes.

For those who say, "I don't know any poor people" ...if you want to find some, simply go sit in the church office for a few hours and be willing to talk to somebody who calls to ask for help. Actually, poor people aren't always the only ones in need. Single parents don't always need money, but they would LOVE to have help with everyday tasks the rest of us take for granted. (Ever thought of how difficult it would be to mow your yard and care for a sick child at the same time?) Elderly people don't necessarily need free food ... they'd just like for somebody to pick things up for them while you're running errands. Families don't always need their utility bills paid ... what they'd really like is another family to hang out with who'll be trustworthy, consistent and good role models for their children. These are all areas where our Downtown family really shines!

Immediate needs for the Loaves and Fishes Project are these:

Prayers COVERING this effort!

Loaves and Fishes team members

Patience on behalf of our church family as we struggle to figure out how to do this correctly and "GODLY"

Upcoming needs for the Loaves and Fishes Project are these:

Willingness on behalf of our church family to form relationships with people you meet every day in order to bring Jesus to our community

Willingness on behalf of our church family to search out people who have needs that we might be able to assist with

Willingness on behalf of our church family to provide paying jobs for people who come to us in need of money*

Donations of items like food, appliances, linens, bedding, dishes, furniture ... anything people in need might be able to use (please refrain from dumping your precious garage sale items that did not sell)

As you know, The Loaves and Fishes Project is no longer a food pantry that's open on Sunday afternoons. Loaves and Fishes is now opening in the hearts of our Downtown church family. That means you. Think of it as ...in the past Loaves and Fishes was like a doctor. Downtown members would find somebody in need and send them to "the doctor" on Sundays. Now Loaves and Fishes is simply a medical supply closet and you are all the physicians. Welcome to the supply closet where we can help fill a pantry with food or fill a room with furniture or fill a person with the joy of knowing they have a job to help them supply their family's needs. Go help heal our community with the GOOD NEWS. You may very well be the only person they know that will share it with them.

* When somebody approaches us with financial needs, we will search the job board for an appropriate task. If "member Bob" wants somebody to paint a shed and we send "Charles" (who is needing \$120 for an Entergy bill) out to do it, once Charles finishes painting, the church office contacts Bob to make sure the job was finished properly. Bob says, " Charles finished the paint job. I'll write a check to Downtown church for \$120 and I'll bring it by tomorrow." The church office then writes a check to Entergy for \$120 and presents it to Charles. Everybody is kept on the "up and up".