

The Beacon Newsletter for the winter quarter 2009/2010

Well, 2009 has been a wild ride to say the least. The economy has taken a hit in so many ways and thus, our donations are down considerably. As a member of the Gospel Missions Network, we get monthly updates of what is happening in shelters and missions around the country. Some of our long-standing missions have had to close their doors due to a lack of financial support. This is doubly critical in light of the need we are facing. Even if the economy begins to turn, it's like trying to turn a cruise ship on a dime; it just doesn't happen.

We know that the long-term recovery for the job market lags far behind as business begin to recover and the bleeding of lost jobs begins to slow and perhaps even cease, the creation of jobs will be far down the road.

We have seen an acute acceleration of individuals and families that have hit the wall with no income, along with eviction notices and utility shutoffs. The unemployment numbers the government issues only reflect the numbers of individuals who are currently receiving unemployment benefits. Those who have given up looking for work, have taken reduced hours at their place of employment, or are working part-time are not counted in the number the government releases. Those who follow unemployment trends indicate that the true number of the unemployed is typically 2 Xs the announced unemployment number. That translates into 2900+ individuals in Dekalb County whop are capable of working, but can't find an employer to hire them. When we add the number of children in families to this number, we believe that almost 10,000 of the 42,000 residents of Dekalb County are at risk of insufficient food and safe housing. That's a staggering 25%.

In an article released on November 18, 2009, The Star indicated that the poverty rate for Dekalb County is a little over 10%. That number came from the 2008 statistics. Looking at the free and reduced lunch numbers that are available through the local school district also indicates a doubling of the numbers from last year.

Here at the ministry, we are seeing an increase of 150% in the number of calls that are coming into our office seeking financial help in the areas of rent assistance, utilities, lot rent at mobile home parks, etc. Our funds that are available to help those in need are rapidly shrinking and in one case, have been exhausted.

As Christmas approaches, each of us who follow the One who came on our behalf and for our sakes, we think of the journey to Bethlehem where there was no room in the inn. Mary and Joseph were given shelter in a stable and a manger in a hole cut into the rocky side of a hill. I can tell you that there are many in our midst right now that would consider those accommodations acceptable. This should not be. We have people staying the night in local barns and shelters of any kind. The scary part is that winter has not yet arrived.

Last week I received a call from a mother of two who has been without electricity and water since July. Her landlord has been more than generous and sympathetic to her plight and has allowed her to stay where she is, but that is coming to an end shortly. The local shelters are at this time full and the waiting list is growing. Families are

moving in with friends and relatives. We see this at the food bank, when the household requests go from a family of 4 to a household of 11 or 12.

We realize that we cannot help everyone. The numbers alone are overwhelming the support systems in place to offer assistance. However, we are here to do what we can and with your generosity, we can perhaps help one more family than we currently are able.

In the local community, we are assisting those who otherwise would be uprooted, especially along with their children, forced to move in with friends or relatives. This often results in children changing school districts, or in the case of elementary students, moving to a different school within the district. Without the assistance that your donations provide, many would find themselves literally “out on the street.”

Our current group of residents here at the Long-term Recovery Center are some of the most dedicated individuals who are immersing themselves in the life-skills program, Bible studies, and group classes. These individuals realize the need to learn a new way of dealing with life and the decisions that go along with it. It is our goal to enable these individuals to contribute to the community rather than take from it.

Chris Swanson, our long-time Pastoral Care Coordinator, has been side-lined with surgery from the discovery of cancer of the colon. Her surgery was successful and she is currently recovering. She will be seeing the oncologist soon to make the determination of the next step of her treatment, potentially chemotherapy. Please keep Chris in your prayers for God’s healing and for her family as they deal with this most unfortunate of circumstances.

The food bank, minus the clothing bank, has reopened at 2100 Wayne Street in front of the mobile home park across from Foamex. This was the only space that we could find that met our space requirements and the financial ability to continue operating the food bank here in Auburn. However, our previous home in the Macintosh Bldg. was half of the rent and utilities that we are now forced to pay in the new location. Our current monthly needs are about \$250 higher than our previous costs. Unfortunately, there was not enough room in this location to have the clothing bank, so for now we have shuttered that part of our ministry. There is a movement under foot to build a new food bank in a location here in Auburn, which would allow us to have the food and clothing bank, the Christmas Bureau and our newly developing furniture ministry all under one roof. More about that as those plans develop.

In these tough economic times, Shelter Ministries needs your prayer and financial support more than ever. As the cost of food, natural gas and utilities increase, so do the costs of the Long-term Recovery Center, maintaining the food bank, offering community assistance with financial needs for rent and utilities, and offering families a joy of Christmas through the Christmas Bureau. With your help we hope to house those who would otherwise be sleeping in their cars or on the street along with feeding those who truly do not know where their next meal is coming from. We are especially concerned for the children from these homes. We want to make sure that there is always “room at the inn” for those in need.