

Stewardship in Action at St. Bernard



MINISTRY PROFILE: INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK

As many Christians would agree, the New Year is an opportunity for a new beginning, promise, choice and commitment to serve God. Here at St. Bernard, there are several choices for volunteer services that not only meet the needs of the church, but also the people it serves. One of those choices is becoming a volunteer for the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) ministry. For many years, St. Bernard has been actively involved as one of the church partners of Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN), a non-profit humanitarian organization that provides temporary shelter for Somerset County families who have been displaced or lost their homes.

IHN's primary objective is to break the cycle of homelessness through case management programs that include direct intervention services, physical and emotional health care services, good nutrition education, and good parenting. The key to the program's success is the clients' determination to cooperate with IHN to ensure their way out of the program.

St. Bernard Parish networks with a variety of faith-based organization (churches and temples) and social service organizations in Somerset County to provide one week of meals and temporary shelter for four or five families, several times per year. There are about 70 volunteers at St. Bernard who perform a wide variety of tasks and services. But they can always use more helping hands.

The Stewardship Council recently interviewed some St. Bernard Church parishioners who are active volunteers with IHN and have shared their thoughts about what brought them to volunteer, and about their sense of fulfillment from unselfishly giving their time, talent and treasure.

See their comments on the back page of this newsletter.

IHN PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church
Bridgewater United Methodist Church
Evangel Chapel
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Hillsborough Reformed Church
Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church
Lamington Presbyterian Church
Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church
Middlebush Reformed Church
North Branch Reformed Church
Pluckemin Presbyterian Church
St. Bernard Roman Catholic Church
St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church
St. James Roman Catholic Church
St. Matthias Roman Catholic Church
Temple Beth-El



PERSPECTIVES FROM THOSE WHO VOLUNTEER

Cynthia O' Connor - Overall Coordinator of IHN in St Bernard

How long have you been serving IHN at St. Bernard Church, and what made you decide to serve in this ministry?

I have been serving in the IHN ministry since summer of 2001. I had seen an article in the Church Bulletin from Jane McElroy who was looking for a replacement. When I read the request for a replacement, something resonated within me and I had an "I can do this" moment.

What is your specific assignment as a volunteer?

As the Coordinator of St. Bernard's IHN program, I oversee the scheduling of the various volunteers, either directly or through sub-coordinators that handle specific task areas (meals, transporting the beds & belongings, shopping for supplies, etc.).

How would you describe your experience in serving IHN?

My experience with IHN has been both fulfilling and demanding over the years. My involvement with IHN has been a real eye opener as to the hardships that many in our community face daily. It has also made me all the more aware of how important the formative years are for each of us when we are learning skills from our parents, teachers, friends, and family. For many of the guests that I have met over the years in the IHN program, they did not have the benefit of a family that was helping to form them and teach them during the growing years. Most people do not realize the importance of those life skills and how relevant they are when the child becomes an adult and needs to be making decisions and choices for themselves and maybe for their children.

Tracy Liston – Food Coordinator

How long have you been serving IHN in St. Bernard Church and what made you decide to serve in this ministry?

I have been the Food Coordinator of IHN for our parish for more than 20 years. I started as a cook, then became the Thursday night team leader, and have been the overall food coordinator for about eight years.

What is your specific assignment as a volunteer?

I plan the menu for the entire week. I work with the cooking team leaders to ensure we have nutritious and delicious food every night of the week and that we are serving a varied menu. My goal is to serve healthy food that mirrors a typical family meal of that season.

How would you describe your experience in serving IHN?

I enjoy volunteering in this ministry because I love all things associated with cooking. I'm a foodie at heart. I enjoy cooking, meal planning, and trying to follow the seasons with our menus. And I feel a real sense of giving back to the community. It feels good to know that you helped put a meal together for families in need.

Denise Dibuono – Evening Host

How long have you been serving IHN in St. Bernard Church and what made you decide to serve in this ministry?

I have been with IHN ministry for over 10 years. I chose that ministry because it seemed like a natural extension of my mental health nursing background.

What is your specific assignment as a volunteer?

My specific assignment on the evening rotation is greeting the guests when they arrive at 5 pm, setting up the dinner which is brought by other parishioners and then joining our guests for dinner. During this time, we are able to offer a sense of family in a relaxed setting. Many times we read to the children or play games with them.

How would you describe your experience in serving IHN?

My experience as a volunteer with IHN is mixed...there is a lot of gratification seeing families attaining healthy living circumstances for themselves, but it is also painful watching the tremendous struggles these families experience. These families face tremendous struggles and even the smallest gesture of caring can have positive impacts. Another nice aspect of the work is getting to know the co-worker who is the other helper during the 4 hours of work.



Interested in learning more about the Stewardship Council?

Please contact Mark Dransfield (mlrek@optonline.net or by calling 908-526-6649)