



TRANSFORMING FROM INSIDE OUT

Love In the Name of Christ

VOLUME 26 ISSUE III

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Love INC links people in need to volunteers from a network of area churches. Our mission is to transform lives and communities, In the Name of Christ.

When Paradise Became a Nightmare!



A local pastor contacted Love INC about a family we helped several years ago. The mother and her son (we'll call them Grace and Joe), along with some grandchildren, lived together eking out a meager existence from Grace's social security check and Joe's part-time earnings. They went to food pantries. Churches periodically helped with rent or utilities. But it seemed like Joe was healthy enough to work for the family and make ends meet. "Same old story," thought our staff. But the pastor had another side to the story, a bit of history not remembered. This story illustrates that hidden beneath the beauty and affluence of Albemarle and Charlottesville, one segment of our population has been suffering for many years.

Situated in a delightful part of the county with views of the Blue Ridge, a lovely little parcel yields only a faint buzz of I-64 traffic in the distance. But right next to this piece of Heaven is a Superfund Site, one of the most polluted, most toxic places in America. A Superfund Site is any land in the United States that has been contaminated by hazardous waste and designated by the EPA for massive clean-up. The Greenwood Chemical Company, formerly Cochrille Chemical, was cited in the 1970s for "continuing to operate in a manner demonstrably to the peril of the local community." Few other jobs were available to folks living nearby, and there was even less information about possible risks to the employees. Explosions and fires were not uncommon in those days—at one point, even the owner's clothes had caught fire!—and the company routinely dumped toxic chemicals into local streams and groundwater. Sometimes the creek ran green. Sometimes it ran red.

The pastor who called told us that the family in question was suffering from the effects of the pollution. Grace and Joe had lived there, right next to the plant. The pastor said that the contaminated creek ran through what had once been a summer resort, and then it became his grandparents' property. He said that even the family dog had lost its fur. Not realizing the dangers, the property had been bought by the pastor of Emmanuel Episcopal Church for Grace and Joe's family when their previous place was taken to build I-64.

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Heaven, continued

As Grace watched, four men engulfed in flames ran from the chemical company. She hurried to the property to help and was on the scene even before the first responders. “That plant used to explode all the time,” she said. “You’d see all these silver things in the air.” But this was the big one.

As a result of the Superfund Site, Joe had seizures as a child. Cancer had become rampant in their family. Grace’s parents both died of cancer and her brother had bone cancer. She, her son, and several other unrelated neighbors developed sarcoidosis, an immune system disease causing inflammation in various internal organs, often the lungs. Doctors saved Grace’s life with a lung transplant, but as a result of his disease, Joe could not work fulltime. And he wasn’t able to get disability because, ironically, his illness was not severe enough.

Today the family struggles to make ends meet. Joe wants to work, but he’s frequently too sick. The rent and utilities are higher than they can afford. Unfortunately, subsidized housing is not always available to all who need it. Love INC helps as best it can, but the family still struggles with the weight of its burden.

We at Love INC have learned a lesson here. We are humbled by our initial misgivings about this family. Although we’re pretty good at detective work, we don’t always find out the whole story, the backstory, behind the calls that we get. Grave injustices done years ago can bring about consequences that are quite far reaching. What can be done about this? Should we add more support to our advocacy? We invite your ideas.

A Pastor’s Perspective (Quotation used in Raymond Klein’s recent sermon)

The world needs us, the followers of Jesus, to say “Enough already!” and to work together to be God’s hands and feet.

The world is suffering; therefore, we have work to do. Why us? Because we are the hands and feet of Christ to all people. To all people! To all people, regardless of race, religion, creed, country of origin, socio-economic background, legal status, or gender. We can be the shepherds God speaks about in Jeremiah who will lead others from the darkness of despair into the light of hope. We are the leaders who defend the cause of the poor and relieve the pain of the suffering. Why us? Because God feeds the hungry with our hands, runs to the hurting with our feet, defends the helpless with our bodies, and speaks truth to power with our voices. We are the continuing movement Jesus started. Therefore, let’s get to work.

The world is suffering; therefore we have work to do. How do we start? In Jesus, God has already raised “the righteous descendent” about which the book of Jeremiah speaks. Jesus showed up for the poor and the marginalized. He showed up for the hungry and the sick. He showed up and spoke truth to power and demanded justice. How do we change

the world? By showing up! Show up for the hungry and feed them. Show up for the lonely and visit them. Show up for the bullied and defend them. Show up for change-makers and march with them. Show up for one another because your smile may be the only smile someone gets, your hug may be the only hug someone receives, and your kind word may be the only kind word someone hears. But none of that happens unless you show up. Show up, because there is a world waiting for you.

—Rev. Ed Stallworth, pastor of Inman United Methodist Church, Inman, South Carolina

Footnote: In Romans 12:6-8, God clearly states that He has given us “gifts” and talents “according to the grace given to each of us. Why do you think He gave us those gifts and talents? Jesus commanded us to help the poor and the needy. Can you, will you use your gifts/talents to help those in need? Also, Jesus’ last command was the Great Commission, “Go, make disciples”. Can you, will you use your gifts/talents to bring people in from outside of your walls?

Blessings for the Samaritan

This one was different. Love INC receives about a half dozen “I’m stranded here” telephone calls every month. The staff takes special care with these requests because, while the needs are urgent and frequently valid, the callers can also be opportunists. Sometimes only experience and savvy separate the two.

“Susan” arrived in Charlottesville this summer with her three younger children and her older son, who was excited to be attending an important tech camp at the University of Virginia. She had already enrolled him for the one-week camp and made hotel reservations for the family.

Susan is a disabled veteran who served her country with honor, but she showed up at our door with a too-crazy-to-be-true story that could make most anyone skeptical. But we dug deep and began sifting the wheat from the chaff. As it turns out, her story was true!

Susan had told us she had no gas, no food, no motel, and no money—what she did have was enough worry to send most anyone into a panic. It seems that Susan, being a vet and receiving both retirement and disability funding, had recently changed banks back in North Carolina where she lived. Her Veteran’s Administration check wasn’t being cleared at the new bank, so she found herself penniless in a strange



town far away from home. Upon realization of her dilemma, Susan first contacted First Presbyterian Church, which they referred her to Love INC.

After determining the veracity of her story, our staff met her in a parking lot in town. She was so genuine. She really could have been our daughter. A volunteer gave two small Kroger cards, made sure her car was filled with gas, and bought a good meal for the family. A church even provided one night in a motel (churches almost never do that.) All that got her started. We didn’t have any further contact until the end of the week.

So imagine our surprise then when Susan and her children showed up at Love INC to repay us with \$100 in Kroger gift cards! Then she went to First Presbyterian to thank them with a \$125 Visa gift card! All of us were amazed. She told us she wanted to return the kindness we had shown her and

pass it on to someone else in need. “You didn’t know me” she said, “but you reached out to me anyway.”

Does that sound familiar? Susan’s words are quite reminiscent of Matthew 25: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” This is what we are all called to do, to entertain angels

most any other activity that would take her out in public. This left Ms. Centeno in isolation and depression.

But the Metzgers began visiting her each Tuesday. They got a shopping list, did her shopping, and took her out for a quiet, secluded lunch. With this friendship and caring, Ms. Centeno stopped feeling such loneliness and despair. The couple helped find volunteers to assist with home repairs and computer setup. They found a volunteer to help Ms. Centeno wash her hair (the seizures made it hard for her to do this herself).

Breakfast at the Airport

Reaching out in love to a Love INC client can yield a long-term friendship that extends far beyond any expectations.

In 2000, the Metzgers, from Christ Episcopal Church, began helping a woman we will call Ms. Centeno. Thus began a long, caring relationship. The client had a medical condition in which she was unable to tolerate large crowds of people because she would have debilitating seizures at sudden noises. As a result, she was unable to attend church or

Breakfast, continued

And a youth group was found to assist with the yardwork. Things were going well, but after four years, the Metzgers were called to move to Florida.

Other volunteers stepped in, though, and they continued to love and minister to her. Pam, from Maple Grove Church, provided a lot of help for Ms. Centeno and was very good to her, but she still missed the Metzgers and their friendship. They would talk on the phone from time to time, and Facebook proved to be a good way to keep in touch.

Then, miraculously, UVA physicians found a new medication to help diminish the constant seizures. That meant Ms. Centeno was able to go out in public and socialize. As a result of her newfound freedom, some relatives sent her

money to visit Puerto Rico for the graduation of a beloved nephew.

So that's how we got the title for this story. During her trip, Ms. Centeno and the Metzgers ended up having a wonderful reunion together at an airport in Florida. The layover was several hours, so they spent a long, leisurely breakfast reconnecting and rekindling their friendship. Through the Lord's medical miracle, they were able to enjoy their time in an airport—one of the busiest, noisiest places on Earth. God smiled at the irony.

This is the way Love INC was designed to work: that Love INC gives churches opportunities for Christian service which can build relationships in the Lord that last for eternity.

Love INC needs YOU!

Love INC wishes to reach out to the most needy and vulnerable of this area's poor. But it seems that we end up assisting those in less dire straits, simply because these "low income" but more organized, 'together' folks have the ability to pick up needed items from the donors.

Mr. and Mrs. A., recently granted custody of three grandchildren, got a dining room table and chairs. They were able to go to the donor's home to pick it up. But Ms. G. has been waiting for over a year and a half for a table in her kitchen because she is disabled, without family or supports and she has NO WAY to pick up anything.

In August, Jim and his son-in-law blessed a very needy family with lovely leather sofa set. They

took it to the family themselves! Yes, it is more work. It certainly is easier to call AM-VETS. And not all our donors have that ability to deliver furniture. But our volunteers and donors generally have far more resources than Ms. G. And volunteers with a truck or small trailer could help those who can do little for themselves.

Blessings,



INSERT SIGNATURE

Raymond Klein

Executive Director

LOVE INC OFFICE

Monday through Friday
9 A.M.— 4 P.M.

Telephone Line

Neighbor Help Line: 434-977-7777

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