

FEEDING THE HUNGRY

By Jim Bellis
STAFF WRITER

Greater Faith Community Action Corporation, a ministry of Greater Faith Apostolic Church, knew the homeless population of Springfield needed help - but not just a place to stay a night or to get a meal.

They wanted to meet their spiritual needs too. From that a ministry grew to include two transitional homes and the Master's Table, a soup kitchen/restaurant, located on Central Avenue in Springfield.

"This is a faith-based ministry," said Pastor Robert Gardner, describing the men's home on Batts Boulevard. "It's not just a halfway house. There're rules and principles that you've got to go by. This is a place of spiritual refuge. When you come in you're going to learn spiritual principles."

Jim Campbell, director of the men's house, is a vocal and passionate proponent of the program. "I've never seen anybody with a vision like Robert Gardner," he said. "He is my hero."

Campbell entered the program two months after it started and has been a part of things ever since. He went through the two phases of a year long program designed to turn an individual away from sub-

THE Master's TABLE

"I was hungry and you gave me food." - Matthew 25:35



From child to adult, those hungry are welcomed at the Greater Faith Community home. From 10-11 a.m. the cafeteria operates as a soup kitchen. From 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. the Master's Table is a restaurant with proceeds supporting the soup kitchen. JIM BELLIS/TIMES

stance abuse and towards a productive lifestyle.

"You get a lot of church and a lot of counseling," said Campbell. "I enjoy talking to people and sharing my story. Alcohol will get to anybody. Drugs will get to anybody. There's a lot of white-collar functioning drug addicts."

Campbell said he's glad to be past the substance abuse now, and is the director of the men's home along with working a job in town.

A women's home compliments the men's and is supervised by Toni Davis, herself a graduate of the GFCAC program.

"I'm not going to lie," said Davis,

Several area churches have undertaken to assist in the ministry of GFCAC and the First United Methodist Church in Springfield was one of the first. Gardner said they helped with the purchase of both transitional homes, and funded a full-time program director for a year.

"Because this is such a community problem, I never wanted it to be just one church doing everything," said Gardner. "God has seen our heart in that, because it's happening. We sort of just picked it up and ran with it, but a lot of churches have been in there with us."

Gardner says the needs continue to grow and include foodstuffs, linens, hygiene products, furniture, shoes, clothing, winter coats and blankets, in addition to cash and volunteers.

"Our needs are not just financial," he said. "It's easy just to write a check so that we can go out and get the things we need. We need other things, too."

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No one goes hungry

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Table, is a small restaurant that also serves a soup kitchen serving free meals from 10-11 a.m. every day except Sunday. Restaurant meals are served at other times, with the money earned going towards the soup kitchen ministry.

"If you've got a family of five or six, and are just barely making it," said Campbell, "the six days a week to take your family down and get a good hot meal, that can make or break. That can mean everything."

Gardner said that attendance at the soup kitchen can range from six to more than 30 and that they never know how many to expect. As a result, there is a continual need for help.



Campbell

"We have an ongoing need for volunteers for the soup kitchen. That's an everyday thing. We never know what the crowd will be. We just need an ongoing schedule of volunteers that we can depend on to work so that you've got every day cov-

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The need for volunteers and food is especially acute.

"For the homeless feeding, on Thanksgiving Day," said Gardner, "we need volunteers to take the food out. We need turkey, dressing, all the trimmings. We need as much food donated to us as we can possibly get, because we'll probably pass all of it out."

"Also, as we go out to take these meals, we'd also like to have blanket and pillows to leave as well. For somebody that's homeless and sleeping in an abandoned building, you don't want to give them just food."

Campbell said that for people in his situation, the ministry is literally a lifesaver.

"People like me, we're estranged from families, we have burned so many bridges, and nobody needs us anymore. But they need us, and they accept us. A friend says we're an X-rated church because we're all ex-something."

"I want everybody in this