

December in five words . . .

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services, and individuals called daily to see how they could make this a special season for our Clairvaux Farm family. Heartfelt giving describes the atmosphere we experienced day after day as we neared Christmas Day itself. It was more than amazing...

Faithful... Throughout the years, many kind people have blessed Clairvaux Farm and the Meeting Ground ministries with volunteering, in time, effort, and gifts of money. Friendships have been maintained... and so many

Christmas cards came in daily, thanking all for caring for those without homes. It is this faithfulness that upholds the future hope for our activities. To all of you who participate - in a parade for the awareness of homelessness, in coming to the Farm to help transport residents to appointments, in bringing gifts and giving your time and assistance - thank you, truly. We all thank you so much for faithfully caring for others.

Throughout December, the love of God was truly experienced... Finally, the word 'hopeful' rounds out the

month. For the residents, hope came in various ways. Two families were able to find homes they could look forward to moving in to... several men found jobs to bring in some much needed income... one mother and baby daughter were able to move closer to her job and her family. For staff, some extra hope came along when a volunteer was able to stay longer than expected!

[Special Note: We are always on the lookout for extra hands to help... Please give us a call if you have some hours in the week or month - we can use help with

transportation to and from Elkton, with evening shifts, and with mentoring, teaching, etc. We can always use you!]

As we look forward to the new year, we have hope that new horizons await each of us. May 2005 be a year where we all work together towards helping provide homes for those who are without. May 2005 be a year of hope beyond what we've known... so that we find ourselves at the end, once again, awestruck... grateful... faithful... hopeful... ☺

Community decision making . . .

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But maybe that's not backwards. If every national election was accompanied by a national potluck supper with some prayer we would certainly have better voter participation.

There are twelve of us on this year's board of directors. Our names are listed at the top of page 2 of every Loaves and Fishes. We are volunteers. Like all the other volunteers at Meeting Ground we enjoy our work. We believe in Meeting Ground and its mission and we like to make a difference for others with the contribution of our time, talents and energy.

There is not too much drama to our meetings, which is a good thing. A lot of drama in the administration of our local, state and national governance is usually a sign of problems. We did find ourselves racing against the clock last September, however. We began our evening meeting in the parlor of the Elkton Presbyterian Church without the lights on. But, as the night came upon us, the room grew dim. And none of us could find a light switch. So we held our papers up close and began losing sight of the people seated across the room as we were doing business in the dark. We hurried through and set up a task force to investigate the lighting of future meetings.

Actually vision is a large part of what we concern ourselves with in the governance of Meeting Ground. In his best-selling book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey observes that "all things are created twice". The final creation is the actual construction of something. But before that there is always a first creation in the mind

and imagination of the creators. So his second habit for effectiveness is to "begin with the end in mind". Everything worthwhile begins with a vision.

In 2001 the General Council of Meeting Ground organized a retreat to begin planning for the future. That retreat led to the formation of a long-range planning committee, which worked for a year on a vision for Meeting Ground. Their report led to the formation of a transition task force, which worked for another year on that vision. And that led to hiring Udo Sommerhoff as the Director of Operations. We created that position to relieve Carl Mazza of many of his day-to-day responsibilities in operating our shelters. We asked Carl to be a Director of Missions. That has enabled Carl to begin envisioning a program directed to the children of homeless families. In September he presented a nine-page proposal to the board for a "walking retreat-school" which would bring together youth who have experienced homelessness with youth from our churches who are looking for a new faith experience.

So it may happen, some day, that two twelve-year old girls become friends at a picnic arranged by Meeting Ground: one from a broken family, who has lived in and out of homeless shelters and the other from an up-scale household, who has been sheltered from the hard realities of life. Their friendship, and the support they find in it, will have had its origins in a planning retreat of the General Council back in 2001. That is the power of vision.

As a board of directors we are guided by the vision of Meeting Ground's mission statement, which is printed at the bottom of page 2 of every Loaves and Fishes. Our job is to enable the staff, volunteers and residents of Meeting Ground to accomplish the work described in that statement. We do that in a couple of different ways.

One way is by being a link between the readers of Loaves and Fishes and other friends of Meeting Ground to what goes on each day at Wayfarer's House, Clairvaux Farm and George Porter House. We consider ourselves representatives. That is what we are elected to be. We represent people who are interested in ending homelessness; people who live with "faith, hope and love"; people in Cecil County, in Delaware, and in America who see themselves as a part of a community in which some of us are homeless.

Another way we enable our staff, volunteer and residents to live out the vision of our mission statement is by monitoring the work of Udo Sommerhoff, our Director of Operations, and Carl Mazza, our Director of Missions. Their job descriptions include responsibility for the operation of this ministry. If Udo and Carl do their jobs then there is money in the bank to pay the bills, the heat comes in the winter and the fans turn on in the summer, there is food on the table at meal times, there is a van taking residents to doctors' appointments on Mondays and Thursdays, there is someone in the office to answer the phone, there is an up-to-date web page and homeless persons have a bed to sleep in each night at our

three sites.

The staff, volunteers and residents who make all this happen each day are accountable to our two directors. The directors, Udo and Carl, are accountable to the board.

Of course there is more to governance than just checking in with Udo and Carl once a month. We have created a set of policies which guide them in their work and which guide the organization. We spend time each month reviewing our policies and adjusting them when they need more effectiveness.

An example of that is the "reasonable interpretations" of our "ends policies" that Udo and Carl are working on for the board. At a retreat in October the board of directors studied the mission statement and created a set of ends policies that state how the mission statement will be accomplished. In a sense it is a job description for our directors. But it is more visionary than practical. Udo and Carl are going to write out a reasonable interpretation of each policy that will describe how it will actually look in real life.

Those will be an item for discussion at a future board meeting. It's a way of doing business. We govern through policy-making and by supporting each other in our separate responsibilities. In each meeting we pray. We give God our thanks for the staff, volunteers and residents God has brought to Meeting Ground. And we ask for God's help to do our part in making Meeting Ground the continued success it has been. ☺