



Rick and Traci Harvey with their children.

What does it mean to be God's disciple?

by Jan Spann

Available in most communities these days, food pantries and soup kitchens feel the brunt of the current economic conditions in two critical ways. More people need the services but donations are slower because of tightening budgets. Yet, Christ's message has never been thwarted by human limitations or challenges and indeed seems to beckon even louder when we most wish to resist it.

And so begins the story of how Soul Food Café Ministry came to life.

Rick and Traci Harvey and their seven children returned to Conway in 1994. Traci is a Conway High School graduate and both are graduates of the University of Central Arkansas. The Harveys visited a diversity of local churches, asking their

children to look not at denominational labels but instead focus on the people. That same openness is a key component to the Soul Food Café Ministry. "This ministry provides an opportunity (whether that's churches or organizations like CAPCA or Bethlehem House) to help distribute, feed, clothe and minister to those coming to the mission for assistance," Rick explains.

The Harveys started SFCM in July 2001 through the church where Rick was pastor, and it first began by serving hot meals at a local restaurant. The mission soon added clothing and found a new home, where it remained until the building burned in mid-2006.

A full-time pastor for 10 years, Rick now serves with no salary, as does all the staff. This keeps the annual operating cost at just \$24,000. The mission now uses the Four Winds Church gymnasium on Dave Ward Drive in Conway, graciously offered after the fire.



Eralene Barker volunteers at Soul Food Café.

According to Rick, Conway is a benevolent city. "Faulkner County is amazing," he said. "We have found people and organizations with a heart for God that have helped this ministry thrive in the most impossible circumstances."

Each week, 40 to 60 volunteers help with the Tuesday schedule, which starts with a continental breakfast followed by the first of three prayer services. The office also opens to receive the paperwork for food boxes that are provided later in the day. Clients enjoy a hot lunch, which also includes a worship and praise service. Volunteers include college students, church volunteers and mission clients.

The ministry purchases items from the Arkansas Food Bank for pennies on the dollar, and while these include products welcome on any table, the challenge is that the Dove ice cream bars, chocolate milk and frozen vegetables sit at room temperature and must be quickly sent home with clients. Often, a store's call will require an immediate pick-up, and that meat or produce must be distributed that same day, presenting a challenge for a mission that's only open on Tuesday.

The vision, the really big dream that God has put before this ministry, sits less than a mile from the current location. A 14,400-square-foot building sits ready for completion. The facility will also have a furniture showroom and a clothing display. The warehouse includes a 30-foot-by-30-foot drive-in freezer that can house 40 pallets of frozen foods, such as biscuits, vegetables and meats.

The plan includes offering space to other agencies, so that no food is wasted. Other ideas include Upward Basketball, life skill classes for clients who have just come from prison or have lost their jobs and have no resources.

A main part of the mission is feeding the soul, and the new facility will have a prayer room. Five to 10 Tuesday attendees give their lives to Christ, and the mission helps them find a church home or they continue to attend at the mission.

"Expanding the vision we've been given leads us to offer this space to meet many community needs in addition to what just we provide," Rick says. Other local food pantries could use the space, providing volunteers to staff the operation on days other than the current Tuesday operation.

The mission networks with groups like Toys For Tots, the women's shelter, CAPCA and local food pantries. "We are each the branches of Christ's ministry, and we hope to network our resources with churches and organizations to carry the message."

This past Christmas, 100 families braved icy roads to receive toy bundles.

Erik Leamon and The Ride repaired more than 60 donated bicycles for The Bikes for Tykes program. Bikes can also provide the only means of transportation for some adults.

Rick and Traci hope that college groups, civic organizations, churches and families will consider the "adoption" of one aspect of the vision. That can be donations of goods – such as furniture – as well as construction services – like painting and plumbing – to name just a few.

Local organizations and individuals have already helped complete the exterior, including Vernon Lasker, Hiegel Glass, Ray Nabholz, Coney Garage Doors, A&B Dirt Movers, and Harris Johnson Construction, many of whom donated all labor and materials. It will take \$200,000 to complete the interior, and plans include an industrial kitchen to cook hot meals, showers and a laundry to wash donated clothes and for client use.

These are most welcome and needed gifts, but often the contributions evoke Christ's teachings. On a small fixed income, one client brings several canned goods when she comes, because, she says, so many others need it more.

On Tuesdays at the mission, you'll see babies in infant carriers, toddlers hugged by loving moms, and men and women of various ages gathered in community. After the 2006 fire razed the previous location, Four Winds Church offered its gymnasium so Soul Food never missed a Tuesday to feed the spirit and bellies of its faithful.

When asked how the mission feeds her, one client said, "It lifts my spirits and makes me realize that my fixed income is lots more than many people have. I can pay my rent and receive medical assistance through the Pine Street Clinic, but I need the food to make it through the month."

Overwhelmingly, those who gather on Tuesdays say they've learned what blessings they have. "The mission is a place to get prayer, meet nice people and be greeted at the door," says another client.

Does this attitude of gratitude hold those of us with sufficient homes and filled refrigerators to do more? Can we expand our Christian duty beyond the safety net of our church and step into this community need? Can we make time on our schedules and a few extra dollars in the budget to give as Christ asks?

To learn more, stop by on any Tuesday to see how one couple's response to God's call is transforming lives by providing spiritual nurture and basic necessities.

Volunteer Jackie Piggee lends a helping hand.



Volunteers position a wall for Habitat home. Six local churches have volunteered to help build a home in Conway through Habitat for Humanity.

by Dr. Quentin Washispack

Six churches volunteer to build a home

Six churches are volunteering to together build a home in Conway in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity.

The six churches - Grace United Methodist, First Presbyterian Church, St Peter's Episcopal, New Life Church, Greater Fellowship Christian and Cornerstone Bible Church – have invested over \$3,000 in monetary gifts, plus volunteers and meals.

These churches believe in living out the example of Jesus as he served others. Galatians 5:13 states, "Serve one another in love."

Bobbye Williams and her two children, ages 10 and 22, will live in the house. She had three house plans to choose from and she selected the one with three bedrooms and 1 1/2 baths. It will include a wheelchair ramp and all interior doors will be wide enough for a wheelchair.

Ms. Williams has enjoyed the process of earning her sweat equity hours and is eager to begin building her own home. She feels honored to have been chosen and feels that God has truly blessed her.

The groundbreaking ceremony was scheduled in late February at the site at Mill and Factory streets. The construction schedule includes the roof installed on March 7, the seal and insulation on March 28, the doors and trim on April 4, and the driveway and walks formed on May 11. The sod will be laid on May 24, which will be a youth group day.

In addition to this construction schedule, each of the six churches will provide a breakfast or lunch for the volunteers on a rotating schedule.

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian ministry founded on the conviction that every man, woman and child should have a decent, safe and affordable place to live. Habitat builds with people in need regardless of race or religion. Habitat has built more than 300,000 houses around the world, providing more than 1.5 million people in more than 3,000 communities with shelter.

Habitat was founded in 1976 by Millard Fuller along with his wife, Linda.

Through volunteer labor and donations of money and materials, Habitat builds and rehabilitates simple, decent houses with the help of the homeowner (partner) families. Habitat houses are sold to partner

families at no profit and financed with affordable loans. The homeowners' monthly mortgage payments are used to build more Habitat houses.

Homeowners and volunteers build under trained supervision. Individuals, corporations, faith groups and others provide vital financial support.

If you or your church is interested in getting involved, please email doctorqjw@gmail.com.

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