

Highlights of the 2009 Next Generation CS Fellowship Holiday Volunteer Activities:

The NGCSF is very grateful to all of the volunteers who so unselfishly expressed the spirit of Christ this past holiday season—and embodied Mary Baker Eddy's statement that "**A Christian Scientist is a humanitarian...**" (Manual 46: 26-1). Here are some highlights of the holiday activities:

On Nov. 24 two volunteers (Sandy and Vienna) helped prepare the Thanksgiving meal at *The Bridge*, a homeless drop-in center in downtown St. Louis which serves 3,000 meals a week. During this time the NGCSF's outreach coordinator, Janeen McGee, met with *The Bridge's* volunteer coordinator, Debra Crowe. As they went down to the kitchen to visit with Sandy and Vienna, they came up with the idea of doing a holiday party for the guests on Dec. 23. When they shared the idea with Sandy and Vienna, Vienna immediately became very excited. She had always given holiday parties when she lived in California and called the opportunity to put on this party "an answer to prayer."

On Monday, Nov. 30 a group of 10 went to *The Bridge* to prepare and serve dinner. Three youth were able to participate: Eddie, Devon and Jim. LaVerne and Bob chopped lettuce. Sandy and Janeen chopped cantaloupe. Linda chopped onions—lots of onions. They all noticed the poor quality of the lettuce and cantaloupes, but they cut away to find the good stuff that was fine for eating. They served noodles, beef stew, green beans, salad (with all the dressings combined into one), bread and drinks. Jim and Steve passed out plastic ware and smiles. Eddie was a great help in washing dishes afterward. They were a happy, serving group. Afterward they debriefed and were given a list of items that were needed at the homeless drop-in center.

On Friday Dec. 4 a group of 20 or so got together in Old St. Charles for an "inward nurture" activity. They caroled at the art studio of George Denninger and strolled the festive streets visiting shops and enjoying the company.

Sunday Dec. 13 was the day-long "caroling to seniors" event. The group started at Glenridge where Jayne had organized our activity and pizza. The guests appreciated it, and it was a great way to get to share in fellowship--spreading out to eat pizza and enjoying a bit of conversation. Highlights included trombone accompaniment by Jim Sawyer and a solo of "Silent Night" by gospel singer Selethia Harris. From there they proceeded to Mother of Perpetual Help at the Cardinal Ritter Senior Center on Watson Road where the residents were eagerly awaiting our group. Then, it was on to Peace Haven where the carolers sang in the solarium to an attentive group. All together there were 38 carolers (including 5 under age 8). Two older Sunday School students also participated. There was a trumpet at each location, a piano at the first two locations, and a trombone. The seniors enjoyed the activity and love. As the carolers left the Mother of Perpetual Help location they sang "We Wish you a Merry Christmas" and went around to all the seniors (at least 30 in all), shaking hands and wishing each one a "Merry Christmas!" At first the little ones of the group were shy, but they watched as adults spread cheer. At the last stop, the youngest carolers (ages 7, 4 and 3) waited until the last song was sung, then quickly went into the group of seniors grasping hands and wishing them a "Merry Christmas!" What a wonderful display of love! It was a true testimony to the joy that day.

On Friday Dec. 18 a group of 6 went to the YWCA Head Start warehouse in north St. Louis. They helped decorate and prepare for the 60 families that would come through to select gifts for their children that day. While the volunteers were there, they worked with 6 families and two teachers who selected gifts for children, which included a stuffed animal, books, toys, clothes, stockings, and a goodie for the parents, too. They are also able to take a tour of the facility, which was one of 12 YWCA Head Start locations. The early childhood program at the North County location serves 160 children, all of whom looked like they were loving their surroundings and each other!

Another group of 12 got together on Dec. 19 for dinner, fun and “inward nurture” in the city of St. Charles. It was a great way to get to know each other and truly enjoy the fellowship. The group also shared ideas on how they could help grow that spirit of brotherliness in the CS community.

On Sunday Dec. 20 a group of 6 of volunteers went to *The Women’s Safehouse* where they organized a large donation that came in a few days before. They sorted women’s and children’s coats, clothes, shoes, and household items. Devon took over the shoe organizing, Linda the women’s clothes, Brooke and Sue the children’s clothes, and Mindy and Janeen sorted through bags and boxes. They worked hard in the basement of a facility that houses 55 women and children who seek safety and confidentiality. The staff was inviting and very grateful. They left the donation area of the basement in good shape for staff who needed to come down and quickly select items for families of all sizes with a variety of needs.

On Wednesday Dec. 23 the big Christmas party was held for the everyone at the homeless drop-in center *The Bridge*. Following up on the inspiration from the previous visits to *The Bridge*, volunteers organized a large donation drive of more than 800 items. Bob and LaVerne helped launch this effort by donating 230 pairs of socks decorated with red ribbon and a candy cane. Their enthusiasm was contagious as others pitched in to buy hundreds of pairs of underwear and t-shirts, 200 travel-sized toothpastes, toothbrushes and paste kits, hats, combs, scarves, and mittens. There was great planning and organizing. The kids helped wrap the party favors (kazoos) after Sunday School, and eight people made cookies to share at the party: 24 dozen in total. The Bargmanns donated all the copying of song books (a creative contribution!). The leader of the party was Vienna, who shared her wonderful ideas for party games, song leading, and silliness as well as talent coordination for the culmination of a great time. Jim and three other professional musicians played as a trombone quartet, Tim acted out “The Grinch who Stole Christmas” with his “Whoville” helpers, and he sang a wonderful song. Mitchell, age seven, sang “Little Drummer Boy” to the audience (they loved it), Lindsey, age three, sang “Twinkle, Twinkle, Christmas Star,” Linda read the Christmas story, Dick lead the event with a wonderful prayer which was responded to with “amens” all around, Maryl gave an uplifting inspirational talk, Natalie led the singing (even when the microphone stopped working!), Vienna gave direction and cheered everyone on (even when the microphone stopped working!). Many volunteers sat down with the guests and had wonderful conversations about the lives of those at the drop-in center—their journeys, their faith, what their hopes and dreams were this year, and just some silliness.

One of the greatest joys early in the afternoon was watching more and more volunteers come through the doors with enthusiastic smiles and willing hearts, eager to share of themselves. It was so fun to see those from the Fellowship in this light at a homeless drop-in center. All together there were 42 volunteers who came that day, including eight Sunday School students. Many, many others who couldn't attend baked cookies, contributed donations, and helped with preparation.

During the middle of the four-hour party, Cindy and her son, Chris, were called upon to help interpret for two Spanish-speaking men who came to the drop-in center and had nowhere else to go. Willingly they spent about an hour helping the center's social worker meet the needs of these men and were successful in finding shelter for them when there was no one else around to interpret. Hugs were all around at the end of their time together. Dick had in-depth conversations with three men and spent time better understanding the need for transportation and how we might meet that need through conversation with the center's social worker, Sarah. Karen had a long conversation with one man who celebrated life in a simple way and let us know that he enjoyed the party saying "it helped him get rid of his Grinch-iness." Janeen sat with two wonderful women who called themselves sisters. They would often request Christmas songs, and when Janeen asked one what her favorite was, she said "Little Drummer Boy." When Mitchell took the stage and started, singing, Janeen celebrated with her that he was singing for her!

The group played a wonderful game of blowing up balloons stuffing them into stockings and making them into reindeer antlers. Then those 12 or so wearing the antlers came up on stage and they all sang "Rudolph." **It was the best time, and the group was not sure how it was going to go over, but it did!** They all know to do that one again—and even the "coolest" of the men got up there with antlers and all. The drop-in center can hold 200 guests, and it's common that this number is present for meals and throughout the day. Our NGCSF volunteers estimated that during their four hours of festivities, 150 folks enjoyed the love they shared with them. The volunteers were not shy at all about announcing that we were the Next Generation Christian Science Fellowship, and were warmly received. As they ended the party, *The Bridge* guests stayed around for conversation. One man wanted to talk with Jim and share his love of the trombone, saying he had played for 51 years. Friends rearranged work schedules to join the group. Family members joined together to volunteer.

Saturday Jan. 2 the NGCSF outreach group finished Christmas break off with a Youth fellowship / inward nurture opportunity of laser tag at Chesterfield Sports Fusion. Eager anticipation had been leading up to this event, and everyone had a great time bonding.

The NGCSF eagerly looks forward to our future community outreach events—all opportunities to grow in our Christ-inspired love for our neighbors!