

Beacon of Hope

~News~



guiding people on their journey to wholeness

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MCC – the best kept secret in town!

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MCC believes all people deserve to be treated with compassion and respect. We exist to move people beyond the challenges of poverty through life-affirming programs and supportive services.



*Kathy Baillargeon,
Executive Director*

“Milwaukee Christian Center, are you a church or a school?”

is the question we hear most often from people not aware of who we are and what we do at MCC. It’s been said that MCC is the “the best kept secret in

town”, a situation we want to change. Our organization is so much more to the people living in our immediate community... we have been, and continue to be a beacon of hope to those we serve.

In January, MCC’s board of directors and management staff participated in an all day retreat with Design for Ministry resulting in a strategic plan that prioritizes four strategic arenas we have begun addressing: 1) identity and marketing; 2) staff development and wage ranges; 3) fund development; and 4) master planning and redevelopment of our facilities.

2008 is a time for us to refocus and strengthen our identity to help you and others better understand who we are and what we do. We have revisited our values, vision, and mission and are beginning to create a transformed identity to launch MCC into the future. An initial step in that direction is revamping and renaming our newsletter. Beacon of Hope aptly reflects who we are. We are a beacon of hope for the impoverished in our community, guiding people on a journey to wholeness.

Based on Christian values, MCC has quietly offered life-affirming programs and supportive services to move people beyond the challenges of poverty for the last 87 years. But, we don’t want to be quiet anymore! We have begun work with Blue Star Creative, a Milwaukee-based marketing firm who will guide us through the development of a communications marketing plan.

The challenge we face is communicating a holistic message about who we are because we provide so many vital

The challenge we face is communicating

a holistic message about who we are

because we provide so many vital

programs, services, and activities.

activities. Some know us as a youth program, others as a senior adults program. Clients call our Neighborhood Improvement Project for housing repairs or to buy a new house. The hungry look to our food pantry. The court refers first time offenders to our juvenile

justice program. And, we offer employment opportunities to re-entry offenders and low-income women entering the workforce. MCC also operates out of many different sites on Milwaukee’s near south side, so our work is widely spread throughout the community. When you hear MCC, we want you and our program participants to know us as a synergetic organization; an organization whose total effect is more effective than any individual program.

Please join us in our vision to create a community where suffering is alleviated, the inherent value of each person is cherished, and opportunities abound.

Your Generosity Helps Thousands! Bowl-a-thon 2008

This past January 26th, 28 teams, volunteers, Celebrity Bowlers, and MCC friends braved the snow to participate in MCC's 10th Anniversary Bowl-a-thon fundraiser held at the New Berlin Bowl, New Berlin. With your help, MCC raised \$14,100 in support of programs benefiting our participants' lives!



Mary Jende, Karen Binash (standing), Melanie Poser and Karen Schnurer (L to R) bowled with team spirit, and they have the trophy to prove it!

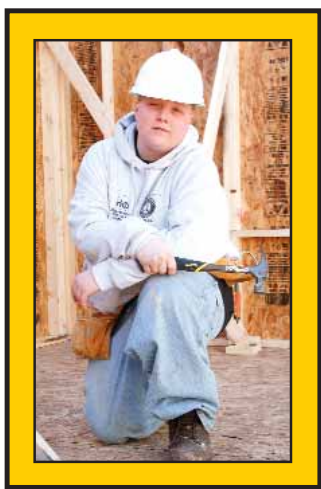
Many thanks go out to our sponsors: *Presenting Sponsor:* Robertson Ryan & Associates; *Participating Lane Sponsors:* Ritz, Holman, Butala, Fine LLP, Rozga Funeral Home, Olympic Wall Systems, Inc., Mortenson Construction, The Scan Group, Inc., and Roberta Oldenburg; and our *Lane Sponsors:* Lincoln State Bank, Weigel, Carlson, Blau & Clemens, S. C., CG Schmidt, Inc., David & Anousone Lettenberger, LaVerne, Shirley and the Fonz, and Mary Binder. Thank you to the many businesses donating items for our silent auction and raffle, to Dave's World ProShop for donating the bowling trophies, and to Dunn's Sporting Goods for the bowl-a-thon T-shirts. And thank you to our bowlers and guests for making this Bowl-a-thon the most successful one yet!

Our Celebrity Bowlers, Lance Allan and Charles Benson, Today's TMJ4, were on hand to greet the bowlers, and to help bowl down the effects of poverty at the day's event. Kathy Baillargeon, MCC Executive Director, and Lance Allan presented 8 trophies at the post-bowling party. The *Eloise Summitt Team Spirit Award* was introduced this year in memory of MCC's former board member, Eloise Summitt. Eloise died this past year, but the enthusiasm, dedication and team spirit she exemplified as a volunteer board member lives on through this award. A panel of "secret judges" evaluated each team during the event with the award being presented to "Girl's Nite Out" team members: Mary Jean Jende, Melanie Poser, Karen Schnurer, and Karen Binash. See you all next year!



Training – The Difference Between Life & Death

Many people have taken emergency response training classes to prepare themselves for unexpected situations, but few have actually had an opportunity to put their training into practice. For Aaron Parent, an MCC Youthbuild/AmeriCorps member, the Community Emergency Response Team Training (CERT) he received last year made the difference between life and death for himself and his housemates.



Aaron Parent's CERT training saved his friend's family.

Aaron lived in a duplex on Milwaukee's South Side that was home to his friend Luis's family of eight and Aaron's three roommates. Aaron spent quite a bit of time with Luis's family in the lower flat lifting weights or working on the computer. Like usual, nothing seemed out of the ordinary on the night of November 6th, 2007 until Luis's mother yelled, FIRE! A fire had broken out in the kitchen pantry, and Luis was sound asleep in the room next to it.

Aaron's first response was to throw water on the fire, but that only made things worse, and the fire spread quickly. Aaron started yelling for Luis to get up, but he didn't respond. By this time the fire was starting to come into the bedroom through the wall and the house was filling with black smoke. Aaron couldn't let Luis die, so he ducked down and ran into the room keeping below the level of smoke to find Luis. By now the fire had spread to the bedroom ceiling and walls and he couldn't exit the room the way he came in. Luis was groggy so he picked him up, broke the bedroom window with his elbow and

tried to throw Luis out the first floor window. Luis finally realized what was going on, so Aaron went out first to pull off the screen and then pulled Luis through the window. Both fell, but Luis hit the cement and hurt his leg in the escape. Luis's mother and the other seven children were able to escape out the front door.

Continued on the back page...

Diversity Builds Community

Diversity is fundamental. That is the un-official motto of a unique partnership at the Milwaukee Christian Center. This year, the MCC has partnered with *Crossing the Stream*, a multicultural youth leadership initiative of Lutheran Campus Ministry in Greater Milwaukee. The name of the program, *Crossing the Stream*, refers to the journey across boundaries toward “Serving, Transforming, Renewing, Equipping, and Affirming Ministry (STREAM).”

“*Crossing the Stream* is about recognizing the gifts in others,” explained Pastor Brad Brown, program director for Lutheran Campus Ministry. “The program is built on the kind of reciprocal partnerships that depend on diversity for success.” By recruiting multicultural, interscholastic teams (2 high school students and 2 university students), the program seeks to create an environment where everyone gives and receives. “We were also interested in expanding beyond our partnerships with local congregations,” continued Pastor Brad. “Social service non-profits connect to the community in different ways than congregations. They have a different rhythm and a different structure. As a MCC board member, I knew that the Milwaukee Christian Center would be a great partner for this program. Because the people who gather at the MCC are such richly blessed individuals, I knew that Marquette students would benefit from receiving those gifts,” shared Pastor Brad.



Kids Reading to Kids program participants, Breona Reasby, Bobby Moore, Mariah Cruz (staff), and Jenny Greer, enjoy a good book.

Kids Reading to Kids

For the past several months, four young adults have been working together to create a new literacy program at MCC called “*Kids Reading to Kids*.” Team members Sarah Kodras and Whitney Wegge (university students) and Crystal Lugo and Mariah Cruz (MCC high school students) have been learning about multicultural leadership by working together to address the critical issue of minimal reading proficiency among low income and disadvantaged children.

Emilio Lopez, MCC Associate Director, explained, “MCC’s *Kids Reading to Kids* program is based on a national program for reading and character development for children in grades 1-4 reading substantially below grade level. Our *Crossing the Stream* team members read to the younger children in our youth program providing a non-threatening environment for the beginning reader. The older students are role models for the younger students and the younger students gain more confidence in themselves as they learn new vocabulary and skills.” Pastor Brad added, “The *Kids Reading to Kids* program that Crystal, Mariah, Sarah, and Whitney have brought to MCC is a great fit for the program. The reading program continues the emphasis on calling forth leadership gifts from young adults. The best way to learn is to teach. And the best way to teach is to learn. That’s the type of reciprocity we are seeking with *Crossing the Stream*.”

As part of the program, the *Crossing the Stream* students travel together on a Cultural Immersion Experience. This year, the group traveled to Puerto Rico from March 13-19. The group stayed at a Lutheran camp in Dorado, about 15 miles from San Juan. Their time was spent exploring various parts of the island learning about history, politics, and the environment.

On her return from Puerto Rico, Mariah Cruz shared this reflection on her experience. “The best part of the trip was bonding with other people while experiencing the culture of Puerto Rico.” She also enjoyed introducing her new friends to the Puerto Rican food that is a part of her family tradition. That is what *Crossing the Stream* is all about—sharing our gifts on our journey together.

The Crossing the Stream program has been made possible by a generous grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.



Fellow travelers, Wade Loofboro, Crystal Lugo, Jesse Stone, Mariah Cruz, Mary Stone, Mykala Eddington, Erika Ruhl, Louise Gebel, Mallory Musolf, and Caitlin Brock, enjoy a Caribbean beach in Puerto Rico.

Faith *in* Action

**"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same."
~ Nelson Mandela, South African statesman**

It's an exciting time for the MCC! For the past few months, board and staff members have been engaged in a time of reflection, dreaming, and discernment to clarify and reaffirm our mission and place in the community. Although our logo is evolving and our newsletter has an updated look, we continue to be a place of compassion and hope.

Eighty-seven years ago, MCC began as an outreach ministry of the American Baptist Church addressing the needs of the poor. Our founders were motivated by the Great Commandment instructing them to "love your neighbor as yourself". Throughout its history, MCC has stayed true to its mission based on life-giving values. Values such as compassion, respect, equity, inclusion, integrity, empowerment, and transformation have guided staff and volunteers over the years to provide consistency and direction to our programs and supportive services. Those values-based programs and services in turn have become a beacon of hope drawing youth and adults alike toward the "light" we share with the community.

But, the most rewarding benefit of our efforts is found in the lives that have been changed as a result of their experience at MCC. For example, over 20 years ago, Bernadette Arellano, a young mother with three children, sought out help from a food pantry during a rough time in her family's life. She began volunteering at the food pantry out of gratitude for the kindness she received. When the MCC food pantry coordinator position became available, Bernadette applied, was hired, and compassionately worked with our food pantry participants for eight years. Last year she completed a bachelor's degree in human services and was promoted to youthbuild coordinator where she works one on one with at-risk young adults as they find new direction for their lives. Bernadette reflected, "Because of my life experience, I can relate to our MCC participants knowing how important it is to treat everyone with respect. Yes, it's important to meet peoples' basic needs, but more importantly we are building a foundation for life, encouraging people to give back to the community."



Bernadette Arellano, Youthbuild Coordinator

As Nelson Mandela stated, through our actions we unconsciously give other people permission to become a source of light for others. I encourage you to help us continue to be a light, a beacon of hope, for the community. Together, we can let our light shine. Please support the Milwaukee Christian Center through a financial donation, in-kind gift, or volunteer service.

Thank You,
Jeri Sende, Development Director

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Volunteer's Voice



Jim Cieslak

*Commodity Box
Distribution Coordinator*

How did you first become involved with MCC? In what capacity?

I grew up in the neighborhood and was working as a loan officer at Firststar Bank. I became a board member about 15 years ago when Ken Smith was the Executive Director. The agency was looking for someone with financial experience to strengthen the board.

What made you return to MCC as a volunteer years later?

I have more free time now that my kids are grown and live out of state. I've redefined my priorities and don't have as many artificial commitments. I had been regularly volunteering with nature groups but it seemed superfluous. I decided to look on the Volunteer Center's website for a food pantry position. MCC was offering an opportunity two mornings per week and it was perfect for me, especially since I was already familiar with the agency.

How else have you interacted with MCC staff and programming recently?

I remember Kathi's program (Kids Place) and I always hope she is appreciated for her efforts. I see parents and grandparents come through the food pantry, but don't interact with kids in there. If there's going to be hope for the community we have to spend time with our children. They are the future and we have to spend time cultivating those seeds.

What inspires you to help others?

I am the oldest of six children and we were brought up to believe that we each have a responsibility to the community. It doesn't take much to see the needs . . . we all have to try to do just a little. We need to change attitudes in order to solve problems. I know I'm helping people every time I'm here.

What causes are you most passionate about?

Milwaukee is struggling. I know I can make a difference here at MCC. What I do will be valued and put to good use, but I keep wondering how much is enough.

How do you find time to volunteer regularly?

I work a second shift job at Columbia St. Mary's from noon to 8:30pm. I decided to put some of my morning time to better use. It is a good step in the direction of making a difference. I only commit to what I am capable of doing and am actually looking into more options for involvement at MCC.

*"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Do you volunteer for any other organizations or events?

I have been on several boards and school advisory groups in the past and I continue to contribute financially to half a dozen causes. I occasionally volunteer at the Wehr Nature Center, mostly monitoring trails and assisting visitors. I don't get involved in too many organizations because I don't want to over commit. I feel guilty when I have to say no to something.

What advice (if any) do you have for potential volunteers?

We need to make time for our community. Career is not everything, but our society has become too busy pursuing our careers and material gains. It's truly sad what we've let Milwaukee become. We make our own choices and need to be committed to them.

It's easy to become a volunteer. I would encourage anyone with a few hours per week to help out where they can. They shouldn't be afraid to take the step; getting involved is worth the momentary risk.

What is your favorite part of volunteering at MCC's EFP?

Making connections with people and interacting with the food pantry clients and staff. An interesting mix of people comes through these doors, such as veterans and Native Americans. The food pantry has really minimized the difficulties people go through to get a box of food. It's become a painless and respectful process.

What is the greatest challenge you face in your EFP volunteer position?

Some food pantry clients feel a sense of entitlement and take our services for granted, but I'd say about 99% of them are grateful. The negative attitudes are hard to overcome, but most people just want someone to listen to them. They are resilient people. The positives definitely outweigh the negatives.

Would you like to share any particularly memorable experiences you've had here at MCC?

The mother of a former mentor of mine came into the food pantry and I was happy to be able to assist her. I realized that helping people comes full circle.

What are your hopes for MCC's future?

Areas of need are expanding in Milwaukee. The universal struggle nonprofits face is remaining true to the mission while being open to new ideas. I hope MCC continues to focus on serving people and meeting basic needs. Resources are out there. The agency has done a wonderful job of staying focused, but should remember that volunteers can offer help and new perspectives.



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 Blue Star Creative

guiding people on their journey to wholeness

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Aaron then ran upstairs to make sure the other three people were out of the house. He kicked down the door and found his best friend’s girlfriend in the apartment packing to go out of town for the weekend. Aaron grabbed her bags and both of them ran down the stairs and out the door. Luckily, someone on the street had seen the fire and had called 911, and the fire department arrived soon after everyone was out of the house.

Aaron shared, “Everything happened so fast. I never thought I’d use the CERT training I went through a few months ago, but the things I learned at the training kicked in....know your surroundings, remain calm, and make sure everyone is accounted for and out of harm’s way. Now I really appreciate the importance of the CERT training...it helped me rescue my friend from the fire.”

Upcoming Events

Youthbuild Open House:
 Thursday, April 10th, 11 am-2 pm

Volunteer Recognition Celebration:
 Monday, April 28th noon

T'ai Chi Classes:
 Tuesdays, 10-11 am, main site gym, everyone welcome!

Summer Youth Program:
 June 23 through August 15 at three sites;

Forest Home Elementary School:
 7 am – 6 pm

Doerfler Elementary School:
 7 am – 6 pm

Kosciuszko Community Center:
 8 am – 5 pm

Cost: \$30 per week. Scholarships and fee reductions will be available based on need. Call MCC (414-645-5350) for further information, or to obtain an application.