

The mission of FISH Hospitality Program is to serve homeless women and families by providing shelter and meals, and such other assistance as we are able, in order to give them a new opportunity to live independently in their communities as respected families and individuals. FHP does assist and enable our guests to obtain housing, jobs, medical services and other assistance to which they are entitled, as far as resources allow. FHP serves people in need without regard to race, religion, national origin or disability.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

June 2 - **FHP Annual Flea Market and Yard Sale** Our Lady of Mount Virgin School 450 Drake Ave., Middlesex NJ 08846 8:30am – 3:00pm
(rain date June 9 from 8:30 am – 3:00pm)
See inside for more details

September 18 – **Board of Directors Meeting**
7:30 pm Wesley United Methodist Church
1500 Plainfield Ave.,
South Plainfield N.J. 07080

October 9 - **Coordinator's Meeting**
Christ United Methodist Church
485 Hoes Lane
Piscataway N.J. 08854

SERVICE STATISTICS

(January 1, 2012 – April 30, 2012)

Persons sheltered - 28
Family units - 13
Number of adults sheltered - 13
Number of children sheltered - 15
Bed nights provided – 1,371

Volunteer View

As we thought about what to write as our volunteer view what immediately came to mind is how the FISH Hospitality weeks bring our church together. The different jobs that are needed in the given week bring out people from our congregation that may be outside of our circle of friends. Working and sharing in this special ministry allows us to see others in a different light, both the guests of FISH Hospitality and the people we may only say "hello" to on a Sunday.

FISH Hospitality gives our church a chance to be the hands and feet of Jesus together under our own roof. The FISH Hospitality week has us working side by side getting to know each other through the work and fellowship. The week also grants us the opportunity to strengthen the friendships that are already in place. I should not label anything that is done during the week as "work" or "jobs:"... our hosting weeks are more like a party and what better way to serve the Lord than with gladness.

Dawn Ramsen
St. Paul's United Church of Christ,
Milltown

BAKERS NEEDED

The ever-popular baked goods table at our annual Yard Sale/Flea Market needs donations of your best baked cookies, cakes, pies or breads. Please call the FISH office (732-968-5957) to let us know what you will bring on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning.

New Jersey Should Put its Affordable Housing Funds to Good Use

Here is an affordable housing controversy in our state that you can pick up the phone and call your legislators and Governor Christie about.

In past years, the state has required each municipality to collect fees from developers to go into a fund for building affordable housing in the municipality. The funds have been a good thing because they provide a resource for building affordable housing without raising taxes. Some municipalities have spent their fund to build housing, some have left most or all of it unspent. By law, if the money isn't spent after four years, it goes to the state--in this case, after July 17. That's fine, say some local leaders; the state needs it. No, it's not fine at all, say others.

The critics argue that if the money ends up in the state's general fund, it will cover state costs and will only help Christie get away with giving a tax break to the wealthy. The Governor's office says, no, the state would spend the money on housing-related costs, such as rental assistance and homelessness prevention. But the critics' response is that it should go to building more affordable homes, because that is the greatest need and that is what the funds were intended for. Some municipalities are rushing to commit the funds by the July deadline; others are demanding an extension.

How much money are we talking about? Statewide, the total of unspent funds is about \$170 million. In Middlesex County, shockingly, \$30.2 million is unspent; in Somerset County, \$17 million, among the highest numbers in the state. Union County has \$1.2 million left.

A possible solution is a proposed bill, the New Jersey Residential Foreclosure Transformation Act, S.1566/A.2168. This bill would allow the unused funds to be used for purchasing foreclosed residential properties and rehabilitating them for low- and moderate-income families. The bill has the support of an unusual coalition of housing advocates and municipal leaders.

Here's what you can do: You can call the Governor's office at 609-292-6000 or write him at the Office of the Governor, PO Box 001, Trenton, NJ 08625. Tell him to be sure that the municipal affordable housing fund money is used to build affordable housing and for no other purpose. Remember, even a very short, handwritten note is useful and gets counted as voter reaction. Or you can call your local library to ask for the contact information for your legislators in Trenton and then let them know that you support the NJ Residential Foreclosure Transformation Act.

Please call or write. Sometimes it doesn't take much time to make a difference.

Wish List

NEW pillows
body wash - body lotion - baby wipes
grocery store gift cards

You may leave these items at the FISH Office or any participating Congregation.

FISH HOSPITALITY PROGRAM, INC. YARD SALE / FLEA MARKET

**Saturday June 2 at
Our Lady of Mount Virgin
R. C. Church - School Yard
450 Drake Ave, Middlesex, N.J. 08846
8:30am until 3:00pm
(rain date Saturday June 9)**

CALLING ALL VENDORS AND VOLUNTEERS

**Table space is \$20 each, Van space
\$25.00 each
(Vendors arrive at 7:45am)
Donations for the FHP tables can be
delivered to
the school on Friday, June 1, 4:00pm to
6:30pm
Volunteers are needed to set up,
clean up,
and sell items at FHP tables.**

**Please call the FHP office
(732-968-5957)
to tell us
how YOU will help in this fund raising
event.**

YOU SAVED US!!!

It's not something you dream of as a child. And it's probably not something on your agenda as you study at a well known university. Homelessness. We all hear the statistics. It's just "out there," not here. Not me, not you. Well, one day all that changed. Single motherhood is never easy. It's always a struggle. Most people have their families. Us ? Not so much.

I was two years into single motherhood when I hit bottom. Nobody cared. Oh, they'd act like they did. I think some did a little. Chalk it up to ignorance. They'd ask, "How are you doing? How's the baby?" But they wanted me to say fine, so I said, "Fine." I'm sure some cared a little, but not enough to help, so I didn't usually ask. I know they didn't because when I did ask people disappeared, went dark, whatever you want to call it. No one cared enough to help to the extent we needed. So, I stopped hoping they would. While my friends had empty guests' rooms or at least empty couches, I faced homelessness alone. Then one day I went to the county's Social Service office and spent the day trying to get some shelter. They kept me there until after hours, just waiting around with my baby. Finally I was seen, and well, perhaps this lady hadn't taken this job because she cared about people because instead of helping me get housing she threatened to call child protective services since I had a minor and nowhere to go. That night we stayed at friends for the night - the only friend who offered her couch. Fast forward to the next afternoon at the Board of Social Services. I sat once again in a different office where a sweet lady made a few phone calls to try to get housing for us. Somebody answered - FISH Hospitality Program. I had an appointment the next morning with Susan. She accepted me into the program. So I packed our things into the program's van and off we went. Somebody cared.

A few days in I would learn that while there were fewer than a dozen of us, people were calling everyday, looking, hoping for shelter. I was overwhelmed that God would have put it on Susan's heart to accept me and my little one in while others had to be reluctantly turned away due to the program's capacity. I was so touched and grateful. It was so refreshing to feel God caring for us and healing my heart.

That night we slept in a Presbyterian church in Westfield. People came and fed us and hung out with us and gave us stuff just because they cared. It was so strange. Why they cared I couldn't figure out. I wasn't sure which was more odd, for a stranger to care or for a friend not to. Still I saw Jesus so clearly in them. No words can describe how it felt to be accepted and cared for while most of the world walked by on the other side of the street. It was good to be on this side.

I truly believe in God and in the love He puts on our hearts. Still, I think most people fail to realize how tangible love needs to be. When Jesus came to earth, when He died,

when He bled his life away. He showed us the true kind of love: sacrificial love, a love that gives, not a love that gets. A love that gives not to get back. A love that gives without respect to who the recipient may be. We are to lay down our lives for each other. This is a nearly forgotten virtue.

FISH Hospitality was the first fully dedicated program to this sort of mission that I have ever personally encountered. People's needs are so real and so big. I admit I was ashamed of being in a needy place and would often pretend things were ok. But when I did speak up most people would say they couldn't help but they would pray for me. I got so tired of hearing that people say they'd pray for me. It really started to sound more like, "I don't care enough to do anything but let me sound spiritual, and if you're lucky, I'll mention you to God." FISH Hospitality isn't like that. FISH Hospitality meets needs. Real needs, Big needs. Needs that no one else is brave enough to commit to meeting. FISH gives you shelter, clothing, food, necessities, counseling, and most of all, love. Furthermore FISH welcomes you into it's family forever. Residents and "graduates" of FISH are invited to an annual Christmas banquet that ends with sacks of gifts being given to every child.

If there is one place, one organization, one experience in my life that I've felt most tangibly the real sacrificial love of my savior Jesus Christ, it is FISH Hospitality Program.

Thank you for changing our lives, my own and my daughter's. Thank you for giving us a chance at succeeding in life. Thank you for giving us hope and a chance to regain sanity and strength. Thank you for being there when no one else was. Thank you for being the reason I didn't give up. You saved us, FISH Hospitality, and no matter where life takes us, we will never forget you.

With Love,
Wendy and Bella

Update: Just over the horizon the Lord had many sweet blessings for my little girl and myself. We now have a car, a two bedroom, two bathroom townhouse in a beautiful neighborhood in Charlotte, North Carolina, and even a family dog. I have my dream job. My little girl finally has her own room that I've been dreaming of since before she was born. I trust that the Lord has more good waiting for us. And I trust that He has great things for FISH Hospitality residents now and in the future. For those reading this who are now in the program, take all you can from your time there. You will learn so much if you are willing to. Most of all, put your trust in the Lord. Without Him placing us in FISH I might have given up. Very few people know that despite my faith I was shaken by circumstances and had become both depressed and suicidal due to lack of support and despair. FISH Hospitality changed everything for me, and now I can look back and say that I have "tasted and seen that the Lord is good, blessed are those who put their trust in Him." Psalm 34:8

JUNE 2012

FISH Hospitality Program, Inc.

A tri-county program for homeless women and families serving Middlesex, Union and Somerset Counties in New Jersey

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Union County: PO Box 5440
Plainfield, NJ 07061
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Piscataway, NJ
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e-mail: fishhospsw@aol.com
web site: www.fishhospitality.com

Board of Directors

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	William Schultz

Exec. Director: Susan E. Baybutt, MSW, LSW,
C-ASWCM

Thank you to **VERSATILE printing applications** of Bound Brook, NJ for their continued support of FHP by donating their services to print this newsletter.

PARTICIPATING CONGREGATIONS

Host Congregations (night and/or day):

Bound Brook Presbyterian Church - n
Christ United Methodist Church, Piscataway - n
First Baptist, Sewaren - n
First Presbyterian, Avenel - n
First Presbyterian, Dunellen - n
Friends Quaker Meeting House, Plainfield – n
Middlesex Bible Chapel – d
New Beginnings Church of the Nazarene, Edison- n
Rose of Sharon Community Church, Plainfield – n & d
Second Reformed Church, New Brunswick – n
St John the Evangelist R. C. Church, Dunellen - d
St Paul's United Church of Christ, Milltown –n
The Presbyterian Church in Westfield - n
Trinity Episcopal, Woodbridge – n
Trinity Presbyterian Church, East Brunswick - n
Wesley United Methodist Church, S. Plainfield - d
Woodbridge United Methodist Church - n

Buddy Congregations:

New Dover United Methodist Church
St Cecelia's R.C. Church, Iselin
St James R.C. Church, Woodbridge

Support Congregations:

Grace Alliance, Piscataway
Our Lady of Fatima R.C. Church, Piscataway
Our Lady of Mount Virgin R.C. Church, Middlesex
Pilgrim Covenant, South Plainfield
St Francis Cabrini R.C., Piscataway
St Luke's R.C. Church, North Plainfield
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Bound Brook
The Rescue House of Prayer, S. Plainfield
Trinity Reformed Church, N. Plainfield

Affiliate of Family Promise
Affiliate of FISH, Inc. Dunellen, NJ
Member of New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless

A United Way Agency