

New Perspectives on 5th Street

July 14, 2011

“When two or three come together...”

Matthew 18:20

Dear Friends,

Looking out from the threshold of *The Place of Refuge* today, it is a marvel now to see a completely renovated 5th Street. From our perspective above the newly laid sidewalks, we look out from a brand new handicapped ramp. The construction of this ramp was a real challenge for us, and although it was just a small piece of the story of 5th Street this year, what it represents is very significant. And even still, I must say, it's more than this.



As I reflect on the project, start-to-finish, it's not difficult to see God's hand in it all—from the planning phase to the applications. Gathering the input of so many generous volunteers. Waiting (and waiting!) at Licenses & Inspections. Rejections. Approvals. The variance. Bryan Dickey's testimony—on short notice—in Harrisburg before the Accessibility Advisory Board, a board made up of some 20 citizens, each with some kind of physical disability. Looking back on the whole process, we can see that in His time all things are done.

The builder's work is about so much more though, more than just the newly hardened concrete surface, new railings and new curbs. To watch the process is to see the old curbs, old railings and the rubble—to hear the jack hammers and saws, to see the dirt beneath—to taste the dust.

It is no easy task, this work that has been set before us. We offer help and hope in Christ's name, to people who live difficult lives, often in the midst of dust and rubble.

Your support has made this possible.

What happens when the ground falls out from under a human life – imagine a life stricken by childhood diabetes, someone twice orphaned, first by a mother's sudden death and again in young adulthood when a caregiver suddenly died, then later in adulthood she develops an incurable chronic illness. What happens is devastating! Imagine then, the instability of moving from place to place through most of life. Then, just when you think you've found a home, you are told, *you must leave – you are no longer welcome here.*

This is the story of our client Jocelyn (not her real name), who has been coming to see me for counseling for about a year now. I got a phone message from her late one Friday and sensed that she was in real need. So I called her to be sure that we talked before the weekend began. She said, “I'm out in the street again.....and I'm on my way to see if I can find a shelter.” “Can you call your pastor?” I asked. “You cannot be out in the street by yourself. You are in a fellowship in your church. Someone

will open their door for you,” I said. She asked, and one of the leaders let her stay for one night, but the next day, off she went to the shelter.

We met the following Monday, and she had a smile on her face. “Are you alright?” I asked. She answered:

“Yes. One of my pastors prayed for me before I went out, and we both agreed that we had to believe God’s promises. The first thing I came across at the shelter was a letter hung on a wall there. It said: *If you remember the wrong done to you, and you add all the negative memories to that, you would dig a grave for yourself. But if you forgive those who have hurt you, you will climb a ladder that will bring you above your circumstances.* I choose to follow the light and the forgiveness that is found in my tradition of faith. I have always felt forgiveness is important. But up to this point, I would go to the person and tell them, yes, I forgive you, but then I would do everything I could to avoid that person. This time, however, I was awakened, and I realized that forgiveness is more than what we say in words. Forgiveness reaches out to the person who has wronged you, and says to them: *I love you.* Forgiveness does not hide from pain, but it seeks to embrace the other, knowing full-well that this person can fail you again. You can say I had an epiphany.

The world talks about the hurts, about the wrongs others do, but I realized there are those people who are always worse off than I am. In this shelter, I saw many women and their children with deep hurts. Their worlds are full of chaos. And many of them have been hurt in the most profound ways. But for me, ***I know that I have hope.***

How was I to respond to these women and especially to their little children? I prayed and took out a little jar of oil, and during the time that many of them slept, I went from bed to bed anointing their beds and asking my God to give them hope.”

When the foundation of our lives seems to rupture, will we choose to climb the ladder of hope, or will we dig our grave? You decide. I know that Jocelyn will do all she can to climb.

Our clients need our clinical counseling expertise. But it’s the faith element in what we offer them that gives them resiliency and recovery.

Only with your support can we continue this work!!

Strength and Purpose

Growing our Services

- ❑ I am so pleased to report that **we are growing!!**
- ❑ On average, we are now serving **over 50 individuals and families each month** with **over 100 direct appointments!**
- ❑ With the energy we are putting into our services, we are now covering, on average, between 55% and 60% of our monthly expenses. And this less than 2 years out from finally being fully credentialed with CBH in October 2009!!

- ❑ Every month that goes by, we are getting better and better at this work. Bryan Dickey has done a great job recently developing new systems to enhance our abilities know and understand the most prevalent diagnoses of our target population—leveraging the data we are already working with. This will serve in a multi-faceted way to improve our abilities to report to foundations and our ability to identify potential new programs that will mesh well with our current energies.
- ❑ With the outstanding support of Michelle Bonilla as In-Take Coordinator, our count of new clients starting therapy with us has exceeded our internal targets for the past two months. We are now averaging **10 new clients each month!**

We are growing but we are still in a delicate place.

Looking Ahead

- ❑ We are scheduled to host Temple University’s **Nurses-Family Partnership** at Refuge later this month—a group of Temple’s prenatal nurses who are committed to two years of follow-up with young Philadelphia mothers and their children.
- ❑ We have been **selected on the ‘short-list’ of finalists** for the 2011 GlaxoSmithKline IMPACT Award—an award recognizing Non-Profits in the city who demonstrate innovative approaches to providing health services to underserved urban communities.
- ❑ Even at this moment, the judges are deliberating about this year’s winner who will be announced sometime this summer. To win this award would make an enormous impact on us financially, but would also serve to make a big statement about the work we are doing here. **Even to be regarded as a finalist feels like a tremendous achievement.**

Strengthening our Staff

- ❑ I am happy to say that I have recently met with my advisor at Westminster Theological Seminary and will be returning this summer to the doctoral program in Urban Missions to complete work on my dissertation: “How to Build a Counseling Center in the Urban Context.”
- ❑ In addition to the coordination of in-takes and front-end support, **Michelle Bonilla is now stepping into a stronger role** with us by lending her expertise in assisting with development efforts, coordinating with foundations and writing grants.
- ❑ **Dorothy Yoder, a new intern** from Westminster Theological Seminary recently started at the beginning of this month.
- ❑ **Sharon Mangum** of Biblical Seminary, who is on the track to become a Licensed Therapist, **is due to begin her internship with us in August.**

Expanding our Horizons

- ❑ **Bianca Previdi, a 4th Year Puerto Rican (!) Psychiatric Resident from the University of Pennsylvania will also soon begin her year of residency with us.** She will be of tremendous assistance as we take steps to incorporate a new evidence-based model known as “Prolonged Exposure Therapy” into our existing clinical framework. This nationally approved model is currently being applied to US veterans suffering with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The parallels between the symptoms our clients face and the symptoms surfacing in our veteran populations is astonishing. The overlap is remarkable.

We need your help!

Many of our clients struggle to pay for counseling services, and although many of them are hard-working and insured, because we cannot yet accept their employers' insurance plans, we are forced to see them as out-of-network clients. They all say the same thing. They simply do not want to go somewhere else. As we grow, we will be able to hire additional licensed staff to meet the criteria of these plans and receive financial reimbursement. In the meantime, we need your support to help us cover costs for these people, many of whom are in great need of our help. Many, it would be ungodly for us to turn away.

Your contribution will make a huge difference.
Please give a gift of support today.

Your contributions are an encouragement, a support, and truly, *a gift* to us as we carry on with this work. Thank you for all of your support and prayers.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elizabeth Hernandez".

Elizabeth Hernandez, M.A.R.
Executive Director