

Depaul USA re-opens Little Rock homeless center

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |





Rabbi Eugene H. Levy gave a blessing March 30 for Jericho Way homeless day center, now operated by Depaul USA. (Aprille Hanson)



Changes have already happened at Jericho Way. Where there used to be long, white plastic tables in the main room now sit stylish small black tables and comfortable chairs. (Aprille Hanson)



Chuck Levesque, president and executive director of Depaul USA, said he wants to grow the garden plots Jericho Way already has to involve not only the homeless, but the community. (Aprille Hanson)

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It's been a hard road for William "Bud" Caudle, who frequently visits the Jericho Way homeless day center in Little Rock.

"I lost all my money and home. I've toured all the psych wards in the city," Caudle said. But at the March 30 re-opening of Jericho Way now operated by Depaul USA, a nationwide nonprofit that offers services for the homeless to get back on their feet and excel in their communities, Caudle said he has a renewed hope.

"I think it's wonderful that they said people of faith and no faith can come and get help from people of faith and no faith," Caudle said, adding he's a little bit Methodist and a little bit Buddhist. "I had been turned away from religion for a long time, but when Sister (Elizabeth Greim, DC) said that, I started to cry and in that moment I said, 'Thank God.'"

"We're not going to fix it all, but we're going to be here to help them."

Sister Elizabeth Greim, DC

Caudle is just one of the many lives Depaul USA is hoping to strengthen by implementing its proven program, focusing on four key principles: providing assistance to confront homelessness; improve health and well-being; assistance to become economically self-sufficient; and attain and remain in housing.

The people who come are not referred to as the homeless, but rather "participants."

The nonprofit came out of the Catholic tradition of St. Vincent de Paul but is committed to serving all people, not just Catholics. It has day centers in Philadelphia, New Orleans, St. Louis, Macon, Ga., and Little Rock, with Chicago as its next endeavor.

"We want to get deeper involvement, so they don't just come for food but to sit with a case worker and figure out what you need to make the next step in your life," said Chuck Levesque, president and executive director of Depaul USA.

Up until March, Jericho Way was operated by the City of Little Rock. However, Mayor Mark Stodala, who attended the ceremony along with North Little Rock Mayor Joe Smith, wanted to enlist the help of an outside organization. Sister Joan Pytlik, DC, the diocesan minister for religious, helped get the ball rolling by getting more information about Depaul USA from Levesque and passing it along to the mayor.

"Sister Joan said, 'Hey the Daughters of Charity are running an operation up there, maybe you need to go take a look at it,'" Stodola said to the crowd.

After the mayor and other city officials met with Sister Elizabeth, who was then the director of the nonprofit's Macon, Ga., center called Daybreak, the wheels began to turn, leading to a \$270,000 contract for Depaul USA to take over operations at the center at 3000 Confederate Boulevard. Sister Elizabeth was named director for Jericho Way.

Another Daughter of Charity will take over the Georgia facility this summer.

"I would hope that someone coming to Jericho Way now would say they were treated with respect, that their dignity was acknowledged and respected and that they were treated as an adult," Sister Elizabeth said. "They are an adult who has the ability, at whatever level they are at, to be the agent of their own change. We're not going to fix it all, but we're going to be here to help them."

For basic necessities, breakfast, lunch and laundry facilities are offered, Sister Elizabeth said. There are also three showers, two for men and one for women.

As time goes on, the center will focus on job training, education and getting the community involved, which can start with church volunteers.

"Helping staff the laundry room, help with reception, welcoming people in the morning ... taking in their bags and helping them secure their things so they can feel safe with us ... helping in the kitchen," Sister Elizabeth said of available volunteer opportunities. "Some people might just be on-call, if someone needs an application filled out, someone who can sit down and help fill out an application with somebody."

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor gave the opening prayer, while Rabbi Eugene H. Levy gave a blessing and Rev. Thompson Murray of Quapaw Quarter United Methodist Church gave the closing prayer.

"We recall the story of the good Samaritan who offered assistance to a broken man very different from himself on that Jericho Way 2,000 years ago, who saw a need and did something about it," Bishop Taylor said in his prayer, adding later, "This is a safe place where homeless people can find care and shelter today."

Levesque said the goal is not to duplicate services already present in Little Rock but to fill in gaps.

Despite only a short amount of time being operated by Depaul USA, some significant changes

have already taken place, most notably in the main room when people first walk through the doors. Where there used to be long, white plastic tables now sit stylish small black tables and comfortable chairs like one would find in a family room.

It is changes like this that make all the difference in how a homeless person feels about changing their life, Caudle said.

“I was telling the Sister when I wake up and come here, I don’t feel homeless,” Caudle said.

For volunteer opportunities, contact Calandra Davis at (501) 297-0991 or calandra.davis@depaulusa.org.