

Pastor's Notes: Helping the Poor in Our Community: Part 3 of 3

February 6, 2021

On Jan. 12, 2021, Fr. Carter interviewed Dr. Jimmy Turner, Basilica parishioner and Chief Operations Officer of Chattanooga Community Kitchen, a social service provider that is here to meet those most basic needs of hungry, homeless, and vulnerable people in our community, while also offering them a clear path to self-sufficiency. Excerpts from the third and final part of the interview are presented below.

Fr. Carter: What are some of the volunteer opportunities at the Community Kitchen?

Dr. Turner: We need volunteers to help us prepare and serve meals. And that can be done from the safety and comfort of your own home, or here on site with us. So you can call us or come by and say, "Hey, what do you need cooked? I can cook it for you." You can bring us the food. We can supply you with something that maybe we have on the shelves that you can cook for us. And then, you can come up here and you can serve it because we're serving three meals a day. So come up here and be a breakfast server, be a lunch server, be a dinner server - whatever is going to work with your schedule and your opportunity. It doesn't have to be every day. It doesn't have to be every week. Maybe you can come once a month. And hey, that's once a month that we know we got somebody for those 12 meals out of the year covered. So, thank you; come and do that.

We need people that help our staff to check mail, to sort mail, to put it away, to check it for people, and make sure that they get their mail; to hand out soap and shampoo and towels for people to go take their shower; to help us to sweep the floor and keep the place looking nice for those who want to come in for services. We need people to help us sort clothing, hang it, put it out on the floor help people find the sizes and the items that they need when they come in needing something. That's a big help to us.

We need people who can help us with meal delivery. We have several camps in the Chattanooga area - over 100, actually. We go to some of those camps every single day and deliver hot meals and sack lunches so that they don't have to come down here and risk exposing themselves to a crowded condition, for COVID-19 or the flu.

The best thing to do is go online to homelesschattanooga.org and click on the [Get Involved](#) tab. And that right there is going to give you everything that you need to know from how to sign up to volunteer, where to drop off donations, numbers to call to people to get in touch with. Everything is right there available to you. If you don't have access to the Internet - if you're one of those people who's just not going to take that step - then give us a call at 423-756-4222 and either ask for me, or just say, "Hey, I want to volunteer. Who do I speak to?" and they'll connect you with our volunteer coordinator.

Fr. Carter: It was taught to me that when you encounter the person, it's as simple as asking their name, asking how they're doing, and making a connection on a human level. Not just giving them material help, but giving them also the emotional, and then, of course, the spiritual help to go the next step, and then say, "Can I pray for you?" What do you have to say about that?

Dr. Turner: One of the things that I tell people is to change your language so that you always talk about the people, and then the circumstance: They're not homeless people; they're people experiencing homelessness. When we make people the first part of our language, we start to highlight that they're not an exhibit for us to be entertained by. We're not asking their story, we're not asking them how they ended up homeless, because maybe that's a traumatic thing for them to relay, and they don't want to tell you, or they're just going to tell you something to entertain you, to get you to go away. Talk to them like you would talk to meeting your new neighbor. Because that's what they are. They're your neighbor; they just live outdoors. You talk to your outdoor neighbor, and you say hi. You get to know them, share information about yourself. Ask them questions that you would ask your neighbor, when they move in. And, you know, if you bake them a casserole, don't expect to get the dish back - just like your neighbor.

Fr. Carter: And it's okay within that conversation to have to say no. But we always say "yes" to the person, in the sense of, "I want to give you of myself."

Dr. Turner: People have told me that they feel awkward lying to people, when they might ask them, "Do you have any money?" and they'll say no. And they know good and well they had money in their pockets. One of the ways that I have responded to that is: I just say, "I'm sorry, I don't carry money for that." And so it's a simple turn of phrase that is not lying, because I may not have any cash on me. And it might be because I don't want to carry money so that I don't give it to somebody. And it might be that I do carry cash, but I don't carry it for giving to people in that manner. And so I would just encourage people to find a way that is comfortable with your own conscience to say no and be okay with that.

Fr. Carter: Thank you, Dr. Jimmy Turner. Thank you that you gave us your time to give us some words of wisdom, so that we can also be proactive as people of faith when we encounter Christ in the streets.

The full transcript and audio recording of the interview are available on the Basilica's website along with Fr. Carter's Pastor's Notes for Jan. 24, Jan. 31, and Feb. 6, 2021, accessible at stspeterandpaulbasilica.com/pastors-notes.