

# Good Works, Inc. — A Community of Hope

**Celebrating 40 Years!**



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Keith Wasserman, Founder/Executive Director

*"I made the WIDOW'S heart sing, I took up the case of  
the STRANGER, I was a father to the FATHERLESS."  
(Job 29:12-13)*

June 2021

Greetings from the community of HOPE, summer greetings with JOY and gratitude!



As many of you may already know, I have chosen to experience homelessness in 11 different cities during the past 30+ years in order to learn and better understand the people and situation of homelessness. My first trip was to Lexington, Kentucky in 1989. I knew there was something I needed to understand. I wrote a story called *Three Days in November* soon after I returned. When I go to stay on the streets with people experiencing homelessness for a few days, I feel like I enter a very different world. I see things that I would have never seen as a tourist or a townie. Charleston, Jacksonville, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Tulsa and several other cities. I go to *learn* what it is like to be on "the other side", where I can better understand *what it feels like* to be in the situation of loss — loss of significant relationships, loss of a support system, loss of a safe place to live, loss of

dignity, privacy, purpose and often the loss of hope. I have learned many things through my "continuing education" about vulnerability, mental illness, addiction, fear; and I have seen and experienced the kindness of strangers. I have tried to use what I have experienced to re-think how we are operating The Good Works Timothy House.

Over the years, there have been some consistent themes which have emerged from my time on the streets. These include fear, the limits of institution, the use and abuse of power, the downside of individualism, healthy and unhealthy food, healthcare and the power of dehumanization.

Here are a few snapshots into my observations on how people use power in a way that can make someone feel 'less than human'. In Akron I went to the desk at the shelter to ask if I could use the bathroom. The staff person responded with a dramatic "I just cleaned it". Was there a message here for me? Later when I reflected, I realized how inappropriate that was and how degraded I felt. Then, I thought, had I done that to someone at Good Works? In Pittsburgh a group of us were accused of stealing things from the pockets of the coats in the church foyer during the church service. Those who came from the mission were taken into a room after the service and asked if we took things. I wondered if I had done something like that and not even realized what I was doing. When I stayed overnight in Charleston, I decided to leave the shelter right after breakfast, but the resident in charge of my stuff would not give me my belongings and required me to wait and wouldn't explain why. I felt taken advantage of. Have I ever done something like that?

I also remember the kindness of the man who ran the shelter in Tulsa when he allowed me to come in out of the cold and sleep inside on the floor even though there were no beds and lots of people. I also remember Jeff in Pittsburgh who came to our bedside each night to say a prayer and offer a kind word as we went to sleep. In Louisville I remember one resident of the shelter who worked in the kitchen who saw me, asked me if I was hungry and then went into the kitchen to get me some freshly made chicken.

WE NEED others to model and inspire us into acts of love and kindness. We need others to show us the way to love. And we need to learn from the missteps and mistakes of those who don't do what is right and use their power to harm.

## IN THE NEWS

- We are preparing to welcome our summer interns as well as several teen interns who will join us for Summer Service. Darlene Wasserman is preparing another season of our annual Summer Lunch for adults and children. We are also arranging to serve many neighbors this summer at their homes. To volunteer to help, email us. If you'd like to assist us with the Summer Lunch, you can send us gift cards to purchase fresh items.
- Friday Night Life continues each week. What a beautiful mix of so many different kinds of people. What a gift to gather each week to share a meal, friendship and fun. We are seeking groups to sponsor the meal this fall.
- We are preparing to welcome several Work Retreats this summer. They will be serving primarily at Sign of HOPE, through Neighbors Helping Neighbors, and Summer Lunch. WE feel so grateful for these volunteers and the energy and JOY they bring!
- Vision of HOPE (on our website) explains a lot of what we desire and hope for as we love and serve people. I want to encourage you to take a look.
- The Transformation Station has recently welcomed new participants. We are excited to see this aspect of GW move forward again.

In closing, I want to share a word about mutuality, something that has become very important to all of us in the Good Works Community. So much of what happens in our culture as it pertains to people who experience brokenness reflects the models in the 'helping profession', where professionals help people in need by providing them with services. This is good, but I believe that hope is transmitted and embedded in its most potent form into our lives through *mutuality*. Through mutuality, we can grow into a few relationships with people we met through GW, where there is both giving and receiving on both sides. For many years, I have been mindful of how important it is to clothe people with dignity, and allow people to do as much for themselves as they can as an expression of love. Recently, I have become very sensitive to how important it is to move through the stages of "do for" to "do with" to "be with", and to value BEING with someone as an essential aspect of healing. In scripture, it is clear that Jesus teaches us to invite people into our lives who cannot repay us (Luke 14:14) and we practice this. But what if the most meaningful part of love wasn't just to have people come to "your party" (See Luke 14:12-14), but to be invited to *their* home, maybe to their party? (See Matthew 9:10-12). The invitation to have dinner and be invited into the home of someone is one thing we hope for in our relationships!

Love is a verb,  
Keith Wasserman



Neighbors Helping Neighbors



Sign of HOPE (100 Central Avenue) on May 24