

Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship: A True Sanctuary

By Martha Roden, member of Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship

Here at Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship, we are deeply committed to helping those in need in our community. We take our cue from Jesus' statement: "What you do to the least of us you do to me." Because of this, we have always been deeply involved with homeless outreach.

A Little History

From 2012 through 2019, we temporarily hosted homeless families on a rotating basis through Faith Family Hospitality (FFH) and served as a Day Center for FFH. From 2013-2014, we added shower and laundry facilities to our building. In 2015 we offered up our building as a warming center and began providing a free, home-cooked dinner on Friday or Saturday night. Eventually we offered a free breakfast on Sundays. In 2019 we added free, over-size, outdoor lockers, so homeless individuals could safely store their belongings without fear of theft, rather than carrying them with them everywhere.

The Pandemic

However, when COVID-19 hit, everything changed. We decided to open our hearts and our church doors to some of the most vulnerable homeless individuals we knew, inviting them to live in our church. Since March 2020, we have provided ongoing housing for at-risk persons in our church. Our church sanctuary has become a true sanctuary to those in need.

Those living at the church have now become caretakers of our building and grounds. They are our "homeless angels" who built our patios, created our raised beds, and tended the plants. They are the ones who open the church doors each day to other homeless individuals so they can take hot showers, wash their clothes, grab a snack, receive a personal hygiene item or clothing, all while being provided with a warm, welcoming presence . . . and often times, good advice!

Our Go FundMe

In April 2021, we started a True Sanctuary GoFundMe campaign to raise \$10,000 to keep the lights on, hot water running, and food and clothing available to those we serve. Between April and August, we raised \$4,000, thanks to individual donors (some out of state) and First Mennonite in Denver. Later, between October and December, we arrived at \$8,000, thanks to a nice injection from Carlsbad Mennonite in New Mexico. Finally, in March 2021, we received one last final donation from the Rotary Club of Fort Collins and actually exceeded our goal – we raised \$10,505!

What We Offer



Our southern western patio and garden beds were built by our residents in Summer 2021



This funding has allowed us to continue providing food, showers, laundry, a community closet, and support for some of the unhoused people of Fort Collins. But more importantly, we provide a safe place where homeless individuals can rest, talk, and feel welcome and accepted as part of the community. By providing this safe place for them, we help re-build relationships.

After all, research shows that lack of shelter is traumatic enough, but loss of relationships has an even greater impact. When individuals are treated with kindness, dignity, and respect, they begin to feel as if they are valued members of the community, and their sense of "belonging" is enhanced.