The Parable That Led to a Partnership Against Poverty

A History of

SAMARITAN MINISTRY
of Greater Washington

By David B. Richardson
On behalf of all of us at Samaritan Ministry, many many thanks to David Richardson for the tremendous number of hours he spent reading years of monthly Board meeting minutes, tracking down and interviewing members of the Samaritan Ministry family, and producing this labor of love. I would also like to thank Peter Albert and the many others who helped with this history.

R. Carter Echols  
Executive Director  
October 16, 1996

Samaritan Ministry is a non-profit partnership of over 30 Episcopal churches in the Washington area. Through the Next Step program, Samaritan Ministry provides social services, job counseling, life skills workshops, transitional housing, and other support to people in need who want to improve their lives.

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THE PARABLE THAT LED TO A PARTNERSHIP AGAINST POVERTY
A History of Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington
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It began in a single Episcopal parish in a distressed neighborhood of Washington, D.C. This is the story of how Samaritan Ministry started by helping people in its own nearby streets, then developed into a Greater Washington partnership of 38 parishes, with a unique approach that has enabled thousands of people in need to improve their lives.

Samaritan Ministry was the name given in the early 1980's to a consolidation of the social ministries of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church, located at 16th and Newton Streets, N.W. The St. Stephen's neighborhood, a block from the 14th Street corridor in Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant, had experienced some of the city's worst riots in the late 1960's, and in 1980 it had still not recovered from those events. The unemployment rate in the largely African-American and Hispanic community had risen to one of the nation's highest. Crime was rampant, and the social fabric of the impoverished neighborhood had been further stretched by widespread alcoholism and chronic drug abuse.

In setting out to help its neighbors in this grim setting, St. Stephen's drew its inspiration from the parable in Luke's gospel of the Samaritan who helps a wounded fellow-traveler, enabling him to recover and continue his journey. In the words of the Rev. Dr. Jack Woodard, the rector of St. Stephen's at the time and a guiding spirit in the new enterprise, "Samaritan Ministry grew out of many years' struggle to be 'Good Samaritans' to the most vulnerable people of Washington." From the very beginning, Samaritan staff and volunteers expressed a conviction that as relationships developed between them and the people in the community, the lives of all involved would be transformed. Said Woodard, "With our Christian inspiration, our primary aim was to find every opportunity to create change in us all."

AN EARLY CHALLENGE--AND A STRONG RESPONSE

At the start, the level of assistance that could be provided by the new Ministry was severely limited by parish resources. As Jack Woodard later wrote, Samaritan "could give little more to a person in need than a sack of groceries or a small amount of money." But one of Woodard's great gifts was his ability to create, over time, a network of support for Samaritan Ministry. Initially, Trinity Parish in New York City
made a grant to St. Stephen's to pay for an outreach director, a social worker named Dennis Bethea. Then an eager, hard-working volunteer group from the parish and the neighborhood joined in to help Bethea.

As word spread that the church was offering assistance, more and more people in need showed up at the cramped Samaritan Ministry offices in St. Stephen's basement. And as their numbers increased, so did the challenge to St. Stephen's to bolster its services. In response, Woodard launched a concerted effort to organize support from other Episcopal parishes in the Washington metropolitan area, and many came through with money or food. In the Ministry's first year, volunteers packed 2,400 sacks of groceries from its food pantry, some 390 people received money toward paying utility bills, medical costs, and transportation to new jobs or clinics, and more than 10,000 pounds of U.S. Department of Agriculture surplus food were distributed.

In 1982, Samaritan Ministry appointed Elizabeth Downs, another social worker, to succeed Bethea as director. She was assisted in her first year by a full-time volunteer and later by two aides, and their work was supported by stipends from other private agencies. Downs struggled with the fact that the types of assistance being asked of Samaritan Ministry were changing significantly, even as its services grew. Earlier, most callers had sought emergency food handouts and other "crisis" assistance. But now more and more homeless and distressed people began coming to the Ministry's doors looking for other kinds of help--employment assistance, counselling on family and health care, legal aid, and advocacy within the community. To meet such emerging needs required a substantial boost in resources.

A PARTNERSHIP "TO ENGAGE THE SOUL"

The year 1985 was a major turning point for Samaritan Ministry. Up to then, the services offered by St. Stephen's had been supported by donations of money and food from other parishes, along with some volunteers. But in 1985, a call from St. Stephen's to these parishes for further resources led to a fundamental change of the Ministry's structure.

In an informal discussion with Jack Woodard, the Rev. Dr. Frank Wade, rector of St. Alban's, D.C., suggested that the mission undertaken by St. Stephen's had become too much for one parish to handle. All the Episcopal parishes in the area, he advised, should begin to share equally in all aspects of the work. Over the next year, Wade's suggestion led to the transformation of Samaritan Ministry from a one-parish effort supported on an ad hoc basis by other area congregations to an incorporated partnership of supporting churches, governed by a policy-making board made up of representatives from each parish.
"In the early years of Samaritan Ministry," Wade explained recently, "the practice grew in our parish of just sending money to support worthy causes. But we came to realize that that wasn't enough. It doesn't engage the soul. So we determined to engage the soul, not just capital."

Woodward later recalled his first reaction—and that of his vestry—to giving way to such a corporate entity: uneasiness. To use his words, "We feared that the ministry at the heart and soul of St. Stephen's might be watered down or moved away. But St. Stephen's, for the sake of the community and its pressing needs, soon accepted the merit of this suggestion and began developing a conference to give it reality."

The gathering that would begin to transform Samaritan Ministry took place in the summer of 1985 on the campus of Mt. Vernon College. A task force drawn from the parishes that supported the Ministry spent the last half of that year in a series of monthly "Great Meetings" to work out the legal foundation and the vision for the new partnership. Specifically, their task was to form a new and independent organization, to be jointly "owned," controlled, and supported by a consortium of parishes in Greater Washington.

"When we came together in a 'Great Meeting' to do all this," recalls Ellen Compton-Tejera of St. Thomas, D.C., a task force member and later president of the Ministry's board, "we felt that the Holy Spirit was in the room."

**BYLAWS STEEPED IN THEOLOGY**

The task force members quickly agreed that the newly-formed agency should bear the name "The Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington." In drafting its bylaws, they took the unusual step of giving precedence to the Christian spirit over standard legal practice. Instead of the usual preamble for such contracts, they headed the basic document with a "Theological Statement of Purpose." It underlined the challenges facing Samaritan Ministry and concluded, "We sense that Christ is calling us to do the work of Good Samaritans across boundaries of state, city, and diocese."

Led by Jim Johnstone, a lawyer and a member of St. Alban's, D.C., the task force committed the Ministry to a broader role of support to those in need in the Washington area, "including, without limitation, giving emergency food and other assistance to individuals and families, providing employment counseling and assistance, and fostering growth and independence among those who are in poverty, are unemployed, or otherwise in need."
The proposed bylaws listed four goals:

- to emulate the compassion of Jesus by doing everything possible to meet basic human needs, through practical and efficient means;

- to move people out of crisis into stability and dignity in a manner that fosters their growth and independence and that empowers them, and to do this renouncing feelings of superiority and acts of paternalism;

- to raise questions about the injustice of poverty in the midst of affluence and about public policies that lack compassion; to engage causes as well as victims and to reform as well as to remedy;

- to draw people to Christ through these ministries, as Christ's agents, although never to make joining the Church a condition of giving help.

A NEW BEGINNING

To govern the affairs of the reconstituted Samaritan Ministry as a true working partnership, the bylaws provided for a board of directors made up of one voting representative and one alternate from each partner parish, with each parish required to contribute a minimum annual amount "in money or kind" toward operating costs.

The agency's day-to-day management was placed in the hands of an executive director, to be supervised by an executive committee made up of the officers of the board, two committee chairs, and three directors-at-large. After months of work, the new partnership became a legal entity, effective January 1, 1986, when the D.C. government approved the articles of incorporation.

The original 12 partner parishes were:

All Saints, Chevy Chase, Md.  St. John's, Olney, Md.
St. Alban's, Washington, D.C.  St. Mark's, Washington, D.C.
St. Andrew's, Burke, Va.  St. Stephen & the Incarnation
St. Columba's, Washington, D.C.  Washington, D.C.
St. Francis', Potomac, Md.
Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington (SMGW) began its real work on January 9, 1986, with a meeting of its first board of directors, representing the 12 partner parishes. Named as board president, Richard Dowd of St. Columba’s, D.C., invoked at the gathering the memory of "the first partnership of the Apostles." An environmental scientist, he had been asked by his rector to represent St. Columba’s on the task force and soon found himself "immersed in the spirit of this great endeavor."

Also present was the agency’s newly-appointed first executive director, Dr. Donald Burnes, an educator and a former vestry member of St. Stephen’s, who six years earlier had helped create the original Samaritan Ministry. "The key to our success," Burnes told the board, "lies in how we do in attracting volunteers, called in Christ, to come and assist us. Only with adequate numbers of volunteers and staff can we become truly responsive to our less fortunate neighbors, as was the Good Samaritan."

A TIME OF TRANSITION AND EXPANSION

In its first year, Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington stirred new excitement in partner parishes, which brought new commitments of volunteers and financial support. By year’s end, the number of partner parishes had increased from the original 12 to 19, including the National Cathedral, and the SMGW staff had grown from four to eight. Meanwhile, the board continued its task of reorganization, strengthening existing programs and investigating new ways to serve people in need. Before the start-up year was over, SMGW had more than doubled the number of people to whom it had given emergency food, financial aid, and employment counseling. "We were particularly pleased," said Burnes, "with the arrival of Juanita Heatley as employment services director. She injected new life into the jobs program, and it paid off not only in increased placements but in more pleased employers."

Along with the positive changes, SMGW also experienced some difficulties. Two or three ambitious projects failed to materialize, and a knotty problem with employment services was finally resolved only by means of a joint agreement with the D.C. government to make use of its Jobs Bank. And funding and budgeting for the enlarged Ministry turned out to be a challenge in itself.

Another potential difficulty lay in the fact that the partner parishes were very different from one another in significant ways—as they have continued to be. Some were large, with considerable resources of money and volunteers, while others were small and struggling. Some parishes favored social advocacy and a more aggressive stance as a prime weapon against poverty; others preferred a more conservative approach, downplaying confrontation.
Yet, surprising as it may appear, the "holy dozen," as one irreverent congregation member dubbed the 12 initial partner parishes, surmounted one difference after another by making adjustments and reaching compromises as they went along. To the gratification of clerical and lay leaders and the Ministry staff, that happy situation has basically remained the case over succeeding years.

"We established such unity back then," recalled Richard Dowd, "as to serve as a model for governance of such a partnership. All of us seemed inspired with a willingness, no matter what came up, to put aside other agendas and stay focused on our shared mission."

NEW FRONT AGAINST POVERTY

Little more than a year after Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington came into existence, it took the important step of opening a second center in Southeast Washington. This met a long-felt need. Workers at SMGW's Northwest Center at St. Stephen's had found it difficult to serve the southeastern parts of the District, and the bus trip from Southeast to the Northwest Center was a long one for those trying to reach SMGW.

In outlining plans for the new center, Burnes called it "an opportunity and a responsibility to extend God's grace to more of our neighbors in need." Opened on a part-time basis in April 1987 with its own staff person and a few volunteers, it was located on the grounds of a new partner parish, the Church of the Holy Communion, on Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue. As an indication of the need for such a center, it was able, in its first two weeks, to distribute emergency food to 58 households.

In early 1988 Samaritan Ministry moved to add another dimension to its services by joining with the National Cathedral in launching an adult literacy program. From the partner parishes, SMGW recruited volunteers to train as tutors for a few hours a week, using outside instructors and material. Since literacy tutoring began, it has continued to serve as a valuable tool in helping disadvantaged people to improve their lives.

As just one example of many, a homeless single parent who shall be called Charles came to SMGW, determined to turn his life around after serving three prison terms. The biggest obstacle to a breakthrough, he decided, was that he could barely read or write. While receiving assistance in other ways, he started intensive one-on-one work in literacy with a trained volunteer--a retired official of
the Federal Reserve Bank. Charles made such progress, preparing to return to school as a step toward job training, that he delighted in showing off his newly-acquired literacy by reading children's books in the library to his son, Charles, Jr. aged 6.

"It's still not easy," Charles said of his progress, "but I'm on my way. The good people at Samaritan Ministry have faith in me. As long as they have faith in me, I have faith in myself."

NEW DIRECTOR, NEW DIRECTION

The year 1988 saw the beginning of significant new developments for Samaritan Ministry under a new directing hand. Burnes had resigned from the directorship at mid-year after steering the Ministry through a difficult start-up period; during his time in the post the number of partner parishes increased to 29 and he advanced the idea--later realized--of creating a transitional housing facility for client families. "In my stewardship," Burnes said later, "I tried to focus upon the fact that Samaritan Ministry had two separate sets of people working together--those off the streets and those in partner parishes. And our key objective was to maximize opportunities for both. I am happy that goal remains No. 1." Following an extensive search, the board chose Carter Echols, a lay leader at the Church of the Epiphany, Washington, D.C., as the new executive director. With a BA in Religious Studies and an MBA, Echols had worked with nonprofit organizations since the mid-1970's, most recently as associate director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork. Echols built on the original work at SMGW, taking it in important new directions. Among the key developments under her leadership have been a rethinking of SMGW's fundamental objectives, the development of the Next Step process for program participants, and the creation of a community of effort--she describes it as "a people on a journey together"--integrating volunteers and paid staff. "The core elements were there," remembers Volunteer Coordinator Martha Hamstra, who joined Samaritan in 1987, "but Carter made it happen."

THE MINISTRY CLARIFIES ITS COURSE

Soon after Echols became director, she and the board reviewed the Ministry's objectives and developed a vision statement to guide SMGW in a new direction. As approved in early 1989, the new statement declared:

- We are a Christian organization, which is guided by these two goals:
- To provide services to persons in need which enable self-sufficiency, independence, and dignity, and,
To provide opportunities for members of partner parishes to participate in the ministry.

The new vision statement led to a significant change in Samaritan Ministry's program and mode of operation. SMGW's energies, which had been diffused over a wide variety of activities since its founding in 1986, now became more focused. Secondly, the Ministry began moving away from emergency assistance--meeting specific needs for money or food--and toward helping program participants develop self-sufficiency. And, thirdly, SMGW began to place greater emphasis on the connection between the work of its volunteers and paid staff and their own spiritual transformation.

DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

In starting Samaritan Ministry down its new road, the staff and volunteers began by telling all those coming in for assistance about the Ministry's self-sufficiency approach. The question was, "How do you want to change your life?" And along with the question came the message, "We are here to support you in your effort to make that change." Everyone whose answer was "yes" was welcomed as a participant, an open-door practice that in itself separates SMGW from other organizations in the field. "We'll work with anybody who wants to make a change and for as long as they want to do that," says Echols.

People expressing a clear interest in changing their lives were interviewed by a caseworker and were encouraged to discuss their goals. Their objectives might range over a variety of choices: improving health, getting a job, becoming better parents, finding good housing, or going back to school. Once a person identified a goal, Samaritan Ministry agreed to work with them to find ways to support them in reaching their objective. To emphasize a serious intent on both sides to carry out the agreement, the procedure called for both the caseworker and program participant to sign a form of contract.

The Ministry's use of the word "participant" instead of "client" in referring to a person coming for assistance reflected a new approach, that of helping each individual to find a road to improvement to fit their own style and goals rather than following a set program. In essence, Samaritan Ministry would carry out its "neighbor helping neighbor" philosophy by providing the tools and support to help participants find their own solutions. SMGW's objective, as Echols puts it, is to affirm the progress of program participants, rather than their neediness, to emphasize their hopes and strengths rather than their disappointments and failures.
By early 1990 this process was further refined with the identification of "mini-goals"—small, manageable tasks enabling participants to move incrementally toward whatever ultimate goal they had chosen. The mini-goals became known as "Next Steps" and were noted on blue cards that served as tangible evidence of each individual's progress. Since that time, Next Steps have formed the basis for all Samaritan Ministry activities.

To help those taking Next Steps toward self-sufficiency, the Ministry provides a variety of support activities. A single mother, for example, might receive food, help in obtaining lodging, transportation assistance, or referral for child care while she underwent employment training.

"A unique system had evolved to fill a long-overdue need," recalls Frank Wade. "Previously, individuals had been hampered by having to collect piecemeal the necessary forms of support. Samaritan Ministry's answer was to fulfill all the individual's needs in one package—a full-service approach."

Six months after the self-sufficiency program began, with a growing list of participants, Echols observed in a diocesan newsletter that the response to SMGW's new approach had been "overwhelming. . . . The majority of people seem delighted to have someone with whom they can talk and work."

At the core of the Samaritan Ministry endeavor, of course, is the staff—8 paid staff, 33 regular (at least one day a week) volunteers, and over 2,000 ad hoc volunteers annually—working together in an integrated effort. SMGW "helps people to find the gifts they want to contribute," says Echols, and it enables them to use their skills in behalf of others. Parishioners becoming volunteer caseworkers in the self-sufficiency program experience a special stimulation in the work. "It's so much better than just handing things out," said one. "I get a real charge at the chance to help others change their lives." Another calls the experience at Samaritan "a journey of faith we make together. We both gain."

FINDING MORE JOBS—AND A LOGO

With the introduction of the Next Step methodology, Samaritan Ministry's employment program gained new impetus. Soon job-seekers began working more closely with caseworkers on a day-to-day basis, through Next Steps covering a full range of activities that included job searches, contacting employers, preparing resumes, and learning how to handle job contacts—even getting transportation and clothes in
which to attend job interviews. Within a year of the introduction of Next Steps into the employment program, more than 100 participants found jobs, and this number has continued to increase in succeeding years.

As a further aid to job-seekers, Samaritan Ministry enlisted as volunteers Ed and Pat Hoyles of the Church of the Holy Comforter, Vienna, who run a technical recruiting firm. The couple set up a series of workshops for participants: "Getting Yourself Up to Speed" (to enter the work-force), "Using Telephone Techniques to Get Job Interviews," and "How to Turn an Interview into a Job" (using videotaped practice interviews). After SMGW caseworkers reported that participants were having difficulty in adjusting to life in the workforce, the Hoyles added a workshop on keeping the job: "After You Get the Job--Now What?"

To spread the word about Next Steps to potential participants in the greater Washington area, partner parish St. Columba's, D.C., printed up thousands of cards saying: "If you want to set goals and take steps to a better life, call Samaritan Ministry." SMGW then began leaving the cards in homeless shelters and other gathering places, or giving them to people on the street, which it has done ever since to good effect.

Beginning in early 1993, Samaritan Ministry has worked with emergency soup kitchens to help eligible community members obtain government food stamps. Neighborhood volunteers were trained to render such assistance. Recognizing that a number of those in the Hispanic population had problems in learning about and getting food stamps because of language difficulties, the Ministry helps them to do so under a special federal program. For Samaritan Ministry, the outreach through soup kitchens serves as an added opportunity to spread the word of its benefits to another segment of the community, many of whom have learned for the first time about the Next Step program.

But the main way the Ministry's message reaches those in need is by word-of-mouth. Over the years, increasing numbers of people have turned up at the Northwest or Southeast centers saying they have learned through the grapevine--through neighbors, family, or friends--that others were getting jobs and other life improvements through Samaritan Ministry.

Samaritan Ministry took a Next Step for itself after a few years of the successful self-sufficiency program by creating an attention-getting logo showing three ascending steps. The symbol has appeared ever since on SMGW letterheads, newsletters, annual reports, and employment and fund-raising literature.
BUILDING MATERIAL SUPPORT

From its earliest years, SMGW welcomed gifts from individuals to supplement the annual funding by partner parishes and sought grants from foundations and donations from other organizations. As time went on, financial support for Samaritan Ministry has begun to come from a wide number of other sources, in itself testimony to SMGW's growing stature in the community. These have included other churches, schools, supermarkets, stores, theaters, restaurants, florists, a jazz club, the Washington Ballet, and the Capital's professional basketball and hockey teams.

The highlight of SMGW's fund-raising every year, starting in 1990, was and remains its annual auction, an event which by 1996 was netting over $30,000--the equivalent of nearly one month's operating expenses--offering sale items ranging from a picnic basket to a week in a bungalow in Jamaica.

Along with fund-raising, food collection has long been an important part of SMGW's activities. Since 1988 partner parishes have held special food drives on Mother's Day and Father's Day to stock the Ministry's pantry with canned and boxed goods and other basic groceries. More recently, the list of items sought in such collections has extended to toiletries and underwear.

A BASE FOR PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

For many years, Samaritan Ministry had dreamed of establishing its own program of transitional housing, where homeless families might live while moving toward self-sufficiency. An early attempt by Don Burnes to obtain a building for this purpose fell through, but in 1988 the outlook for an SMGW transitional housing project brightened.

That year St. Alban's, D.C., raised a leadership gift of $80,000, and several other partner parishes added donations. Within two years, SMGW entered into a partnership with Community Family Life Services, which had successful experience in the transitional housing field, and Christ Lutheran Church, which had been left $100,000 for such a project. The new entity was named the Transitional Housing Corporation (THC).

THC found a place ideally suited for transitional housing in the form of a 14-unit apartment building at 935 Kennedy St., N.W. While in dilapidated condition--it had been boarded up for nearly a decade--the building was located on major bus lines and in a good neighborhood for families in transition.
Volunteer negotiators from Samaritan Ministry and its THC partners spent two years arranging the purchase with owners and lien holders, while seeking the means to renovate the building and provide operating funds. It was established that the building, once renovated, would be purchased by the D.C. government and rented back to THC under a long-term lease.

Heading the volunteer legal negotiators was John Watson, a board member from St. Columba's, D.C., since 1988, whose Washington law firm piled up hundreds of pro bono hours over nearly nine months of cutting through government red tape and working out the complex details of a construction loan.

"It was one thing for me to give money to Samaritan Ministry," Watson said later, "but it was another and more satisfying thing to give myself and my professional expertise. I found an infinitely deeper sense of commitment in using the talent the Lord provided me to carry out the Lord's work--especially on a project of such historic significance to the community."

No sooner did a settlement take place on the Kennedy Street building in early January 1992 than Samaritan Ministry began recruiting volunteers and resources from partner parishes for help in preparing the quarters for occupancy. Parish volunteers had played a significant role in the legal work, drawing up preliminary architectural plans and arranging for MANNA, a non-profit developer, to direct the renovation. Now more volunteers were needed almost at once to work on the initial clean-up of the building so construction could begin in 90 days. Happily, partner parishes came through with eager crews of men and women.

In the months that followed, these volunteers turned up at the building every Saturday to do heavy lifting, cleaning, and painting under MANNA's professional direction. Meanwhile, partner parishes put out a call for furnishings to make the apartments ready for occupancy. Over the next year, volunteers collected these furnishings, carted them into storage, then into the building when ready, until all units were completely equipped, down to the smallest kitchen items. Beds were donated by a mattress retailer. All told, volunteers donated over 2,000 hours readying the building for occupancy--and were credited by MANNA with saving more than $150,000 in construction costs,
"MODELS OF EXCELLENCE"

"Partner Arms" was, fittingly enough, the name chosen for the transitional housing building, which opened with a community celebration on February 24, 1993. Samaritan Ministry and its partners in THC had taken great care to select participants in its programs who, with their families, would be the first to move in. Three families did so immediately, with 11 more to follow. Each family pays a reduced rate for occupancy (initially up to 18, and now up to 24 months), amounting to one third of their monthly income. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides funds to cover the program over its first five years.

All participating residents in Partner Arms are required to take part in job training, family counselling, and other Next Steps on the road to economic independence. Samaritan Ministry hired a full-time employment counselor for Partner Arms and assigned three other staff members to devote part of their time to the project. The Ministry recruits and trains volunteers to help in conducting workshops for the new residents in such things as budgeting, nutrition, cooking, child care, and self-esteem. In addition, SMGW staff members work with a child advocate and caseworkers from Community Family Life Services to offer Partner Arms children tutoring, recreational activities, field trips, and other programs—all including neighborhood children to bridge an important gap with the community.

Since Partner Arms opened in early 1993, 16 of 19 families who came there from homeless shelters have made their transitions successfully and moved into permanent housing elsewhere. The adults have earned high school diplomas, finished job training, completed counseling for family problems, begun to live without drugs or alcohol, and found, in most cases, better-paying jobs.

"Our achievements demonstrate how community change can be achieved through collaborative work of local organizations," said Polly Donaldson, a longtime board member and former president of Samaritan Ministry who now heads the THC. "Many of the facets of our partnership, building acquisition and rehabilitation, and overall program can serve as models of excellence for other housing providers."

A NEW HOME

Less than nine months after Partner Arms opened, on November 6, 1993, Samaritan Ministry moved its offices about a mile up 16th Street from St. Stephen and the Incarnation to 1516 Hamilton Street N.W., at 16th and Colorado. The decision to move SMGW's Northwest Center was a difficult one, despite the space squeeze created
by the growing number of participants and staff. "It was a painful, faithful struggle for all of us," remembers Carter Echols--Samaritan wanted to offer more programs and services but was reluctant to leave the St. Stephen's neighborhood.

In St. Stephen's cramped basement, space had become so tight that often there was only standing room in the reception area, and the two employment counselors frequently had to meet simultaneously with two participants in a 9-by-15 foot office. "If you had more space, there's lots more I'd like to tell you," one man told Barbara Reich, a volunteer caseworker. By relocating to Hamilton Street, SMGW was able to occupy an entire three-story frame house with ample room for meetings and other activities.

The rector and parishioners of St. Stephen's also had mixed feelings about Samaritan Ministry's relocation. They were proud of having given birth to the Ministry, seeing it through the early period of struggle, and serving as its home for so many years. So for them the Ministry's going was tinged with sadness. Yet they made it clear that they recognized the logic of the move, and they remain staunch parish partners.

"We were sorry to have lost such a close and wonderful part of our lives," says the Rev. Carlyle Gill, St. Stephen's rector. "We truly feel that our parish and our neighborhood were blessed by Samaritan Ministry's presence. But now that it's gone, we still maintain ties of friendship and continue our strong commitment to the Ministry and what it means for the whole community."

SAMARITAN MINISTRY GOES ECUMENICAL

The space on Hamilton Street is owned by and is located two doors away from Christ Lutheran Church, which joined Samaritan Ministry and Community Family Life Services to create the Transitional Housing Corporation. To Samaritan Ministry's board, the powerful assistance from Christ Lutheran Church warranted the inclusion of that church, in November 1993, as an associate partner with the other SMGW partner parishes, until then an entirely Episcopal group.

"We are proud to be working hand-in-hand with Samaritan Ministry," said Christ Lutheran's pastor, the Rev. Norman Theis. "The lesson of our relationship is that no congregation can do it alone. Clearly, community effort must involve each of us, each using their strengths for the benefit of all."
The growth and change of Samaritan Ministry was reflected in the revised mission statement adopted by the board in May 1994 to better describe SMGW's overarching goal of building community in the divided Washington metropolitan area:

- Samaritan Ministry is a community partnership bringing together homeless people and others in need in Greater Washington with support and volunteers from Episcopal and other churches in a joint effort to improve the lives of all.

- Samaritan Ministry pursues this goal by promoting awareness of community needs, fostering partnership at all levels, breaking down barriers imposed by poverty, and developing participants' abilities to help themselves to better lives.

SHARING THE SECRET

By 1994 Samaritan Ministry's unique program was gaining notice far beyond the Beltway and more and more inquiries began to come in from other parts of the country. As a response, SMGW in 1995 published a 42-page manual entitled Samaritan Ministry's Next Step Program: A Replicable Model for Effective Social Ministry by Congregations, funded by partner parish St. Alban’s, D.C., for use in other communities seeking a blueprint for self-sufficiency programs. Since the manual's publication, reviews of it, the number of copies sold, and inquiries about it from other parts of the United States, have continued to indicate the growing interest in Samaritan Ministry's unique and evolving approach.

NEW OPPORTUNITY IN SOUTHEAST D.C.

Transportation has long been a prime concern to Samaritan Ministry in its efforts to extend its services within the Greater Washington community. Bus routes are not always within easy reach of participants and can be especially difficult to cope with for the disabled and single parents with children in tow. The opportunity to ease transportation problems ranked high among the reasons that in 1996 Samaritan moved its Southeast Center from the Church of the Holy Communion in Congress Heights to a building on the grounds of Young's Memorial Church of Christ Holiness in Anacostia, which had been renovated by Young's Memorial, the Church of the Apostles, and SMGW.

The new Southeast Center, which opened on April 25, is not only closer to people living in the area, but it is also more convenient for bus travel. And it has more parking space, making it accessible to volunteers from other parishes. Occupying a two-story house at 2451 Ainger Place, it is also much larger than the old Southeast
office, making it possible for Samaritan Ministry both to expand its social service programs in the Southeast and, for the first time, to offer employment services to the area. Previously these were available only at the Northwest Center—a long trip by bus.

"It was a perfect fit for both Young's Memorial and Samaritan Ministry," said Anne Elsbree, of St. Luke's, Bethesda, whose SMGW program committee played an important part in arranging the move. "Young's Memorial was looking hard for a social service outreach program to occupy its building at the same time we were looking for a prime location with a congenial host."

For parishioners and volunteers at Holy Communion, there were mixed feelings about losing the Southeast Center—sadness at its going, yet good memories of Samaritan Ministry's nine years there and how it had changed the community. "I worked as a volunteer case manager for Samaritan Ministry for seven of those years," said Cindy Duggard, a Holy Communion parishioner, "and they were happy ones. In the child development program we read stories to the children. One mother told me I was such an inspiration for her little daughter that she won first prize for reading the most books among 8- to 9-year-olds in her school club. We all learned a lot together."

ACCOMPLISHMENT—IN FIGURES AND LIVES

In any given year since Samaritan Ministry began, there are two ways of assessing its performance. First, a look at the numbers. In 1995 program participants made 3,136 visits to SMGW offices and, teamed with caseworkers, accomplished 2,821 Next Steps. During the year 157 of the program participants landed jobs—for a total of 1,747 over the last ten years.

Figures, however, only begin to tell the story of what Samaritan Ministry has meant to the community. That is best told through the individuals who came off Washington's streets looking for help to change their lives—then did so. Like Clyde, who had to quit a janitor's job on becoming a single parent with four small children. Shifted to public assistance but unable to keep up with the rent, Clyde moved his family into a shelter. For a couple of years he had to take night shifts in a hotel to pay a babysitter.

Then Clyde heard about Samaritan Ministry. Moving through Next Steps as the last of his children started school, he found work, through the Ministry's employment service, at St. George's, D.C., which got him home before his kids. After three years there, he moved to a small local development corporation, doing contract work in the
North Capitol area. "Things are definitely looking up now," he says. "And Samaritan Ministry has been behind me all the way. Its job interview program alone gave me a tremendous boost. It's just a wonderful organization."

Then there's Brenda, who had slipped into a life of alcohol, prostitution, and abusive relationships. Persuaded to visit SMGW by her brother, Brenda took Next Steps that helped her to obtain desperately-needed eyeglasses, better computer skills, carfare to employment interviews, and a full-time job. Now Brenda is able to care both for herself and her son, who had been living with her grandmother. "I can never thank Samaritan Ministry enough," she says. "They helped me find my true self."

Gerald had been an X-ray film librarian at a hospital but had suffered from depression for years after his mother died. "She was the only person I could talk to." He had taken to drugs and alcohol, losing his job and the will to find another. He finally went to Samaritan Ministry, which placed him in a substance abuse center, gave him food and clothes, and helped him through a whole series of Next Steps until he found work again. "I feel like a changed man, not just a man with a job," said Gerald, "and I'm determined to stay off drink and drugs the rest of my life. Once Samaritan Ministry finds you, and knows you want to work toward a goal, it sticks with you all the way."

And there's John, who stood in line every night to enter a homeless shelter following a ten-year prison term that made employers leery of hiring him. Finally John, too, found Samaritan Ministry, and life slowly but surely began to look up. He honed his job-search skills by attending workshops on resumes and interviews, using SMGW's job listings and support to contact employers, acquiring clothes and toilet articles from the Ministry, then getting bus tokens to travel to employment interviews. After six long months and many rejections, John was hired by a waste management company to work full-time with excellent benefits. Saving to rent his own place, he told the Ministry, "I could never have made it without you."

With every year the files at Samaritan Ministry collect more such stories of lives transformed, together with testimonials of SMGW "alumni" explaining how caseworkers helped make their dreams come true. Of course, the files also contain records of Next Steps not taken, of participants who drop out, and of jobs or housing gained, then lost. But SMGW has responded by starting regular follow-ups with employed former participants and with their employers. And every day continues to bring newcomers to SMGW's doors, as word spreads in the neighborhoods that "those folks can help you make it happen."
HEALERS ALONG THE WAY

Of vital importance on Samaritan Ministry's journey are the many volunteers who work. Next Step by Next Step, to assist participants toward their goals. These include such people as Mac and Franna McClelland from All Saints' Church, Chevy Chase, an original partner parish. Mac, an early board member, served as a front-office coordinator, managing the flow of people into the office, and is now a social service caseworker. Franna began volunteering by compiling program statistics, then switched to the Southeast Center where she has used her expertise in child development to help create and implement SMGW's family program.

Of the years with Samaritan Ministry, Mac says: "I was at loose ends after retiring from the Foreign Service, trying various ways to stay busy and useful. Samaritan Ministry filled a real need in my life, gave it a new meaning. Franna came to it differently because she had done the same sort of work earlier with Arab families in Baghdad and Dhahran.

"One reason we both enjoy Samaritan Ministry so much," Mac adds, "is its family atmosphere. The people are so wonderful to work with. I cannot think of a more rewarding challenge."

Another couple playing a big role in guiding people toward self-sufficiency are Adrian and Sandra Loftin of St. Alban's, D.C. Adrian, a retired human resources executive for National Geographic, has served as a front office coordinator and employment caseworker and is now a job placement specialist. Sandra, meanwhile, has worked as a resume writer and an employment caseworker, helping hundreds of program participants move through their Next Steps to jobs. Echols calls such volunteers "the lifeblood of our mission."

As SMGW marks its tenth year in 1996, what changes lie ahead? Roberta Wood-Benjamin, the director of programs since 1991, with many years in such work for other organizations, stresses the importance of continuing to refine and improve upon existing programs. "We learn more every year in working within the community," she says, "and our participants play a vital role in helping us to do so. They have caused us to put increasing emphasis on the quality of the services we provide, as compared with the number we serve."
Several of those with past or present leadership positions in Samaritan Ministry feel a need to do more to promote advocacy --that is, to play a more active role in rallying community support to attack poverty. Polly Donaldson calls advocacy "not just an adjunct but a responsibility." Frank Wade sees a need for an advocacy group that would work separately from the operational side of Samaritan Ministry.

SPREADING THE MINISTRY'S WINGS

Others at Samaritan Ministry feel the time has come to decentralize its operations, so that much of its work could be carried out through individual parishes throughout the Greater Washington area. Despite the relocation of its two centers, many participants must still travel miles to reach SMGW offices, discouraging a number from coming at all. The computer age offers the opportunity to change this situation and to get parishes even more involved. All information on available resources and program participants could go into a central information pool. Then, partner parishes using modems could draw upon the data to support casework in their own neighborhoods, to the farthest reaches of the metropolitan area.

Samaritan Ministry already is extending its reach in new directions, with its Next Step program beginning to serve as a model for other social service organizations. One of these is Three Oaks Center, in Lexington Park, Md., which opened in 1996 to serve homeless people in St. Mary's County. When a dozen local religious, civic, and business organizations joined to create the Center in 1995, they were especially attracted to Samaritan Ministry's work because, according to Rona Harting, rector of the Church of the Ascension, Lexington Park, "Of a number of social service organizations we visited in Baltimore and Washington, none impressed us as much as Samaritan Ministry and its unique approach. We, therefore, asked its help in holding a retreat, and with its sympathetic support were able to get ourselves up and running. Samaritan Ministry continues to serve not only as a model but as an inspiration to us all."

Extending SMGW's reach still further, in mid-1996, Carter Echols, Martha Hamstra, and Robert Wood-Benjamin traveled to Champaign, Illinois, to assist another organization seeking a model to help less fortunate members of its community.

Whatever changes lie ahead, Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington celebrates its 10th anniversary by pursuing in expanding ways its partnership of parishes against poverty, working to enhance the lives of all it touches. And it continues to draw its inspiration from the Biblical parable of the traveler whose help enabled another in distress to continue, healed, on his journey.