



The Servant

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE BLAND MINISTRY CENTER

SPRING 2019

Did you know that on any given week, there are between 30-40 regular local volunteers working around Bland Ministry Center, keeping the grounds presentable, serving in the main office, food pantry, and clothes closet?

The make-up of our BMC Family is constantly changing. Someone retires and comes around looking for a reason to stay busy. Another sticks around after completing college community service hours. Some have left us to be closer to family. Too many we have lost in their old age.

Among our current volunteers actually willing to share personal information, their median age is 72! The oldest is 84. I've got to tell you, if I make it to 84, I'm going to be home still watching cop show reruns. The average volunteer has been with us for 8.9 years; one has been actively volunteering for as long as 20 years. There's no denying, our volunteers are aging. They are capable. They are still active in serving others. They are generous and fun. But... they are aging (no offense, guys). ***And they need people like YOU to join them.***

Ecclesiastes 4:9 says "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor." If you are local, have time, and are able, we would like to encourage you to come along side one of our current volunteers so that we all might have a better return for the labor being done at Bland Ministry Center. They want you to know that it's not just work either! "The new friendships that you get to establish that feel like you're a family" and "the feeling that you get when you know you're doing a small part in helping others" are a couple of the added benefits of working with us.

There are jobs for everyone: Paperwork and light housekeeping. Sorting clothing donations or packing food boxes. Heavy lifting and long rides to pick up food donations. It takes all kinds of people, but we find ourselves more and more in need of strong, young backs for the bulk of the jobs.

While there's no job description or list of requirements for serving here, let me tell you about one of our model volunteers: No matter how rough the day had been, our moods were always lifted when he came around. He was joyful. Kind. Patient. Wise. Humble. An encourager. A servant. I'm talking about Jack Fields. Jack was on his way to work here in Bland a couple of weeks ago after a food pick-up when he passed away suddenly. We don't expect that his shoes (or trademark overalls) will ever be filled. But if you think that you can practice even a little bit of joy, kindness, patience, or humility, we'd sure love to have you around.

Our Mission

The mission of the Bland Ministry Center is simple: to meet the physical and spiritual needs of people. We can easily say that our clients are fed and clothed. Our dental staff makes sure mouths are healthy; funding is provided to keep clients' electricity on during the coldest winter months. We certainly have programs in place for regularly meeting basic physical needs, but of course that isn't our full mission. We see both physical and spiritual needs arise almost daily, and often before we can even act, God has orchestrated a solution to those needs. He doesn't just show us where there is a need, He puts people in our path who have the means to meet those needs.

When we say that we strive to be a "missionary point of service for all Christians, Churches, and organizations by providing opportunities to fulfill Christ's Great Commission," there is probably no program that better highlights this than construction and home repair.

Last year we relied heavily on referrals from area agencies that had clients in home health situations as well as a new partnership with Western Blue Ridge Baptist Network's Hearts and Hammers program for mission team projects. Both relationships were a Godsend when it came time to match visiting teams with local needs.

One of the "referred clients" from last summer was a disabled gentleman who lived alone. An agency got involved after this man laid on his floor for three days without a phone and with no visitors checking in on him. Two mission teams worked on his home to make it handicap accessible, but more than that, they formed a relationship with him, sharing the love, joy, and hope of Jesus with him. This man told them how much he had loved to sing in church growing up, and how he used to play hymns on an old guitar that he had long since lost. He meant enough to one member of the team that they mailed him a guitar after they returned home from their week in Southwest Virginia.

Team leaders often reflect upon their week in a journal kept in the dining room of the mission house, many listing their team members or the projects completed. One shared that they had team members "young and old learning new skills with power tools and powerful witnessing." There's nothing more precious to us than experienced laborers doing hard work with patience and kindness. Think how much simpler it would be for them to go onto a job site, put their heads down, and get the work done quickly. Instead, they take the time to teach the younger generations accompanying them and to minister to the homeowners they serve.

We could not be effective in the home repair program without coordinators like David Clonch from Hearts and Hammers, home health providers who care enough about their clients to go above their regular duties, or mission teams that are willing to serve and get involved in the lives of those they are working with.

We would love to have you get involved in meeting physical and spiritual needs of the elderly and disadvantaged members of our community. Your church can organize a mission trip with a team member who is a contractor or skilled in construction. If you don't have skilled laborers but still want to work, Hearts and Hammers can organize a project and let you work with one of their local leaders. Finally, if you want to make a difference but prefer to do so from the comfort of your own home, you can take one of our Blue Envelopes. Numbered 1-200, you return your envelope with the corresponding number. Envelope #105 comes back with \$105, and so on. The Blue Envelope Project brings in right at \$20,000 to go straight towards building material to allow construction teams to meet physical and spiritual needs.

Feeding His Sheep

On Tuesdays, our main office becomes the hub for food pantry distribution. Nancy greets clients at the door and sends them to either Carol, Judy, or Sandy depending on their county of residence. They make their way around the house to Barbara and then Pat. It's rare that we go a Tuesday without hearing a flirty elderly man comment on all of the beautiful young ladies helping him out. Our "office ladies" usually return the flattery with a touch of sarcasm, but at the risk of embarrassing them, they're all quite beautiful inside and out. We always enjoy having them around, but we truly depend on them on Tuesdays.

That being said, they're still volunteers, and we've been advised by our lawyers that we cannot hold them here against their will. When one isn't feeling well or, Heaven forbid, takes a vacation, one of us is left to fill in, much to our clients' chagrin. A couple of months ago, Miss Sandy was out visiting grandbabies, so I filled in at the table next to Carol Townley.

Carol and her husband Ron are members of First Baptist Church Bluefield and have been actively serving the Ministry Center since its inception in 1980. For more than 25 years, Carol has registered food pantry clients in the old "White House" and now the brick office. She starts each Tuesday at 9:50 on the front porch of the office welcoming clients, asking for prayer requests, and leading them in prayer.

When I sat next to Carol, I waited patiently while the first few clients in the door went through the out of state line. Finally one of our regular Bland County men came in, and I got hands on the notebook ready to sign his form for the day. Nope, he pulled out the chair next to Carol, and proceeded to catch up on life (mostly doctor visits and weather) while I flipped through for his paper. The next Virginia family to come in also walked right past me while I was smiling and motioning for them to have a seat in my chair. "There's Miss Carol! How are you doin' today?" She asked how so-and-so was doing after surgery.

I was beginning to think I had something on my face! Why wouldn't anyone come through my line? I felt like I was destined to sit and watch everyone else work, but I was filling in TO HELP! I was determined to catch the next Virginia family in my line. But with Carol's chair already full with her current client, the next woman came in... and walked right past me! "Excuse me, ma'am. Right here!" "Oh no, I've got to see Miss Carol." "No ma'am," I told her, "I've got the books right here, I can help you."

"No ma'am, I've got to ask Miss Carol to pray for me. I'll wait for her."

Well, I guess I can't be mad at that. That is just who Carol is, though. The folks coming through the lines aren't just forms in a notebook. They are her people. She knows their families, their histories, and their prayers. She writes down their requests so that she can remember and specifically take them to God. She hurts when they hurt, and she rejoices when they rejoice.

Working with the public can be tiresome work. Sometimes our tanks are just about empty or we're being pulled in five different directions, and we can be impatient. But then I am reminded of our mission- to meet the physical and spiritual needs of those in our communities. I appreciate Carol's reminder that our clients are coming to be fed, but that means so much more than a couple of bags of produce or box full of canned goods. It means they are being treated with compassion and dignity... That they know they are loved when they walk through our doors... That they leave with the hope of Jesus.

What's Next

May 3 CHOSEN ROAD IN CONCERT

Join our volunteers at Parkview Baptist Church in Bluefield, VA as we enjoy the music of Chosen Road! The event will be held Friday, May 3, at 7:00 pm. Please call our office for tickets (\$10) as they will **not** be sold at the door.

June 8 BEAR JAM

Our 5th annual contemporary Christian worship event is moving indoors! This year's event will feature Ryan Stevenson and will be held at the APEX Center in Wytheville. Tickets start at just \$10 on our website!

August 16 Hope & Care Golf Tournament

Due to the rainy, windy weather we always experience at our usual May event, we have moved our annual golf tournament back a little later in the year. More details to follow, but pencil us in your calendar for this August!

Have luggage, will travel

Contact our office if you'd like to have Dee Dee for a speaking engagement! We would love to come share what's going on at the Bland Ministry Center with your church, WMU meeting, or civic group. Priority given to destinations that have a Duck Donuts.

Is your church bringing a mission team this year?

Please be advised that our insurance company is requiring proof of insurance from all of our groups. Have your team leader call us with any questions.



**Bland
Ministry
Center**

FOOD PANTRY • CLOTHES CLOSET • DENTAL CLINIC • HOME REPAIR



If you would like to hold a special collection for the Ministry Center, please consider the following needs:

Denture Kits for storing and cleaning

Lowe's gift cards

School supplies

Floss, ADA toothpaste, toothbrushes

Ramen noodles

Hamburger Helper

Socks & Underwear (new, in package)

Crackers

Canned Meat

Office Supplies (copy paper, ink pens)

Peanut Butter

Cereal