

LCC CONNECTION

Get to Know a Ministry

This past year the Bloomington homeless outreach took the name Lifeline Ministry. This ministry has come under the oversight of LCC's Mission Team which gives accountability and access to more resources with the desire to establish a long-lasting, local outreach.



How did Lifeline begin?

From the beginning, the Lord has laid on Darin and Liz Johnson's heart the desire to serve people. They did not always know where or how, but this is the story of God's leading.

. . .

In January of 2023, LCC's Mission Team planned a trip to Kenya, Africa to serve for a week with Paul and Mary Kamunge. Darin and Liz went with the McKains and Kaebbs, and after returning home, the desire to serve, specifically with orphans, began to grow in their hearts. They had heard of the adoption agency, Lifesong, through Clayton and Lorraine Slagel, so Darin met for an interview with Lifesong staff. He told them upfront, "I don't know why I'm here." He was recommended to SpreadTruth and this led them to join the summer trip to NY city. They learned many things about outreach on this trip. Some pros and some cons. Returning from the trip they were still in quandary, unsure and directionless as to the next step.

LCC CONNECTION

Labor Day 2023, Darin and Liz were at home. They had no church events to attend, no family to visit, and were feeling dejected. Darin was convicted and decided that if he wanted to help people he needed to go to them. Being familiar with visiting people on the streets in NY, Darin and Liz decided to spend Labor Day with the homeless on the streets of Bloomington. They packed up some sandwiches and drove the hour from their home in Sauneman.

...

The first man they met was sitting on a park bench. After asking his name and giving him a sandwich, they found out he needed socks. They told him they'd be back, but he didn't believe them. He said, "No one ever comes back." They came across another man who looked in even worse shape. "He's drugged, probably lazy." All the reasons ran through Darin's mind why this man wasn't deserving of help. Darin asked his name. The man told him and said he had been praying for someone to bring him food. This humbled them, knowing there was Someone with a greater plan than they could see. The man told them his story of foster care, the military, and how he got to where he was. For three hours Darin and Liz talked to him.

They returned to the man needing socks. Darin realized they had to be consistent and keep their promises if they were going to help these people. Since then this man has died but every Saturday, from that Labor day on, Darin and Liz traveled to Bloomington to share the gospel and share a meal with whomever the Lord brought along their path. They chose Saturdays because the other food pantries in Bloomington don't serve on the weekends.

...

As winter came, they changed the menu to hot pasta and meat sauce, serving it out of the back of their car. They took Bible tracts and hygiene items in hopes to build trust. "When you first meet people on the street they don't trust you. They are used to being used but also "ministered" to. They know the Christian lingo and anticipate being asked to pray the sinner's prayer," says Darin. Darin and Liz realized again that consistency was important and genuine care was needed. They couldn't go out just to do a good deed. Darin says, "These people need Jesus, food, and water. Everything else is extra."

A Continued Leading

Fast forward to May 2024. It was weighing on Darin's heart for him and Liz to get together with Clayton and Lorraine. Finding a time that worked, they went over for dinner. During dinner, Clayton and Lorraine mentioned they would make great parents and should consider adoption. But Darin said, "No, my heart is still in caring for orphans." The next day, Saturday, they traveled to Bloomington to serve. At one encampment the first person to come out of their tent was a woman who carried herself like she was pregnant. Darin asked her name and how she planned to care for the baby. Shocked that they noticed, Nastasha admitted she couldn't keep the baby and planned to give her up for adoption. Darin replied, "We'll take her." Going back to Liz, he told her the situation but before he could say anything more, Liz said, "We'll take her." The idea of adoption was fresh on their minds, and here was that exact opportunity.

LCC CONNECTION

They went back Sunday to take Nastasha food. They knew it was important for her to have nourishment while the baby developed and wanted to know more about the baby. It was another flurry of a day, with God bringing opportunity after opportunity for them to serve. Even on their way home they ended up with a flat tire. Thomas Luke came from Gridley with a jack and while they were changing the tire a homeless man came by needing a ride to Chenoa. Thomas talked with him and gave him a lift.

. . .

Every day they took food to Nastasha, showing her they were serious about caring for her and her baby. They thought of a name for the baby. Naomi. In the Bible Naomi's daughter-in-law chose Naomi's God and Darin and Liz wanted this baby to know their God. Thursday, they drove Nastasha to her sonogram appointment which progressed into rushing her to the hospital for an emergency C Section! Naomi was born May 20th, 2024 and her legal name was given, Naomi Grace Johnson. For the next month, Darin and Liz stayed in the hospital until Naomi was able to come home. They paused serving on Saturdays to get settled in with their little one.

. . .

The adoption process started immediately since the birth mother and father had given all rights directly to Darin and Liz. Remember the conversation Darin had with Lifesong telling them he didn't know why he was there? That previous interview expedited their process through Lifesong and Naomi's adoption was completed on October 31st, 2024.

Who helps with Lifeline?

Fall of 2024, Darin and Liz started going back to serve on the streets every other Saturday. This is the pattern they still hold today. They had purchased a van and fitted it with a generator and steam table and are now serving up to 11 gallons of pasta and 2 gallons of coffee a day. That feeds about 50 people with each person getting a hot bowl of food, a cup of coffee, a packaged snack, and a conversation if they are willing.

. . .

Several people have come alongside Darin and Liz in this ministry. Chad Fehr heard about the outreach from Carson and Tess Kuenzi who had accompanied them several times. Chad was familiar with serving food to the homeless, volunteering at the Salvation Army once a month but he is grateful for the opportunity to foster relationships and tell people of Christ while sharing food. This meets people's deepest spiritual needs. Chad will step down from serving during harvest so there is a need for someone to serve with Darin and Liz during that time.

. . .

Recently, a sister volunteer from Ministry and More has been serving with them. She had a hard background and is able to minister to the ladies. Are you a woman who would like to serve? Women have an opening to talk to the ladies on the street since many of them do not trust men.

LCC CONNECTION



Curt Hastings and Dale Gross oversee that supplies are stocked for the ministry. Items like spare tents, toiletries, first aid kits, socks, coats, tracts, Bibles and water. They have reorganized the Mission Team's storage room and put in more shelving. The items are funded through the Mission Team budget and donations. Proceeds from this year's Chili Cookoff went towards these supplies and a replacement generator that was needed.

...

Alana Fehr and Marsha Slagel cook the meals. Twice a month they each cook up meat and pasta, assembling it with sauce into gallon bags ready for the freezer or for serving that week. They have a steady source of donated meat from a butcher in Fairbury but the pasta and sauce come from donations and the Mission budget. It costs about \$75 per Saturday for the pasta, sauce, bottled water, snacks, coffee, and utensils. These ladies have a system down to the cooking process and are using the biggest pots, pans and roasters they have available! They are open to more cooks if you are interested.



What does a serving day look like?

Darin, Chad, and Liz (with Naomi) meet at the church at 8:30 am to make the coffee, get the generator started, and get the steam tables ready and filled with food. They check their spare stock and by 9:30 are heading to Bloomington. Stops include Home Sweet Home, downtown, the Abundant Life Church area, the Train Station, Carl BroMenn, Caseys, Salvation Army, behind Culvers, and anywhere they see people walking. They drive until either they are out of food or out of time which can be anywhere from 2 to 4 pm. They return to the church, clean up the containers and call it a day.



LCC CONNECTION



Your giving and prayers for your church are investments in this ministry.

Do you know of any needs in the church? This ministry welcomes opportunities to serve people in need who are associated with our church family. For example, meals were taken to help a church member's family when her newborn granddaughter was in critical condition in the hospital. Another member's son was ministered to when he was struggling on the streets, in and out of the hospital and passed away in Chicago.

Would you like to help cook? Jars of sauce and boxes of pasta are needed on a regular basis.

Do you have items you'd like to donate? Coats, socks, bedding, etc.

Would you like to help serve on a Saturday? The serving days are posted on the church Breeze calendar. *Contact the Missions Team if you are interested in serving in any of these ways.*

Why would someone want serve?

To be honest it's early on Saturday morning, rain or shine. Most of those you serve don't appreciate you or your gift of food and time. You will sometimes be accused by neighbors in the serving areas of enabling people and hindering businesses. Some of the people you serve seem to disappear, and later you learn that they have died. However, your faith and boldness in the Lord will be strengthened. You will see God's sovereignty on display. It is an opportunity to serve your Lord and fulfill these commands:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20).

After Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan he asked the lawyer, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." " (Luke 10:36-37)

Lifeline's story is a testimony of God's work in and through the family of God. We see God's children working together, unknowingly at times, for the furthering of his kingdom in "love with faith" (Eph. 6:23).