

Neighborhood Hospitality *by Amy Rich*



If you remove the yoke of oppression, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. Isaiah 58:9-12

Whenever Patchwork's doors are open, people come in.

They may be young or old; living in poverty or living on comfortable incomes; white, black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American; men or women; gay or straight; disabled; mentally ill; veterans; alone or part of large families.

It is our goal to treat every one of them with respect, no matter who they are.

Many come in for our Neighborhood Hospitality—for a cup of coffee and a donut; for a place to charge their cell phones; for a loaf of bread and some fresh produce; for clothing and other items from our free area; for some dog or cat food for their pets; to use our phone or fax machine; to rest in our library; to try to figure out where to go for help with their rent or utilities; to take a shower; or simply to have someone to talk to.

Last year, we logged approximately 5500 instances of this kind of hospitality. This number includes 592 showers for individuals who, for various reasons, had no other access to shower facilities.

I am often in and out of Patchwork's main office when our guests are talking to Dee and Shawn, our Office Assistants. Dee and Shawn also share stories with me from their experiences in the office. Through these stories, I am very aware that we are living in a broken world full of injustice.

We see good people working so hard to stay ahead of their monthly bills—water, electric, medicine, food, rent, mortgage payments—only to have a setback—a temporary layoff, an illness, a significant home repair, car trouble—arise and drag them down. We see wonderful people who care about others and who share a laugh with us in the main office but who can't break their addictions. They disappear for a few months, then reappear, telling us they've gotten themselves cleaned up again. We see people who are stressed by their living situations and who are trying to make good decisions, but whose stress clouds their decision making. We see people who have done terrible, inexcusable things in the past, but are here now asking for help.

My job at Patchwork is rewarding—I feel like I'm doing something meaningful and worthwhile. I don't lack the resources to live the way I want: simply yet comfortably. As I travel through



Neighborhood Hospitality (con't)

our city, I am generally greeted with respect. I do not live a life severely limited by injustice or oppression.

I want that for all of our guests. I believe that God wants that for them, as well, and that Jesus, in the way that he relates to the poor, the outcasts, and the ostracized, provides us with real life examples of how to bring them justice.

As I speak with our guests, I imagine what justice might look like in their lives: what would bring about the wholeness and completeness that I believe God would want for them. I imagine jobs for those who are able to work that would pay their living expenses and allow them to stop feeling the stress of being one small problem away from losing everything. I imagine flexible employers able to incorporate unusual souls into their workforce. I imagine alternative opportunities for those unable to work that would provide them with a way to feel they are making meaningful and worthwhile contributions to society. I imagine safe and affordable housing for everyone. I imagine healing for addicts, for those who are mentally ill, for those whose past is scarred by abuse. I imagine resources to help people get past the mistakes they've made.

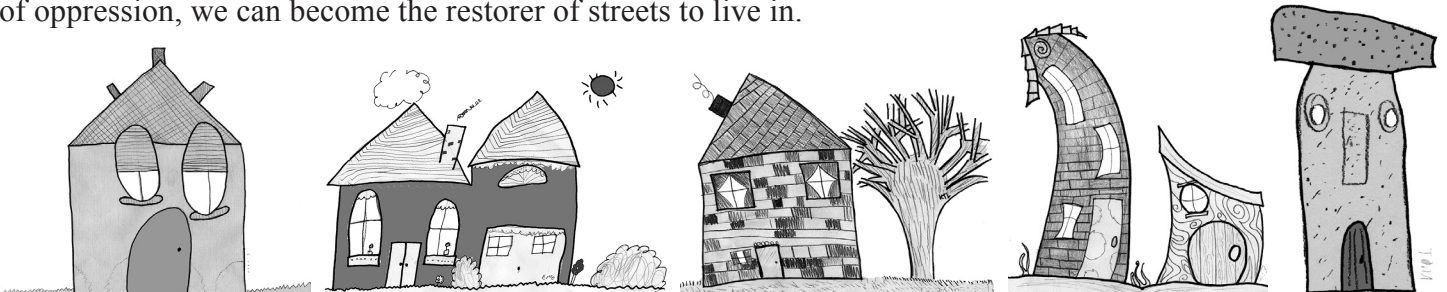
How can Patchwork even begin to bring justice to these situations? We don't provide financial assistance or jobs or counseling or housing or health care.

But, we are a witness to the injustice. I believe that is no small thing.

We are a place of acceptance and support. We are a place where people come together to try to learn from and understand each other. We are a place that runs on faith that there is a better way.

We are not alone. We are part of a much larger community of congregations and organizations and individuals who are working together to fight injustice.

I believe Patchwork embodies the words of Isaiah 58, and as part of a community working to remove the yoke of oppression, we can become the restorer of streets to live in.



Stories of Hospitality

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2

Patchwork's Neighborhood Hospitality can be difficult to describe to someone who has never experienced it themselves—someone who has never walked into our building on a Monday morning to see a group of people clustered around the kitchen table talking, drinking coffee, eating donuts, and charging their cell phones. We're not a day shelter. We're not a soup kitchen. We have a food pantry, but we don't provide any additional financial aid.

We are...something else.

Each day is varied. It has moments that are enjoyable as our guests joke with us, and we are able to provide exactly what they need. But there are also moments that are difficult when we meet people whose needs are great, whose resources are limited, and for whom we have no good answers.

Stories of Hospitality (con't)

One very cold winter day is a great example. A group of people drink coffee at the kitchen table. Another group of people sit in the library to rest. People come and go, some sorting through the free items by the office and others picking up some bread and fresh produce by the food pantry.

A few days ago, a woman taking a shower here asked Shawn if we had a hair dryer. We didn't, but the request got Shawn thinking, and she bought one for Patchwork. Today the woman is back, and she's brought a styling brush and hair spray. It's clear that being able to both shower and do her hair will absolutely make her day. "I hope I remember how to do this," she jokes. It's clear that she will feel great about herself today. She and her husband are living in a car while they look everywhere for work.

It's a very cold day in Evansville with a wind chill advisory in effect. Even the men taking showers request the hair dryer so they don't have to leave the building with wet hair.

Another woman shares photos of her newborn daughter with Shawn and me. We've gotten to know her and her family this fall as they've come to take showers from time to time. They own a home, but got behind on the water bill when her husband was temporarily laid off. They had just scraped together the money to get the water turned back on when the frigid temperatures hit and their pipes burst. Her husband is working on repairs.

A woman uses our office phone to check in with her daughter who is delivering a table to her apartment this morning. A man uses the kitchen phone to try to learn some details about a friend who was taken to the hospital this morning.

A woman from a local church came yesterday with a pile of homemade quilts for those in need. We give some to the couple who are living in their car and they are very grateful. Later, we give one to a man who is grateful for the warmth, for the beauty of the fabric, and for the happy memories of his grandmother's quilts.

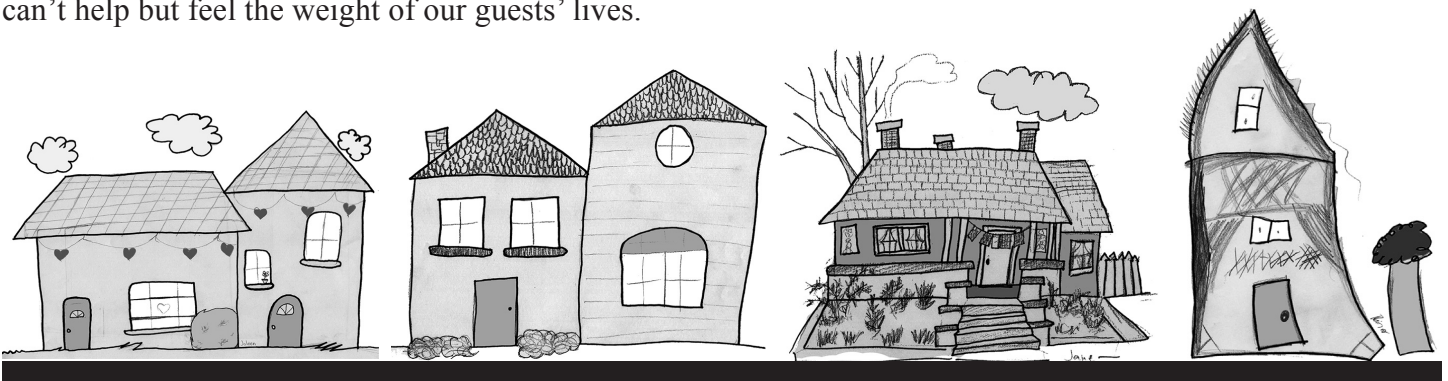
A man talks to Shawn. He's an alcoholic and he's fallen off the wagon, and while he was drunk, he has done something terrible that he deeply regrets. He's also homeless. His story is difficult to hear. Shawn calls around to other organizations and finds a free copy of the AA book he needs. He leaves to go to an AA meeting.

One of our regulars signs in for a shower. He's an interesting individual with plenty of stories to share about his former adventures, work, philosophy, and life. He, too, owns a house that he is slowly repairing as his finances allow. He doesn't have a lot, but he does have his dignity. He has yet to repair his shower, so he comes to Patchwork.

A woman calls Patchwork. Yesterday Dee was helping her to get food and other assistance, and she wants to thank Dee again for all her help.

And so is spent the day. We meet many people with complicated lives made more complicated by a lack of income.

I know many of you keep Patchwork and our guests in your prayers. I also ask for prayers for our staff who can't help but feel the weight of our guests' lives.



Sunday Fellowship at Patchwork Central

Each Sunday evening Patchwork Central is host to a diverse and informal gathering of friends of Patchwork. The service is usually led by members of the group, with occasional talks by guest speakers. While the subjects are varied according to the interests and theology of the person who is leading that evening, the meeting almost always includes singing, readings and reflection, prayer, communion, and, yes, of course, an offering to support Patchwork. Afterwards there is a pot luck supper and conversation.

If you have an interest in Patchwork and think you might enjoy this eclectic fellowship, please try us out. We meet every Sunday at 5:15 p.m. at 100 Washington Ave. in the Patchwork Meetinghouse.



Why do YOU come to Sunday Fellowship at Patchwork

Karen Husby:

“20 years ago, when I first came to Evansville, my colleague Pastor Walt Wangerin told me I should check out Patchwork Central. I did, and I stayed. I appreciate the commitment to living out our faith as a creative and transformative presence in the neighborhood and city. I lead worship about once a month, and find that the worshipping community will always have some worthwhile reflections on topics that we wrestle with as we seek to carry out our commitments. I tell folks that I have a lot more questions for them than answers, and I like it that the group welcomes the challenge.”

Beth Stone:

“I attend Patchwork Sunday evening services for two basic reasons:

- 1) It provides an opportunity to learn about and experience God and God’s presence.
 - 2) It provides an opportunity to learn about and experience community with other people.
- Maybe a third reason is that it provides an opportunity to share a meal with friends!”

Why do YOU come to Sunday Fellowship at Patchwork (con't)

Alan Winslow:

“The main reason I come to the evening meetings is the feeling of community (family) that is here. I like the fact that we can all have our own ideas about almost anything and can share them without fear of either a critical response or offending someone else. I also like the interactive worship format and feel that I almost always learn something. The other thing about Patchwork as a whole is that it gives me a place to be a part of something worthwhile and a sense of belonging and a reliable network of support. There is also something about Judi in it all. And having Amy and John here makes it all that much better.”

Erica Shipley:

“I come for food and fellowship. Everyone is open minded, and I never leave without learning something or without being given food for thought. The music is something I greatly enjoy. It is simple but holds great meaning. I enjoy the rotation of leaders who bring their personality, background, and thoughts to share and help us all grow. It is meaningful to me that we gather to grow together but also support the community in a needed way.”

Jane Vickers:

“I know I do not come often, but when I do, it is to see and be with the friends I have made there over the years working as the children’s program director.”

Laura Weaver:

“I enjoy meeting with a group of congenial, caring people at Patchwork Central on Sunday evenings. This gathering has many attractive features. One is the variety of speakers, topics, and points of view. I also appreciate the group participation in readings, communion, and singing. Especially important for me is the communal experience of spirited singing. This group enjoys singing, accompanied by talented pianists. In this activity we connect with each other and with God. Indeed, I think congregational singing can be considered a sacrament (Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger). I’m glad that, in these Patchwork gatherings, singing is not subordinate to but valued equally with the word. Each week my participation in this group sustains and inspires me.”

Darlene Blagg:

“I like coming to Patchwork Central because of the wonderful fellowship that we have among us. I really enjoy the music: the singing and piano playing. I feel like my spirit gets an uplift with some of the talks by the people who are leading the service. It is a wonderful support system of loving and caring people.”

Robin Church:

“Although I’ve only been attending Sunday evening worship at Patchwork for a short while, it has already become an important part of my life—something I look forward to all week. One of the main reasons is because it’s truly such a patchwork of people. I remember the night Phil Fisher led the service and asked about everyone’s religious background. I was amazed at the many different answers—Quaker, Mennonite, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Church of God, none, and probably more that I’ve forgotten. I love the diversity and the respect for that diversity our Community demonstrates when we share communion every week. Other churches I’ve attended felt like they were filled with all arms or legs or mouths, but I think at Patchwork we’ve got a little of everything—truly the body of Christ. I also love that we are a smallish group—I’m not at all into Big Box Mega churches. Then there’s the potluck dinner afterwards—as Alan Winslow calls it, the best kept secret in town. :-)”

Patchwork Food Pantry Update

The Evansville Emergency Food Pantry Consortium, of which Patchwork is one of six member-pantries, is experiencing major changes and growth. As the Consortium adjusts, it needs your help.

Hungry individuals and families are eligible to receive food from one of the six Consortium pantries once every 30 days. Before they can receive food, families must obtain a food voucher from one of several referral agencies across town. On any given day, multiple Consortium pantries are open across the city to give hungry people food. Last year, the combined Consortium pantries served 45,000 individuals from 18,000 households. The food each family receives is nutritionally balanced and is enough for everyone in the family to eat for 3-4 days.

Behind the scenes, every time a referral agency issues a voucher, the agency calls a central clearinghouse to confirm that the family seeking food has not received food from a Consortium pantry in the past 30 days. We have found that, while most people are happy to follow the rules, there are enough who try to cheat the system so that without the limit, the demand for food would outstrip our ability to pay to provide it.

For many, many years, the clearinghouse has been handled by the 211 operators at the United Way of Southwestern Indiana. However, demand for 211's services has greatly increased recently, which means that United Way can no longer provide this service for the Consortium.

As a solution, the Consortium has started its own call center that, as of March 1, 2014, is working with referral agencies to track and limit households' food pantry usage. The tracking software, office space, computers, phones lines, internet, and coordination of volunteers are unexpected and sizable expenses for the Consortium. Additional donations to the Consortium would be welcome. Tax deductible donations can be sent directly to: The Evansville Emergency Food Pantry Consortium, P.O. Box 2536, Evansville, IN 47728. You can designate your check for food, office expenses, or the area of greatest need.

The Consortium is also looking for volunteers to staff the new call center, which is open from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Each volunteer would commit to three hours a week answering phones and entering data into the computer. Contact us at Patchwork if you would be interested in volunteering.

Your support of the Evansville Emergency Food Pantry Consortium indirectly helps Patchwork's food pantry because we would not be able to keep our food pantry open without the help of the Consortium.

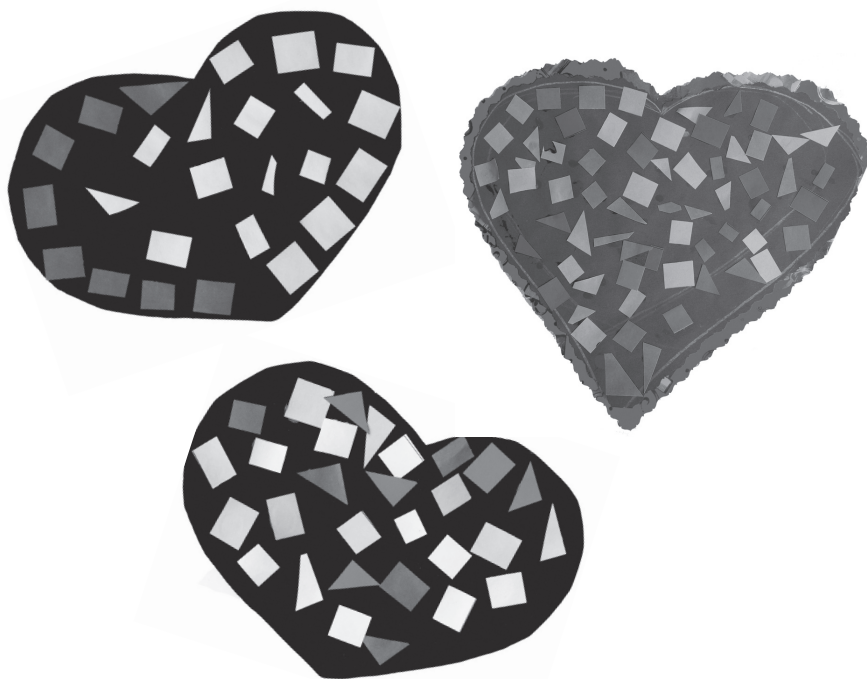


PATCHWORK MISSION STATEMENT

Based in Evansville, Indiana, Patchwork Central, Inc. creates community and encourages spiritual and social growth

by offering hospitality,
by providing opportunities for learning,
by fostering creativity and involvement in the arts, and
by working toward a more peaceful and just world.

Patchwork's
Pancake Extravaganza
coming up
Saturday, April 5
7:30 am – 11:30 am
Adults \$6 & Children \$4



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Please be generous as you consider sending your cash contribution in the envelope provided for your convenience. Your generosity will help us continue the Patchwork tradition of providing these many creative programs.

Indiana Youth Institute Indiana Youth Investment Award 2005



This activity made possible by the Vanderburgh Community Foundation, the Indiana Arts Commission, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



The Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana





100 Washington Avenue
Evansville, IN 47713-1521

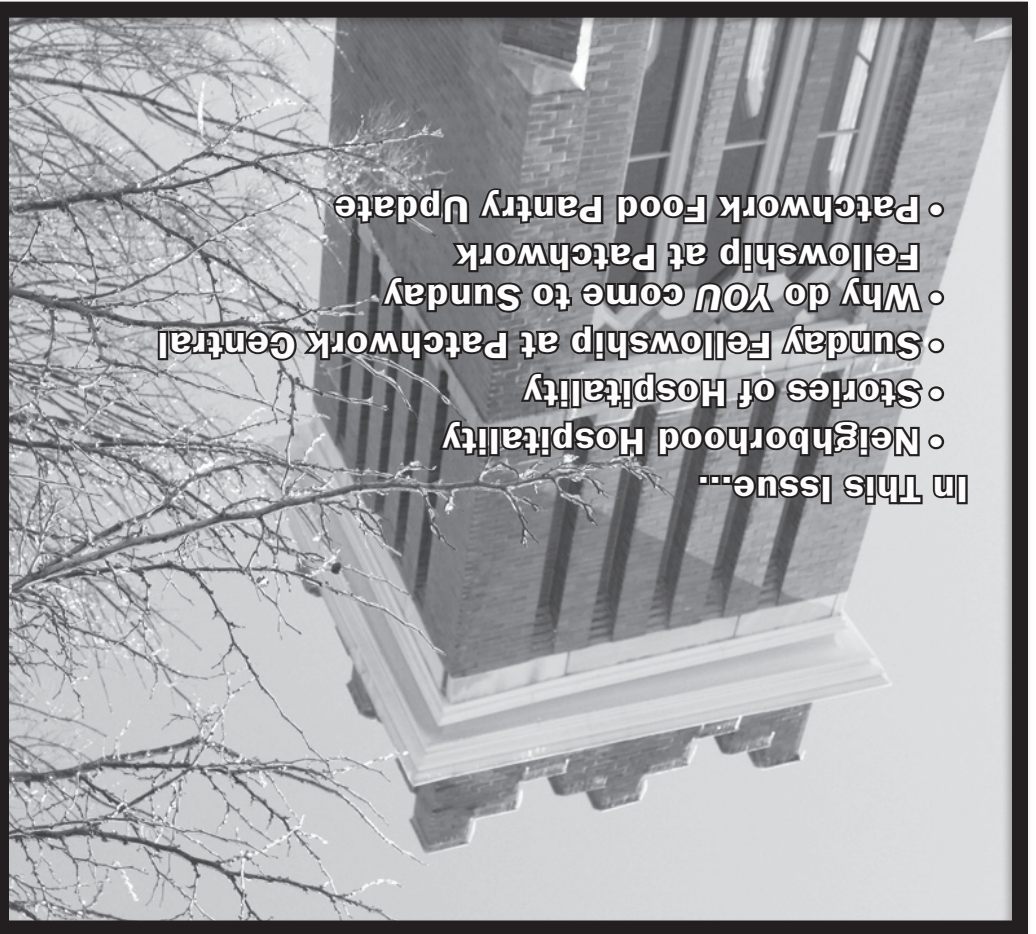
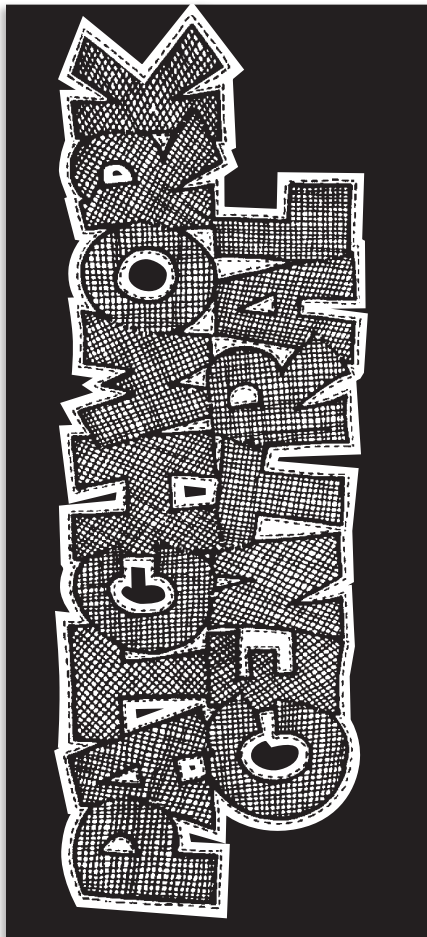
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