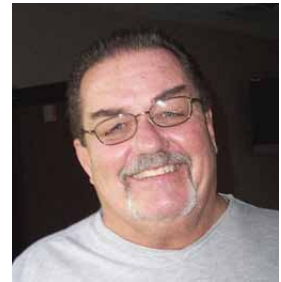


## Volunteer Spotlight

By Rick Lynn

I met our Volunteer Spotlight candidate, Jim Eastman, while volunteering as an overnight supervisor in a MCREST shelter at Sacred Heart church in Roseville. Jim had also signed up to help as an overnight supervisor for the same reason I do, there is usually a shortage of volunteers for overnight supervision. I have met and become good friends with so many people like Jim serving overnight both in my own church and at other churches. It is a quiet time of basically watching over the church and sleeping guests so you get a great chance for conversation and fellowship. Jim and I have now been friends for about two years.



*Jim Eastman*

The week I met Jim, Sacred Heart was helping MCREST cover an open week in the schedule by donating their wonderful building. Jim volunteers as a member of the “B” team that steps in whenever an open week occurs or a church cannot completely cover all the volunteer tasks to run a full week-long shelter. Jim earns his living driving the big rig trucks, traveling often and all over the country. When Jim is home MCREST knows they can count on him to help out. I thought Jim would be a good candidate for the Volunteer Spotlight because he is an ordinary person, like so many of us men and women, but he is also extraordinary in a certain way. I asked Jim why he does this volunteer work and he said he could best answer that question by telling me a story of a man he knew a few years back.

Jim said, the guy enjoyed a drink or two but never thought he had a problem with alcohol. Turned out he did have a problem, he was an alcoholic. At the same time he was a successful finance manager in the retail auto industry and his success earned him a beautiful upscale home, a pool in yard, two cars in the garage etc. He was happily married to a great woman and he and his wife had adopted their two grandchildren to spare them a life of drug abuse their parents had fallen into. The couple made the special commitment to protect and love these two kids as they do to this day. Unfortunately this loving story started to unravel because the man could not get his own substance problem under control. Like so many afflicted with a substance abuse problem, be it alcohol or drugs, the substance takes over their lives and without intervention the substance wins. The personal damage goes far beyond just themselves as whole families come apart. This once proud man, next lost his job and then compounded his own bad luck by making some bad personal choices to try to keep his home. Those bad choices landed him in worse financial shape and even bigger legal problems. His wife then asked for a divorce. Divorce is a life changing, stressful experience for everyone involved but this guy had his uncontrolled alcoholism to deal with also. In a matter of only a year he was homeless, estranged from his children, whom he cherished, and living on the street. He was too proud to go to a shelter. During a cold winter week in January the man actually camped out in a field across from the Macomb County Social Services offices on Elizabeth Road for two weeks. He found debris in the field and covered himself from the cold...he basically was just trying to survive. His despair and hopelessness were overwhelming and depression set in. He felt lost and with no friends. He had not eaten in days and the sensation was

nothing he had ever felt before. It was not the hunger he had felt if he had a busy day and he missed lunch or breakfast, it was a gnawing hunger that made him weak. When he could no longer stand the hunger he went into the Macomb County Social Services offices and asked for help. The office staff came up with a jar of peanut butter and some peaches but told him he would need to go to the Salvation Army in Mt. Clemens for any further help. The Salvation Army referred him to MCREST and gave him two bus tickets to get him down to the MCREST office in Roseville.

At MCREST, the man was welcomed by Fred Pantalleresco. Fred has worked with the homeless for many years and he knows how people living on the street feel and what they have endured. At the same time Fred believes in tough love and that is what the man got from Fred. April Morris then worked to rebuild the man's confidence, changing his focus from past problems to rebuilding for the future. April helped with job search and even found a program in Michigan Works that would pay tuition for the man to be retrained for a new career. As Fred and April rebuilt the man's shattered confidence and self image Joelene Beckett helped him start Alcoholics Anonymous and served as his substance abuse recovery coach. The man spent a little over three months in MCREST church shelters while training for a new job. The man started a new job and found a new home within weeks of finishing the CAP program (Choose A Path) at MCREST. While his marriage is over, his life with his children is robust and he has his own home again thanks to MCREST helping him get back on his feet.

I'm pretty sure you would agree that this is an inspirational story for Jim to witness and relay to me. Jim said he thinks the story alone frames what MCREST is all about... so much more than just a cot and a meal. So in Jim's opinion, MCREST is a great place to volunteer to do God's work. He went on to say, "if you can't volunteer for some reason then support MCREST financially if you are able, including fund raising events, and do it all to help those down on their luck and less fortunate." Remember when I said Jim Eastman was also extraordinary? **Jim's dedication to volunteering is driven primarily because he was the man who lived the story above.** Jim experienced one of the worst fates to happen to someone, he became homeless. All of the usual culprits played a part in his fate, substance abuse, lack of employment, divorce and bad personal choices. Jim was once flying high like many but was brought to his knees by homelessness and a string of bad events. While on his knees he reintroduced himself to God and they have made a peace about it all. With God's help MCREST gave Jim the "hand up" he needed. Jim did the rest and he continues to rebound from those days, reaching out to other homeless men and women in the MCREST shelters. He shares his story whenever possible and tells homeless folks to "never give up." In fact the loves of Jim's life are his 14 year old son Dayne and his 13 year old daughter Quinn. Jim gave the kids, especially Quinn, a three-part mantra to repeat everyday. Jim tests Quinn to repeat his mantra every so often and she quickly says, Dad will always be there for me, We will all get through this together and Don't ever give up! Jim told Quinn to hang on to those lines now for comfort and know they will mean even more down the road in her life. While Jim has been sober for four years he says the best part of this story is that he has his children back in his life and that is a priceless gift for which he will be forever grateful. Jim wants Dayne and Quinn to know that he will never leave them, that they should never be afraid because he will always be there for them and that they will never get too old for his customary hug and kiss each time he sees them. God bless you Jim, you're my hero!