

Last Saturday between the hours of 9:30 and 2:30 will be a time four adults, a Pastor and six children from the 2009 Holy Trinity confirmation class will always remember. Our hearts and eyes were widened with a recent visit to the Mary Jane Enrichment Center in North Philadelphia.

Less than one mile from the Liberty Bell, the Franklin Museum and the steps of where Rocky ascended before his fictional boxing match houses a soup kitchen, a clothing center and resident living space for people whom seemed to have been forgotten about by the mainstream folks.

Over thirty-five years ago the Williams served food at their establishment on the ground floor of the Mary Jane Hotel. The bar and grill was called Candido's. Today the former hotel and bar serve as home to the Mary Jane Enrichment Center run by the Edna Williams, her sons and the rest of her family. To be able to serve the Lord and teach the good bible, Edna needs to rely on funding from the homeless system, church groups and humane individuals. Edna Williams and her family work the new "31" which is 24 hours a day and seven days a week to assist people who need a hot meal and a chance to be thankful to what the good Lord has given us. Her saying is feed the people, not just on Christmas and Thanksgiving, but everyday. Our visit to the Center was on a day where the temperature was zero degrees outside and my dogs weren't interested on staying outside very long. We met at the church and caravanned to the Philadelphia not aware what our day had in store. I envisioned a soup kitchen with rows of tables and the kids serving soup to those in need of a hot meal and potentially words of encouragement. I was prepared to take a beating about my New York Giants losing to their rivals the Eagles and how the Super Bowl was to be called the Pennsylvania Turnpike bowl between the Steelers and the Eagles. Boy was I in for a surprise.

Upon entering we saw place, which has not changed since the 1960's, with Formica tops black and white tiles and Edna greeting us with her friendly smile. She welcomed us to her home and described to the group the history and what we can do to help her during our visit. Edna showed us the back room with clothes in bags, food on the shelves and donated things all over. We started to assist in preparing the food for the day which consisted of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, tuna fish, donuts and, crackers for the bag lunches. John her son was preparing for lunch and dinner by making up a batch of rice and hot bean soup

The people she feeds wander up and down the blocks that are homeless or near homeless and need a good meal and some warm clothes. To make the tuna fish last for everybody the children were allowed to only add an equivalent of one tablespoon of tuna fish to each sandwich and then wrap it in wax paper. We brought soup cups with lids which they were grateful for to keep the soup and rice hot. We were told the people don't want to leave where they were keeping warm so they start coming to the Center in the early afternoon. By then it started to warm up at a balmy 13 degrees. Edna gave our group a tour of the where the residences live and we met several men and women whom have various ailments from diabetes, cataracts, in contigence and dementia. They all have no families, no pictures on the walls of grandchildren or vacation trips. But during the tour each one was happy and would never think of leaving.

Edna loves each one of them and in between her stories and getting hugs from us she would cry briefly and say this is like a Third World Country. We finished preparing the food and sorted through the clothes to put outside of the Center for persons in need. One of the kids was sorting through the coats and found a Flyers coat, which he put outside. John was organizing the coats and noticed the jacket, which looked familiar, and he said this is my jacket and when he checked the pockets he also found his keys.

The visit made an impact on us all and several of us will be organizing a trip back next month to bring vital items trash bags, blankets, detergents, supplies, sandwich bags, aluminum foil, furniture, juices and the list is endless.

This visit had made a lasting impression on us all, and when God says to go out and feed the hungry his daily bread, we'll know what he meant because we spent the day doing just that.