

Church of Mary Magdalene

by Jean Kim

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I decided to write about the Church of Mary Magdalene extensively to encourage others to develop a similar program for the homeless population, women, and children men and families. I also wanted to write the history of the Church of Mary Magdalene since it is very unique and meaningful ministry, not only for the homeless, but for all the participating churches and individuals.

With a vision and decision to develop a worshipping congregation with homeless women, I approached a very close friend of mine to tell her that "*I have conceived this vision of developing spiritual program for homeless women for a decade. It is about the time to deliver this baby. Would you be a midwife?*" She was more than willing to be a midwife for me to give a birth to this baby, the Church of Mary Magdalene.

I began by constructing a Church of Mary Magdalene on paper. It was a proposal as to how and what we would do. I discussed my proposal with a friend who was a psychiatrist with whom I had worked many years. She critique the material and the two of us approached more friends.

A group of 5-7 members of Seattle Church Women United met with whom I had worked on peace and justice issues. We read and discussed what I wrote.

I suggested to name the church "Mary Magdalene." Mary Magdalene was a woman in the New Testament who was caught by 7 demons and healed when Jesus came

into her life. She was the first person to encounter the resurrected Jesus, the first person who was commissioned to deliver the news of his resurrection to the world, and the first person to do it.

In the biblical times, multiple difficulties, any difficulties, such as physical or mental illness, personal tragedy were called "demons." I hoped homeless women who experienced multiple difficulties including homelessness could experience healing as Jesus came into their lives such as Mary Magdalene experienced. They could arrive where she arrived, witnessing not only to Jesus' resurrection but to their own restoration from past hurts, wounds, and homelessness.

No one came up with different name. We ended up naming the church " Church of Mary Magdalene."

We then formed the first board of Mary Magdalene Church.

It was in November, 1990, my friend and I went to see the pastor of the First United Methodist Church, 5th Avenue and Columbia, in downtown Seattle, where homeless women and men live and hang out underneath the beautiful Columbia Towers and next to the exclusive Rainier Club.

We told him that we needed a space to have worship service with homeless women. He said that he had to run it through his committees. I remember challenging him saying that "*I haven't got time for that; homelessness is an urgency. God commanded me to plant the cross in a church, which became apparent to me that I was to develop a church with homeless women; I just needed a little corner in that giant church building.*" "Praise God for him who did give me a little coffee room without running it through the committees. I also remember him asking me when I wanted to start the church. I named the date, " January 19, 1991. He said OK.

I printed large and small flyers informing homeless women of "worship, singing and food" on January 19, 1991, quickly distributing them to a few women at shelters and a drop-in center.

One advantage I had in starting this ministry so easily and quickly was that I had been around quite long time in the community and was known to homeless women, service providers, a circle of ecumenical churches and non-religious people. You can say, I had some credibility in the community. I was a mental health counselor through the Health Care For the Homeless, a program of Harborview Community Mental Health Center through the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Washington Medical School. I was assigned to Angeline Homeless Women's Drop In Center, YWCA Women's Shelter and Lutheran Compass Center Women's Shelter as a Mental Health Practitioner to assess emotional problems and offer case counseling and management service for homeless women. I was also deeply involved with peace and justice movement with many people in the community. Therefore, it wasn't difficult to get support in the wider Seattle community. It was as if God disciplined and prepared me for this day!

On that history-making day, January 19, 1991, half dozen homeless women came with my flyer in their hands. I also invited a few friends including a

clergy woman to be with us. I conducted our first worship service in a coffee room at the First United Methodist church upstairs, sitting around a little round table, very small, simple and quiet way. One woman on the first day said "When I saw the name Mary Magdalene, I knew it is the right place for me and I came." We worshipped God together and ate lunch.

We began to meet on every Saturday because the First United Methodist Church did not have a space for us on Sunday. The Church still meets on Saturday. We opened from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Homeless women must leave the shelters at 7:30 a.m. and reopened at 5:30 p.m. I began to build a small congregation as a volunteer pastor. I didn't want to wait until we were ready financially. I felt sense of urgency.

We started this church with zero budget. I was a volunteer pastor on week-end. At that time, I was working two part-time jobs which was equivalent to 2 full time jobs. A year later, the Board of the Church of Mary Magdalene paid me one quarter pay, half pay the next year, three quarters next year, and then full time pay. But the mission costed me 18 hours a day. I called it 400% work.

In our first year denominational executives gave us their blessing with token contributions along with volunteer gifts from women's organizations. Agencies that are supported by government funds restrict religious people to enter the premise, but the agencies allowed me to go in to see women or leave flyers because they had known me for long time. They were comfortable with my approach that would be different from those who imposing conversion.

I ended up developing two types of congregations: One was a visible one worshipping on Saturdays. The other one was an invisible one existing in the community included over 50 women I encountered during the week to listen, support and help meet their needs.

The list of invisible church members is longer than the visible ones. For many reasons they weren't at our church services. Some of the reasons were that they did not want to be with a crowd; they did not want to associate with the mentally ill or homeless women one more day; and/or they were not interested in the organized traditional "church." But they wanted to

maintain contact with me in the community. Some women considered themselves to be our members because they had a relationship with me.

I want to stress a few points here:

- It did not take many people to start something like this program. It started with ONE PERSON who was seriously concerned with the issue of homelessness.
- Finding a few others who shared the same concern wasn't hard at all. But they were ones who were willing to start the Church in a small way, joyfully and hopefully.
- It was important to take a church to the streets where the homeless are, instead of waiting for them to come. The homeless do not have financial means, strength or motivation to travel long distances to look for a God, who didn't seem to care, in the perceptions of the homeless.
- It was important to reach out to the homeless. I always feel the worship service is a banquet of the Kingdom of God, and my job was constantly inviting people to the banquet. Many of them needed to be invited many times before they appeared.
- We then filed the church as non-profit organization.

The Purpose of the Church

We described the **Purpose of The Church** in the record in the Corporation of the Church as follows:

The Purpose for which this corporation is formed is to provide a spiritual, loving and supportive environment for nondenominational worship services, meals and counseling for homeless women of Seattle, enabling those who come to express their talents, improve their skills and find assistance in discerning ways to improve their lives.

The Program of the Church of Mary Magdalene will respond to the needs of the congregation. It may include: worship, sharing meals, socialization, talent-sharing, therapy groups, singing, cooking, dancing, GED and English classes, parenting, money management, and other activities as may be deemed necessary.

The Mission Statement as recorded in Corporation Article:

We, the women of community of God's covenant, are called into the ministry of Jesus in this world. God calls us to break down the dividing walls between the rich and poor women in Seattle and bring peace to them. Peace for homeless, dysfunctional women will mean healing for the

wounded, liberation for the captives of illness, empowerment for the powerless, comfort for the grieving, security for the frightened and abused, love for the abandoned, and hope to rise with Jesus from their tomb of illness and hopelessness.

The Ministerial Purpose of the church is as follows: The purpose of the church was drawn from the reality that service agencies, medical professions and Christian churches divide the whole person into separate parts according to their problem areas and needs. The purpose of the church, therefore, based on the strong belief that human spirituality and psychosocial and physical needs must be integrated because each are integral parts of the whole. The conclusion is that low self-esteem, negative self image, hopelessness and homelessness may result in developing destructive behavior, to self, others and society and result in illness, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

The purpose of the church was based on the belief that God created women in her/his own image and blessed them equally to enjoy the abundance on earth and have a home to live in. This is God's justice. By restoring the lost pride, self-worth and the image that God created originally, women can begin to feel better about themselves: This new image will enhance motivation to live, to get better, to get up, to work, to produce and to regain hope and healing.

The purpose of the church was based on the belief that the Christian Church must offer a profound ground of hope and healing in God by enhancing the woman's image instead of damaging it. If many traditional churches contributed toward lowering a woman's image causing them to feel inferior, the ministry of Church of Mary Magdalene must undo this damage.

The Ministerial Purpose Of The Church is therefore "empowering women to restore their pride, self-worth and dignity by experiencing a positive, loving and forgiving God instead of a judging, condemning and punishing God; to find a fundamental ground of hope and meaning of life by having faith in God; to seek experience of healing from previous as well as present wounds; to end homelessness by developing emotional, spiritual and physical homes.

In order to meet spiritual needs of the homeless women we developed our own image of WOMAN. Homeless women tried to replace the negative image with the positive image of women they created. God loves these women because they are created in the image of God and blessed. By claiming who they are and by building themselves

up, they restored the original image of God who created them. They also developed their own *Affirmation of Faith* of homeless women and many litanies (Ref: Worship Resource).

It was and still is a Women's Church.

Many women had experienced much abuse and were profoundly damaged emotionally and spiritually. In their homeless life they continued to be abused, robbed, and/or raped and even murdered. They faced continual threat and fear in their daily street life. Many of them are fearful to be around male figures and some are even paranoid. They wanted to have one day without such a threat. Therefore, we developed a community of women that is safe, accepting, caring, loving, sharing and supporting.

However, later we decided to invite men on four special occasions since many supporters are men, and they were longing to experience worshipping God with us. Those four events are our anniversary (January 19), Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

It was and still is an ecumenical church.

This church started ecumenically. Members come from all different denominations and even non-Christian backgrounds, and our supporters are from ecumenical churches, other faith traditions, and women's secular organizations. The church is non-denominational (ecumenical): All women with or without Christian faith are welcome.

The Theme of our Sermons

In order to find the fundamental ground of hope in God, we set up theme for every year and looked for clues in the Scripture that lift up the image of women. The first few years we prepared sermons focusing on the Scripture texts that strengthen the image of women.

The theme of 1994 was "Let us dream a new dream." Since many women gave up their dreams a long time ago, even if they had a dream, it never came true. Their dream was always crushed. Therefore, the focus was on the fact that every woman deserves to dream a new vision and hope.

The theme of 1995 was "Jubilee."

We talked about Jubilee for the whole year from the perspective of the poor, oppressed, abused homeless women and the whole congregation developed the image of jubilee for women (Ref: Worship Resource).

The theme of 1996 was "Coming Home."

I often think of the vision God gave me in my dream to "plant a cross." Looking back those years

I had worked with homeless women, I now know planting the cross meant planting "hope, love, motivation, justice, patience, forgiveness, discipline and much more. With the theme "coming home" we dealt with 52 virtues such as love, compassion, forgiveness, honor, etc. Whenever, we restored each virtue God created in us as the image of God, we celebrated it as "coming home." Now I feel that planting cross meant planting all of those 52 virtues in the souls of the homeless women.

The theme of 1997 was "Exodus."

We encouraged each woman to experience an exodus, coming out of some kind of trouble and naming their promised land they wanted to find. Of course, for many women, exodus from homelessness was the priority and moving into a permanent home was their promised land. Some women also expressed exodus from illness and healing as their promised land.

SATURDAY ACTIVITIES

As I mentioned earlier, the Mary Magdalene program is an integrated one. Whatever we do serves to meet the three dimensional needs, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.

Breakfast and Hot Lunch: Breaking bread together:

We served homemade hot breakfast as our way of welcoming homeless women struggling to survive in cold weather, cold treatment of the world and cold every way around. We also serve hot lunches, resembling the holiday meal. Meals not only meet physical needs of homeless women but add emotional satisfaction and spiritual needs in believing that food comes with love of those who prepared it with their resources, energy and time. Eating food helps the homeless to experience the taste of God's love. Volunteer groups who cook the food are the agents who transfer God's love into the souls of homeless women. Meal time is also a social time with one another and with the volunteers who prepared them. We call our meal "communion" with each other and Jesus. It is a most physically, emotionally and spiritually gratifying time. Therefore, we eat a lot together, not only Saturdays, but during the week when we meet in small groups for activities or therapy.

Pastor and volunteers cooked breakfast. Lunches were cooked by over 30 different church or non church groups on rotating basis. We even had Asian food, soul food of African American culture as well as traditional American food. For the first year, the Korean Elder Association cooked for us.

We ate plenty of rice and kimchee (pickled spicy vegetable). Our congregation, therefore, became a culturally integrated one also.

WORSHIP SERVICE

A few unusual things were included in the worship service.

Sing out:

Before worship service, the whole congregation sings for an hour. Singing has served to meet their spiritual needs as well as the therapeutic healing.

My family could not help develop my music talent since I was born and reared in difficult times and moving around so much as a refugee escaping from war. When I lost my son and hit the bottom of my life, I didn't want to live any more but couldn't do anything about it except to cry every day. Whenever grief, guilt and pain crushed and choked me to the extent that I could not breathe any more, I would sit down with a hymn book open and begin to sing from the first page on. My singing at that time meant crying out, screaming, groaning and mourning, and praying. By the time I reached the last page of the hymnal, I experienced relief and was able to breathe, get up to cook or go to work. From this experience I learned that music can be a wonderful instrument of God's healing power.

I encouraged my congregation to sing for an hour. They enjoy it so much that no one wants to stop singing even after an hour singing. I had to stop them to proceed with worship service and meeting the lunch schedule.

We shook scarves, banged on drums, tambourines and whatever we could grab; we used them along with our singing. We sang emotionally, physically and spiritually. Women experience relief, joy and peace after they sing out all of their frustrations, anger and down feelings. Women also witness that they cannot be angry and sing at the same time. They have to choose one of them. In singing time there is no room for anger to creep in. It is very joyful time. We experienced the presence of the Spirit and built a cohesive community among ourselves. An hour long singing prepares the congregation to get ready spiritually to worship God.

I hope our traditional churches try this method. There are a lot of people who need this therapeutic and spiritual worship service.

We had different volunteer song leader every Saturday. It was a nightmare to get different song leaders every Saturday. But there were many

talented women who came and led singing. Finally, the Episcopal Church gave us \$4,100 grant to hire a music leader. Francyl Gawryn was hired. She was one of our music volunteers. She had leadership skill, vocal talent and played the guitar.

Choir:

We then formed a choir of homeless women. Of course, we were amateur singers who made a joyful noise and praised God. The choir sang in our worship service. Local churches invited our choir to sing in their services. They found it inspiring to see homeless women who seemed to have no hope or joy, praise God in singing, perhaps better than many healthy people can do. Our singing in the community became our way of serving the community that served us in many different ways. Before we formed a choir, we used to invite an outside choir to sing for us. Singing together with people from community means building one community in solidarity and in one God. The guests enjoyed the whole service as much as our members.

We were even invited to sing at the national Silent Witness Exhibit and March held in Washington D.C. in October, 1997, honoring thousands of women who were killed in domestic violence. Many of our women are survivors of domestic violence, beginning in their early life and throughout their adult life. They weren't killed, but many of them were profoundly injured and live with those scars forever interfering with their healthy life as members of the society. They are living witnesses. Living Witness sang for Silent Witness. It was a profoundly moving experience. Our women built an image of

violence, and it expresses quite well what they witness as "violence." (Ref: Worship Resource).

Congregation Preach Together With A Pastor:

The whole congregation participated in preaching the sermon with their input and ideas. Most of these women have been preached at and finger-pointed as sinners, judged and condemned. It was about time they spoke up. They did a wonderful job participating in preaching. Preaching together met not only their spiritual needs but also helped them feel important, and they were heard. Verbalizing ideas, knowledge, problems, feelings and helping to build sermon is a wonderful thing people need to experience. Therefore, the sermon I preached became theirs rather than I feeding them and preaching at them with only ideas.

Healing ritual: Offering

Since the congregation did not have much cash, we didn't have monetary offering. Instead, I passed out a couple of 3x3 size thin papers. I encouraged women to write on one of them all of their negative and destructive sources, issues, problems. They put down pains, burdens and habits with drug/alcohol, wrong doings (stealing, lying, prostitution), illness, homelessness that they don't want to own or experience any more.

They then bring them to the altar as their offering to God. It is very tangible, concrete and a visible way of naming their troubles. In faith that God will accept them, cancel them and forgive them, they take them to God. As a concrete proof that God accepted and forgave them, we burned the paper on the candle flame. As they see their paper turning to ashes, the worship leader helps them affirm that their troubles are gone and encourages them not to repeat or take them back.

On another piece of paper, the worship leader encourages them to write all of the positive aspects of themselves including wishes, dreams, and affirmation that God loves them. I encouraged them to write down all the positive things such as "God loves me, I am a good woman, I need housing, healing, jobs, or anything they hoped for. I encouraged them to tuck this piece into their bosom and let it remind them what they have in there. This was a way of developing faith in God. This practice was created on the basis that where their mind is, their behavior, their life style and their effort will be, and their soul can be placed in God's hands.

It is a very concrete way of developing a belief system that women can be healed and uplifted from all forms of troubles; God is with them and will help them as they struggle to bring their dreams to reality. It is exactly what our women experienced. They claimed that it works. It has been serving as a very powerful tool to bring healing to these wounded souls.

Prayer:

In our prayer time we stood in a circle holding hands; everyone participated in congregational prayer expressing something each person had to celebrate with the congregation responding "Praise God;" confessing their own mistakes and wrong doings with congregational response "Forgive us, O, Lord; and prayer concerns for themselves, others and world with congregational response "Hear our prayer, O God."

Some women celebrated their sobriety from alcohol or being clean from drugs even for a short time. Some of them celebrated for good things

happening to themselves, families or to their friends. Many of them prayed for their family members whom they haven't seen for a long time. Some mothers prayed for their children in prison. A major prayer concern for many women was housing or healing for those who are sick.

We prayed for justice in this nation for the poor and hungry and homeless. And the pastor ended by adding more of her pastoral prayer for the church. This model of praying was not like reading ready-made prayer or listening to the prayer a pastor alone delivers. It was a communal prayer in which every one's hearts and souls are poured in together as a community of faith that shares pain and troubles.

OTHER ACTIVITIES ON SATURDAY

Hot lunch:

After the worship service, a hot meal was served. (Ref: Breakfast and Lunch: Break bread together indicated above). We combined closing prayer and prayer for the meal because after breaking from the service it was hard to get attention back for another prayer. We usually sang "let us break bread together on our knees." We took the meal as our communion with our Lord.

Medical and Nursing Service:

On Saturdays, we also had a retired medical doctor come in as a volunteer, and nursing students from the nursing department of the university for training in dealing with homeless mentally ill population. They offered educational classes, created group discussions and answered medical questions because many of our women have medical problems. It was very touching to see a prominent medical doctor washing the feet of these poor women who walked the streets daily.

Massage therapy:

We had a talented board member who had training in massage therapy. She would come in early Saturday morning and gave massages to women who live in enormous anxiety and stress in homeless life. Women enjoyed it very much.

Exercise:

On Saturday, we had a member of the church who was a water aerobic teacher. She turned on music and led women through different steps of exercise. They enjoyed it very much and greatly needed it too.

Theology of the lingerie:

As a tangible way to help restore woman's dignity and pride we offered a NEW clean pair of lingerie on Saturday, on a quarterly basis. I usually made people laugh by saying that it is my "lingerie theology," and that feminist theology must start from lingerie theology. Wearing unfitting, dirty, or someone else's underwear, no one could feel like a person, especially women. Those who walked in to our church on Saturday morning, filled out a lingerie request form first, enjoyed breakfast, singing, worship and lunch. By the time they left, they had their new lingerie. I Cor. 3:16 says that our body is the temple of God's spirit; whoever destroys our body God will destroy that person also. Therefore, wearing new lingerie helps restore the women's image God created and loves. It is emotionally and physically gratifying experience as well as uplifting the image of God in us. Our women seldom can purchase new clothes. They wear used clothes given by people. But lingerie must be brand NEW, never been worn even once!

Clothing closet:

Early in the morning as they came in or after lunch, we opened clothing bank. Each woman could pick her clothes donated by the community.

Food closet:

We kept very small quantity of food in the closet. Or I brought food package in for ones who needed them. According to the needs, women took home cooked food or canned food items.

Crisis intervention/case management:

After lunch, women lined up by taking a number to bring me their crisis situation: "no place to sleep tonight, someone was sick, some one needed a job or got a job but no bus pass, or white uniform, or white shoes, someone needed legal service," etc. I had to help solve them before we all closed the church at 3:30 p.m.

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES (Tuesday-Friday)

For the first a couple of years we didn't have any space to do anything else but Saturday service at the Methodist Church. Most of counseling, crisis intervention for women took place on the street under my umbrella (most of the winter it rains in Seattle), or in my car. My office work done at home at night. But then, the vice president of investment in the Smith Barney Co. responded to a newspaper article about our church and responded by paying for an office space. It was small but was located on the 2nd Ave. between homeless women's shelter and Drop In Center. It was

convenient for the women and me to visit each other. That office didn't have fire escape except one front door. In case of fire I had no choice but being roasted in there. I and women were so happy and appreciative to have a place, not standing under my umbrella or sitting in my car we didn't even notice the fact that we didn't have fire escape. The room was so small it could hold only 5-6 women, but sometimes we jammed 10 women in there for group work. Later we were able to use common area for arts and crafts.

Daily Outreach:

I had seen a lack of motivation among homeless women to learn or to do something. Many of them have never disciplined or strengthened their will power or patience. They have never experienced living with a good role model figure in their family environment. It was hard to motivate them and help them to stick to what they wanted to do. They gave up and dropped it easily. Therefore, the whole ministry has been planting (inducing) motivation. To raise their motivation, outreach was a crucial. Every day, I was out there visiting and inviting them. I visited the Drop In Day Center, low income housing, shelters, rest rooms of department stores, library, park, streets, bus stops. Some places I had to go during the day, and some others I had to be there in the evening. This was why I was seeing so many women who were not coming to the church but needed help. I was a walking social worker and clergy.

Bible study (weekly):

In the first phase, we had no space for bible study. So we got on a ferry to Bremerton which took two hours for a round trip. It was especially meaningful when we studied God's creation by looking at water, fish, clear blue sky, and beautiful nature. We did bible study on a ferry eating snacks I brought. Bible study was a time for homeless women to express their daily problems and find solution in the bible. The solution could be physical, emotional or spiritual one. It was also a prayer time for one another. After the bible study we went to the Korean Elder Association for hot meal. They always treated us as special guests calling us "angels." My husband was a volunteer president, and I was also a volunteer there.

Housing Group (Weekly):

Since many women struggle to find place to live, I spent many hours and days helping them to find housing; apply for low income housing and find emergency housing when they were evicted or on

the run with children from abusive spouses or they fall ill or are discharged from hospitals. Sometimes their anger management problem caused eviction from their shelters, and they had no place to go. I tried to call all the existing available facilities but often I get answer " there is no bed."

I kept housing applications. The half of the session was a therapy session. I led women to talk about what caused them homelessness; their own behavioral issues that led them to eviction and how could they change. In the second half of the session

I helped women to fill out application forms because I noticed very few women can concentrate enough to finish it or mail it. Quite often, the completed application form would rot in the bottom of their purse. After I sign the form as a professional reference, I myself put the stamp on and mail them leaving a copy for my file to return back to at a later date. We found housing for numerous number of women and settled them down.

Arts & Crafts / crocheting/sewing Group (Twice a week).

When I was working at mental health system, one schizophrenic woman gave me a picture she had drawn. She inspired me to see God-given talent in her and motivated me to open a social club with mental patients, not in the mental health center, but outside the facility, in a church building on weekly basis. Those alienated people who have no place to go used to come there once a week and express their talents in drawing, writing, knitting, even playing games.

While many homeless women suffer from chronic physical or emotional troubles, amazing number of homeless women have God-given talents. For them we

developed a class that taught arts, crafts, knitting, crocheting and sewing. They made dolls, ornaments, jewelry; crocheted afghans, baby blankets, doll clothes, and many more. We were invited by church bazaars to sell our crafts and women then received some extra income. We provide snacks or hot meals when this group met. Most of all, they felt so good about themselves for being able to produce marketable products. This group led by a faithful and talented member of the Church of Mary Magdalene. This project could grow into piece work if we had a paid or unpaid consistent supervisor/leader. While many women have little education and job skills, they can do less stressful simple work under guidance. We could

not fully develop it because we did not have enough staff or volunteers.

Filling up bean bags:

A few women got a part-time job and earned some extra income by filling up bean bags for a food bank. If we had larger space, we could have expanded this program also.

Stuffing envelopes:

Church Council of Greater Seattle or some churches gave our women a little job to stuff envelopes and earned extra income.

Gardening- "Peapod patch"

Some homeless or formerly homeless women were interested in gardening and landscaping. Simple gardening and landscaping were something a woman could do alone without much interaction with other people, since some of them have trouble relating to others. The City of Seattle rented out a small piece of land, called "peapod patch" to people who wanted to plant something. Church of Mary Magdalene paid to rent the space and a few homeless women planted some vegetables. In the fall, they brought me a few tomatoes. I can never forget how precious they were unlike many I had seen in the market. Our women raised them! It was like seeing a new life! I am sure those women who raised them felt the same.

Women's Support Group:

Lonely women, or women who didn't have much insight to what was wrong with them, or women found it hard to change their behaviors, came together to support each other in trying to do better with their lives. This group was led by a volunteer counselor. When I led this group, I used to introduce "behavior modification" to them.

Counseling:

Women who learn about our program constantly come into my office looking for help or simply to talk. Besides me, we had volunteer counselors and interns in psychology, theology, social work who also helped with individual or group counseling and facilitate therapy groups.

Computer Class:

Women who live on public assistance or a limited income always face lack of funds to meet their needs; those checks cannot be stretched out to the end of the month. To offer them an additional financial help, we decided to offer a computer

class hoping many women were interested in learning. It takes committed volunteer teachers to show up on a consistent schedule and homeless women who are committed to learn. We had neither group available. Volunteers were very inconsistent and so were the learners, but it could be done if funds had been available to hire a computer teacher.

Stuffing envelopes:

Church Council of Greater Seattle or some churches gave our women a little job to stuff envelopes and earned extra income.

Fund Raising:

Since the Church of Mary Magdalene was dependent on outside individual contributions, not a penny from government, it was constant event to raise funds by the Fund Raising Committee of the Board and the pastor of the church. Individual, church, secular donations and grants on local, regional and national level supported this church. We had a few successful fund raising concert by local musicians; their talent, time and even some of the expenses were donated by them. Therefore, this church was everyone's church.

Publicity:

We sent out occasional newsletters, annual inserts in the monthly paper of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, usually in November of each year. The story of the church was publicized in local, regional and national newsletters, magazines, local newspapers, as well as on local television. Even for the pastor to receive so many awards was a good way of publicizing the ministry to the public. Through speaking to churches, organizations, colleges and universities and events was another good way of doing publicity.

Internship Program:

We trained students from University of Washington, School of Social Service, Seattle Pacific University, Nursing /Psychology Department, Seattle University, Psychology Department, Antioch University.

Community Education:

Church of Mary Magdalene's reliance on volunteers and financial support from other churches has had a wonderful side effect. As women from the community come to visit or volunteer or to cook, they step across an invisible boundary -- into the "foreign country" of

homelessness. Many have learned from the media that homeless people are dangerous, and to be feared. For their part, homeless women often think that mainstream "church people" look down on them. As they share a meal, sing and pray together, or talk over their needlework, women find they have much in common. These visits combine with contact in the other direction, as our pastor and choir go out to visit other churches to speak or sing, and as craftswomen visit church bazaars to sell their wares and being on media (newspaper, TV, magazine and newsletters). Bit by bit, over the years, these congregations are becoming better educated and more engaged in the issues of homelessness because they have actually met homeless people. It is our hope that they will be moved into advocacy and civic activism that will impact the underlying causes of homelessness, as well as improve the social safety net.

Volunteer coordination:

For most of activities and events we needed help from volunteers as we could not afford to hire more than one or two paid staff. The Church of Mary Magdalene was a program of volunteers, the people acknowledge their gifts and were willing to share them with those who were disadvantaged and excluded from getting the same blessings.

Scheduling for Saturday cooking:

As I mentioned earlier, sharing table together was an essential part of the work of Jesus and so it was with the Church of Mary Magdalene. More than 35 churches shared that responsibility. Soliciting a new group, maintaining the existing groups, contacting them and scheduling their cooking days was a big mission itself. Due to the love and effort of those who were willing to share major meals with homeless women, at Mary Magdalene banquet was prepared every week. The major hot meal was on Saturdays, and there were snacks at each activity.

Networking:

This ministry networked with 100 other social service agencies and churches to give and to receive support. We shared the homeless population for different services and needed to support one another and work together. We needed to network with Christian churches and other faith traditions because we shared the same concern to end homelessness in this country.

Social Club:

There was a time in the first phase of the ministry, we needed a place for homeless women to sit in on weekends. On Saturdays, the church was open, but there was no drop in center on Sundays. I opened a Social Club for them on Sundays in an empty large store space in downtown Seattle. It was hard to obtain permission to use it for that purpose because Pioneer Square Preservation Board, which consisted of residents, business owners and a few service providers, were adamant against opening anything for homeless people. First, I was rejected for the use of the empty space. I went to a higher Board above the one that rejected me. I presented my program of the Social Club on Sunday with the following arguments: 1) "Those homeless people are not coming from out of the city or town. They are residents of the Seattle's downtown community just as everyone else although they sleep outside. 2) Basically they are good citizens of this society although they are poor and some are sick; 3) They are not going outside to spend their public assistance check and come back in to the city, but they spend the whole check in your stores, and therefore, they are your customers. 4) Isn't it better for me to have them all at one place with dozen different healthy programs including food and clothing on Sundays rather than having them all over the city including the doorway of your store?" The Higher Board of the Pioneer Square Preservation gave me permission to use that expensive store space rent free with the comment "We have never heard such good proposal."

I offered groups work, arts & crafts, sewing, games, reading, hot meals, coffee, and even nap time. I carried out this social club with secular volunteers because it was Sunday. The Angeline Women's Drop In Center received an extra grant to open their Center on weekends. I went back to the Preservation Board with a complete report on how many different programs and how many women in total were served during the time I was allowed to use the space. The Board was very happy with what they did. "Knock and the door will be open; ask and you will get it!"

SPECIAL EVENTS

Summer picnics:

In summer time, the Seattle area is beautiful. It is sad if people can not find a place to go in this beautiful cool weather. Our homeless women have few places to go and few people invite them. I worked it out with churches on the Islands to invite us in summer for picnic because our women enjoy the ferry ride. To go to the churches on islands we

must ferries. Luckily, we found four churches on four islands that host our picnics every summer. There is no church under the sun that hosts a picnic every month throughout the summer. That's Mary Magdalene. It was a wonderful connection we made with local churches and isolated homeless women.

Both parties enjoyed each other so much. The hosting church often paid our travel cost and prepared a wonderful BBQ picnic. Our women usually ate all they could eat and pack enough to take home.

Mother's Day:

Our women have very difficult time on Mother's Day and Father's Day. Not only do they carry mixture of love and anger toward their parents they also carry longing, guilt and anger for their own children, who are usually taken away by the state as they are being assessed and unable to care for them. They also feel anger toward their grown children who abandoned them as their parents did. To deal with this emotion, we call Mother's Day "Women's Day." Instead of thinking of their own mothers, we focused on their being "women," and found some good things about themselves as women and celebrated that. Of course, we dealt with love, guilt and hatred we carry as women and helped them to be free from that so that they can really become women to celebrate who they are.

For 1997 Mother's Day, we sent out letters to the wider community, inviting all women to come with nicely wrapped gifts, and also invited homeless women. We paired them up, created an opportunity for women from wider community and homeless community to sit together, give gifts celebrating being women, and chat and be connected. Both populations enjoyed it so much that they want to repeat that every year. It went so well that some women built relationships with each other and maintained contact afterwards. It was a wonderful way of helping the wider community to sit closely with the homeless women and learn directly about their situations.

Anniversary, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas

were the most special events for them. We invited the whole homeless community, men, women and children and also supporters from the wider community. We sang, worshiped and shared meal together. At Christmas many gifts from different churches and individuals were distributed to the homeless women, men and children. I always

hoped that people in the wider community show that much interest in the homeless on monthly basis, not once a year. Then, we might make a big difference in ending poverty and homelessness.

My 60th Birthday: In July 13, 1995:

I celebrated my 60th birthday. In Korean culture, it is a big deal because in old times, people never made to their 60th birthday. My son asked me what he could do to celebrate my 60th birthday most meaningfully. Most common thing Korean grown children do for parents of 60th birthday is sending them on a trip to Holy Land, or Europe, or something. My son asked me where I wanted to go. Of course, I have never been to Holy Land where Jesus was born; I am dying to go there someday. I told him to host a big picnic with lots of music for the homeless women on one of the Seattle Parks. He said, "Mom, that is not to please you in celebrating your big birthday. It is pleasing somebody else" I told him, "yes, but it is the best way of celebrating my 60th birthday." He hosted a wonderful picnic hiring a person to play music. Homeless women seldom experienced such a party! My family had never seen how much homeless women could eat! I had never seen the how many of the members of the Church of Mary Magdalene and other homeless women could dance, play and have such a good time! And I also invited my family, relatives, personal friends and asked them not to give me gifts or cards. Instead, they could give me birthday funds which I wanted to use to create a "no homeless woman night " in downtown Seattle.

In Korean culture, on 60th days birthday friends and family members give money. Monetary gifts came in throughout the year because whenever friends heard about my 60th birthday they gave me money. Guess how much I collected? From July to December, over \$10,000! With that gift, I discussed with shelter providers to choose two nights right after Christmas. It is the most lonely time with empty pockets and it is closer to the end of the month. We gave 30 women motel rooms.

With the funds, throughout that year, we helped 168 women and children with their rental assistance and emergency residence in motel rooms. One of them was a very paranoid woman who had broken leg and had to walk around the streets on her crutches. I kept her in motel room for 2 months until she got the cast off. Another one was a woman with 5 children whom I had to place in motel because we couldn't find low income housing or even a shelter in time of need. I still didn't get to go the Holy Land. But I visited

the true Holy Land of Jesus Christ that is existing among the homeless. Every year, I urged our Board to allocate substantial amount of budget for the housing for homeless women. They have been doing it ,and I deeply appreciated it.

This congregation of homeless women kept growing. Throughout the year, a total of 500 different women went through our worship services. Equal numbers of different women we saw in the community. We had a couple of thousand supporters on local, regional and national level. It was a church that was created by everyone and supported by everyone, women, men and children from different denominations, faith traditions and secular groups. For the first 5 years we had one paid staff (pastor), after which, for the rest of 2 years while I served, we hired a secretary and member volunteers and many other volunteers helped. This program has been proven to be unique and a needed one. A local TV station cited our program 10 times. Newspapers, magazines and newsletters on local, regional and national levels reported our story over 46 times and 13 awards came our way. The Holy Spirit inspired one person with a vision and then involved a few more and more and more. Today we have 20 hard working women on the board and 3 paid staff. Many homeless women witnessed that their life had turned around through this ministry.

Since I retired, under the wonderful, capable successor and leadership, the Church's weekly activities have been moved to the same location where they worship. They have expanded by hiring another staff to run the weekday activities, called "Mary's House."

Mission of Ending Homelessness For All Women

When I reflect upon the past, it is an amazing work of the Holy Spirit how she guided me to start this mission of ending homelessness right after the General Assembly made overtures to me. Whenever I come back from a large conference I seemed to end up writing a confessional statement. In 1988, when I came back form World Conference on Peace And Justice in Korean peninsula held in Seoul, Korea, I wrote a confessional statement for the Church Council of Greater Seattle on the hatred of the U.S.A. on peoples who hold different ideologies from ours. In 1990, when I came back from Pacific Peace and Justice Conference held in Hilo, Hawaii, I wrote a confessional statement for the Church Council of Greater Seattle on the sin the U.S.A committed toward people in the Pacific Islands. Both times I

was sent to these conferences as one of those who represented the Church Council of Greater Seattle because I was serving on the Board. The Council published both statements in its monthly newspaper. Before and after the 1997 General Assembly held in Syracuse, NY, this time I ended up writing the following confessional statement for homeless women. We published it in Church Council newspaper. The Executive Director of the Church Council read the confession at the Christmas service of the Church of Mary Magdalene. When I wrote this statement, I have never even dreamed to be called to go on a national speaking tour to motivate Presbyterian Churches to participate in the mission of ending homelessness. I was retiring and was not looking for another job. I want to share it with my readers because that confessional statement became the base and root that gave me the motivation and strength to develop the mission further and ended up writing this book:

Background of the Statement

We are at a crucial point in time when welfare reform and economic policy in this nation throw more women and children into homelessness. Having a place to live is a fundamental human rights God gave everyone in this world, and yet this affluent democratic country allows too many human beings, especially women, to suffer homelessness. Leaving so many women and children in homelessness is an absurd sin we, as a people and a nation, commit together. Homelessness is an assault and violence against our human dignity which is the image of God. Federal, state and city governments and religious or secular agencies are trying to do something. But their efforts and programs fall far short of the goal to end homelessness.

A serious question is, how long we will keep on providing the insufficient level of programs and keep producing and increasing homelessness, especially for women and children? Are we going to perpetuate this problem for 200 or 500 more years? At some point we have got to stop it by attacking the root causes of homelessness.

I have experienced unbearable pain and frustration every single day when I had to face a great shortage of housing for the new or chronically homeless women, who are sick or with young children. I have been sharing anger and rage with many women who ended up sleeping on the streets or in temporary shelters. Out of this pain and rage, a new vision was born to develop a mission of ending homelessness for all women in this country.

NOW is the time for all of us to move beyond the temporary band-aid programs toward the final solution. And thus, we make this strong appeal to our sisters and brothers, regardless of your religion or no religion, to join us in developing this movement of ending homelessness for all women in this country and in this world as a clear CALL from God, who created all human beings in his/her own image and blessed them equally to have homes on earth.

1. Confessional Statement

In order for the Church of Mary Magdalene to develop the movement ending homelessness for all women on the biblical base, we prepared the following confessional statement:

We believe in the liberating and healing Jesus Christ whose purpose of coming to this world was to be incarnated with God's heart to deliver (salvation) human beings from poverty, sickness, yokes, oppression and sins (Luke 4:18-19, Matt. 4:23-25, Luke 14:15-24, John 3:16.

This statement of Shared Principles on Welfare Reform was signed by 47 religious and Social Welfare Organizations. Leaders stated that " as people of faith and religious commitment, we are called to seek justice for people who are poor. Central to our religious traditions, sacred texts, and teachings is a divine mandate to protect the poor. We believe that people are more important than the sum of their economic activities. "Robert Bohl, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA stated that "as Christians, we must set before all our leaders their responsibility to promote the common good."

We must remind them of the clear biblical message that God judges harshly whose nation that ignore the cries of the poor and the vulnerable, and we must hold our leaders to that standard of accountability. Indeed, it is worth noting that in the scene in Matt. 25: 31 so familiar to all of us, it is the nations that are called to stand before the judgment seat of God and answer for their treatment of the poor."

Scripture tells us that Jesus accepted, recognized, healed and restored women; examples are Mary Magdalene, the bent-over woman, the woman with a bleeding problem, the woman caught in the act of adultery, gentile women, Mary and Martha and many more. St. Paul described equality of women in Gal. 3:28; "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Whereas: the housing and welfare policy have affected the poor, there are approximately 3 million homeless and 4-19 million people are at risk of becoming homeless in this affluent country, Whereas 18.7 million Americans will be homeless by the year 2,003 if there is no change in the national housing policy,

Whereas: in Seattle alone we have more than 5,000 homeless in any given night, and it will be increasing with the present welfare reform and housing policies,

Whereas: there are too many women are homeless and are sick,

Whereas: the Federal government allocates 1% for social service and nearly 50% for the military spending,

Whereas: homelessness in this affluent country is an absurd sin we commit together as a society. It is a gross human rights abuse and violation that must end here first before we blame the human rights abuse in other countries,

Whereas: we believe in the Creator God who made all human beings, men and women, in God's own image and blessed them equally to live on earth in harmony with each other and enjoy the abundance on earth (Gen.1:26-30) and therefore, all humanity and all the resources belong to God and everyone deserves to share the blessings,

Whereas: we believe in the Blessing God who commanded the blessed to bless others (Gen. 12:3b).and to care for the poor (Lev. 19-9-10, 18.).

Whereas: we believe in the Exodus God who could not sit in a remote heaven watching people suffer and die and came down to the earth to deliver people out of their misery and pain (Ex.3: 7-10),

Whereas: we believe in the Healing God who binds up broken hearted, comforts the mourning, brings good news to the poor and frees the oppressed and captive (Is. 61: 1-3),

Whereas: we believe in the Liberating God who proclaimed Jubilee year, the year for the poor to restore what they lost and for the rich to return to whom it originally belonged and both become liberated(Lev. 25:8-12),

Whereas: we who have homes, families, jobs, financial resources, sense of pride, self-esteem and dignity are wealthy and powerful in the eyes of the poor and also in the eyes of God,

NOW THEREFORE, WE CONFESS: that the Christian church follows the modern day economic ideology and values as our principle, we are

engulfed by them rather than being reformers. We abandon the ideology and value of the gospel of Jesus Christ and allow the gulf between the rich and poor to become wide and deep.

We confess that we make the church as a club to meet our own needs and comfort instead of becoming a giving, sacrificing and dying church as Jesus Christ did and therefore, we create a big gulf between Jesus and the Christian church by losing the ideology and the cross of Jesus Christ.

We confess that we lock God up in heaven and leave no relationship between God and the reality of human suffering in homelessness.

We confess that we theologize wealth as blessings from God, claim its ownership and adopt apathy and indifference as our guard to blur our conscience and greed.

We confess that we have been seeking complacency and security of our own by closing our eyes toward needs of the poor; sleeping in a warm bed while the homeless sleep in rainy alleys, under the bush and at crowded shelters; eating juicy meat while the homeless chew a dried bread; riding in heated cars while the homeless walk on wet and cold streets with no warm cover.

We confess that we keep silent when we should speak the truth about the injustice of degrading, abusing, raping and murdering the homeless women in cold, wet, violent streets. We condemn the poor and homeless in the name of welfare reform.

We confess that we allow poverty to drag God's people, especially women, into homelessness and play deaf and blind when the homeless women look to us and cry out for help.

We confess that we give basket charity to the poor at Thanksgiving and Christmas to ease our guilt and greed and forget about their existence for the rest of the year and never want to look into the root cause of the homelessness.

We confess that we blame the poor and a few people in the White House for the poverty and homelessness in this country and forget we are part of the problem and refuse to own it. We confess that we must share the responsibility of dehumanizing and demonizing the poor and homeless women by leaving them in substandard human condition.

We confess that the Christian community is losing our address, identity and the standing ground as a Christian church in this particular historical and economic context of our day.

We confess that we, the Christian churches are facing a crisis by losing the message of Jesus Christ, therefore losing our direction, losing our responsibility and Jesus' command to love and care for the poor and needy neighbors as ourselves.

Now We Call Upon The Churches For Action!

- We must examine ourselves and our life style and begin to simplify them and learn to share our blessings with those who are in need.
- We must examine what we do with our faith in God and what we do with our blessings.
- As a church we must honestly examine how thick our wall is from the outside world and also examine where our funds go. We must urge the church to share substantial portion with the poor.
- As citizens of the State we must honestly examine where our funds go and urge local government to spend more funds for the homeless rather than on the sports stadium.
- As a nation we must honestly examine how the welfare reform affect on the needy people and urge our government to allocate the tithing (10% of the budget) for the poor and homeless.
- We must develop a policy of ending homelessness making it a major goal of local, state and federal government. We must develop a rehabilitation program to help the poor and homeless recover from poverty and homelessness as well as disabilities.
- We call upon churches to investigate the situation of homelessness and adopt ending it as it's major mission goal.
- We call upon all the Christian churches and congregations of other faith tradition to respond to the homelessness in our own city and State and work together to achieve our goal of ending homelessness in this country.
- We call on the churches to work ecumenically to overcome the crisis we are facing in order to recover our identity and ideology as the Christ's church through our courageous action of delivering all suffering people of God from their homelessness.

- All the religions on earth must commit to be the healing, sharing, liberating, acting, sacrificing communities that have a courage to take a risk, stand up for the powerless and homeless and die for justice.
- We declare that we won't tolerate this injustice of homelessness in our society any longer and that NOW is the time for all churches to speak up, take responsibility and leadership to end the poverty and homelessness.
- We request that the statement of this confession be published in the denominational / other religious papers.
- We also request that this statement of confession be used for bible study and worship in churches.

SHIRTS DRIVE

As an outcry of the homeless women to end their homelessness, the Church of Mary Magdalene developed t-shirts and sweatshirts with the message "End Homelessness For All Women" printed on them. We want one million people wear the shirts and one billion people read the message and be motivated to do something to end the homelessness for all women and children in this country.

Wearing the shirts serves multiple purposes:

- Consciousness raising on the reality of homelessness of women in this country.
- Proceeds from the donation will be used to assist homeless women with rental payment or emergency housing (\$15.00 donation for t-shirts and \$20.00 donation for sweatshirts)