



ELIE BOGUE

Change of heart

Inner call to do more led to a new career

Was it a “road to Damascus” type experience that led Jim Christie away from a high-paying job as a medical technology salesman to serving the very poorest of the community?

Maybe. He’d been a volunteer at the Franciscan Center for several years and couldn’t shake the feeling that he should be doing more.

“My heart started moving fast away from what I was doing,” Christie said of his salesman job. “I was praying and praying and praying over what to do. I said ‘Lord, beat me over the head. Make it clear.’”

His theological head-slap came in the form of the center’s founder, Sally Ley, who asked him to serve on the center’s board of directors. It wasn’t long after that that she asked him to consider taking over her job when she stepped away from day-to-day operations.

He’s been the executive director of the Franciscan Center since June 2009, and while it has been a financial sacrifice, “in every other aspect of my life it’s been a huge

step forward,” he said.

The Franciscan Center is one of many small nonprofit agencies in town working to weave together a social safety net for people struggling to survive in Fort Wayne. Each week, dozens of volunteers pack more than 1,000 sack lunches that are distributed to needy families in town. The agency also offers food and medicine pantries that supply items people can’t buy with food stamps, such as toilet paper and diapers. Every day the pantries are open, their shelves are cleared within hours, Christie said.

“They (clients) come out of here with a full grocery bag,” he said. “It’s not going to last them a month, but it helps.”

Clients can also fill out prayer request slips, and Christie and other staff members take those requests to St. Henry’s church every day to pray over them.

“I’m able to go to church on a daily basis, praying for the poor,” a factor that continues to motivate Christie in his work. “The deeper I’ve come to know my faith... the more I realized we are supposed

to serve and follow God’s will in life. Where does it come from? The Holy Spirit working in me.

“I’m a selfish person and a huge sinner, and it’s the Holy Spirit working through me,” he added.

Christie’s supposed selfishness is nowhere in sight as he describes the staff members and volunteers who he says truly run the agency.

“My employees and volunteers are so dedicated,” he said. “We give an opportunity for the community to serve...and give back to the community,” adding that there are volunteers coming from across the city—from families with young children to retirees who come in to stuff sandwiches, fruit, chips, cookies and napkins in brown paper bags that will be distributed at various locations in the southeastern neighborhoods that surround the center.

“I fell in love with it. I fell in love with the ministry. I just love serving the folks. I love helping, and frankly I love sharing Christ in all we do,” he said. ■