

Retired and Transformed

A few years ago, two Foundry friends invited me to join the governing board of Arlingtonians Meeting Emergency Needs, known as AMEN. A secular nonprofit, AMEN helps individuals living close to the margins in an outwardly affluent Washington suburb. I'd recently retired and was focusing on a new time of life, so I agreed. I didn't know then that my "yes" would turn into a real calling.

AMEN works to stop homelessness before it starts. It provides a safety net by meeting urgent needs with limited financial assistance for rent, utilities and unforeseen medical and dental costs. It helps people get "back on their feet," stay housed and healthy, and avoid eviction and power cutoffs. AMEN's part-time staff, its all-volunteer board of directors and its daily volunteers (Foundry members are among them) help transform the lives of those in need. And as with so many nonprofits, needs always exceed available funds, so a full 20% of requests to AMEN can't be met.

As I became active I saw how real needs are met. I later agreed to lead AMEN as chair of its board of directors. My responsibilities exposed me to a world distinct from the diplomacy and cultural exchange that had been my profession. They immersed me in grassroots America, its volunteerism and its local social services. They emphasized a focus on fundraising, staff and board member recruitment, and financial management. And they brought me a deep appreciation of support for AMEN from individual donors, faith communities, foundations, and local government. I particularly enjoyed joining colleagues to educate Arlington students on the causes of homelessness and its prevention. Their participation in Fannie Mae's Help the Homeless Walk totaled over 1,200 walkers last fall and brought AMEN significant program funding.

While AMEN is managed by lay individuals, I firmly believe God calls it to transform the lives of others in need and make a difference. That work, in turn, transforms us. Amen to that!

- Steve Telkins