

PTS ALUM JAY POLIZIANI SERVES PITTSBURGH'S HOMELESS

As director of Northside Common Ministries in Pittsburgh, Jay Poliziani '08 found the “perfect” job match for combining his PTS training in pastoral care with his marketing degree. Every day he comforts people in stress, and he regularly raises funds for this multifaceted homeless ministry founded more than 30 years ago by a group of 30 local congregations, today supported by more than 60 such bodies.

Before becoming director, Jay worked for nearly 15 years as a social service provider for Goodwill, the larger organization housing the NCM shelter he's now in charge of. “With my experience coordinating the shelter's meals and years of interactions with homeless individuals in the downtown area, I knew that I could be an effective advocate and, more importantly, help them to be effective advocates for themselves,” Jay notes.



Currently providing for 1,000+ “food-insecure” households every month, NCM operates the city's largest food pantry—the largest pantry between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia; a homeless men's shelter; a permanent housing program; and a GED classroom. The multid denominational ministry is also a host site for a medical clinic for the homeless, a free tax-preparation site, and a utility assistance program. “I was drawn to NCM because of its holistic commitment to the people we serve—addressing as many of their needs as possible in one location with the help of many community service partners and thousands of volunteers,” says Jay.

On a typical day, the NCM shelter is full to capacity, housing 25 men. “In the winter, we use our couches to bring the number to 30,” Jay notes. The men work with a case manager, on-site doctors, visiting chaplains, and various life-skills volunteers who prepare them to get back out on their own. “During the day, while the residents look for housing and work, we open the doors to the street homeless to shower, do laundry, and get a hot meal. We also offer optional chapel/Bible study five nights a week.”

Jay reflects on the experience of a recent NCM resident: “Before Gary came to the shelter he had a wife, two teenaged kids, a dog, a house, and his own business. But an accident laid him up for a year, and he lost everything—even the dog. He never thought he would end up at a homeless shelter. Over six months with us Gary got a job, then a promotion. He got an apartment, is seeing his kids again, and leads the city's homeless street-outreach team.”

How can people help? Jay offers some creative ideas: “Build a tower of toilet paper and donate it to our pantry. Did you know that people can't use food stamps to buy toilet paper, paper towels, or laundry detergent? On a clothesline at your church, have folks hang new twin-sized sheet sets, bed pillows, and men's boxers. When it fills up, donate these items, which we always need. And think about volunteering on Monday and/or Wednesday night, when we don't have a chaplain. You don't have to be a pastor—just a caring person.”

“Our shelter men need people to connect with—folks who can lead workshops, Bible studies, or just hang out,” Jay notes. Here's your invitation.

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