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Pastor has a 'heart that's made for all people'

BY KATHERINE MULLEN
STAFF WRITER

When Mark Vander Meer took a short sabbatical last year from his job as pastor of Monocacy Valley Church, he couldn't stay away from volunteering.

"That's how important it was," Vander Meer said of his efforts at Mission of Mercy in Frederick. "I don't want to miss out. It's something I genuinely miss when I'm not there."

Vander Meer, a 53 year-old Frederick resident, has volunteered with Mission of Mercy for three years, where he routinely checks in patients and files paperwork.

Mission of Mercy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing free medical and dental care to the uninsured working poor and homeless in Frederick, Thurmont, Brunswick and Mount Airy. In total, Mission of Mercy has 13 centers in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Arizona.

Twice a month on Mondays, volunteer doctors, nurses and dentists set up shop in a large mobile van at the Frederick Church of the Brethren to provide free health services including prenatal care for expectant mothers and drug prescriptions.

On those days Vander Meer and a volunteer staff of nearly 30 people help more than 100 uninsured resident's non-stop from sunrise to early evening, Vander Meer said.

Many of the people seeking medical treatment have appointments, Vander Meer noted, but usually, a line of walk-in patients wait all morning before Mission of Mercy opens its doors.

Vander Meer first heard about Mission of Mercy through George Waxter, a member Monocacy Valley Church in Ijamsville, he said.

He first supported Mission of Mercy financially and then decided to get involved in the organization to set an example for the rest of his church. Giving money was simply not enough, he realized.

"You just don't send a check to local missions," Vander Meer said. "You need to live out what you say"

Waxter, a volunteer dentist with the Mission of Mercy, said Vander Meer goes out of his way to help others and tries to instill in his flock a message of tolerance and love for others.

According to Waxter, Vander Meer's compassionate and humanistic attitude is apparent in his volunteer work at the Mission of Mercy.

"We have the downtrodden [at the Mission of Mercy]," Waxter said, "and I think [Vander Meer is] good at that. He has a heart that's made for all people."

Vander Meer agreed that Mission of Mercy is a good fit for him, since he always had an interest in medicine and worked as a chaplain in Somerset Medical Center in New Jersey prior to moving to Frederick 16 years ago.

Vander Meer said his work at Mission of Mercy makes him feel like he is making a difference in the lives of patients whom he described as hardworking and of all different ages.

Since many people come back to Mission of Mercy for check-ups and additional medical appointments, this has allowed Vander Meer to get to know several patients, he said.

Vander Meer's volunteerism with Mission of Mercy is not his only mission work in the community. Vander Meer said he started the Monocacy Valley Church in 1991 in Frederick as a place for people who were spiritually lost or had drifted away from church. The Monocacy

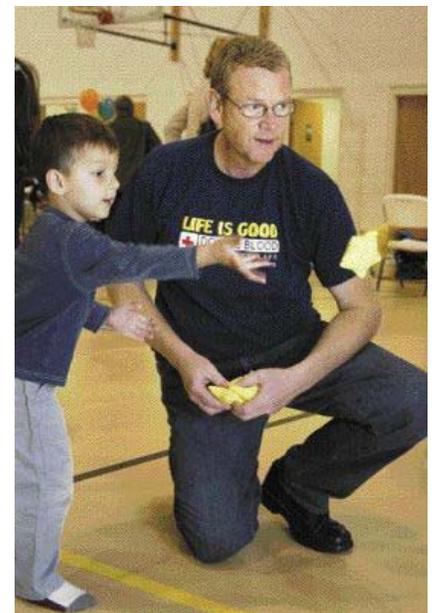
Valley Church is a part of the Reformed Church of America.

Through the church's encouragement of mission work in the community, Vander Meer is actively involved in local shelters where he helps the homeless and disenfranchised get back on their feet, he said.

Members of the Monocacy Valley Church also lend their time and support to the Heartly House, Hope Alive and the Rescue Mission in Frederick, Vander Meer said.

However, it is the Mission of Mercy that has become like a family for Vander Meer, and where the need to help the poor and uninsured is close to his heart, he said.

"There is such a need for the Mission of Mercy program and it's growing," Vander Meer said. "We can't keep up with the need."



The Rev. Mark Vander Meer of Frederick helps Spencer Buckwalter, 3, of New Market, play the bean bag toss game during an Easter event at the monocacy Valley Church in Ijamsville on Saturday.

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