

Once I Was Like You, by Koya Harris-Beard, Intake Manager

I think there's a stigma for persons who are experiencing homelessness, in that people feel they put themselves in that position. But this couldn't be farther from the truth. Every day at Interfaith, I hear the real stories. John recently confided in me that he was a successful businessman with a wife and 3 children. John became ill to the point that he had to stop working. And in his words, "when you got no money, you got no honey." His wife left, taking his children and what was left of their savings. Not knowing about agencies that could help and too prideful to ask, he lost everything. Now 4 years later, John is still on the streets. He has developed a mental illness, his health problems have worsened and he lost his disability due to red tape beyond his control.



When he was ready to get help, help was not available. He spoke about the outrageous waiting list and being passed around from agency to agency feeling as if no one truly wanted to get to the root of his homelessness and help. One day while sleeping at a Pilot gas station he was told about Interfaith. He decided to take one more chance.

Once at Interfaith, John was able to get clothing and food. He saw a doctor at our free clinic, then work with the ladies at the Center for Life for prescription help! He's now receiving ongoing service from our Outreach team to help with getting his social security reinstated and permanent housing.

John told me he wanted our readers and donors to know that they truly make a difference. John said, "Without this place, taking the time to help me sort my life out, I don't know what I would have done."

What you give here at Interfaith, gets put to good use, so don't ever think that what you contribute to Interfaith's mission is not good enough. Personally, I appreciate each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart for supporting us. And I look forward to a radically blessed year!

Food 4 Kids - Year Round Blessings, by Karen Fant, Manager

Recently I have been thinking about all the blessings that were showered on Food 4 Kids during 2020, in spite of COVID. It's remarkable that during a pandemic so many awesome students, with the guidance of some caring adults, were willing to step up and make a difference in the lives of their fellow students. Marion County has amazing young people and here are some examples of those individuals.

A big thank you to the Aftershock Elite Travel Softball Team for their successful food drive for Food 4 Kids. When students help students - everyone's a winner! (pictured right).



Reddick - Collier Elementary had a very successful food drive with 1,103 pounds of food. They are an amazing school, and students will benefit greatly from their efforts.

The Marion Afterschool Program, under the guidance of Pam Ubanks, had a very successful peanut butter and jelly drive. This could not have come at a better time and we are thankful for their efforts to make this food drive such a success. They even helped unload the PB&J. Three of the ladies work for schools that are part of the backpack program so they understand how important this program is to the students.

From the Chief Executive Officer: Karla Grimsley



Have we ever been so relieved at the turn of the new year? I remember in 2004 when we were elated to end the year and the hurricane season. But I don't think we've had a more challenging time than 2020 because the impact was global. Everyone was affected in some way. It also had far too many casualties. The one that came the closest to me was the loss of our board member, Nick Nikkinen. He was in his final term after serving 4 years faithfully on our Board of Directors. One month we were in a Finance Committee meeting together and everything was fine. By the next month's meeting, he was no longer with us. I can still remember his kind and relaxed demeanor, his gentle smile and how he followed up with me later that day in an email to encourage me and give me some feedback on an issue we had discussed. He will be missed and our hearts go out to his family. I would guess that many of you reading this email have known someone that was lost due to Covid-19 by now. I have to wonder what those people who were taken so

unexpectedly would say to us if they could come back for a few minutes. Interestingly, a man from my home church in Lakeland did just so, in a way. Anthony was a teenager when I was in the "young marrieds" group. I watched him become a man, marry one of the sweetest girls in our church and then move away to start a family. He and his wife ultimately adopted 5 children and had a very full and beautiful life. Sadly this young man was taken way too soon by the virus. About a month before he passed, he posted this on his social media page. It's such an important and timely message and I feel compelled to share it where I can, so I'd like to share it with you:

1 Corinthians 15:52-58 (Read this scripture, all of my FB and church friends) I am challenging you today!

I do not live in fear that one day I will die. I have prepared my soul to meet my maker. Dying will be the closing of one chapter and the opening of another in my life. God has made it so that there is no sting in death and that the grave holds no victory over my soul. I am ready if the Lord should call today! I have seen enough of the pain and suffering in this world and I have also seen victorious living in action. But what awaits me and all who believe is far greater.

DO NOT LIVE IN FEAR OF DEATH IF YOU ARE A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN! Do not let satan rob you of your joy. Practice and exercise your faith and live a triumphant life! If I should die of COVID, I am ready. If I should go by cancer, I am ready. If I should go by car accident, I am ready. God, you know my heart.

The one who should fear death is the unbeliever. What awaits those who refuse Christ is not pretty and it will be no party!

If you believe the Word of God, live your life in such a way that others will see and want what you have. There will be scoffers and He has foretold us of this.

I know that God can call me any day and I am ready. I have thought about the family that I would leave behind, and I know that the same God who has kept me will be with them. God can see the future and can keep my family in the hollow of his hands.

We are victorious either way, if we go or if we stay! God does provide healing and salvation and the ultimate healing will be the day we step into Heaven and see the one who breathed the very breath of life into us.

I charge you and challenge you as a born again believer that you stand firm in your faith, be un-moveable, abound in the work of the Lord, for your labor is not in vain that you do for the Lord!

I pray a blanket prayer for all of my friends that you will be blessed by the presence of the very living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That He will keep your mind in peace! That He will make you bold and fearless and that you will call on Him daily. He is my ever present help in times of trouble. Set Your saints on fire and fill us with power to accomplish Your purpose!

To my children - You will be reading this one day. I was not sick when I wrote this. I am well. But, my soul is longing for Heaven and I want to see you there with me. Do not let this world rob you of the peace and joy that comes in Christ Jesus. There are many who are living in fear and I believe the very elect will be deceived by satan during times like these. But read your Bible and pray and live victorious!

I can't help but believe that he was inspired to write this by a loving God who knew his fate. I also believe that if he or Nick or many of the others who we've lost in this season could come back and give us some words of wisdom or encouragement, this is what they would say. Let's not be overtaken by challenging times. Let's follow Anthony's advice and live a victorious life in this new year. 2021, we are ready for you!

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21

Special Gifts

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A Special Gift

Give a gift to someone special - an honorary or memorial donation in their name to Interfaith! The person honored (or their family) will receive a letter of acknowledgement. Please contact Kayla at 629-8868 x202 or by email Kayla.Hess@IESmarion.org. Mail donations to PO Box 992, Ocala, FL 34478.

Many Thanks to...

Special thanks to these awesome food drives and donations (in pounds): Marion County Tax Collector: 1,021; Ocala West United Methodist: 2,238; First Assembly of God: 478; First Baptist Ocala: 97; Trinity Baptist: 519; Palm Cay: 3,396; Lake Weir High School ROTC: 791; Reddick Collier School: 755; Cornerstone School: 581; St John's Lutheran Church: 526; A Child's Haven: 285; Forest High ROTC: 4,585; Typ Tap Insurance: 2,111; St Paul's United Methodist: 1,412; Lockhead Martin: 3,487; CF-Association of FL Colleges: 347; Countryside Presbyterian: 221; College Park Church of God: 130; Hardwood Trails POA: 222; On Top of the World: 2,873; Villages HOA: 300; and Marion County Medical Society: 2,713 pounds of food. We also received: The Guest House, Ocala: 10 turkeys & trimmings; Hook & Ladder Realty: 10 turkeys; Center State Bank, SR 200 office: 200 pounds of turkeys; and St John's United Methodist: 20 turkeys

100 families will have a ham for their holiday meal thanks to the Marion County Tax Collector's office. They are one of our biggest supporters and we couldn't do without them! God bless George Albright and all of his staff for caring for our community. Pictured right.



Special thanks to Brianne & Rhett Counts for 718 pair of socks!

We are so grateful to the community for their contributions to the Bring the Harvest Home food drive recently - we received 3,560 pounds of food!

A big thank you to Dorothy Pernu from Duke Energy for showing up with some donations! One was a \$500 check from Duke Energy! We appreciate this support!

Thank you to Steven Hawter Jr and the Twilight Cruisers for another incredible donation from their annual car show. This makes 20 years that they have made sure children have a special Christmas!! Today provided 650 toys and \$5,091 to support the mission of Interfaith. God bless everyone who helped make this possible. (pictured above).



Thank you to Matias Colen for collecting food for our Food 4 Kids Program at his bar mitzvah!

Food 4 Kids was the recipient of a very generous donation from the new Dunkin' Donuts at Grand Oaks Town Center in Ocala. A big thank you for your support of the backpack program. It is greatly appreciated.



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MISSION STATEMENT

Interfaith Emergency Services is a community of faith called by God to offer emergency assistance without judgment to all persons in Marion County.

Are You Ready? by Jody Schaible, Campus Pastor

As Campus Pastor, I love making the bible relevant for our shelter residents, and sometimes with a little humor. As I was preparing to discuss Advent, I wanted to make a point that Advent is a time to celebrate Christ's birth, but also to look forward to when Jesus comes again. During my research, I came across a story that was told by a pastor that was preaching on the Second Coming of Christ.

Leonard Jenkins, was a pastor of a Pentecostal Church in the Welsh Valleys. Apparently one Sunday he was preaching on the Second Coming of Christ, and his text was taken from the Gospel of Matthew: 'And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world - from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven' (Matthew 24:30,31). Each point in his sermon concluded with the words: 'And the trumpet will sound ... and the Lord will return ... are you ready?' He worked the congregation up to a certain pitch with an eloquence that only a Welsh preacher possesses ... and he finished his sermon poignantly and powerfully with the (by now) oft repeated words: 'And the trumpet will sound ... and the Lord will return ... are you ready?' Unknown to the congregation, Leonard had hidden away his grandson (who was learning to play the trumpet at school) at the back of the church. On cue, when Leonard had uttered his final words of the sermon: 'And the trumpet will sound ... and the Lord will return ... are you ready?' his grandson blew a great blast on his trumpet! Apparently, the response was amazing. Half the congregation jumped up on the pews, looking to Heaven, with arms outstretched, crying out, 'We are ready, Lord! We are ready!' ... and the other half of the congregation were trying to hide under the pews. My friends, Jesus IS coming again! Are you ready?