



COLONY SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting ministries of the members of Colony

This week Colony is spotlighting Joan Waters and her ministry at the Mission Centers of Houston's Fletcher Center where Joan regularly volunteers her time working through the Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC). I asked Joan to answer a few questions in order to tell us of what God is doing at the Fletcher Mission.

What is the purpose of the ministry and what role do you play in it?

CWJC is a national ministry of the Women's Missionary Union. Mission Centers of Houston founded a CWJC program seven years ago to help women "reach up and not merely to reach out." Our goals are to assist women to become more self sufficient through skill development and a personal relationship with Christ. The Fletcher Mission offers 2 sessions of 40 days of classes (10 weeks) in the fall and spring of each year in which women learn computer/technology skills, academic skills for the GED or beyond, life skills such as job prep, financial management, and nutrition, and most importantly, Bible study through *The Purpose Driven Life*. Participants are assigned mentors who support, pray for, and encourage them during class sessions and then follow up for six months after. I am currently Site Coordinator and a teacher of academics and Bible study.

How and why did you become involved?

A Christian friend asked me to join the CWJC Advisory Council. Two months after that, the site coordinator had to resign for health reasons. The spring session 2008 would have to be cancelled. I prayed over the Christmas break and sensed that God wanted me to serve in that role. Three sessions later, I'm clearly hooked!

What life experiences prepared you for this ministry?

My father died when I was 3 years old, leaving my mother and me provided for, but requiring that she return to work. Lacking confidence, this 34 year old widow struggled to navigate the demands of the business world. At age 9, I accepted Christ as my savior. God had touched my heart that people had needs greater than my own. Later, in my work experience I was a teacher, counselor, and principal. As a volunteer at CWJC, I have drawn on every bit of this experience and training to relate to and help women step by faith out of their comfort zones.

What difficulties/frustrations are there in this ministry?

A. Recruitment and retaining students. These women must often break the cycle of non-commitment. They don't have support and accountability systems so they are late, absent, and even drop out when they experience transportation or other problems. Sometimes they leave when they begin to see God's purposes for their lives and they "run" because they feel they are not ready.

B. Childcare. With all the churches in Houston, it is still difficult to have dependable volunteers to be with their little ones while their mothers are in classes.

What victories have you seen?

Many successful stories, but one is a 17-year-old mother of a toddler who had been in trouble before dropping out in the 8th grade. She worked hard on her academic skills and was faithful to her Bible study. She passed all 5 parts of the GED and the day her certificate arrived in the mail was the same day her friends graduated from high school. She had literally redeemed 4 years of her academic life. Her relationship with her mother improved, and she went on to get a place of her own and a job. Her mother later called and asked for a copy of *The Purpose Driven Life* because "it helped her daughter so much." She wanted to improve as well.

What has God taught you through this ministry?

Many, many things. He has helped me to see the pockets of poverty and social resources in this large city. I can better understand the feelings of overwhelmed women who try to access these services for their families, (wait lists, etc.) I've seen/heard firsthand their low self-esteem, their traumas (even threat of suicide), their lack of support, and their lostness and lack of purpose in their lives. He has opened my heart and mind to the realities of a life without God. He has made me discontent in doing nothing to share God with others.

How is it personally rewarding to you?

It is so very rewarding to be a small part of a women's support network, to see them grow in confidence, in life skill development, but most importantly, in developing a personal relationship with God. To see them discover that God loves them and has purposes for their lives is a great joy. As well, CWJC has helped me to be more obedient to God's purposes for my life and to experience one of the many ways He is at work in the real world. I'm a better person for it.

Are there needs for others to minister at the Fletcher Center? If so, what are they?

Fletcher Center operates a community clothing closet, Kids' Clubs, ESL classes, Acteens and CWJC. Volunteers are always needed to process clothing donations, lead children/teen activities, and provide childcare. Donations are used to provide teaching/craft/activity materials. Clothing donations are placed in the Closet and food goes to the pantry at the nearby Gano Center. CWJC uses volunteers as teachers, mentors for each lady, prayer warriors, and most needed nursery workers. Donations provide scholarships for GED testing (\$41), instructional materials (*The Purpose Driven Life*, *Bibles*, GED prep materials, binders, etc.), and postage and printing supplies for recruitment.

If someone wants to know more about the work of the Houston Mission Center, who can they talk with?

Joan Waters at 281-506-8717 or 832-453-8717, the CWJC registrar Margaret Saunders at 281-648-1536, or the Executive Director of Mission Centers of Houston Ginger Smith at 713-227-0304.