

My name is Donna Allen and I am a member of the Unitarian Universalist Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn.

Our church has accepted a covenant that begins, "Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law..."

A few years ago, our minister, Rev. Nathan Detering encouraged us to commit as individuals to a service pledge. Many people took that to heart and pledged to new volunteer positions and expanded existing ones.

It didn't take me long to find a volunteer role that fit me perfectly. I had been helping our church by purchasing supplies for the Family Promise MetroWest program during our host weeks. It never occurred to me that I could or should do more until I learned that our coordinators were struggling to find enough volunteers to successfully host during the summer months. I asked what they needed me to do and discovered that they desperately needed overnight hosts.

After inquiring about the responsibilities, I felt I could easily handle the tasks of locking doors, making coffee and being there if one of the guests needed assistance. So, I did it.

On my first overnight shift, I arrived early and spent some time talking with the guests. I was hooked. I was humbled by their ability to seek and attain help for their families and to strive to make a better life for themselves and their children. They are just like you and me. They are our neighbors. They are human beings with struggles. Every one of us struggles with something.

During that week, I spent a 2<sup>nd</sup> night in my church and spent a bit more time with the families and was impassioned by their stories and with their ability to adapt. Each one was grateful to have a safe place and be in a program that helps them plan a future.

The next morning, I hugged them goodbye as they moved on to the next host church. Then I thought, "If our church is having difficulty finding overnight volunteers in the summer, other churches are probably having the same challenges."

My coordinator gave me the name and email address of the Volunteer Coordinator, Judy Mongiardo, at Family Promise MetroWest and I asked her to share my contact information with the coordinators of each host congregation.

It took about 4 hours before I received my first request. That was last July. Fisk Methodist was my first "away" overnight. Since then, I have spent 1-2 nights per week with almost every host congregation in the network. I have met some lovely people who give generously of their time and talents to make this program such a success. I have learned a lot about each community by reading the posters on the walls and the newsletters in the foyers.

Most importantly, I know I have made some very good friends inside this program, whether they are or were guests or other volunteers. I have stayed in touch with a couple families who have transitioned to housing and have bumped into a few others while shopping in the grocery store. What joy to see them, again!

It takes more than 50 people to volunteer for each hosting week. I deeply respect each coordinator who takes on that responsibility. Thank you for letting me help you. It has been a pleasure to walk beside you in this journey.