

Clothes Closet is More than Clothing for all Seasons

Rev. Elaine Sanford
HER Faith Ministries
NBA Incubate Partner
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When she visited the HER Faith Ministries Clothes Closet, Pamela Bland said that she owned just one dress to her name. She had worn the floral-patterned garment so often that Pamela said, "I am really ashamed to be seen wearing it." The 47 year-old mother of four admitted that her wardrobe had not been a priority for some time. She



said that she had only one skirt, a few worn pairs of pants and a few blouses. "I don't have anything else to wear to an important place except for my one dress," she said. "So, I just wash it out and keep wearing it," The mother of three works part-time and lives on a fixed income. She must provide for a teenage son, three daughters (one is an adult with a disability), and an infant grandchild. Pamela had visited the Clothes Closet at HER Faith Ministries to get clothing, socks and other necessities for her children. But, she had never visited the closet for herself. "The ladies were nice and didn't make me feel like I was too fat for the clothes," said Ms. Bland. "They made me smile and encouraged me to try on the clothes. I really appreciated what they did to help me. It was a really good experience."

"The Clothes Closet was created in 2010 in response to a community need for access to affordable clothing for every season," said Rev. Elaine Sanford, executive director. Clothing for the entire family is provided at a nominal cost based on the individual's ability to pay. In many instances, the items may be provided free of charge since the idea of the Closet is not to make money. The prices might range from \$5 for women's suits and coats to 50 cents for blouses, baby items and shoes. "We are always concerned about preserving the dignity of the individual's that we serve," said Sanford. "We don't want anyone to walk out of here without taking an item that they need, simply because they can't afford it. This is a place where everyone can afford to shop, even if you don't have any money," she said. "We might

ask you to help us to fold up a few items or to help us to hang up some things, if you have the time. We want every guest to feel that he or she has purchased or secured the item on their own - rather than having someone to provide it as charity.”

Sanford says that the Clothes Closet has become a gathering place for many people who appreciate the opportunity for fellowship with staff. Some stop by to visit while others want to talk about problems at home, or to ask for prayer. “The Clothes Closet is itself an outreach ministry for people who need to be connected.” Sanford said. “Some may not have a church relationship and may not have a good relationship with family. The Clothes Closet fills this void and is a neutral place where anyone can meet.” One recent example is Ms. Josephine Seymore who visited the Closet because she needed to talk to somebody about the death of her granddaughter. The family has been estranged, and so, Ms. Seymore had not been able to talk to the family about how the young woman’s death had impacted her. “I just came over here to talk about it and to ask Ms. Anner to pray with me,” she said. “I like the fact that you can come over here and look around in the shop. You can talk to Ms. Cookie or Ms. Anner about whatever is on your mind, and they will pray for you, if you want them to. Sometimes, I don’t need anything, I just stop by to see them. It makes me feel good.”

Sanford guesses that the Closet receives an average of 150 to 200 visitors per month. The number is larger during holidays and sale times. The Closet serves a great need for families to buy reasonably-priced clothing. Anyone may donate gently worn coats, hats, sweaters, slacks or shoes. The Ministry accepts all “like-new” or slightly worn items for men, women, children or babies. The items must be clean, in good condition and ready to wear. Donors may drop the items off on Tuesday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., or donors may coordinate a time for the staff to pick items up.”

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