

**THE QUALITY OF MERCY; HOME-OPERATED MINISTRY OFFERS BOTH BREAD AND WORDS TO PEOPLE IN NEED; SERVING OTHERS: MERCY HOUSE MINISTRIES INC.**

Byline: Elizabeth McCormick

WINTER HAVEN

Glenn and Naomi Reinbergs needed groceries and a little bit of hope after losing their jobs.

That's where Mercy House Ministries Inc. came in.

'We offer food to families having a hard time,' said Billy Benton, president of the non-denominational ministry based in Winter Haven.

'We minister the word of God to uplift them.'

The Department of Children and Families sent the Reinbergs to Mercy House for some help. Glenn Reinbergs has been out of work for a few weeks and he and his wife are having trouble meeting the rent and feeding their two children.

Mercy House was able to give them groceries and some ideas for finding work.

'They're very helpful,' said Cyndi Gero, community resource counselor for the Department of Children and Families in Haines City.

'(The Bentons) are serving a wonderful need and a lot of times people not only need food for the body but they need food for the soul, too,' Gero said.

'Our motto is: Everything will be pleasing in the sight of the Lord,' Benton said. 'Mercy triumphs over judgment.'

Benton and his wife, Pamela, began Mercy House Ministries 2 1/2 years ago out of their home. They bought food with the money in their pockets and volunteered their time to help others in need.

Now they work out of a building at 3910 Lake Alfred Road with 10 to 12 volunteers. Donations help pay for the building.

The Bentons' daughter, Mary Ellen, 13, is often there to keep the children company by telling stories, coloring or playing music while Adam, 18, helps out with odd jobs.

The ministry office is open for assistance on Tuesdays from 3 to 4 p.m. and donations can be left during the week. The Bentons hold a Bible study Wednesday nights at 7 that's open to anyone.

'Our idea is to get with the parents and find out why they are where they are and help them,' Benton, 45, said. 'Word of mouth keeps us alive. We see a lot of success stories.'

Bill and Rosemary Snyder of Auburndale were short of money and Mercy House Ministries helped get them some food. The Snyders have two children and one is blind and handicapped.

'They come to my house and pray for the family,' said Bill Snyder, 46. 'It's a real blessing.'

'Our goal is to minister a need,' said Mrs. Benton, 41, who acts as vice president of the ministry.

Most of the people in need of help just lost a job or are going through a job change. The ministry also offers emergency help if a storm rips through the area or someone can't leave their home to get any food.

'Any of us are susceptible to be down on luck,' Benton said.

He knows from firsthand experience.

When he was a child, his family frequently moved from town to town and found themselves on hard times.

'I knew what it was like to live under a bridge,' he said. 'I remember digging Coke bottles out of the ground to have money to buy flour.'

Things didn't get much better after he became an adult with his own family. After an auto accident 14 years ago in Georgia, the Bentons found they had no income, they had to move into government housing and they had a baby on the way.

'It was very eye-opening,' Mrs. Benton said.

When the Bentons moved to Florida in 1988, they had \$200 in their pocket and lived in a travel trailer in Lake Wales. Now the couple live in a mobile home near Polk City.

But they have always given to others.

'We've always done this,' Mrs. Benton said. 'We would give of ourselves and ended up with nothing at times. We both know what it is to have to do without and to be shunned at times when you need help.'

Before opening Mercy House, the couple worked with Rose Street Ministry, which was affiliated with Carpenter's Home Church in Lakeland, and would help as many as 170 people each day.

To help make expenses, Benton refurbishes mobile homes from his business called Central Florida Maintenance. Pamela Benton was a disc jockey at WTWB, a gospel station in Auburndale, but decided to work full-time on the ministry.

'We knew the ministry would become work,' he said. 'As people keep coming in the door, we'll keep doing what we do.'