

# Downtown's Grace and Hope Mission feeds souls

By Jacques Kelly THE BALTIMORE SUN

The doors of the Grace and Hope Mission open five evenings a week. Most nights, depending on the time of the month, about 40 to 60 people will step in from Gay Street, just south of The Block in Baltimore, for a religious service and a free meal.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," said Helen Meewes, the mission's superintendent, quoting from the Book of Philippians.

Meewes is one of three missionaries, including Karen Harp and Gunhild Carlson, who live upstairs and staff one of Baltimore's oldest nondenominational, charitable institutions.

The mission was started by Mamie Caskie and Jennie Goranflo, who with \$4 in their pockets held their first service on West Camden Street in 1914. Caskie wrote that God told her to come to Baltimore to work with those who were down and out. "Open a door to the discouraged, to those who have lost hope and forgotten about grace," she wrote.

The Baltimore mission moved to Gay Street in 1919 in a building that had been Neiderhofer's bar, a victim of Prohibition that had been famous for its beer and crabs served on little red tables.

A fancy iron marquee, a remnant of that era, still projects over the entrance at 4 S. Gay St., along with an electric sign in the form of a cross.

The interior has auditorium-style seats for maybe 150 people. There is an elevated sanctuary with a keyboard, vibraharp and other instruments on which the missionaries play their hymns. The nightly interdenominational service might include "When We All Get to Heaven" or "Victory in Jesus." The missionaries lead the singing, read the Bible and preach. Signs on the walls read "God is Love."

The missionaries used to take their musical instruments and play

on street corners. Passers-by might contribute to the cause. Nowadays, friends of the mission write checks for the meals served. It is not a shelter; there is no overnight accommodation. The missionaries distribute clothing when they get a donation of it.

Many of the patrons address the missionaries as "sister." The missionaries wear unadorned black skirts and red knit blouses, the Grace and Hope colors. They lead celibate lives and give up having husbands, children and their own homes.

"I went to the mission in Jersey City when I was a child and the Lord called me. I've had 49 years of working," said Meewes, who ran the Grace and Hope Mission in New York City for 21 years.

Her group has missions in York and Reading, Pa.; Jersey City, N.J.; Boston; and Norfolk, Va.



Grace and Hope Mission volunteers, from left, Juan Coles, John Alston and Kelly Phillips high-five each other and Karen Harp, center, who taught them in Sunday school at the Gay Street mission.



The mission's Gunhild Carlson receives a thankful hug from Tony Cipreni during the yearly Thanksgiving dinner.



Karen Harp shares a smile with Charles Lindsay, who thanked her for his meal. The mission moved to Gay Street in 1919.

It also had a second mission in Baltimore on Greene Street for women and children, but that building fell to University of Maryland construction. There are 12 missionaries in six missions.

Meewes takes a minivan out Sunday mornings and brings in children from West Baltimore for Sunday school. They then get a lunch.

"I keep law and order," she said with a broad smile. "I can be really stern. No matter who walks in, there should be reverence for the Lord's house."

The Gay Street mission's lower floor had been a duckpin bowling alley in another life. Its dining tables were made from the thick wood of bowling-alley floor. One night last week,

the missionaries and volunteers, including students from Digital Harbor High School and a members of a congregation from Littlestown, Pa., served a hot Thanksgiving meal.

"No homeless person should go hungry" Meewes said. "The Lord provides." [jacques.kelly@baltsun.com](mailto:jacques.kelly@baltsun.com)