

**Whitelock Street** is a strange street. It fascinates all, it nurtures some, it kills many. It angers and frightens everyone. I can still, after 23 years, sit on the porch and watch the present mingle with the past. I don't know what keeps me watching. Kids who weren't even thoughts in '67 when I got here, run drugs or fight drugs or hope they don't catch a bullet. Everywhere and every time you look, there's a hand with money slapping a hand with goods. There are beepers and whistles and hats and T-shirts and cute dogs (the guy with the dachshunds has your stuff) and ugly dogs and Z-cars and 16" woofers in open hatchbacks and ringing phones and drops everywhere. The fuel door of my truck was a drop one night. There are licence plates from North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Alabama, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia. Our block is famous, nationwide. Way up high on one lamp post is the irony of the century: **Drug Free Zone**. We are a drug-free zone. The only free things are the samples.

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The stores across the street with so many names and faces buried in the paint are closed and boarded up: the city's acquiescence to the moneyed voters, the remedy to the blight. Buy up and bulldoze down. Get rid of the buildings and you get rid of the drugs. The last store to go is the carryout. It should have been the *first* to go. More than food changes hands here---from noon to three in the morning. But when the *laundromat* goes, where will all the people wash their clothes?

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Earlier this year, St. Francis consulted with Darryl Davidson, an urban architect here in Baltimore, who designed a plan which would save the essential businesses, and enhance the whole area. We presented it to the city, got the verbal support of the local politicians, and have heard no more. Our side of the street, goes the rumor mill, will remain standing because there's no money left. We wonder what that portends for the "acquired" buildings across the street: one whole block of city skeletons.

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In front of the Center, we have declared a non-hang-out zone. At least you can't *sit* and trade. I want 30 feet of space where people don't have to fight the crowds; where some of the neighborhood kids can ask Fr. Tom for peanut-butter cups and not have to climb over buyers, bottles and bags.

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I'm still and always surprised by the existence of the St. Francis Community here in the middle of the inferno. We pray on Sunday. We bury our dead. We remember our kids and lift each other up. We believe. We trust each other. We have two AA groups and three NA groups who gather here in our meeting room. Much healing and support is the blessing. God walks in the street.

Out of this community grew our Bible School again this summer. Debbie Hill, with Mrs. Katherine Mitchell's help put it all together. We had about thirty or so kids for five days a week for four weeks. They did religious studies, arts, crafts, trips, all with love, supervision and discipline. Watching them, I learned that education is only one leg of the walk out of poverty. Triggered creativity is the other. Debbie did it. The inner art came alive in story, costume, and song. Our kids were so full of power and life. We hope they remember.

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We got no monies from the archdiocese to run the bible school this summer. John pretty much picked up the tab himself. We're grateful for the church's help in the past. We're still here carrying on what we committed ourselves to back in 1963 when the Center began. God lives, people to people.

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In June I learned that one of our former bible school children and a member of our community received her BA degree from Morgan State University and has been granted admission to the University of Maryland, College Park, to continue her studies. Three Cheers!

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**Editor's Note:** Many thanks to those of you who have sent us gifts. I have been remiss in sending thank-you notes. Much of my time is taken up with my outside job. This helps support both the Center and myself, and continues the educational and service mission of St. Francis Center among many of the same people as live in our neighborhood.

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Finally, please keep us in mind if you win the lottery or the Irish Sweepstakes. You are constant in your support and we are grateful. These are difficult times, I know. Be assured that your monies are multiplied many times over in direct service to our neighbors.

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Prayers and Best Wishes.

Fr. Tom, John  
Debbie

# ST FRANCIS NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER



## St. Francis Neighborhood Center

936 Whitelock Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21217

*Rev. Thomas Composto      John K. Taylor, III*  
*Directors*

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