



## ***From Our Wesley Nurse . . .***

### ***For God So Loved the World***

Christmas means something different to those of all ages and from every walk of life. Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Children look forward to getting presents and a break from school. The business world hopes for good Black Fridays and large profit margins.

But for many, Christmas can be a time of sorrow, loss and stress. In a world of commercials and shiny things, Christmas can be a burden. The expectations of "having the best Christmas ever," places pressure on individuals and families who are already struggling to meet their basic needs, much less the pay for the extras.

In October Ana Garcia, the Elgin ISD Homeless and Foster Care Liaison, became a member of the Health Ministry Team. Ms. Garcia's job is to identify homeless youth and connect them with school and community resources. These services help reduce barriers so these students can achieve their academic and personal successes.

In addition to assisting homeless families in Elgin, she works closely with school staff and community partners to partner assistance to 'unaccompanied *and* homeless youth.' To be eligible for services under the McKinney- Vento Act, as an unaccompanied homeless youth, the student must lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and not be in the physical custody of a parent or [legal] guardian. The reason for being apart from their parent or guardian can vary from dysfunctional family dynamics, abuse, mental illness, drug/alcohol abuse, incarceration, and a variety of other reasons.

Since joining the Health Ministry Team, Ana has shared how she is working to provide twelve Elgin ISD unaccompanied youth with food on the week-ends. During the week, they eat at the Elgin ISD cafeteria. Since they are homeless and alone, these students double up wherever and with whoever gives them a place to sleep. Some live with other students and they all pitch in to pay the rent and living expenses. These students are attending school full-time and working part-time jobs just to survive and to graduate.

For these teenagers, having enough food and a place to stay is their overwhelming priority. Christmas only creates a problem, not a joy. On Christmas break, these students do have access to free meals at the cafeteria for several days or weeks. Staying with others becomes a problem if there is a shortage of space and they are asked to leave. Without food, shelter, adult support, financial assistance, or spiritual care, these teenagers' lives are hard.

I urge you to pray about putting Christ into Christmas by helping these homeless students, not only at Christmas, but throughout the year. Hebrews 13:16 states, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." In November, the Health Ministry Team members discussed having the church