

**Our History**

“In October 1984 on a very cold night, Stanley Biddle, a homeless man who was a familiar figure on the University of Pennsylvania campus, froze to death after falling asleep near 38th Street. In response, a small group of students, clergy, and local residents came together to confront the bleak and tragic realities of homelessness in their own community. This group formed the University City Hospitality Coalition (UCHC). The first action of the group was to offer one "meal of hospitality" per week that would be open to everyone. To operate, donations were informally solicited and volunteers recruited from churches, colleges, and neighborhood organizations. The meal program expanded to include more evening meals and sandwiches at lunchtime. In 1986 the group obtained an office in the Christian Association. Incorporated in 1987, UCHC is a federally recognized nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) status. UCHC's mission has always been to be more than a soup kitchen. It is an organization designed to encourage leadership among its guests.”

**Our Mission**

• To provide direct support services for poor and homeless people •  
• To encourage empowerment and leadership among guests •  
• To facilitate referrals for guests to other agencies when appropriate •  
• To foster working partnerships between volunteers and guests to create an environment of mutual understanding •

**Services Provided**

**Soup Kitchen:** Hot meals five nights each week and sandwiches on Saturday for poor and homeless persons in West Philadelphia   
**Also:** Mail services, referral services, medical clinic, dental clinic, legal clinic

**Role of Villanova Volunteers**

**Wednesday 4:45 – 7:30**

When we arrive, we help finish preparing the meal. The meal consists of a hot dish, a vegetable, bread and dessert. We also serve hot or cold tea, and provide fruit or other food depending on the availability. We then serve the meal, and sit and talk with those we serve. After seconds and thirds, we clean up the chairs, tables and floor, as well as wash all of the trays and pitchers.

*For more information, please visit:*

[*http://uchc.phillycharities.org/*](http://uchc.phillycharities.org/)

**Transformation –** Because we are understand our time with each of our COV partners as a relationship, we are going to leave the experience having learned something new about ourselves, and how we fit into our community. We want to go into service recognizing a need to change ourselves, and we want to come away being able to acknowledge what we and reflect upon how these fit into our daily lives at Villanova. **How can everything we learn about our community beyond Villanova’s campus be part of our lives at Villanova? How can we make space for transformation?**

**Humility –** We have been invited into the lives of the individuals at the COV site, and this invitation for service is a privilege. During our time at the COV site, we will be placed in a position of privilege because we are given insight into the lives of individuals at some of their most vulnerable times. We can’t take for granted the pieces of themselves that they share with us. Furthermore, we are not going out of our way to *give* anything, because we work with each of our COV partners to simply provide services which the members of the community should have had all along. **When interacting with other individuals at the COV site, ask yourself – what is the *right* relationship for me to have with this person?**

**Partnership** – As a Villanova Community, we have been invited to work with each of our COV partners to provide individuals with some basic needs. The key is that we are working with the sites; we are not working for the sites, and we are not providing the sites with gifts. We emphasize this concept of partnership so that we might better understand that we are all on the same level, we have a mutual respect for each other, and we are working for the same alleviation of poverty. **Notice how Villanova interacts with our COV partner. How can we make this interaction more cohesive?**

**Charity to Solidarity** – Each COV site interacts with the community through acts of charity, acts which address specific and immediate needs. This can take the form of very concrete actions, such as serving a meal or helping with homework, or charity can be more abstract, like lending a listening ear and being a friend. While acts of charity are invaluable, it is important to recognize that they are not the entire picture because there is another, equally important facet to service: working for justice. Acts of justice usually takes place on the level of advocacy and education. Because COV is a charity based organization, it is important to become fully engaged with these acts by striving for solidarity with each of our partners. **What is your purpose in going to COV today? What does it mean to be fully present?**

C.O.V.

CORNERSTONES