

# WHAT IS "FISH"??

In scores of communities over the world, volunteers whose slogan is "Love Thy Neighbor" are responding to human need. They operate under the improbable name of FISH. It is not an acronym. The FISH symbol is the same as that secretly used by early Christians during centuries of persecution to identify themselves to each other.

The FISH movement began in England in 1961 under the leadership of the pastor and a layperson of an Anglican church in Old Headington. It was born in a burst of conviction, by both pastor and congregation, that a major problem in society was a decline of neighborliness - of caring about others. Challenged by the co-founders to get their religion off its seat and onto its feet, the parishioners came up with the FISH idea.

Volunteers for specific services were recruited from among parishioners. A card bearing the FISH symbol with the instruction, "If you need help of any kind, put me in your window," was distributed to every home in the village. Each block had a street warden, identified by a metal fish mounted on his gate. A card in a window signaled "a neighbor in distress" and the warden would spring into immediate action.

News of this unique way of expressing Christian concern for others spread rapidly through Europe and then to the Church of the Good Shepherd in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Flyers were distributed by parishioners to residents of the town. Said the flyer: "FISH is simply a group of Christian people who wish to express their love and concern for their neighbor. There is no charge for any service we provide; you will never be asked to listen to any lecture. We do not wish to preach...only to help."

Although nobody knows the exact number, more than 1,300 chapters of FISH are thought to be operating in the United States today. To many, one of the most appealing aspects of this movement is its paucity of organization. Most Chapters have no officers other than a chairperson, treasurer, and a steering committee.

Sunnyvale FISH has as its slogan "Christians Who Care." Sponsored by the Sunnyvale Area Ecumenical Parish, its work is supported by over 20 congregations of several different denominations. It includes supportive churches in neighboring cities of Cupertino, Los Altos, Santa Clara and San Jose, and also individuals—caring friends in the community. Food, donated clothing, household utensils, linens, blankets and layettes are offered. [No legitimate request is left unfilled as long as resources are available.](#) Sunnyvale FISH also provides assistance to Sunnyvale Community Services for Thanksgiving baskets to give away each year.

Most FISH services require no special talent, no money - just an honest interest in serving one's neighbor. No FISH volunteer is under any illusion that this movement is or can be the answer to deep-seated problems that plague our society. They do feel that they can help with concern and caring for others.

FISH is simply a group of loving, caring people who give of themselves without concern for reward or recognition. Being part of FISH means offering your commitment to be a servant of God and to demonstrate God's love through your actions.

For information on how you can be involved call Renata Thorne at (408) 252-9045.