PADS was established seventeen years ago. and since then it has served the homeless by providing nightly winter time food and shelter. PADS also provides daytime services that our homeless guests can access. Medical care, social services, job skills development and education assistance are just a few of the ways in which PADS helps the homeless get back on their feet.

St. Luke the Evangelist Church (OCA) is the thirtieth faith community in the south suburbs of Chicago, and the first Orthodox parish among them, to provide a winter shelter for the homeless. Every Monday we lay out twenty mattresses, bedding and towels (all provided by PADS) for our homeless guests. At 6:30 pm they begin to arrive. Each guest must show a PADS identification card to be admitted. At about 7:15, our food team serves a hot dinner to our guests. The food team also provides breakfast and lunch items for the next day.

After dinner the guests retire to their beds, watch a movie, read or just chat until about 10:15, when the lights go out. Between 5:30 and 6:00 am on Tuesday morning, the guests are awakened so they can prepare to leave for the day. They have breakfast and are given a bag lunch, and then they depart between 6:30 and 7:00.

**HOW DO WE DO IT?**
Facilitating this program at St. Luke (and other sites) requires many volunteers. At least four or five people are needed from 6:00 to 11:00 pm, two or three for each of the two night shifts (10:45-3:00 and 2:45-7:00), and one or two for clean up on Tuesday morning. The food team arrives at 6:30 pm and is ready to leave by 8:30. In addition, other volunteers transport paperwork and laundry and make reminder calls each week.

Even though our shelter site is open every Monday evening, volunteers are asked to commit to just one shift per month, although some do less and others do more. As of now, thirty-eight St. Luke parishioners have participated in our St. Luke Night of Sharing in one way or another. PADS provides additional volunteers as needed, some of whom are high school or college students who need service learning hours for their classes. Not only do volunteers interact with the guests, but they also get to know each other. We work together to provide a pleasant atmosphere for our guests. We also pray for each of our guests through the St. Luke Prayer Ministry, and we have selected St. Paraskeva of Serbia (known for her care of the poor, and who also moved from city to city) as the patron saint of this endeavor.

**HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?**
Providing time to serve others is easy to do at our St. Luke Night of Sharing. Volunteering once a month for the seven months that our site is open adds up to only about five hours per month, or about thirty-five hours per year. That's less than half a percent of the year. Each week about 8 percent of our time each year just eating our three meals per day.

Pearl Homiak is a nun at the St. Barbara Monastery in Santa Paula, CA.

Many women benefited from the purses and bags when we distributed them to the Human Development Services of Westchester in Port Chester, Hope Soup Kitchen of New Rochelle, and Emmanuel House in Manhattan, and to homeless women in New York City. One of the more memorable comments we received when distributing at a homeless drop-in center was when one woman picked out a pretty straw purse and said she would use it for Easter, which was a couple of weeks away. She came back to our group about twenty minutes later and asked very gingerly if she could have a second purse so that she could use it when she went to church on Palm Sunday. We learned so much from these women about their need to have a purse to keep smaller items in, one that they could keep close to them at all times, particularly at night when they are more likely to be robbed of their meager possessions.

We began a community food drive in 1989. During the past three years, our community has donated more than 10,000 non-perishable food items. During the Christmas holiday, we include hams for holiday meals. Members of our parish support HOPE Community Services, the largest food pantry and soup kitchen in our region. HOPE distributes free meals to the disadvantaged, the working poor and the elderly. HOPE’s kitchen serves dinner three evenings a week, fifty-two weeks a year. The food pantry distributes bagged groceries every other week, with special distributions for holidays. Additionally, HOPE also provides social services and substance abuse referrals.

Oasis House, a men’s shelter in New Rochelle, was another one of our focuses. In 1997, we started our “Let’s Get Cooking” project. Once a month we prepare dinner for thirty residents of a men’s shelter. In 2000, our priest, Fr. Nick.
When you catch the same bus every day, you start to recognize your fellow commuters. Last year I started a conversation with a woman I see every morning. She asked me a question I hear often, one that usually makes me feel extremely inferior. “You have an accent. Where are you from? … Albania? Where's that?” When she found out that I work for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, her next question was, “What is Orthodox?”

I felt like I was a complete stranger to her. How would I relate? This incident made me think of how many other immigrants probably have the same experience, trying to adjust and introduce themselves and their culture to a “new world.”

The more I thought about it, the more I asked myself, “Why does a person leave his own country? What does it mean to be a stranger, and how should we as Christians behave toward the ‘stranger?’” Using my own experience as an example, I tried to find answers in the Bible and in the history of the Orthodox Christianity in America.

From the very beginning, the people in the Bible were people on the move. They were strangers in a foreign country. Many reasons are given for their immigration, including poverty, slavery, war, love and religion. They left their familiar worlds to go to unknown ones. However, it was because of these traveling strangers that knowledge of God spread to other countries.