

# **LIVING FAITH, CHANGING LIVES, MAKING A DIFFERENCE: ONE PERSON AT A TIME**

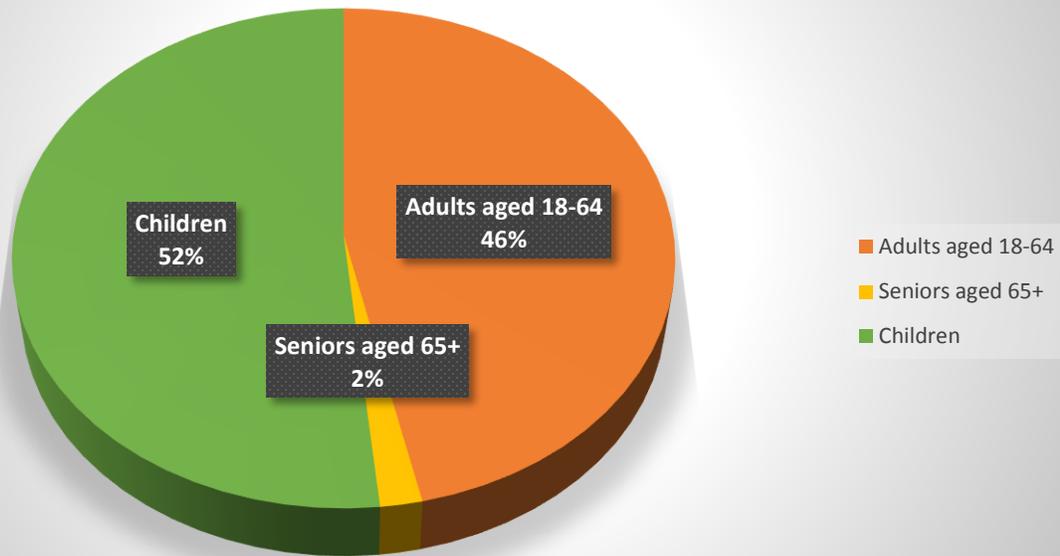
## **QUARTERLY REPORT FROM SOCIAL SERVICE MINISTRIES**

SJV's Social Service Ministries Department, through its Emergency Assistance Ministry, provides food, clothes, financial, and other types of assistance to those in need. Working in conjunction with the Food Pantry, Joseph's Coat Resale Shop, our Employment Ministry, other ministries within Social Services, and partnering with ministries such as Memorial Assistance Ministries and Catholic Charities, our volunteer interviewers meet with those in our neighborhood who are facing financial crises. These difficulties are often due to unemployment, low income, rising medical costs, higher food prices, or unforeseen family crises. Acting on their commitment to the Corporal Works of Mercy and through the donations of our very generous parishioners, the volunteers are able to compassionately respond to the needs of our clients and help them overcome the 'bumps on the road.'

The interviews for assistance are held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. Assistance is available to those in need who live within our service area: zip codes 77043, 77055, 77077 and 77079. Expectant women who are enrolled in the Gabriel Project are also eligible for these services. We currently have six experienced and trained volunteers plus our staff who interview the families for assistance.

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, November is one of the busiest months of the year for our Emergency Assistance Ministry. During the months of September, October, and November, our volunteers saw record numbers of clients in need of assistance. **We had 358 emergency service visits, assisting a total of 1,263 individuals in this past quarter.** Although the individuals interviewed for assistance were adults, the report is designed to show the makeup of the families assisted. As such, the majority of those assisted through the visits were children (52%), and only 2% of them were 65 years of age or older. This is consistent with the Houston Food Bank's report that children account for approximately 47% of the people who receive assistance from them, and that on any given day, one in four children in Harris County does not have consistent access to enough nutritious food.

## AGE OF PERSONS HELPED September -- November 2015



Of the 358 visits, fifty-nine of them were expectant mothers who belong to our Gabriel Project, and we have actually had over 200 Gabriel Project visits so far this year! The number of expectant mothers whom we've seen through the Gabriel Project has increased by about threefold in the last year or two. The severity of problems that these expectant mothers face has also escalated in the last few years. So far this year, we have assisted Gabriel Project mothers with the following problems: domestic violence, sexual abuse, teen pregnancies, mental illness, homelessness, etc. Most of the Gabriel Project mothers are not married and receive little to no support from their families. We owe so much of the success of the program to our Gabriel Project volunteer coordinator, Dee Twomey. Dee and her team of Angels meet with the expectant mothers in crisis pregnancies and provide them with practical and spiritual support, referring them to resources as needed, guiding, and mentoring them through their pregnancies. We assist Gabriel Project mothers with baby items as needed and available, and each mother receives a layette filled with baby supplies, including diapers, bottles, and baby clothing. Without the assistance from the Gabriel Project and our amazing Angels, these mothers might not choose life for their babies.

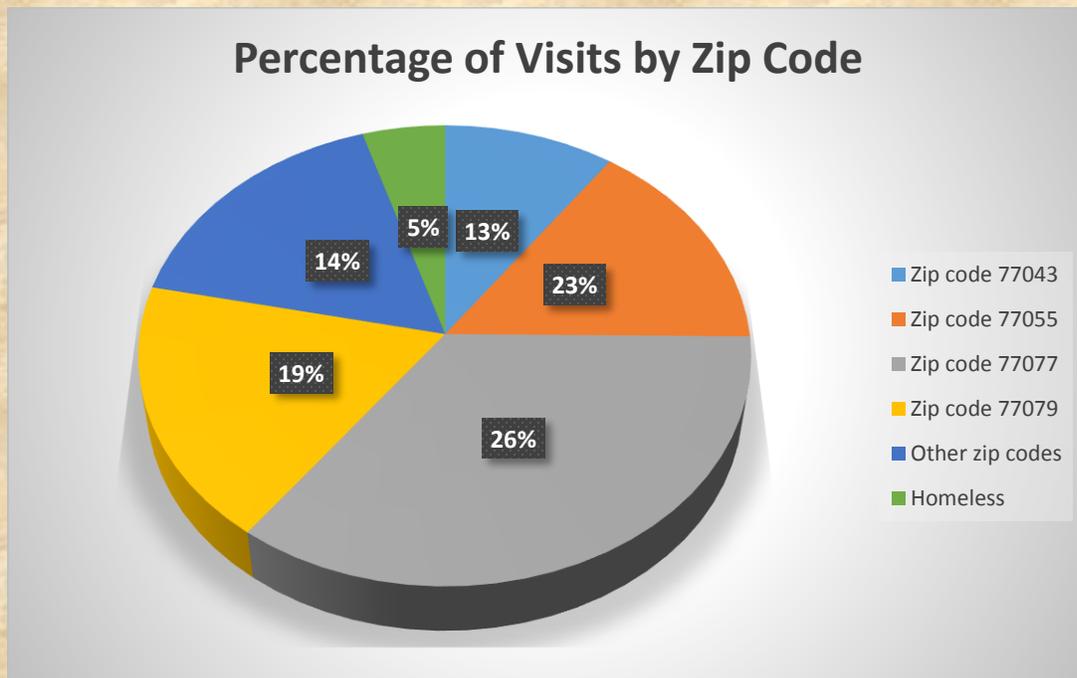
Families in need were assisted with either food, clothes, financial assistance for utilities or rent, or a combination of these:

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED	
Food	277 families
Clothes	175 families
Financial Assistance	54 families
Other (transportation, Gold Card applications, résumé, referrals to other ministries)	41 families

Through the Food Pantry, 442 bags of food were distributed, and 614 individuals received assistance with clothes through Joseph’s Coat Resale Shop. We also assisted 27 homeless individuals with our Hope Bags.

Among the “other” types of assistance provided through the Social Services’ Emergency Assistance Ministry, it’s important to mention the referrals to other ministries. Through partnerships with Catholic Charities and Memorial Assistance Ministries we are able to facilitate counseling services for the families we assist, as well as opportunities to increase self-sufficiency.

As for the place of residence of those we assist, the majority of them come from zip code 77077. The remaining 14% of those we assist are Gabriel Project clients who come from all over the Houston area:



In addition to our Emergency Services, the Social Service Ministries here at SJV also provide a number of other services to those in need. Our ESL (English as a Second Language) Fall Semester began in August. Students came from all over the world and all walks of life, sharing a common desire to learn English and improve their lives and the lives of their children. We had a total of 10 very committed teachers who volunteered their time twice a week for four hours to their students. The teachers spent even more time preparing for their classes. We also have one experienced volunteer and teacher, Lelia Buerger, who coordinated the ESL program, and several volunteers who substituted for our teachers on a regular basis. In December, 55 students obtained a Certificate of Completion for successfully concluding the semester.

Our Joseph's Coat volunteers served 614 individuals with clothing over this past quarter. Plus, they earned over \$38,000 for our Social Service ministries during these past three months. We have over 100 volunteers who serve in Joseph's Coat in a variety of ways—as cashiers, sorters, pricers, managers, etc. All of the proceeds from Joseph's Coat benefit our Social Service ministries, so their work (along with the many donations we receive) allowed us to be able to serve the more than 1,200 individuals in need this past quarter.

We delivered hot lunches to all of the homebound and disabled seniors in our Meals on Wheels program every week day throughout the summer. That's almost 850 meals delivered! This is due to the work of our Meals on Wheels volunteers who often do more than deliver meals to seniors in need. They also check on them, take time to chat with them, and a few of our volunteers even take time every month to organize and play games with them. We have approximately 40 Meals on Wheels volunteers who make this program possible.

We have continued hosting The Gathering Place in these past three months. The Gathering Place provides food, entertainment, interaction, and exercise (both mental and physical) for individuals within our parish who are suffering from memory loss or some form of dementia. At the same time as The Gathering Place, we offer a support group for caregivers. During this past quarter, we have had about 30 participants, plus their caregivers. The Gathering Place is a beautiful ministry that we provide on a monthly basis in collaboration with Interfaith Care Partners for seniors and their loved ones.

We completed another Habitat for Humanity home this quarter. This is the sixth home that we have built with Habitat. We had two build dates in September and October with about 10-15 volunteers participating on each day. The home was dedicated on November 7<sup>th</sup>. The home was built for the Lewis family (single mother and two young children). Mrs. Lewis and her children previously shared a two bedroom home with her grandmother. This is the first home that they have ever owned.

In October and November, three missions were completed to El Salvador and Eagle Pass, Texas. Throughout the summer, the El Salvador Mission Advance Team worked to collect, sort, organize, inventory, and pack medications for the October mission. It's amazing what we were able to get done at our Medication Sorting Parties. We are grateful for all of the donations of medical supplies and to all of the volunteers who helped us to prepare for the mission.

In addition to all of the work that took place during the fall, our Social Service staff and volunteers were also involved in planning all of the various events and activities that will take place this winter of 2015. Our staff and volunteers translated and coordinated the production of the weekly Spanish bulletin (that's 12 issues over the fall). As previously mentioned, we assisted families with food so they too could celebrate Thanksgiving with their families, and we planned and successfully executed our Christmas Program. This has been our most successful program to date. Over the past weeks, we served over 90 families and over 300 children. Thanks to all of our volunteers' efforts and our parishioners' generosity, we were able to provide each family with a generous gift card, 2 presents for each child, a turkey or ham, and a bag of food for Christmas dinner (including all of the side dishes, bread, a dessert, and fresh fruit). We are still giving out the remaining gifts to those families who come for emergency assistance, and we will continue to do so for as long as we have them.

This Christmas program is quite an undertaking, and it takes lots of planning and preparation, which usually begin a months ahead of time. Our volunteer interviewers are asked to consider the neediest families throughout the year, and they flag them so that they aren't forgotten when the selections are made in November. In the beginning of December, these families are contacted to schedule appointments for them to come in and pick up their Christmas gift packages. When the Christmas program began in 2012, we assisted about 40 families. Three years later, we have more than doubled that number, and we have worked to improve the program in every way we can.

While the Christmas program has always been joyous for the recipient families, our staff, and volunteers, we still didn't feel that we were adequately sharing the real meaning of Christmas with our recipient families. The families were overjoyed to receive the gifts and food that we shared with them, but the focus was still on the things they were receiving. Last year, we added a few elements to our Christmas package such as the story of St. Nicholas and the Legend of the Candy Cane (emphasizing that Jesus is the reason for the season!), but we knew that we could still improve upon this.

This year we added a few new things. First, we presented each family selected for the Christmas program with a beautiful Nativity Cross to hang up on a wall in their home. In previous years, we often saw tears of joy from the parents as they received gifts and gift cards. This year, we were able to witness tears of joy as families were presented with their crosses.

Additionally, thanks to St. Anne's and St. Monica's Societies, we were able to give each family a book about the birth of Jesus that they could read to their children. We thank Erica O'Connor and Karen Hibbard for organizing the Christmas book drive which made this dream come true for us, so that every child could receive not just a toy for Christmas, but a book about Jesus, too! Finally, we included a treat bag for each child filled with candy canes and Christmas goodies, a bookmark about the legend of the candy cane, and a story that parents can read to their children about St. Nicholas. Before seeing each of the families, we also spent some time praying for them.

It was an exhausting, whirlwind week, but all of our volunteers and staff pitched in beautifully, and we were able to cover all shifts without any shortage of volunteers. All of our Emergency Service and office volunteers worked extended hours in order to make sure that our recipient

families received all of their gifts. Thanks also go to all of our supportive team, especially our Food Pantry and Joseph's Coat volunteers.

We wish to thank Deacon Randy Graham, who had already done much of the work for Gift Giving Sunday (which makes our Christmas program possible!) before he was transferred, as well as all of the Gift Giving Sunday volunteers from Youth Formation, the Young Adults, the Knights of Columbus, That Man Is You, and the Men's and Women's ACTS Teams, Strake Jesuit College Preparatory and our own Social Service Ministries volunteers.

There are also many SJV staff members to thank for their efforts in making our Christmas program such a success this year. First, the Young Adults organized the Turkey Drive for us this year. Not only did the Turkey Drive provide us with turkeys for Thanksgiving, but it also provided us with all of the turkeys for our Christmas program as well. In fact, we were so blessed, that we still have turkeys left to give out this week! Thanks also go to the maintenance team who helped us out in so many ways. They helped us bring in large donations, move furniture, and move turkeys around from freezer to freezer to make room! Finally, thanks also to Parish Life and Youth Formation for helping us store turkeys in various freezers throughout the campus and shuffle them around until we could finally give them out.

The last and greatest thank you, of course, goes to our Lord Jesus Christ who has so richly blessed all of us. We would not be able to do any of the things that we do without His help and blessing. We often marveled last week at how just the right volunteer called or showed up at our doorstep at just the time when we needed them or how the perfect donation came in exactly when we needed it. There were no accidents this week. We were all part of the plan to serve our neighbors and be the light of Christ to them. In giving, what a wonderful gift and blessing we have been given in return. What a great honor to serve and be the hands and feet of Jesus for these families and children.

It is our hope that more than numbers, we are able to convey to you the great work that our parish is able to accomplish through your generous donations and our volunteers' desire to serve. Without them, we would not be able to assist our neighbors in need. Your contributions to the Social Service Ministries through donations and volunteering are a marvelous way to live your faith, change lives, and to make a difference!