

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

QUARTERLY REPORT FROM SJV'S SOCIAL SERVICE MINISTRIES MARCH, 2016 – MAY, 2016

The mission of the Social Service Ministries at St. John Vianney Catholic Church is to act on Catholic Social Teaching and our commitment to the Corporal Works of Mercy by providing a compassionate response to those parishioners and families in our community in need of assistance.

In addition to providing our regular services, over the past three months we have turned our focus to assisting parishioners and those around Harris County whose properties and/or livelihood were affected by the devastating floods. In coordination with Catholic Charities and the Society of St. Vincent De Paul, SJV's Social Service Ministries was able to respond to Cardinal DiNardo's call to the faithful to help those families, individuals and even entire parishes as they dealt with the 'day-to-day uncertainty and hazardous conditions.' Our partnerships with these organizations and others, like Memorial Assistance Ministries, allowed us to also assist those impacted by the floods with the long-term recovery. It is truly a blessing that the majority of our parishioners were not affected by the floods. Of those who were affected, most of them have told us that they will be OK. Thanks to the continued generosity of our parishioners, we were able to assist those who did need a helping hand. As we reached out to parishioners to see if any assistance was needed, most of you replied with a resounding 'how can I help?'

Our Social Service Ministries also provide an opportunity for our parishioners to get involved and to answer God's call to grow in faith by sharing their unique gifts and talents while serving and reaching out to those in need. Our ministry is part of the continuous support that St. John Vianney Catholic Church provides to the surrounding community and its parishioners.

During the month of March, 31 SJV volunteers participated in 2 **Mission Trips** to Eagle Pass, Texas. Both teams worked hard to complete repairs on a total of 9 homes for the elderly, disabled, and very poor. In addition, our mission teams also completed work on the new home that they built with a local family. The Alvarez family's home was destroyed by a wind shear and they had been living in a dilapidated trailer. When all the work was completed, Fr. Gerry Kelly, the spiritual leader for our missions, blessed the home and our team celebrated with the family.

The Mission Teams also continue to maintain relationships with the homebound whom we have assisted in the past. Missioners visited over 30 families, bringing them nutritious food and praying with them. They also worshipped with the families at the local parish, Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

We held our Fourth Annual **Walk for Life** in April. The event was hosted by SJV's Respect Life Ministry with the help of St. John Paul II Catholic School's Junior Girl Scouts Troop 20322 and Challenge Club volunteers. Mr. Greg Stokes led us in a rosary as we walked, prayed, and witnessed for life at Terry Hershey Park. A record-setting 180+ parishioners participated in the Walk. To continue our celebration of life, this year we added a 'Social Hour' after the Walk. Music, crafts, games and food capped off our celebration of life, and we raised over \$1200 for the Gabriel Project.

In honor of the Jubilee Year of Mercy and her upcoming canonization, the Respect Life Ministry also hosted a **Movie Night**, showing the first 'feature-length biopic' on Blessed Mother Teresa – The Letters. SJV's Audiovisual Room was full to capacity with close to 100 parishioners attending.

The Spring Semester of **English as a Second Language (ESL)** concluded on May 26th. A total of 88 students graduated from the different levels we offer, ranging from the Introductory Level to Advanced Conversation. This graduating class included several of our Social Service Ministries volunteers who not only wished to put what they were learning into practice, but they also wanted to give back through their service! 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 coordinates the ESL program, and several volunteers who substitute for our teachers on a regular basis. Registration for our ESL Fall Semester is scheduled to begin on July 19th.

May also marked the conclusion of **The Gathering Place's** ninth year of dedicated service to approximately 200 families coping with memory loss. 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. In the words of our Interfaith Care Partners liaison, SJV's Gathering Place coordinators and volunteers' "example of service and compassion inspires others to serve along with them to foster a truly incredible team... Their leadership and spirit embody Christ's call to care for one another... [and to] lovingly respond to families facing the challenges of memory loss."

We also concluded in May one more year of partnering with Spring Branch ISD's very successful **Mentoring Program**. SJV's parishioners serve as mentors for students "on the brink of success" at Nottingham Elementary, Northbrook Middle School and Stratford High School. They commit to a school year timeframe, following their student as they grow through the grade levels.

We delivered hot lunches to all of the homebound and disabled seniors in our **Meals on Wheels** program every week day during this quarter. That's about 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.

This past quarter we also assisted 549 individuals in need of **Emergency Services**. Forty five percent of those who were assisted were children. These numbers remain 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.

We also assisted 14 expectant mothers through our **Gabriel Project**. The severity of problems that these expectant mothers face has escalated dramatically in the last few years. We have assisted Gabriel Project mothers with problems such as 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 Angels. These 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.

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

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED	
Food	461 individuals
Clothes	261 individuals
Financial Assistance	50 individuals
Other (transportation, gold card, résumé, referrals to other ministries)	32 individuals

One hundred ninety four bags of food were distributed through the **Food Pantry**. We also assisted 13 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. By partnering with organizations like 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.

Regarding the place of residence for those we assist, the majority of them came from the zip code 77077. The remaining families come from other zip codes within our service area – 77043, 77055, and 77079 – as well as outside zip codes when the emergency situation merits it.

Our **Joseph’s Coat** volunteers provided 261 individuals with clothing over this past quarter. Plus, they earned almost \$38,000.00 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 assist those in need this past quarter.

We currently have a total of four full-time staff members in the Social Service department, and we are moving along with ever-increasing efficiency and plans and goals that are bigger and bolder than ever! However, we still wouldn’t be able to do everything that we need to do without our office volunteers. Currently, we have five volunteers who work various shifts. They assist us at the front desk and on projects as needed. We couldn’t do it without them!

In addition to all of the work that took place during this last quarter, our Social Service staff and volunteers were also involved in hosting and planning various events for the summer and the coming fall. These include a **Disaster Response Team**, a **Youth Mission** to Eagle Pass, a **Medical Mission** to El Salvador, **Financial Peace** courses, an **Elder Care Workshop**, **Just Faith** educational series, and a **Faithful Citizenship/Advocacy Team**. Such planning involves tasks such as room scheduling, budgeting, evaluating programs, developing goals, planning calendars, updating the website, and developing newsletters and informational literature, etc. Additionally, our staff and volunteers translated and coordinated the production of the weekly Spanish bulletin (that's 12 issues). Finally, we are involved in the development of several new programs for the next fiscal year as well as a major collaboration with Catholic Charities and several of our neighboring parishes. SJV is also planning to build a **Habitat for Humanity** home on our own this summer. This will be a major undertaking requiring the assistance of over 230 volunteers. Much more to come in the next issue of Salt & Light on our ambitious plans and new programs for the next fiscal year!

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. 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 marvelous ways to live your faith, change lives, and make a difference!