

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

Yearly Report from SJV's Social Service Ministries November 1st, 2015 – October 31st, 2016

Scripture, especially in the Hebrew prophets and in the life and words of Jesus, calls us to work for justice and charity. Our Social Service Ministry here at St. John Vianney has clear biblical roots.

In the gospel according to Luke, Jesus began his public life by reading a passage from Isaiah that introduced his ministry and is now the model for social service ministries throughout the Church today. According to Jesus' teachings, we must proclaim the message of the gospel and:

- ❖ bring "good news to the poor" in a society where millions lack the necessities of life;
- ❖ bring "liberty to captives" when so many are enslaved by poverty, addiction, ignorance, discrimination, violence, or disabling conditions;
- ❖ bring "new sight to the blind" in a culture where the excessive pursuit of power or pleasure can spiritually blind us to the dignity and rights of others; and
- ❖ "set the downtrodden free" in communities where crime, racism, family disintegration, and economic and moral forces leave people without real hope (Lk 4:18). Read more.

We are called upon to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt 5:13-16).

Although individuals often profess to be Christian when they have no real ties to a church, the Catholic Church teaches us that our faith is profoundly social. We cannot call ourselves followers of Jesus unless we live out the gospel that he proclaimed, and answer his call to serve the poor and vulnerable, and to work for justice and peace. We, as the parish of St. John Vianney, proclaim our steadfast belief in the gospel through our actions of love and charity to the "least of these" (Mt 25:40).

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. 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.

For the past year, our Social Service Ministries have focused on providing the following services and programs:

Emergency Assistance

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.

The interviews for assistance are held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. Due to the holidays, November and December are our busiest months of the year while January and February are generally our slowest. 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.

Over the past year, we had 1,117 emergency service visits from families, assisting a total of 3,880 individuals (51% children, 46% adults, and 3% seniors). 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.

Through the **Food Pantry**, 1,293 bags of food were distributed to 862 families or 3,222 individuals. We also assisted 46 homeless individuals with our Hope Bags which include food that can be eaten on-the-go, water, toiletries, and other necessities. We have approximately 20 parishioners who volunteer in the food pantry every month to package and distribute food to the families. They also stock and organize the shelves in the pantry. Food is collected once a month through parish **Food Drives**. We also have a group of volunteer gardeners who plant and cultivate a **Community Garden** in the back of the church property to supply the food pantry with fresh seasonal vegetables. Additionally, we receive a variety of donations throughout the year from a wide range of groups (Boy Scouts, YCP, Summer Camp, High School Youth, St. Anne's, National Charity League, etc.). The Young Adults also organized a Turkey (and Ham) Drive for us last 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 were still giving away turkeys in January 2016! Finally, whatever we need that is not donated is ordered through a grocery supply wholesaler. Our volunteer Food Pantry Manager coordinates all donations and orders throughout the year making sure that the food pantry is fully stocked year-round.

Our **Joseph's Coat** volunteers served 1,650 individuals with clothing over this past year. Plus, they earned over \$150,000 for our Social Service ministries. Additionally, Joseph's Coat donates clothing to our missions, neighboring parishes, and various men's and women's charities throughout the Houston area. The space in our store is fairly limited, so our volunteers are selective about what is priced and put out into the store. Items that are still in good condition, but that cannot be placed in the store due to space limitations are passed on to an appropriate ministry. Items that are stained, worn out, or in poor condition are passed along to clothing recyclers who pay us by the pound. We have over 100 volunteers who serve in Joseph's Coat in a variety of ways—as cashiers, sorters, pricers, managers, etc. Joseph's Coat is also directed by a volunteer Store Manager who leads and directs all Joseph's Coat related activities. 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 3,800 individuals in need this past year. Joseph's Coat also hosts a **Christmas Shop** twice a year at the Parish Bazaar and Coffee & Donuts in the Activity Center in December. In October 2016, the Joseph's Coat Christmas Shop earned over \$7,000 on Bazaar Day. This income went to the parish bazaar fund which benefits SJV charities.

Of the 1,117 emergency assistance visits, 118 of them were expectant mothers who belong to our **Gabriel Project**. The number of expectant mothers whom we've seen through the Gabriel Project has increased greatly over 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 the success of the program to our Gabriel Project Coordinators and Angels. The Gabriel Project 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.

Among the "other" types of assistance provided through the Social Services' Emergency Assistance Ministry, it's important to mention the support our other ministries (ESL, Employment, Gabriel Project, etc.) provide to the families we assist. Additionally, through referrals to community partners such as Catholic Charities, Memorial Assistance Ministries, and Spring Branch Community Health Center, we were able to facilitate medical and dental services, counseling services, immigration and legal services, GED, financial management, and citizenship classes, and employment services to assist families in need and provide them with more opportunities to increase self-sufficiency.

In addition to providing our regular services, in April and May, we 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 okay. Thanks to the continued generosity of our parishioners, we were able to assist those who did need a helping hand.

Finally, SJV assisted families through our **Christmas Program** in December 2015. We served 89 families and 290 children through our Christmas Program. 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 gave out approximately \$8,000 in gift cards,

over 500 wrapped gifts, over 80 hams and turkeys, and over 80 bags of groceries. We could not have done this without the assistance of hundreds of volunteers who helped us with all of the many pieces of our Christmas Program.

Our Christmas program is quite an undertaking, involving year-round planning and preparation. 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 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 material things that they received. Last year, we added a few new things to the program. 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. In 2015, 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 who organized a Christmas book drive, we were able to give each family a book about the birth of Jesus that they could read to their children. 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 (emphasizing that Jesus is the reason for the season!), 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.

The week of December 13-18th, 2016 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 staff and Emergency Service volunteers worked extended hours in order to make sure that our recipient families received all of their gifts.

The SJV Christmas Program is made possible, in large part, due to our parish's **Gift Giving Sunday** which occurs in Advent every year on Gaudete Sunday. Social Services coordinates Gift Giving Sunday every year. Parishioners are asked to bring a gift for a child in need to the altar at the mass that they attend. Gifts are collected at the altar at all masses throughout the weekend. By the end of the night on Sunday, December 13th, the altar was overflowing with gifts. Over 90 volunteers from various groups throughout SJV including the Knights of Columbus, High School Youth, Young Adults, Strake Jesuit students and faculty, and SJV's Men's and Women's ACTS Teams participated and helped us distribute an estimated 7,000+ gifts. SJV Social Services received some of the gifts for our Christmas program, but 18 other parishes plus Catholic Charities and the Mission of Yahweh also received gifts for the children in need in their parishes. Gift Giving Sunday is an amazing display of the generosity and the blessings of our parish.

ESL Classes

In addition to our Emergency Services, the Social Service Ministries here at SJV also provide a number of other services to those in need. We offer ESL (English as a Second Language) classes twice a year, in the Fall and Spring. We offer seven levels of classes from Introductory to Advanced Conversation. For the past two semesters, all of our ESL classes have been completely full, and we had to develop a waiting list for each class. Our students come 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. Each semester, we have a total of 10-12 very committed teachers who volunteer their time twice a week for four hours to their students. The teachers spend even more time preparing for their classes. We also engage volunteers as substitute teachers throughout the year. In the past year, 145 students obtained Certificates of Completion in their classes.

Meals on Wheels

We delivered hot lunches to all of the homebound and disabled seniors in our Meals on Wheels program every week day throughout the year. That's almost 3,000 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.

The Gathering Place

Our Social Ministry Department also hosted The Gathering Place once a month in Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. 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, **Common Ground**, for caregivers. During this past year, we have had about 30 participants, plus their caregivers, participating in this program. 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. This year, The Gathering Place is celebrating 10 years with SJV. 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."

Missions

In the Fall of 2015, SJV completed three missions to Eagle Pass, Texas (on the border of Mexico) and El Salvador. In the Spring of 2016, SJV completed two more missions to Eagle Pass. Throughout the summer, the **El Salvador Mission Advance Team** worked to collect, sort, organize, inventory, and pack medications for the October 2016 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 advance team volunteers who helped make the Fall 2016 medical mission to El Salvador possible. Our SJV adult missionaries also led a team of high school students to Eagle Pass for a mission during the Summer of 2016. This Fall (2016), SJV is participating in three more missions to Eagle Pass and El Salvador. Over 100 parishioners participated in the SJV missions this year.

In **Eagle Pass**, mission teams made essential repairs to the homes of elderly, disabled, and very poor families. We repaired approximately 20 homes this past year, plus we built a new home for a family whose home had been destroyed in a storm. A home blessing and dedication with the family was celebrated during the second Spring 2016 mission trip. We also delivered clothing (collected from Joseph's Coat) and food to the families we've assisted in the past. Mission team members delivered the food and clothes, visited with and prayed with over 60 families. They also worshipped with the families at the local parish, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The spiritual focus during these missions was on mercy with planned presentations and activities for the teams around this theme with our Eagle Pass spiritual leader, Maryknoll Missionary, Fr. Gerry Kelly.

The medical mission to **El Salvador** was coordinated by Helping Hands' Medical Missions and SJV partnered with St. Thomas More parish in this effort. The Mission Team set up makeshift clinics in the cities of Apopa, Ciudad Delgado, San Julian, and Santiago Texacuango in El Salvador, where each day, they were greeted with long lines of hopeful and grateful individuals who ordinarily had little to no access to health care and critical medications. Patients received exams, medications, eyeglasses, and referrals as appropriate as well as opportunities for confession with the mission spiritual director, Fr. John Devlin. Over 1,000 individuals were provided with eyeglasses. Shoes were also given to families in need. Additionally, clinicians provided their services to local hospitals, performing surgeries and delivering babies. Over 2,400 individuals were served by our Mission Team.

In addition to providing medical services, the El Salvador mission team visited the sick and prayed with their families at La Divina Providencia, the cancer hospital where Blessed Oscar Romero was martyred celebrating Mass. They also visited children at an orphanage and a pediatric hospital where they brought gifts for the children and care packages for the families. While practicing the corporal works of mercy every day, team members were also able to spend some time in personal spiritual reflection by participating in daily mass, morning and evening prayers, and confession.

Finally, in honor of her canonization, our Parish Mission Council hosted a **Mission Movie Night**, showing the documentary film, "Mother Teresa" in September 2016. Parishioners enjoyed a little taste of India with Indian snacks, desserts, and chai (Indian tea). Following the movie, our mission team members along with parishioners who actually knew and worked with St. Teresa of Calcutta participated in a very moving and lively panel discussion. Over 200 parishioners participated in the celebration.

Respect Life

We held our Fourth Annual **Walk for Life** in April 2016. 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. Diaconate candidate, 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 **Respect Life 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.

Our Respect Life Team also prayed the rosary at Planned Parenthood every week during the **40 Days of Life** in the Spring and Fall of 2016. During the rest of the year, our Respect Life team prayed at Planned Parenthood once a month. They also participated in the monthly Archdiocesan **Helpers of God’s Precious Infants**. They also organized and participated in a Fall **Voter Registration**. Finally, Respect Life members designed and sold **Christmas Cards** to benefit SJV’s Gabriel Project.

SJV Mentoring Program

In May 2016, SJV concluded 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. In the 2015-2016 school year, over 45 parishioners from SJV volunteered to mentor students within SBISD. SJV also hosted mentor orientations and trainings throughout the year as well as an end-of-the-school-year luncheon for our volunteers.

Habitat for Humanity

St. John Vianney is building a Habitat for Humanity house in thanksgiving to Our Lord for the blessings He’s bestowed upon us and in honor of our Golden Jubilee. We raised the walls on the SJV Habitat for Humanity house on July 9, 2016. This has been a major undertaking which will ultimately require the assistance of over 230 volunteers. We took the month of August off from Habitat due to the heat, but began building again in September. To date, we have participated in 9 build dates with over 150 volunteers who contributed over 800 hours of labor. Our SJV volunteers have raised the walls, built the trusses, decked the roof, added shingles and siding to the house, and painted the interior and exterior of the house. We’ve also signed up parishioners to pray for our volunteers (so far, over 20 hours of prayer), the safety of the building project, and the Estrada family who will receive the home that we’ve built. Volunteers have also provided and served lunches (approximately 150 lunches) for all Habitat volunteers on two build dates. The home should be completed and dedicated in early January 2017. The dedication is tentatively scheduled for January 14th.

Social Ministry Communications

Social Services produces approximately one page of news, events, and activities for the weekly parish Bulletin (52 issues per year). Our department also translates the English bulletin into Spanish every week and produces the **Spanish Bulletin** (52 issues in the last year), transmits an informative **Weekly E-Newsletter** (another 52 issues) to all of our volunteers, and publishes the **Salt & Light Quarterly Review** (4 issues a year). We launched Salt & Light last year, and have now completed five issues. We have a team of 4 volunteers who assist us in translating, writing, and designing these various publications. We couldn’t put together all of our various publications without our fabulous Communications Team! Additionally, we have approximately 10 guest contributors to our Salt & Light publication, and we are always looking for more talented writers and collaborators!

Finally, we update the Social Service Ministry pages on the **SJV Website** on a weekly basis, creating new material, promotional material for the rotator, adding new events, and updating calendars and program information. We also take photos at all Social Ministry events and add them to the Social Service Ministries photo gallery folder on the SJV Website and utilize photos for promotional materials.

New Programs

In addition to all of the work that took place during this last quarter, our Social Service staff and volunteers are also involved in planning various events for this fall and the coming spring. We recently launched a **Disaster Relief Committee** and a **Social Concerns Committee**. We are also planning **Financial Peace University** and **Just Faith** courses for the spring of 2017 and will launch a **Faithful Citizenship & Advocacy Core Team** shortly. Such planning involves tasks such as room scheduling, budgeting, evaluating programs, developing goals, planning calendars, recruiting and coordinating volunteers, marketing and advertising programs, updating the website, and developing informational literature, etc. Finally, we are involved in the development of several new collaborations with Catholic Charities, the Archdiocese, and our neighboring parishes.

Additional Activities

Social Service staff and volunteers also participated in our annual Ministry Fair and Parish Bazaar in the Fall of 2016. We recruit and supply volunteers for our Quarterly Parish Blood Drives. Finally, we teams of volunteers who shop for and deliver groceries every month to the food pantry at our sister parish, St. Francis of Assisi. We also coordinate assistance to our sister parishes, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Peter Claver, throughout the year as needed and coordinated and led a high school youth mission to St. Francis of Assisi during Spring Break 2016.

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 the Social Service Ministry volunteers. They make everything that our department does possible!

By The Numbers:

- We fed **3,222** individuals with food from our Food Pantry.
- We clothed **1,650** individuals with clothing from Joseph's Coat.
- We assisted **118** expectant mothers with spiritual and emotional support and supplies for their newborn babies (including food, clothing, financial assistance, layettes, car seats, cribs, childcare books, etc.) through The Gabriel Project.
- We assisted **166** families with their utility bills enabling them to have light, heat, water, and air conditioning in their homes.
- We provided Christmas dinner and gift cards to **89** families and Christmas gifts for **290** children within our parish.
- We collected over **7,000** gifts for children and distributed to 18 other parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.
- We delivered approximately **3,000** hot meals to seniors through the Meals on Wheels program.

- Provided over **45** volunteers to mentor students at Northbrook Middle School and Nottingham Elementary.
- Provided a monthly support group for caregivers and a monthly get together for over **30** individuals with Alzheimer's or other cognitive disabilities and their caregivers.
- Provided English as a Second Language classes to over **145** individuals.
- Completed a record **6** Mission Trips—5 to Eagle Pass, Texas (near the border of Mexico) repairing a total of **20** homes for the elderly and poor and 1 to El Salvador assisting over **2,500** individuals with medical care.

St. Teresa of Calcutta once said, "In this life, we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love." Certainly, in the last year, our parish has not been able to eliminate poverty or solve the many injustices in the world today. However, we have done "small things with great love" that we believe have impacted our community and our world in a positive way.

The parish of St. John Vianney has been richly blessed. In return, our Social Service Ministries have endeavored to bless the lives of those who are less fortunate. We are grateful to all of our many parishioners and volunteers who have blessed us richly with donations and given so generously of their time and talents. 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 the families and children that we serve in our parish.