

## Thank you for helping us share the Good News with those in need!

Thank you all for helping us in our most successful Christmas Assistance Program to date. Thanks to all of your efforts and the many generous donations that we received this year, we were able to provide each selected family with a gift card, at least 2 presents for each child, a turkey or ham, a bag of food for Christmas dinner (including all of the side dishes, bread, and dessert), a goodie bag filled with candy, a Christmas prayer book, a children's Christmas book, and a voucher for shopping in our resale shop, Joseph's Coat. We often see tears of despair throughout the year as we listen to the stories of families in need, but over the last few days of December, we were greatly moved by the tears of joy that were shed as families received Christmas gifts from St. John Vianney.

Seven years ago, when we first began our Christmas program in SJV's Social Services, we served approximately 40 families in need. In December of 2019, over the course of our 3-day Christmas Program which concluded on Thursday, December 19, we served 116 very grateful families and 275 children. We gave out more than \$15,000 in gift cards, more than 550 wrapped gifts, and 116 hams/turkeys (plus bags of groceries). We began giving out the remaining wrapped gifts the next day on a first-come-first-serve basis to those families who came to us for emergency assistance. Since that time, we've assisted 21 more families (38 more children) and given gifts, turkeys, and groceries to each of these families as well. This brings the number of families and children that we've served to a **Grand total of 137 families and 313 children in one week.** We still had about 50 or so leftover gifts, which we donated to Casa Juan Diego for their Three Kings celebration for families in need.

Making all of this happen is now quite a production. We were greatly blessed with the time, talents, and efforts of over **150 volunteers** (plus over 150 volunteers who helped us during Gift Giving Weekend). In addition to our 150+ individual volunteers, we were fortunate to have the assistance of many SJV ministry and social groups. For their assistance, I would like to acknowledge the following SJV departments, groups, and ministries: *Parish Life, Young Adults, CCE, Administration, Communications and IT, Maintenance, Joseph's Coat Resale Shop, the Food Pantry, Gift Giving Sunday volunteers, and Emergency Assistance interviewers and volunteers.* I would especially like to thank *SJV's St. Monica's and St. Anne's Societies* for donating Christmas books for the children.

In previous years, I've tried to recognize all of the key players in my end-of-the-year Christmas summary, but our program has grown so much that I think that's quite impossible now. But, I do feel the need to inform all of our volunteers of the breadth and impact of our efforts. Please feel free to forward the newsletter along to anyone you know who assisted in our Christmas program—both volunteers and donors.

The goal of our Christmas Assistance Program is to not only feed the bodies of those in need at Christmas, but to feed their spirits as well. And, as much as we want to delight children with Christmas toys, we also want to share the joy and Good News about the birth of our Savior. To that end, we take time to pray for all of the families who are selected for assistance, and we share with them the story of St. Nicholas and most importantly, the story of our Savior's birth.

When speaking of the humble birth of Jesus, Pope Francis said that "in this Child, God invites us to be messengers of hope. He invites us to become sentinels for all those bowed down by the despair born of encountering so many closed doors. In this child, God makes us agents of his hospitality." During this Christmas season, St. John Vianney opened our doors to families in need and shared our hospitality and blessings with them. Your love, compassion, and generosity, enabled us to bring the hope of Christ to these vulnerable children and families. We thank you for making this possible.

God bless you all and happy New Year!

Deborah