



St. Mary's

Franciscan Shelter

For Homeless Families

Newsletter



Glad Tidings We Bring...

The definition of a volunteer is a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task.

At St. Mary's our volunteers are members of our shelter family. For the past 33+ years we have been blessed with a wonderful group of volunteers. They have unselfishly offered their time and talents with the staff and families of St. Mary's.

They have assisted in many areas of our shelter. From office work, meal prep and clean up, playroom time with our children, breakfast clean up, gardening days and many, many more.

Unfortunately, during Covid 19, we have missed all of our helpers. The children especially have missed the playroom time during these short days and long nights of winter.

The volunteers are the cornerstones of St. Mary's who are always willing to lend a hand in any aspect of the shelter. We miss you all! It will be wonderful to see you again. Thank you for everything. Christmas blessings and a safe, healthy new year. We cannot wait to see you again - hopefully soon!



STAY SAFE AT HOME.... A BLESSING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC



There are not enough ways to thank you for your amazing response to our Stay Safe at Home campaign. We are so grateful for the overwhelming generosity of our friends and neighbors. This blessing will allow us to continue our mission to provide temporary housing for those finding themselves in emergency situations during the harsh winter ahead. The words "thank you" are surely not enough to express our deep gratitude and heartfelt appreciation. You prove once again that so many wonderful, kind people share our hopes and dreams for a better future for children and families throughout our area. God bless you in every way possible.

Our Pandemic Reality



So many times, during these pandemic days, I hear people say, “when one door closes, another door opens”. Doors opening and closing are a continuous metaphor for daily life here at St. Mary’s. Sometimes it is the reality of the comings and goings- front door, back door east, back door west. Other times, it is the deeper sense

following CDC regulations in their temporary home, our families are so aware that COVID-19 has visited and stayed longer than we expected.

Another door is opening though and the lights and decorations of our beautiful town are lifting our hearts and making it seem that the virus as well as the pending long, dark days of winter are held at bay for a little while.

Here at the shelter, we decorated the house, are warming up the hot chocolate, singing Christmas Carols and encouraging strolls through the beautifully decorated borough of Phoenixville. It is our hope that all of the beauty and lights will bring new life, new dreams, new hopes, and lots of courage for the days ahead.



of emotional doors opening and closing, i.e., the daily disappointments and struggles that are so intense these days. Life for our homeless families is always a roller coaster ride, the pandemic simply accelerates the speed and the intensity of this struggle.

From our closing and opening doors to yours, we send our greetings of peace and good will to each of you this holiday season. Be well, stay well and enjoy this brief time of holiday joy and love. Merry Christmas and glad tidings to all.

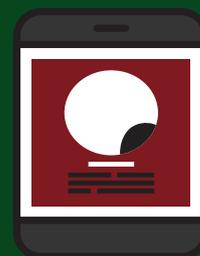
With limitations to services available, inability to move freely around our lovely neighborhood, and the necessity of



TIME, TREASURE
AND TALENT.... A
MILLION THANKS
TO ALL!!



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Sam, Renee and Skye- A very Special Christmas this year!

St. Mary's Franciscan Shelter has been fortunate to have a lovely family stay with us due to some unforeseen circumstances. Sam, Renee and Skye were our first residents in September after our annual closing and deep cleaning of the shelter. They encountered some difficult times and needed a chance to get back on their feet. Both Sam and Renee had lost their jobs which was even harder due to the pandemic. Through no fault of their own, they lost their housing as well. However, this did not slow them down in pursuing their goals. As soon as they arrived, they were ready to get to work.

Sam immediately began applying for jobs and in no time, he succeeded in securing a position. He took that job in order to help get their finances back in order, but continued looking for an even better job. Renee had to stay home during Covid-19 due to the fact that their daughter, Skye, had to do her schooling virtually. They got

Skye set up and she does her school work daily on a laptop. She is a good student that works hard to complete her assignments. Renee, makes sure she is up and ready to get online each day.

This family was a great candidate for the Rapid Rehousing Program provided by Chester County. This program allows them to start out with a larger percent of county assistance while the family gets on their feet and over time, the county will slowly allow them to gain financial independence. They were excited to be chosen for this program and have been moving forward ever since they were chosen. Currently, they are waiting on the final word that their place is ready for them to move in. We will be sad to see this family go, but we feel that theirs will be a great success story going for-

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VIRTUAL SCHOOL AT SAINT MARY'S

One minute this is the dayroom, the next it is our classroom. This is such a familiar sight in so many homes this year. Like everyone else, we have adapted and rearranged and somehow, we found the room and the quiet and the support to keep each child on track and learning in the best way possible....headphones, laptop, notebook and a corner to settle in. Good luck to all students. In the words of one of our residents, **"I am so grateful to have a space to learn, to think, to dream and to just be normal for a little bit of time."**



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CHILDREN AND CHRISTMAS – PERFECT TOGETHER

Today was quite a day! The wonderful fourth grade students from Corpus Christi School Lansdale continued their long-standing tradition of collecting food and other staples for our families here at St. Mary's. In the past, each child would purchase a gift and design a prayer card for the children at the shelter. Staff from St. Mary's would arrive at the school, meet with the students and leave with a van packed to the roof with supplies for the shelter.

Year 2020 meant virtual connecting. The fourth grade teachers came up with an idea on how to make it safe, and still meaningful, knowing that the outreach to those in need was more important than the wrapped packages. They replaced the products with gift cards but kept the beautiful handmade cards and prayers.

The children gathered virtually while the teachers presented the giftbox. (children are present in the photo on the screens). The lovely box is filled to overflowing with a gift cards for our families. The tradition and the connection between our children the fourth-grade class in Lansdale lives on!

Sister Bernadette, Administrator of St. Mary's had the privilege of coming to the school and meeting the children virtually. Their teachers, Ms. Kathleen Lewis and Ms. Marie Heiler shepherd this project but as they say, the students and their families are the ones who made it happen. To the teachers, students and families of Corpus Christi School, a million thanks from our home to yours. God bless you one and all!!!



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