



St. Mary's
Franciscan Shelter
For Homeless Families

Issue 21 ~ **SUMMER 2021**

NEWSLETTER

There is No Place Like HOME



"Click your heels together three times and say 'There's no place like home' and you'll be there." -Wizard of OZ

A dream that surfaced years ago led to quite a journey for us. Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, we followed the yellow brick road which led us to today... weeks away from the Grand Opening of Saint Mary's Transitional Housing.

Turning classrooms into apartments seemed like an easy task: put in a bathroom and kitchen and voila, an apartment! Strangely enough, it didn't go quite that way. We found ourselves going one step forward and then two steps back. In a good week, we went all steps forward, another week all steps back. We always knew there was a light leading us and we kept on going down our own yellow brick road. We learned a lot along the way! Each challenge led us to new insights, new friends, and a stronger, more carefully designed structure.

Our mission in Phoenixville began in 1987 with no money, lots of kindness and a dream that we could make a difference for families who had no home. The former school is no more but the strong, beautiful, century old building endured the demolition and restructuring to ready itself for new life. The mission to serve those in need continues. Our prayer is that we will be faithful to this ongoing mission and bless these former classrooms with a peaceful and safe haven for the families who will live here.

We stand on holy ground. The classrooms are gone, the apartments are created. We are so grateful to be at the place where we can double the number of families we can house in St. Mary's Franciscan Shelter. Our only goal, to better serve those we care for, has been accomplished.

And the accomplishment is beautiful!



ST. MARY'S FRANCISCAN SHELTER
Ribbon Cutting
for our New Transitional Apartments!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23RD
3:00PM TO 6:00PM
RSVP BY SEPTEMBER 10TH

Ph: 610-933-3097

Fax: 610-917-9845

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www.stmarysfs.org



Moving Forward with High Hopes



We have had the pleasure of sheltering Christy and her two children, Malik age 3, and Sheree age 13, for the past several months. Christy's family hit hard times during the pandemic as so many others have. With the loss of her job and housing, they needed somewhere safe to go so they could get back on their feet again. Enter St. Mary's Shelter. Christy moved in, and along with her case manager, began setting goals in order to secure a better future for herself and her family.

Christy had experienced homelessness several other times, so our top priority was to find her permanent housing, in the hopes of never going through this situation again. She got her paperwork into the housing authority right way, then it was time to wait.



Meanwhile, we made sure that all the benefits that she was eligible for were in place. She needed to order her Social Security replacement card and birth certificate which would be critical when she re-joined the workforce. Christy had been in the cleaning business previously, but with the birth of her youngest and the pandemic, she lost her business. Christy had some definite ideas about a career going forward and about how her son could be cared for when she went back to work full-time. While living here at St. Mary's she was doing some private housecleaning.

In less than two months, Christy was awarded a permanent housing voucher. Now, the challenge is to find something available and an appropriate size for a family. She is currently working with a housing locator from the Housing Authority of Chester County. Christy spends her time between caring for her children and regularly researching available housing prospects. Our hope is that Christy is housed within a few weeks so they can be together as a family in their very own place!



Many Hands...

August is a special month at St. Mary's Shelter. It is a time to deep clean our buildings and restore the shelter after the chaos of the past year! This requires the staff to wear different hats for a while and get to know the building in a new way that requires brooms, mops, dust-rags and general TLC.

Helen Keller said, "I long to accomplish a great and noble task; but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble."

Most of us spend much of our lives doing small tasks and taking on the everyday ordinary. Let us take on these ordinary yet *important* tasks in "great and noble" ways.

Doing Something That Will Last

It all started about seven years ago when a woman connected with St. Mary's and also with George through their mutual work with Habitat for Humanity declared, "We gotta get George in to fix that computer in the resource office." Fix the computer he did, and since then, we've lost track of all that St. Mary's Volunteer, George Meade, has repaired around the shelter. When asked what he likes most about the Shelter, not surprisingly his answer is, "The curiosity of this building. It's so unique. You always discover something. Everything in it seems to be a challenge." Honestly, I'm not sure there's much at St. Mary's that he couldn't fix. From a broken basement stair tread, to our camera system, to our office printers, to plumbing problems, he's had a hand in resurrecting many a broken furnishing or system.

George came to St. Mary's with a degree from Bucknell University and having a background in engineering, construction design, electrical and more. He has never been shy to make us the beneficiaries of his many skills and experience. Indeed, I came away from our talk with increased knowledge of fractals, car mechanics, and "how doors really should work". George probably comes in to volunteer his time to St. Mary's two or three times a week, sometimes more! In his own

words, "The reason I come to St. Mary's...the coffee." If George is on-site, you can bet the coffee has been made and his signature Bugs Bunny mug is in use.

But on a more serious note, George said why he's really here, "There was a person here whose husband crashed his motorcycle and spent months in the hospital. He died and she came to [St. Mary's Shelter] with their children. Eventually she got a job in Reading. She was such a good person with a story that could break your heart. That's why we do this."

In the words of Ken Burns, "Do something that will last and be beautiful. It doesn't have to be a bridge-or a symphony or book or a business. It could be the look in the eye of a child you raise or a simple garden you tend. Do something that will last and be beautiful." Thank you in more ways than we can say to George and all our beloved Volunteers at St. Mary's for doing "something that will last and be beautiful" in the lives of others. *We are indebted to you.*



CALLING ALL GARDENERS!

St. Mary's is looking for a few folks to help with our ever-growing garden beds. If you're interested in Volunteering with us in this way or for information about general volunteering at St. Mary's Shelter, please visit our website at <https://stmarysfs.org/volunteer/> or email our Volunteer Coordinator at volunteer@stmarysfs.org.

We would love to hear from you. Thank you!

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St. Mary's
Franciscan Shelter
For Homeless Families

- *Donations by check can be made out to:*
St. Mary's Franciscan Shelter for Homeless Families
- *Online donations can be made at:*
www.stmarysfs.org
- United Way Donor Option #9208

Our Current Needs

If you would like to support St. Mary's by donating items directly to the Shelter, here are a few things we are in need of!

- ⇒ **Paper plates**
- ⇒ **Plastic forks**
- ⇒ **Plastic Knives**
- ⇒ **Napkins**
- ⇒ **Small Vacuum Cleaners**
- ⇒ **Swiffers or dry mops**
- ⇒ **Brooms and dustpans**
- ⇒ **Small fire extinguisher**

For more information or details about specific items, please call us at 610-933-3097. St. Mary's is always staffed and we will accommodate any drop-off time that works for you.

THANK YOU!

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St. Mary's Franciscan Shelter!



Welcome New Staff!



We at St. Mary's Shelter have had the pleasure of welcoming several new staff members into our house over the past month or two. Jenn is new to Phoenixville, having moved here recently from the west coast with her husband and two children. She serves as a House Manager and Kitchen Manager. Jenn is a star in our kitchen, creating photo-worthy meals that taste even better than they look. She takes extra time to present meals that are beautiful and well-crafted. Her kind demeanor is an encouragement to all around her.



Bethany came to us just this month. She and her husband and two children live close by in Phoenixville. She serves as our new Coordinator of Resident Services, a position in which she will coordinate many aspects of resident life from intake to discharge. She is a fast learner and spreads joy with her bubbly and welcoming nature.

Jenn and Bethany, we are so happy to have you on board!

