



Missouri Catholic Conference

# Good News

November/December 2014 Vol. 33 Issue 7

*Bringing the Light of Christ to Missouri.*

## How Do You Give Back During the Holidays?

The holiday season is a wonderful time of the year. It is an occasion for reflection on the birth and life of Our Lord, a time to make memories with loved ones, and a time to give back to those in need. A warm smile and a simple “thank-you” can go a long way to make a difference to someone’s holiday season. There are also programs like adopt-a-family, food pantry food drives, and Toys for Tots that provide charitable giving opportunities to help needy people during the holidays. According to research from the Center on Philanthropy, the average person makes 24% of their annual donations during the holiday season (Thanksgiving to New Year’s).

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, Advent is celebrated as a time of preparation for the coming of Christ. Advent is a time of reflection on one’s personal rela-

tionship with the Lord and strengthening that relationship through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Fasting is a spiritual gift that sends God the message that He is the most important aspect of our lives; prayer for others shows God a generous heart and spirit; and, almsgiving shows readiness and willingness to give back to the needy. This holiday season, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) encourages everyone to set aside time to focus on the important aspects of Advent and charitable giving.

In this issue of *Good News*, the MCC explores ways that people can celebrate Advent and prepare themselves spiritually for Christmas. This *Good News* provides ways that people can become involved and give back to those in need.

## Kansas City Project Shining Star Fills Wish Lists

For hundreds of children, families, and seniors living in poverty in the Kansas City area Christmas presents are not an option. But many of the families served by Catholic Charities’ of Kansas City—St. Joseph will receive gifts and necessities this holiday season thanks to Project Shining Star, Catholic Charities annual effort to provide a Christmas to the needy.

This year’s Shining Star goal is to serve 1,700 people, a goal that can only be reached through donations from community supporters—businesses, parishes, families, and individuals. Each year, the list of needy people participating in the Shining Star Program grows longer. In Kansas City and surrounding Missouri counties, roughly 17% of individuals live in poverty. For children under 18, the poverty rates are even higher reaching nearly 25%.

Catholic Charities invites people to adopt the children with Christmas wish lists. They also need toys

and monetary donations; they have less than half of the toys needed for the 600 children they provide gifts to.

One gift can make a difference in a child’s life. But the act can also extend past the holidays and provide hope for lasting change beyond the holiday season.

For more information or to get involved contact Hannah Brockway at 816.659.8215 or email [hbrockway@ccharities.com](mailto:hbrockway@ccharities.com).



# St. Louis Parish Makes Holidays Joyous

“The harvest is great but the workers are few. Come on down, there is always something to do!” This invitation to serve rings true at St. Augustine Parish located in North St. Louis. With year-round outreach programs that positively impact thousands of people, St. Augustine Parish is known for its charitable and hospitable atmosphere.

Msgr. Robert Gettinger (“Father Bob”) has been leading the efforts of St. Augustine Parish for over 30 years. “Everyone knows Father Bob and everyone loves him,” Carmen Charleston, assistant at St. Augustine Parish, observes. “If you go to any street corner in St. Louis and ask someone if they know Father Bob, odds are they will say yes.”

One of the many assistance programs that Father Bob and the volunteers of St. Augustine provide is their “Christmas Project.” The Christmas outreach program provides assistance to



—Msgr. Robert Gettinger “Father Bob” extends open arms to anyone who needs assistance and welcomes them into St. Augustine Parish.  
*Photo Credit: Lisa Johnston, St. Louis Review*

“These people just need some help to make the holidays a little more joyous”

3,000-5,000 people every holiday season. Throughout the year, people write letters to Father Bob explaining their situation and why they need assistance during the holidays—many are elderly, disabled, sick, or unemployed. St. Augustine Parish is currently receiving about 20 letters a day. “These people just need some help to make the holidays a little more joyous,” Charleston said.

After a committee reads their letter, the needy person is sent a voucher redeemable for a holiday gift basket. The holiday baskets include non-perishable food items and canned goods, as well as a \$15 gift card to Schnucks grocery store for meat or perishable foods. The recipients are also able to pick out toys

for their children and warm items such as gloves, hats, coats, and house slippers. All items are donated through food and toy drives and the gift cards are bought by the parish through money donations from benefactors. People come from all over Missouri and Illinois to redeem their basket, there is no residence requirement—assistance is available to anyone. Volunteers also deliver baskets to the elderly and shut-ins.

Youth groups flock to St. Augustine for months before the holidays to assist with the program. It takes a lot of time and work to sort through donations and fill the baskets that are distributed. Even with the many volunteers St. Augustine Parish can always use more help. “There is always something to do around here,” Charleston said. “Send more workers because we always have work to do!”

To get involved in the Christmas Project and make a difference in someone’s holiday season, call Father Bob at 314.385.1934, chances are he will tell you to come on down, get involved, and lend a helping hand.

# Springfield LifeHouse Helps Homeless Pregnant Women and Their Newborns

By: Maureen Jersak

Believing in the sanctity of life and the innate value of each person, LifeHouse Crisis Maternity Home provides a safe, loving home as well as comprehensive support services for homeless, pregnant women. The women, with their children under the age of five, may enter LifeHouse at any time during their pregnancy and stay for up to a year after delivery, as they work toward the goals of permanent housing, self-sufficiency and a brighter future. LifeHouse is located in a previous Carmelite monastery on 11 acres within the city of Springfield, and can accommodate up to 20 women at one time.

## Sherri's Story

Sherri, an exuberant, affectionate strawberry blonde, has a cleft lip and palate and has suffered seizures all her life. From the age of six, Sherri was molested and raped in her home by her mother's boyfriends. There were drugs in the home, and her mother physically and verbally abused her. Sherri's mother never believed Sherri was molested. "Mom called me a liar. She thought I wanted attention." At 14, Sherri told the school counselor. Charges were filed but the man fled the state and was never found. At 15, Sherri left home. "I've been on my own since then. I was done being abused."

But the bad times continued. At 16, Sherri was raped and became pregnant. The baby was adopted, and the rapist was convicted and went to prison.

Sherri's life went on as she struggled to support herself. Earlier this year Sherri discovered she was pregnant but she had no place to call her own and care for her child. She slept on a cot at a friend's house in the country. There were seven cats, multiple dogs, and fleas everywhere. There was no food in the house and she had no transportation to doctor's appointments. "I became sick. There was nothing to eat. I lost 15 pounds." Sherri ended up in the hospital, and the county health department referred Sherri to LifeHouse.

When Sherri was settled into her room, she asked if she could hang a cross on the wall above her bed. "I think it helps keep the nightmares away. I dream about being raped." Regarding LifeHouse, Sherri stated, "You can't understand what it's like to go from not

having anything to coming into a place where you have so much support."

Since coming to LifeHouse, Sherri has quit smoking, obtained her GED, and taken many life skills and parenting classes. Because of her health history, she is a high-risk pregnancy and sees her physician frequently. Despite her background, Sherri has a sweet, sunny disposition. She smiles and laughs a lot. She wants to go to college and become a social worker and advocate for kids who have been abused. "I've been there. I can relate." Sherri's baby is due in December.



—This baby boy arrived September 14 and is one of 13 healthy babies born to LifeHouse moms since LifeHouse opened on December 29, 2013.

## First Christmas at LifeHouse

LifeHouse opened on December 29, 2013 so this is its first Christmas and the staff and volunteers are anxious to provide a wonderful experience for the women and children.

Donations of diapers, slippers, underwear, and sports and nursing bras are always needed. Toys and books for the children also make wonderful gifts. The women would appreciate clock-radios, hats, coats and gloves, and box fans or white noise machines for their rooms.

Volunteers are needed to provide a variety of services, such as transporting the young women to appointments and classes, and babysitting.

Donations can be mailed to LifeHouse, 424 E. Monastery St., Springfield, MO 65807. For donations of \$100 or more, Maternity Home Tax Credits are available.

For more information, visit [ccsomo.org](http://ccsomo.org) or contact Maureen Jersak, [mjersak@ccsomo.org](mailto:mjersak@ccsomo.org), 417.720.4213.



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## Jefferson City Samaritan Center Provides Christmas to Families in Need

The Samaritan Center in Jefferson City helps to provide a Christmas to more than 400 families in the Mid-Missouri area every year. Through the Adopt-a-Family and Santa's Workshop programs, needy families are supplied with gifts, warm clothes, food, and various other items to make their Christmas special.

Adopting a family is extremely rewarding; it is a chance to buy gifts for a family who would not have a Christmas without caring and generous people. Families, churches, and businesses frequently adopt needy families around the holidays.

Families that wish to be adopted make a wish list of gift ideas for the adopters. In order for a family to be eligible for adoption, they must have at least one child under the age of 12. If they meet this requirement, children under 20 as well as the head of household and their spouse are all eligible to be adopted.

To adopt a family of 5, it costs a minimum of \$195; this includes a gift and a \$15 gift card to a grocery store for each family member. Families are still available to adopt! Contact the Samaritan Center for more details on how to make a difference in a family's holiday season.

The Samaritan Center also provides Santa's Workshop for children who did not get adopted. Any child under 12 can receive a gift from Santa's Workshop between December 1-17. All of these toys are donated or received through toy drives. The Samaritan Center accepts and encourages donations to assist with providing a gift to every child through Santa's Workshop.

To contact the Samaritan Center on ways to get involved with these programs, contact Lindsey LeCuru, the Christmas Coordinator, at 573.634.7776 or visit their Website at [www.midmosamaritan.org](http://www.midmosamaritan.org).

