

Hands of Hope

News from the Franciscan Center

**Spirit of Giving
alive during holiday
season because of YOU
– our Donors,
Volunteers and
Supporters
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Franciscan Center
A Ministry of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi
Sharing Dignity and Hope Since 1968

Dear Friends,

You may have heard me or another staff member say in the past that we are truly a community supported organization – and the 2014 holiday season certainly demonstrated this! There was a tremendous outpouring of support from the good people of Baltimore for our Giving Tree Christmas drive to collect winter clothing, toiletries, jackets and other needed items. What a blessing!

The Franciscan Center's staff has been getting these items into the hands of those who need them through our clothing department, a program that sees 30-50 people daily. Without your belief in our mission, we would not be able to serve our brothers and sisters in need.

During the same time, we were also collecting blankets as part of the 'Blanket Baltimore' initiative started by our new community partner, Hyatt Regency Baltimore. The drive collected more than 1,000 blankets, more than 500 of which have been distributed at the Center. The remaining blankets were given to Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET), a partner of the Center's programs, and several other area charities. In its first year, the campaign really generated a lot of buzz and we are looking forward to future endeavors with the Hyatt Regency Baltimore. Baltimore Raven Torrey Smith even made a donation of blankets through his foundation.

Even though we are now well stocked with winter apparel, the Center has many other needs. One current and pressing need we have at the Center is for consistent and reliable volunteers. There are many opportunities to volunteer at the Center, and I encourage you to look at our website or contact the Center to learn more. On a daily basis, we have as many volunteers working in the building as paid staff, if not more. It is only with the help of our volunteers – who give so generously of their time and talent – that we can continue to provide the many services we offer to poor and hungry men, women and children who come to our door each day seeking assistance.

Please take a few moments to look through this newsletter. I hope you will enjoy reading the uplifting story on page 4 about a reconnection made possible by the Center, and learning about upcoming events. There is also information about an exciting benefit we are able to offer our donors this year – Community Investment Tax Credits. You can learn more about this opportunity on page 6. The Center has an allotment of Community Investment Tax Credits, and we're ready to share them with you!

Everyone of us has something to offer – whether it's time, talent or treasure. I encourage you to consider getting involved at the Center and partnering with us in service to poor and hungry citizens of Baltimore. Using the Franciscan Center as His tool, it is through YOU that God's helping hand will reach the most vulnerable among us.

Peace and All Good,



Christian J. Metzger
Executive Director



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Community embraces season of giving

By Jennifer Lehman

Development &
Communications Coordinator

The holidays are a busy time at the Franciscan Center. Every year, we are truly blessed to receive an outpouring of volunteers and donors -- who all come together to support our mission of helping our neighbors in need.

We are grateful for the new partnerships that formed during the 2014 holiday season. Right before Thanksgiving, staff from the Hyatt Regency Baltimore approached us about being a recipient of their holiday blanket drive.

Kevin Kennedy, General Manager at the Hyatt Regency Baltimore, told the *Baltimore Sun* that "the team was brainstorming ideas to give back and because of the cold weather we thought there were a lot of people who need to stay warm this winter."

The Hyatt's initial goal of collecting 800 new blankets – one for each bed in the hotel – was quickly surpassed. By the end of the drive, the Hyatt collected more than 1,000 blankets. They donated more than 500 to the Franciscan Center and the remaining blankets to the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET) as well as some other charities in the city.

"We were honored to partner with the Hyatt Regency in service to our neighbors



Our group of volunteers from the Hyatt Regency Baltimore, Target and MCVET who helped distribute blankets, toiletries, hats and scarves to more than 500 men, women and children in need on December 23.

in need as they worked to "Blanket Baltimore" with warmth – both during the 2014 holiday season and beyond," said Meg Ducey, Director of Development and Marketing at the Franciscan Center.

We are grateful to the other partners who were involved with the "Hyatt Blankets Baltimore" drive including Target in Canton, Meteorologist Justin Berk and everyone who made a donation.

"The Hyatt collected more than 500 new, warm blankets for the Franciscan Center's clients, which we distributed to the men, women and children whom we serve. What a beautiful blessing!" Meg said. "A THOUSAND THANKS to all those who participated in this amazing project! Your kindness brought special 'warmth' to our community this holiday season."

Along with the blankets, the Franciscan

Center also distributed toiletry bags to 500 people in need. These bags contained full-sized toiletries such as shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothbrush and toothpaste – necessary hygiene items that can be expensive to purchase in stores.

Volunteers including staff from Hyatt Regency Baltimore, Target, and MCVET distributed the toiletry bags and blankets as well as winter hats and scarves to more than 500 men, women and children on December 23rd.

That same day at the Franciscan Center, 515 people enjoyed a delicious Christmas meal that included ham, broccoli, potatoes and a dessert.

Along with donations of toiletries and blankets, the Franciscan Center received a large amount of new clothing for men, women and children. In fact, we received so much donated clothing that the hallways on the administrative floor of the Franciscan Center were transformed into an area to sort clothing by size and gender!

"The word that best describes the 2014 Christmas season here at the Franciscan Center is: ABUNDANCE," Meg exclaimed. "We were overwhelmed by the kindness of our friends in the Baltimore community, who gave so generously to help make the holidays brighter for our most vulnerable neighbors. God Bless you!"

To see more photos from the holiday season at the Franciscan Center, please visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/fcbmore.



Our guests were served with a delicious Christmas meal that included ham, broccoli and potatoes.



Our friends from St. Joseph Church Fullerton were among many generous benefactors who donated clothing and toiletries to the Center.

Center helps family reunite over Christmas

By Jennifer Lehman

*Development &
Communications Coordinator*

For Sheryl Romines, this past Christmas may be hard to top.

Fifteen years ago, Sheryl gave up her two sons to enter a drug rehabilitation program. For a few years, both sons lived with her sister on the Eastern Shore – a decision that allowed Sheryl to keep in contact with them while getting her life back on track.

However, in 2006, Sheryl's sister passed away. Her older son, Lawrence, was old enough to care for himself. But her younger son, Matthew, was not and was placed into foster care. As a result, Sheryl and Matthew lost contact.

"From the day I gave my son up when I was on drugs really bad, I knew (because I left him with my sister who adopted him) I would always be in contact and at that time he was better off there," Sheryl wrote in a letter. "But then in 2006, when my sister died at the age of 27 from cancer, I always had a desire to find my son."

It took nearly a decade, but Lawrence found Matthew on Facebook and reconnected with him last year. It didn't take long for Matthew to reconnect with Sheryl as well. He invited her to spend this past Christmas with him and other family members in Virginia.

Sheryl, who has since recovered from her addiction and lives in an apartment in Baltimore, couldn't afford to buy a bus ticket. She took a chance by asking the Franciscan Center for help -- and is she glad that she did.

"I asked other organizations and churches, but nobody wanted to be involved," she said. "The Franciscan Center is a Godsend."

One thing that sets the Franciscan Center apart from similar agencies is its ability to use discretionary funds to meet those unique requests we receive every now and again. While the Center does not have a great deal of extra money available, there are instances where special requests are made and evaluated by staff members.

Director of Responsive Services Judy Dobson said it was an easy decision to help Sheryl with the cost of her bus ticket.

"When Sr. Mary Jeanne came to me about three weeks before Christmas with a request to help Sheryl be reunited with her



Matthew and Sheryl did not see each other for nearly 15 years and the Franciscan Center helped them reconnect with each other over Christmas.

son whom she had released for adoption, it struck me that the timing of this request couldn't be better," Judy said. "It's Christmas, a time of light in the darkness, a time of sharing, of loving and giving. Having overcome a history of addiction and re-established herself as a productive citizen, Sheryl would be coming full circle in her life. The decision was not difficult; it was one which our entire department supported."

Sheryl said the bus ticket meant the world to her and she could not think of a better way to spend Christmas.

"I'm just grateful to be able to see my son after all of these years and glad the Center was able to help me," she said.

While on the bus, Sheryl said she felt nervous and was unsure of how Matthew would receive her after all of these years. Would he feel anger toward her? Would he be upset that so much time had gone by since they last saw one another?

When Sheryl approached the house, Matthew greeted her at the door with open arms and simply asked, "Hey Mom, how have you been?"

"It was a very tear-jerking experience," she added.

Over the week they spent together, Sheryl and Matthew reminisced about old times and caught up on everything new in their lives now. Since returning to Baltimore, Sheryl and Matthew talk or text on the phone daily and hope to visit again in the near future.

"Thank God he wanted to contact me again," Sheryl said. "It was a beautiful day."

In Memoriam:

Sister Annunciata Bleil, OSF

July 26, 1924 – December 23, 2014

The Franciscan Center and the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi mourn the loss of Sr. Annunciata Bleil, OSF, who was called home to God on December 23, 2014.

Sr. Annunciata was a familiar face at the Franciscan Center for many years, working in the Center's clothing department both at the Center's Maryland Avenue location and at our current location on West 23rd Street. Sr. Annunciata was affectionately known as the "shoe lady," for she took great care to measure clients' feet and look for the best and most comfortable shoes for each one. Anyone who witnessed her in this ministry would have thought she was working in the most expensive shoe store in town! Sister Annunciata took a sincere interest in everyone, extending friendliness and hospitality to all.

With her quiet, gentle nature and humble, joyful service to the poor, Sr. Annunciata's life was a beautiful example of the Franciscan spirit in action.



What's YOUR story?

“Each one of us has a story; a story of grace, a story of sin, a story of journey, many things. And it’s good to pray with our story.”

Pope Francis
October 7, 2014

With these words, Pope Francis shared the essence of what it means to be Franciscan - the spirit that animates the Franciscan Center’s ministry of service to poor and hungry citizens of Baltimore.

Each person whose life we have touched with this ministry throughout the past 46 years has his or her own special story – and each one has become a part of *our* story. St. Francis of Assisi challenged each of us to “preach the Gospel at all times

and when necessary, use words.” Clearly, our stories are our most profound prayers.

We’d love to hear *your* story. Please take a moment today to share how the Franciscan Center has touched your life and what that has meant to you. As we approach our 50th year of service to the Baltimore community, we’re starting a book of memories from past and present clients, volunteers and staff – the story of love that is the Franciscan Center. From time to time, we may also share some of these stories in our quarterly newsletter, website and social media sites.

Please contact Meg Ducey to share your story at (410) 467-5340, Ext. 117 or mducey@fcbmore.org. We won’t use your name unless you want us to.

Bless you for the many wonderful ways in which you’ve shared our story! We look forward to hearing from you!

The Franciscan Center needs YOU!

Every day here at the Franciscan Center, as many as 700 men, women and children in crisis find dignity, hope and comfort in the warm smiles and the welcoming spirits of the Center’s dedicated volunteers and staff. The Center is truly a community supported organization, for on any given day there are as many volunteers working in the building as there are paid staff. We simply could not do what we do without their help!

As demand for our services continues to grow, so does our need for volunteers. Please consider sharing your time and talent at the Franciscan Center in service to our brothers and sisters in need. Volunteers serve from 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Monday through Friday throughout the year. Perhaps you can share your time once or twice a month, or even on a weekly basis. The Center has a wide variety of volunteer opportunities available, so there’s something for everyone! We even offer several evening and weekend volunteer opportunities.

Please contact our Volunteer and In-Kind Donations Coordinator, Angela Hall, to schedule your volunteer service. Angela can be reached by phone at; 410-467-5340, ext. 113, or by e-mail at: ahall@fcbmore.org

We look forward to partnering with you in service to our most vulnerable neighbors!



SAVE THE DATES

Franciscan Center's 20th Annual
Charity Golf Tournament

Monday, June 22, 2015



Franciscan Center's 4th Annual

*Voices from the
Heart Gala*



Saturday, September 19, 2015

**YOU CAN MAKE
AN IMPORTANT
DIFFERENCE
in our community
in 2015... and earn
SIGNIFICANT
TAX SAVINGS!**



We're pleased to report that through a generous grant from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, the Franciscan Center has an allotment of **COMMUNITY INVESTMENT TAX CREDITS** to share with our donors in 2015.

This program offers community-minded individuals and businesses the opportunity to earn a **50% Maryland tax credit** on donations of \$500 or more to the Franciscan Center. **That's over and above the federal and state tax savings you already earn based on your donation!**

Please contact Meg Ducey today for more information or to reserve your Community Investment Tax Credits. Meg can be reached by phone at (410) 467-5340, Ext. 117, or by e-mail at mducey@fcbmore.org.

Thank you for your support! Your kindness makes our mission possible.

**Special thanks to the following Foundations
for their generous support throughout the
period June - December 2014**

Aronsoon Foundation, Inc.

The Abell Foundation, Inc.

The Kenneth S. Battye Charitable Trust

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