



House of Hope: Lake Shore parish's turn at providing shelter includes array of services, fellowship

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PASADENA – Joyce Wiesner recalls the first time she recognized the face of Jesus.

It was 2007, the first year Our Lady of the Chesapeake Parish, Lake Shore, served as an emergency shelter.

“He was from Texas, and his wife had died,” Wiesner said. “He had given a friend a large sum of money for a business venture and never saw a penny of it again. I remember him saying, ‘At least I have a tent and some food, and I woke up this morning. The Lord is good.’”

“When you look into the eyes of people, and see what they have been through”

Matthew 25:31-46 – “... whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers, you did for me” – compels Our Lady of the Chesapeake and 10 other parishes in Anne Arundel County (see list below) to serve as hosts to the Arundel House of Hope’s winter relief program.

Based in Glen Burnie, the ecumenical nonprofit provides emergency housing from late October through April at rotating weekly sites for approximately 100 men, women and children who are homeless.

The outreach’s director is Karen Biagotti, a parishioner of Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie.

“We supply cots, pillows, blankets and over-the-counter medications,” she said. “Our churches supply everything else – transportation to and from the House of Hope, meals, fellowship.”

“The Gathering Place,” the parish hall at Our Lady of the Chesapeake, housed 37 men Jan. 20-26, one of the coldest weeks in memory.

After the “money-counting” ladies had prepared and served a dinner worthy of Thanksgiving Jan. 24, one guest’s gratitude began not with the roof over his head or the hot turkey and mashed potatoes in his belly, but the surrounding spirit.

“It’s scary out there when you’re by yourself,” said David Ames, 46, who began the New Year in a tent in Glen Burnie after seasonal work in Chestertown ran dry. “Being here is special.”

GROUP EFFORT

Father Brian Rafferty, the pastor of Our Lady of the Chesapeake, went on a vacation cruise the day after his parish welcomed the House of Hope.

“That says something about the trust I have in my staff,” he said beforehand. “It helps to have someone like Diane Williams. She can arrange the invasion of Normandy in her sleep.”

Williams, the parish’s House of Hope coordinator, begins her planning in March. It includes a \$40 gala in November that goes a long way toward raising \$22,000 for regular contributions to the House of Hope and meals and utilities during its week as a host site.

“That (last) one is the biggie,” Father Rafferty said. “You have to heat the center.”

The volunteer hours are just as substantial.

High school youths from the parish and nearby St. Jane Frances de Chantal play bingo and board games with guests on Friday and Saturday night, respectively. The 600 students from Bodkin Elementary School prepare 200 box lunches.

Breakfast and dinner are also labor intensive.

“When we first started, restaurants donated the meals and families served,” said Donna White, the parish’s hall manager and development officer. “Families got grumpy, said, ‘We want to do more.’”

Now Anna Smith organizes one dinner, casseroles prepared by her Sturtons Lane neighbors, and the Knights of Columbus Council 10881 supplies another.

There are personal touches, big and small, from the haircuts given by Betty Brooks, to David Richardson renting shuttles to Chesapeake High School for showers on Tuesday and Thursday, or the apple cobbler from the kitchen of JoAnn Streb.

It was Streb’s husband, Jack, who rose at a pastoral council meeting and encouraged the parish to become part of the House of Hope.

“It’s most telling,” Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski said, “that parishioners who volunteer with the House of Hope always tell me they get much more out of it than the guests.”

WELCOME STRUCTURE

Wiesner, a great-grandmother whose Honda Civic is packed with clothing and bottled water she distributes to the homeless, is there every morning, preparing a hot breakfast.

“Some of these men have jobs to get to, but they can’t make their way out of poverty,” Father Rafferty said. “The one thing they crave is respect.”

Jim, who asked that his last name not be published, gets some part-time work at a satellite parking lot at BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport. He was a mortgage settlement officer, but after the housing collapse of 2008, lost his Odenton home and then his marriage.

He finds seasonal work at a hotel in Ocean City, but this is the second winter in which he put his belongings in storage and registered with the House of Hope.

“I’m sacrificing my privacy, not my pride,” he said.

The House of Hope’s website states that participants “must comply with all program policies, procedures, guidelines and daily breathalyzer test.”

At Our Lady of the Chesapeake, Rick Fahlteich monitors the House of Hope overnight, enlisting a fellow male parishioner or two. Father Rafferty said Fahlteich has never reported any trouble.

Participants vacuum the hall, clean the bathrooms and shovel snow. Some attend weekend Mass.

David Vaise, a clinical social worker, offers individual counseling on four of the seven nights the House of Hope is at Our Lady of the Chesapeake.

“You talk to someone for five minutes, you learn a lot about them,” said Vaise, a parishioner since the parish’s establishment in 1980. “We try to give them the truth, in a sensitive way.”

Ames, the participant from Chestertown, said he knows people who remain homeless because they “don’t want help. They don’t want to follow the rules.”

He appreciates the structure of the House of Hope, in all its forms.

“They have a clothes closet, a counselor, and help you anyway they can,” he said of his week at Our Lady of the Chesapeake. “What really matters is that fellowship. That means everything in the world.”

HOST PARISHES

The Arundel House of Hope will utilize 11 Catholic parishes as winter relief emergency shelters this season.

Nov. 11-17 – Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie

Nov. 18-24 – St. Bernadette, Severn

Dec. 2-8 – Holy Family, Davidsonville

Dec. 9-16 – St. Joseph, Odenton

Dec. 30-Jan. 5 – Our Lady of the Fields, Millersville, and St. Andrew by the Bay, Annapolis

Jan. 13-19 – St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Crofton, and St. Mary, Annapolis

Jan. 20-26 – Our Lady of the Chesapeake, Pasadena

Feb. 10-16 – Church of the Crucifixion, Glen Burnie

March 10-16 – Good Shepherd, Glen Burnie