

# St. Joseph University Parish

## Samaritan Ministries Update to the Parish

*“A single father of two came to The Salvation Army needing help with his energy bill. He had set up a payment plan but defaulted, making the entire bill due to avoid a disconnection. Even though he was working full-time at \$15 an hour, he still couldn’t pay the necessary \$475 by the date needed to avoid a disconnection. He came on to meet with me straight from work. He was covered in dirt from working manual labor outside all day. We discussed the unique challenges of being a single father and discussed how difficult it is to work hard and yet sometimes fall short of being able to provide for his family. Tears welled in his eyes after I told him that St. Joseph University Parish was going to take care of the portion of the bill to avoid disconnection. He hasn’t been in need of any other assistance since.”*

The Samaritan Ministry began at St. Joe’s many years ago with a hope to help those in need, whether friends in our parish or others. You, the parishioners, have done so much for our community through your monthly donations, that an update is needed.

From its inception through 2013 our parishioners, through this ministry, had helped 526 families through food donations, utility assistance, and transportation needs to just name a few. In 2013 an Ad Hoc Committee was created to assess all the good that the Samaritan Ministry was doing, and create a mission statement and working document to grow the ministry.

There was a brief slowdown in distribution as the committee worked and monetary and food donations accumulated. The Samaritan Ministry revamped its scope to include four separate ministries. Thus, the name was changed to the Samaritan Ministries. Since then all donations accumulated or collected from our parish have been directed to the poor and needy of our community under these four powerful ministries:

- **Food Pantry:** This ministry distributes bags of high quality food, both nonperishable and fresh food, to parishioners and other qualified guests. It operates Mondays and Fridays from 1:30-3:30 pm out of our parish offices. It averages 25 families a day (a family typically consists of 2 adults and one to two children). These days were chosen based on need and lack of food pantry availability in the city on weekends. A qualified family may come once every 30 days. Over the last 12 months this ministry averaged \$6200 per month in expenditures for food.
- **Pancake Breakfast:** This ministry hosts a breakfast once every month, working out of the St. Ben’s soup kitchen. This breakfast is served from 9:00am-11:00am on the second Saturday of the month. It is available to anyone who comes to the door. The Secular Franciscans Order also provide a breakfast once a month. Saturdays were selected when it was identified that the downtown area soup kitchens operated Monday-Friday and there was a need for a meal on the weekend. This ministry’s goal is to have a breakfast offered every Saturday of the month. In the last year this ministry needed less than \$800 in expenditures. Often the fresh fruit and other items are donated each month by the volunteers. On average 65 guests are served per Saturday breakfast, this would equal 100 plus meals which includes seconds and carry out.
- **Utility Assistance:** This ministry provides financial assistance to the working poor of Vigo County. This assistance takes the form of payment of the past due balance and/or disconnect fee for a utility service

that has been or will be disconnected due to lack of payment. This is offered one time to a qualifying family. This family is one that has exhausted all available assistance programs through the utility company and have no other option available to them. This ministry addresses an unmet need of those that are still considered poor (between 150% - 200% of the federal poverty level for a family of four) but do not qualify for any of the financial assistance offered in Vigo County. A qualifying family has had no history of chronic financial issues. Due to these qualifications this ministry hopes to provide greater potential for families to be kept from substandard living conditions or homelessness while working to return to financial solvency. This ministry helps households where no other assistance program exists. The Salvation Army assists this ministry with screening. This ministry pays any assistance directly to the utility company on behalf of the family. On August 31, 2016 data had shown that \$10,824 had been spent to support reconnection of utilities for 31 families. The ministry averages \$1,200 per month. The committee has decided to cap this outlay at \$500 per month.

- Parishioner Assistance: This ministry serves to meet the urgent needs of St. Joe's parishioners. The net parishioner outlay over the past 12 months has been \$2,100.

The Samaritan Ministries operate out of the parish offices, coordinated and manned by parish volunteers including our many college students. All monetary donations are provided by you, the parishioners, and go directly to purchase food or provide utility assistance. As of August 2016 this parish has helped over 2,188 families or over 6,300 individuals through the food pantry and utility assistance alone. This ministry has grown because of your generosity.

While there are countless stories of gratitude, one more should be shared.

*"A middle aged couple came in needing assistance to avoid a disconnection of their energy services. The husband worked full-time and made enough money to support himself and his wife. However, 2 months prior, they unexpectedly received temporary custody of their grandchildren aged 6, 4, and 2. Although they were happy to provide a home for their grandchildren as opposed to foster care, the additional people in the household stretched the expenses. St Joseph's program assisted with \$352 to avoid disconnection of services. Both husband and wife were very appreciative and kept saying thank you. The husband wiped his eyes more than once. The family hasn't been back for any other assistance."*

The Samaritan Ministries will once again be funded month to month by the second collection the first Sunday of the month, as the Samaritan Ministries accumulated balance has successfully been used for its intended purpose. While this may change our ability to distribute in such great numbers, we feel confident that this ministry will continue to be a great source of mercy to our community provided by the Holy Spirit through the parishioners of St. Joe's. If this collection is something you haven't really thought about before, or lately, you might look at it with fresh eyes. We have a lot to be thankful for in our parish, as we strive to live our mission statement:

***We are a Franciscan Catholic family nourished by the Eucharist who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, share the faith, and are called to serve God through our ministry to the poor, the local colleges and the people of the Wabash Valley.***