



St. Mary's Parish Spotlight March 2011

Social Action Committee - Mercy Shelter

While the name says "Committee", a better description would be "*cherished helpers*". There are two groups from St. Mary's that provide their time and talents to help shelter residents in Hartford.

1. One group, led by Kelly Kearney and Mollie Ions, cooks, delivers and serves meals to Hartford's **Mercy Shelter** (part of Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation, led by the Sisters of Mercy and Director Sister Patricia McKeon).
2. The second group, led by Paul Roderick, cooks and delivers meals to Hartford's **Immaculate Conception Shelter**.

The St. Mary's **Social Action Committee** (1980's edition) was originally headed by Jerry Manning and then Lou Basta. They were involved in a number of outreach activities and had over 50 members in the group. Their outreach activities included:

- Serving food at 4 shelters;
- Regular (4x/year) dry food collections;
- Social activities and Mass for the disabled;
- Clothes collection, sorting and distribution;
- Christmas toy collections;
- Furniture collection;
- College funding program;
- A birthday gift program.



As time progressed and individuals moved on, the **Mercy Shelter** group continued with their specific activities, evolving into a group focusing specifically on cooking and serving meals at the shelter. Lou Basta has since handed the baton to Kelly Kearney, who, along with Mollie Ions, oversees a group of nearly 60 volunteers that cook, deliver, and serve meals at the shelter.

How can you get involved?

For those interested in assisting the Mercy Shelter group, a list of volunteers to cook meals is compiled by Kelly Kearney, who can be reached at (860)658-2842. In addition to cooking meals, desserts are needed on the days that St. Mary's is scheduled. Parishioners are asked to drop off desserts in the lower church by 3:00 PM on the specified days. All dates are found on the parish website at www.stmarysimsbury.org or in the bulletin.





Mission: Mercy Housing and Shelter Corp., a non-profit organization sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, responds to the needs of those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless by providing them with food, housing, shelter, education and support services in an atmosphere that respects each person. Mercy Housing and Shelter advocates on behalf of individuals while challenging injustice in social systems.

What We Do: Mercy provides a continuum of care for homeless people and families to help them become self-supporting, contributing members of the community. Services are available for people with various disabilities including psychiatric and/or substance abuse problems, other special needs, and for offenders and defendants in the criminal justice system. We serve English-speaking and non-English speaking populations. We offer six unique service areas to address different aspects of homelessness. We promote healthy values and a reverence for life through the spirit of justice, compassion and service to others.

History: In 1983, the Sisters of Mercy of Connecticut, as a chapter, committed themselves to reaching out to the hungry and homeless of Hartford through their purchase of St. Elizabeth House at 118 Main St. in Hartford. A private, non-profit entity, Mercy Housing and Shelter Corp. (**MHSC**) was formed. Sister Dolores Crowley was appointed its first administrator and was charged with developing a caring program with the mercy mission as its core. MHSC began its work through delivering four programs:

1. Friendship Center Soup Kitchen (later called the Meals Program and today called the Friendship Center),
2. Friendship Center Day shelter,
3. A 24-bed emergency shelter served single homeless men and women (it no longer exists), and
4. A 42-bed transitional living program also serving homeless men and women.

In 2008, MHSC formally announced its first ever **capital campaign** to renovate St. Elizabeth House at 118 Main St., Hartford. The front part of the house, built in 1807, is the birthplace and childhood home of Henry Barnard, the first education commissioner for the United States, Connecticut and Rhode Island. The back of the house was added in 1908 by the Sisters of the Holy Spirit when they ran a home for single women working in Hartford.

For more information on the history of Mercy Housing and Shelter visit the St. Mary's website (www.stmarysimsbury.org) or the Mercy Housing website (www.mercyhousingct.org).