

Tributes

Donations to Caritas Connections have been made in recognition of the following family and friends:

In Honor Of:
Penny Helmsing
Fr. Bryon
Dan Desloge
Christine Blood
Tim Handlan’s 80th Birthday
Lisa Vallino

In Memory Of:
Dottie Wilson’s sister, Pat
Paul Raczkiewicz
Debbie Rehm
Dr. Joseph Spagna
Buschmann & Thomas families
Mary Ann Kren
Susan Spagna
Jack Hussey
Deacon Tim Dolan
Kevin Shaner
Yvonne Reynolds
Elizabeth Irby Guzman
Maureen Baudendistel
Ann Proscino
Molly Walsh Henroid
James R. Vollmer
Sandra Johnson

Winter Clothing Item Donations Needed

Winters can be especially cruel on the poor and the homeless. Please consider donating gloves, mittens, socks, hats and scarves. Ideally, they would be new but we'll gladly take gently used items as well. Men’s, women’s, and children’s sizes are all welcomed. You can drop them off at the St. Gerard-Majella parish office garage on Monday or Tuesday mornings before 10 a.m.



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Who We Are
Caritas Connections, Inc. is a faith-based organization dedicated to “connecting those who have with those who need”. Many members of our community are eager to share their blessings. Many of our less fortunate neighbors desperately require their help. The challenge is linking the gifts with the needs. We provide that vital connection—transforming compassion into charity. Members of St. Gerard Majella Catholic Church in Kirkwood, MO serve as the primary coordinators and volunteers.

Donations may be sent to: Caritas Connections, Inc., PO Box 31072 St. Louis, MO 63131

Did You Know...

Caritas Connections is eligible for **matching gifts**. We are also now set up to receive **automatic monthly gifts via PayPal** or to take **stock donations**. Gifts of stock can be directly made from 401(k) plans or IRA accounts without needing to pay taxes on distribution—a big help if you no longer itemized because of recent tax changes. To learn more, call 314-225-2605 or e-mail: CaritasConnections@gmail.com

As a retiree who is required to take RMDs from your IRAs, you could lower your income tax liabilities by giving to Caritas Connections. Once you turn 70 ½, you must take annual Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from your Individual Retirement Accounts. By giving some or all of that RMD as a **Qualified Charitable Distribution**, or QCD, you could have tax advantages, even as you support Caritas Connections. Talk to your financial advisor for more information.

You can make your donation to Caritas Connections go further by taking advantage of the **Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit** program that allows an individual, corporation, or trust to receive up to 50% of their gift back through a state of Missouri tax credit. For more information visit our website: www.caritasconnections.com/Donate

Bring Us Your Shipping Boxes

Please don’t put your cardboard boxes in the curbside recycling bin. Let us recycle them! Right now, we’re in need of empty boxes. But size matters! **They should be about the size of a baby diaper or paper ream box**. Please include lids or flaps that fold. If you would like to volunteer to help in the garage, be a Directed Shopper or support us in any other way, email [Mary Kempa](mailto:MaryKempa@gmail.com) at marykempa2@gmail.com.

STAYING connected

The newsletter of Caritas Connections, Inc.

Annual Appeal Letter Stresses Importance of Donations

Our Mission

Inspired by the compassion of Jesus, Caritas Connections, Inc. continues His mission to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and help the sick, suffering and homeless.

Recipients of this year’s annual appeal letter learned that by the end of 2024, Caritas will have purchased more than \$265,000 worth of food, clothing, cleaning supplies and essential items like diapers, wipes, Ensure and other items not covered by food stamps for the more than 30 client organizations we serve. That represents a more than \$25,000 increase over the last year!

This would not be possible without the support of our donors. Yet even with that increase in spending, Caritas is still trying to get back to its pre-Covid purchase levels. The rising cost of essential items has definitely hurt our purchasing power.

Still, the letter talks about the profound impact Caritas Connections makes throughout the St. Louis area. We are grateful for the grants we have received over the past two years, and we will continue to pursue opportunities—but our donors are the real engine that enables

our more than 170 volunteers to do what they do!

The end of the year is an excellent time to donate—especially considering the fact that your donation will go even further as we have an anonymous donor who has once again issued a challenge grant where **every donation of \$125 or more will be matched up to \$20,000. And once again, we’re asking donors to consider using the Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit where you can receive up to a 50% tax credit for your donation by filling out a form (check with your accountant before doing so!)**

We’re hoping this article serves as a reminder to those that received the letter to help us keep the good going. Donations can be made directly through our secure website at www.caritasconnections.com or by sending a check to Caritas Connections, P.O. Box 31072, St. Louis, MO 63131

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One Bonus Leads to Another

When people donate to Caritas, good things happen. In 2024, we spent over \$25,000 more than the previous year, purchasing a variety of essential items. With our goal of assuring that approximately 95 cents out of every dollar donated to Caritas goes directly back to the clients we serve, the Caritas board looked at the remaining budget for 2024 and allocated an additional \$25,000 bonus be awarded to our existing client base.

When Clark Porter, our key client contact at the Federal Probation Office heard of the additional available funding, he asked one of our dedicated shoppers if the money could be spent on purchasing coats. It could and it was.

Our shopper mentioned what she was doing to a few of her friends—and they wanted to help. So she contacted Clark to see what he might do with even more bonus money. Clark has been looking to give bikes to children of ex-offenders as Christmas presents. So, the friends donated directly to Clark who used the money to purchase the three remaining bikes needed to reach his goal of 40 as well as 40 new bike helmets.

One good thing truly leads to another!

Volunteers Needed

Delivery Drivers: If you, or someone you know, might be interested in becoming a driver or just a co-deliverer on some of our client runs, please email Mark Guenther: mguenther@caritas-connections.com

Newsletter writer: Either help out or take over writing duties for our newsletter that comes out 3 times a year.

Social media coordinator: Take over posting content onto our Caritas Connections Facebook page and look into other social media outlets that might be appropriate.

Grant writer: Help out or take over our Caritas pursuit of grants—some grant writing experience helpful, but not necessary. If you're interested in any of the above categories, contact: president@caritasconnections.com



Caritas Mourns the Loss of Deacon Tim Dolan

Deacon Tim Dolan passed on October 1, 2024. Tim was a long-time supporter of Caritas and a frequent participant in the Caritas Golf Tournament. His wife, Kathy has volunteered for Caritas for many years. Tim epitomized what Caritas is all about, always wanting to help others and giving his time and talents in so many ways. May he rest in peace!

Incarnate Word Foundation and St. Louis Women’s Fund Award Grants to Caritas

This past October, Caritas received a double dose of good news. First, Caritas Connections was awarded a two-year grant of \$18,224 by the Spirit of St. Louis Women’s Fund (SOS). The following week, the Incarnate Word Foundation informed Caritas that we would receive a \$5,000 grant to be awarded at a ceremony in early December. SOS is a women’s giving collective, comprised of 200 area women who accept and review grant applications from smaller area nonprofits, conduct site visits, and ultimately vote to determine recipients. Caritas is one of 11 nonprofits serving the St. Louis area that will share nearly \$215,000 in grant funds in the coming year. “The core philosophy of SOS is simple – we pool our resources and award grants as a group. Working collectively, we are able to better support the outstanding work of area nonprofits and have a greater impact on the community as a whole,” said Ally Kell, SOS president. Caritas was chosen from an initial pool of 149 applicants. After a site visit to the Caritas garage and a presentation by several Caritas volunteers and three of our client contacts, Caritas was chosen to be on the final ballot where all members of SOS cast their votes. A site visit was also key with the Incarnate Word Foundation. Sister Helena

Monahan met with three Caritas board members at the garage and then learned more about how Caritas works and the good that we do. That meeting made a very positive impression on Sister Helena and Caritas was subsequently awarded a \$5,000 grant which will be given at a ceremony in December. The grant money from both organizations will go directly toward serving the current Caritas client base and allow us to look at taking on additional clients.



Barb DuBois, Grants Vice Chair for SOS, presents a check to Tom Blood and Mark Guenther.

MAC Puts on “Clothes 4 Kids” Drive for Caritas

Caritas is one of three chosen charitable organizations being supported this year by the Missouri Athletic Club’s Charitable Society for Children. Throughout the year, the MAC’s CSC has had a number of fund-raising events to benefit the three chosen organizations. In January, the results of their fund-raising efforts will be distributed at a special dinner at the MAC. In addition, they have one specific event for each charitable organization designed to get MAC members involved. For Caritas, it was decided they would host a winter clothing drive for kids, called, “Clothes 4 Kids”. Collection bins were placed at both the downtown and West County MAC locations throughout September where MAC members could donate kids’ gloves, hats, coats and socks. Volunteers from Caritas picked up the donated items, sorted them and got them ready to be distributed to three Caritas clients who in turn, provided them to families in need. Nat Walsh, who oversees the MAC’s CSC, came along for the delivery of the clothing items. “It was great to see Caritas in action and be a part of the delivery process,” said Nat. “The MAC’s Charitable Society for Children was proud to help on behalf of all our members.”

Client Profile: Crisis Nursery South Family Empowerment Center

The Crisis Nursery’s Family Empowerment Program located in Mercy Hospital South provides in-home counseling visits, on-site consultations with mothers, and parenting and budgeting classes for families and mothers-to-be. They also regularly provide food bags, diapers and wipes and other assorted items to their clients. According to Anna Rhodes, who is a social worker at the Crisis Nursery South location, they have a wide variety of material support needs that change throughout the year—and Caritas is always able to adapt to those needs thanks to the close relationship they have developed with Rose Aschenbrenner, who has been their dedicated shopper for more than six years. “Caritas has been a massive help for the work we do,” said Anna. “Rose and I connect each month, sometimes more than that—and create a list of items we need and then, thanks to her bargain hunting, she’s able to purchase those items at the best available price.” “Caritas helps give us the flexibility to adjust to the needs of the families and individuals we serve,” said Anna. “When I can bring diapers, wipes, soap and deodorant to an initial client meeting it’s like an instant connection is made. It helps put our client at ease—and that is so important to establish that base.”

The Family Empowerment Program focuses on three key areas—Crisis Intervention, Parent Education, and Case Management. Their clients include Mercy Hospital patients, employees, and individuals living in the greater South County community. Through their counseling and emotional support, they’re able to help clients build routines and take on parenting responsibilities, often in extremely trying circumstances. Recently, Caritas was able to provide an end-of-year bonus. “I thought getting robes for some of our new moms would be a great Christmas present and mentioned that to Rose,” said Anna. “She found some on sale and they’ll be great presents—almost everything we do is for the kids—but it will be nice to remind mothers that they deserve a present, too.” To Anna and all the clients that Crisis Nursery helps serve, working with Caritas is the gift that keeps on giving. *The Crisis Nursery South Family Empowerment Center is just one of many organizations, groups and places that benefit from the many works of Caritas Connections. The more people who volunteer their time as well as donate to the organization, the more people Caritas Connections can help. The need is great. The good you can do is immense.*

Webster-Kirkwood Times Touts Local Ties to Caritas

Readers of the Webster-Kirkwood Times recently may have learned a lot more about the good that Caritas does thanks to a two-page article that ran in their November 22nd edition. To read the full article, simply scan this QR code. (Here’s the link to the story: https://www.timesnewspapers.com/webster-kirkwoodtimes/caritas-connections-food-pantry/article_7551fede-a81c-11ef-b714-134de63d9ce5.html) Special thanks to Tony Roldan, who helped arrange for an early morning visit to the Caritas garage for both a reporter from The Webster-Kirkwood Times as well as the mayor of Kirkwood!



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ROSE ASCHENBRENNER



Rose Aschenbrenner (left) with Anna Rhodes of Crisis Nursery South

Like many of our volunteers, Rose Aschenbrenner’s connection with Caritas began with Father Bryon. “We’ve known Father Bryon for more than 38 years and have stayed in touch throughout,” said Rose. “That’s how I first learned about Caritas and about seven or eight years ago, I decided to volunteer.” Rose initially started with the Outreach Program for St. Louis U. “I was a teacher and was asked to find, buy and then deliver children’s books featuring kids of color. I did that for about two years but then got involved with the Crisis Nursery in South County. According to Rose, “I like to get as much as I can for the money we have to spend. I really enjoy doing my online investigations to find the best price for the goods we need. I may go to Sam’s, Walmart, Costco or Dollar General based on what I’ve been asked to buy. I can’t do it all in one day—but once I’ve got the requested items, we’ll agree on a mutual date, and I’ll make the delivery—often accompanied by my husband.” Rose has been amazed by just how many things food stamps don’t cover - and what a necessity they are for newborns and their families. “You realize what a difference we help make by making these purchases,” said Rose. The recent influx of bonus money was an additional motivation. “We looked at what we had to spend, and I was able to get coats for little kids, robes for the moms and help the Crisis Nursery stock up on paper towels and other items that are always in demand.” “Volunteering for Caritas has been easy, fun and I love that it’s something started by Father Bryon and that I’m able to do my small part to carry that on.”