Compassionate Outreach Ministry
Program Overview and 2018 Outcomes
Church of St. Andrew the Apostle
Gibbsboro-Voorhees, New Jersey

Submitted by Bob Sperrazza
Pastoral Coordinator for Compassionate Outreach
Mission Statement: “Called by our Baptism, we the followers of Christ at St. Andrew’s parish, invite all to share their time, talent and treasure, as we seek justice and charity for those in need.”

OVERVIEW

The Compassionate Outreach Ministry is comprised of a diverse and robust family of outreach initiatives that address the physical and emotional needs of struggling individuals and families within St. Andrew the Apostle parish and the surrounding community. Its outreach programs extend to the nearby city of Camden, one of the poorest and most crime-ridden cities in America. Led by a volunteer Executive Board of seven parishioners, the Ministry is powered by scores of cross-generational volunteers, each of whom have A Hand to Lend, A Smile to Share and A Loving Heart.

Each monthly meeting of the Compassionate Outreach Ministry Board is opened with the following prayer:

“Dear Lord, thank you for assembling this group, at this time, in this place. Help us to perform your charitable work and affirm our Christian faith, with vigor, compassion, justice, patience, mercy and clarity of purpose. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide and inform us in identifying your priorities, and in executing your Divine mission, with dignity and respect. We pray for wisdom, discernment, humility, and the vision to see in the faces of the struggling, hurting, lonely and needy among us Your Holy Face. Help us to use our hearts and minds and hands to ease the burden and soothe the souls of the neediest among us. Help us to leave in our path Your Mercy, Your Grace and Your Redeeming Love. This we ask in gratitude for our blessings and in your name. Amen.”

Bob Sperrazza
Conceiving, undertaking, and improving initiatives to help ease the burden of needy parishioners and others in the surrounding community is a daunting, but important mandate. To be successful, the objectives and outcomes of individual Compassionate Outreach ministries are subject to ongoing critical evaluation. The Executive Board takes its fiduciary responsibility for using parish funds very seriously, exercising prudence in allocating funds for optimal social impact. It is similarly committed to using volunteers’ time and talents, as well as generous parishioner donations, in a responsible, respectful and grateful fashion. Most of all, Compassionate Outreach strives to continually improve extant programs, respond to emerging challenges, and identify new, meaningful and pragmatic ways to assist the poor, struggling, lonely, hurting, disenfranchised and under-served.

There are nine distinct initiatives within Compassionate Outreach: *Christian Cupboard, Nursing Home Companions, Prison Ministry, Clothing Ministry, Local Outreach Ministry, Veterans Outreach Ministry, Joseph’s House Ministry, Meal Ministry, and “Mary’s Table” Homeless Ministry*. Each initiative is led by a volunteer ministry leader, in collaboration with an Executive Board chaired by Bob Sperrazza, Coordinator for Compassionate Outreach.

---

**Disciples of Mercy Award**

In 2018 the Compassionate Outreach Ministry was honored to receive the distinguished *Disciples of Mercy Award* by Catholic Charities at its Justice For All Awards Dinner in Atlantic City. Selection was made by the Justice For All Committee, and approved by the Office of the Bishop and the Catholic Charities Board of Directors.
Christian Cupboard

St. Andrew’s on-site food pantry operates throughout the year and conducts bi-weekly food distributions to lower-income households in the Voorhees-Gibbsboro area. Twenty-five volunteers also orchestrate massive holiday food basket drives at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.

Outcomes:

- Christian Cupboard collected, sorted and distributed 1,224 bags of non-perishable groceries to 34 financially-struggling individuals and households in 2018.
- The Cupboard additionally distributed full grocery carts of perishable and non-perishable groceries, hams, turkeys, produce, dairy items, eggs, bread and pies to each of 270 families via its Holiday Food Drives.
- Throughout the year the Cupboard also provided emergency food assistance to families in our Local Outreach and Prison Ministries, as well as to the Diocesan annual faithFULL Food Drive.
Nursing Home Companions  
Dozens of ministry companions make weekly visits, on individualized schedules, to male and female residents at area nursing homes. They bring conversation, laughs, smiles and friendship to older neighbors who eagerly await their “friends from St. Andrews.”  

Outcomes:
- St. Andrews volunteers made 2,080 face-to-face visits to over three dozen male and female nursing home residents at two area facilities this past year
- Gifts from our Christmas Giving Tree were personally wrapped and delivered by our volunteers to their nursing home friends prior to Christmas
- The Ministry also collaborated with Confirmation candidates who planned and conducted service projects at partner nursing facilities
Clothing Ministry

Throughout the year, ministry volunteers sort through hundreds of pounds of clothing collected in our on-site collection bin. The best articles are folded and distributed to needy individuals and children in the parish and local community; to guests at *Joseph’s House of Camden* emergency homeless shelter; to adult and infant clients served by our *Local Outreach Ministry*; to children of participants in our *Prison Ministry*; to impoverished adults and children in local Section 8 housing projects; and to infants and children helped through *Guadalupe Family Services* in Camden. Remaining clothing is donated to and picked up by *Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America*, *Goodwill*, and the *American Red Cross*.

Outcomes:

- Dozens of struggling parishioners and outreach families received clothing, outerwear, shoes, etc.
- Clothing was provided to 18 female inmates after their release from Camden County Jail, as well as on an ongoing basis to the children of inmates being raised by financially-disadvantaged grandparents
- Carloads of infant and toddler clothing were provided to *Guadalupe Family Svcs.* in Camden as well as to needy families in Lindenwold
- Clothing and shoes were provided to currently and formerly homeless men and women through our collaboration with *Joseph’s House*
Local Outreach Ministry

St. Andrew’s volunteers assist parishioners and nearby community residents in need. Services range from providing referrals for housing or county services to mobilizing parishioners to help individuals and families during short-term crises. Over the past year, St. Andrews has secured and delivered furniture, household items, bedding, clothing, and food to dozens of individuals. Recipients have included displaced senior citizens, single mothers, transitionally homeless opioid-addicted adults, disabled Vietnam veterans, cancer patients, the unemployed, and others. Moreover, through our “Christmas Giving Tree” project, we were able to assist an additional 600 individuals and adults — from new-born infants to seniors — through area nursing homes, Guadalupe Family Services and Joseph’s House homeless shelter in Camden, the Philadelphia VA Nursing Home, NJ Veterans Memorial Home, and elsewhere.

Outcomes:

• Our Christmas Giving Tree project collected gifts and gift cards that benefitted over 700 adults, infants and children; veterans; patients; the elderly; students; and the unemployed

• Furniture, clothing and household items were collected and delivered to 13 local individuals and families, including 4 older parishioners and one disabled veteran

• Over 7,000 infant diapers were collected and delivered to Guadalupe Family Svcs. in Camden, along with multiple highchairs, infant formula, playpens, car seats, apparel, etc.

• Approximately 160 men’s and women’s winter coats were collected and distributed. Recipients included adults and children in our parish Christian Cupboard food program, homeless guests at Joseph’s House and New Visions Homeless Shelters and Cathedral Kitchen in Camden

• Our School Success Drive collected and distributed student backpacks and school supplies benefitting 5 dozen children within and beyond our parish

• Our “Image & Attitude” professional clothing drive collected and distributed over 800 garments for previously-disenfranchised women and men returning to the workforce
Beginning in January of 2018, our monthly luncheon for homeless men and women was relocated from the now-closed New Visions Day Shelter to its new home at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Camden. Since then we have averaged about 90 luncheon guests per month, all served with great love by a growing cadre of adult and youth volunteers. A collaboration with the St. Andrews Youth Ministry has further strengthened our crew with a loyal group of eager and efficient teens. Now called “Mary’s Table,” we promote the monthly luncheon by way of hand-delivered flyers inviting homeless guests to come for “Hot Lunch With A Smile!”

Outcomes:

- Hand-served 1,040 hot meals to homeless men and women at Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and New Visions Homeless Day Shelter over the past 12 months
- Assisted selected guests with referrals to county services, transitional housing and admission to Joseph’s House overnight shelter
- Additionally provided clothing, footwear and personal hygiene items to luncheon guests
Prison Ministry

Weekly classes are conducted by state-vetted St. Andrew’s volunteers at the Camden County Jail, where mentoring and life-skills training is provided each Thursday morning throughout the year. Volunteers undergo state background investigations prior to involvement in this important ministry, which addresses the needs of disenfranchised female inmates during their incarceration and continuing after their release.

Outcomes:

- On average, one dozen female inmates voluntarily attended our weekly life-changing classes
- Wardrobes were supplied to six of the participants’ children
- Twenty-five inmates were helped by volunteers after their release
- Eighteen parolees were provided with food and clothing; 5 were assisted with resume-writing and job interview training; one former inmate’s grandmother was provided with food and furniture; and all were assisted with job search, resume prep, interview training, mentoring and counseling
- Volunteers make themselves available to inmates and parolees by phone and in person for guidance, mentoring, and other assistance
Veterans Outreach Ministry

As Americans we are indebted to the brave men and women who have served and fought for our nation and our liberties. Within 30 minutes of St. Andrews Church reside hundreds of older and disabled veterans who embody the character and values of this great nation. Many spend their final years at the Philadelphia VA Community Living Center nursing home. Others reside at the NJ Veterans Memorial Home in Vineland. Some we are fortunate to sit beside at Sunday mass here at St. Andrews. Each year our Veterans Outreach volunteers take time to visit with these heroes face-to-face, hear their stories, thank them for their service, and convey the gratitude of our families and church community. We also carry with us parishioners’ gifts of love from our “Christmas Giving Tree”. It is a humbling and unforgettable act of Christian service.

Outcomes:

- 100 veterans visited at the Philadelphia Veterans Administration Nursing Home, including a Marine amputee [picture above right] who had, coincidentally, served in Da Nang with one of two Vietnam-Veteran volunteers who serve in the ministry
- 95 veterans visited at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home in Vineland
- Secured furniture and household items for a local disabled Vietnam veteran who was moved into a new Lindenwold apartment
Meal Ministry

Our Meal Ministry consists of a team of volunteer chefs who prepare and deliver meals for selected individuals and families in times of crisis. Over the past year, meals were provided to parishioner and non-parishioner families alike, with additional meals dispatched for homeless guests at Camden City shelters. Some of the volunteer chefs also prepare monthly casseroles for the homeless guests at Joseph’s House of Camden emergency overnight shelter. The Compassionate Outreach Ministry’s ongoing collaboration with this important non-profit extends the reach of our Christian service to disenfranchised populations across Camden County. The combined impact of our volunteers is substantial, faith-affirming and performed entirely selflessly and out-of-sight.

Outcomes:

• Prepared and delivered several hundred meals to parishioners and area residents in crisis
• Assisted an isolated and failing cancer patient served by Vitality Catholic Health Services until her death in summer of 2018
• Assisted a developmentally disabled and opioid-addicted senior male
• Assisted several homeless men and women transitioning to independent living
Joseph’s House of Camden Ministry

Led by Donna Hoel

The Compassionate Outreach Ministry at St. Andrew the Apostle parish has been privileged to collaborate with Joseph’s House of Camden since its opening. We are one of a stable of ministries from area churches who provide monthly casseroles to this overnight homeless shelter, which serves up to 80 men and women each night and operates 365 days of the year. We also collect, sort, pack and deliver other essential items, including clothing, blankets, personal hygiene items, laundry supplies, etc. month after month. Our commitment to serving the transitionally homeless, struggling and disenfranchised members of Camden County is real and backed by dozens of volunteers who time, talent, supplies and resources to JHOC

Outcomes:

- Prepared and delivered 1,900 individual meals for homeless guests at JHOC over the past 12 months
- Collected and delivered carloads of men’s and women’s winter coats, hundreds of pairs of men’s underwear, socks, footwear, blankets, winter hats, scarves, gloves, totes & roller bags, sugar, laundry pods, etc.
- Supported JHOC in its community partnership/awareness project with Whole Foods by alerting the public to homelessness in Camden County this past year
Summary and Conclusion

The Compassionate Outreach family of ministries is a vibrant, responsive and impactful social action enterprise. Over the past year, the tireless efforts of over 180 dedicated adult and teen volunteers touched the lives of men, women, infants and children, male and female, young and old, on over 8,000 separate occasions!

It did so by providing and serving over 1,900 meals for county residents experiencing homelessness; making well over 2,000 loving and one-on-one visits to area nursing home residents; filling over 800 distinct grocery orders for struggling families through its on-site Christian Cupboard food pantry; collecting, packing and delivering an additional 270 grocery carts-full of perishable and non-perishable food, hams, turkeys, produce, eggs, bread and pies to impoverished households in the parish and surrounding community at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter; making hundreds of face-to-face contacts with female offenders and parolees through its Prison Ministry, bringing them hope, sobriety support, mentoring and life-skills training; placing several thousand articles of donated clothing with the needy; preparing and delivering several hundred homemade meals through its Meals Ministry for the ill and home-bound in our community during difficult times; bestowing recognition and conveying gratitude to over 200 U.S. armed forces veterans in long term care, as well as to other vets in the parish and surrounding community; providing empowerment, confidence and hundreds of articles of clothing to “Image & Attitude” program participants who are transitioning out of poverty and back to the work-force; extending countless acts of Christian service to the ill, struggling, unemployed, opioid-dependent and isolated in our parish surrounding community; and serving as a good and steadfast neighbor to demoralized and disenfranchised residents of the City of Camden, one of the poorest and most crime-ridden cities in the United States.

The outcomes summarized in this report reflect the generosity and seriousness of purpose of an exuberant Catholic parish committed to demonstrating its Faith In Action. Moving forward, the leadership of our Executive Board pledges to continue our mission to recruit similarly minded people of faith to perform God’s work, people with “A Hand to Lend, A Smile To Share, And A Loving Heart.”