



St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker Christmas 2015

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The St. Francis - St. Joseph Catholic Worker House would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. God bless you and thank you for all that you have done. The continued success of our mission would not have been possible without you.



Manager's Message

It's hard to believe, but 2015 is almost over. We have had another banner year helping our men get off the streets and move on to permanent housing. But I certainly can't take the credit. We are blessed to have the support of so many folks to help us achieve this goal. Thank you so much!

Lately I've found myself reflecting on my early days in sobriety. In particular, the holidays. These can be such a difficult time for men like us. My relationship with my family at that time was volatile to say the least. Some in my family were trying to forgive but they just weren't there yet. Some didn't want to see me at all. Others were uncomfortable around me because they didn't really know how to act ("Now, is it okay to drink a glass of wine in front of you, or should I not?"). A few just had a lot of questions that I didn't particularly want to answer. They didn't mean anything by it, they were just curious. Still, it was exhausting.

When I returned back to Charlie's $\frac{3}{4}$ House, my residence in those days, I felt like I was coming home. Seeing my family was another painful reminder of the hole I had dug for myself, of the damage I had caused. I am grateful that I had a place to go, to be surrounded by others who were in the hole with me, others who understood. In time my relationship with my family was repaired, but it didn't happen overnight.

Our House, our sanctuary from not just the drug dealers and the elements, but sometimes too from family, friends or even the past. This is just the beginning of a long road that many of our guests will have to walk, and we've been charged with helping them through the first difficult steps. I am honored to be a part of it.



Here's a great new way you can contribute to St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker House (SFSJCWH) while you're shopping. The Kroger Company has a program that will donate to the House based on your purchases at Kroger stores. All you need to do is register your Kroger Plus Card on-line and link it to SFSJCWH through the Community Rewards link on their web site. This WILL NOT affect your other rewards earned with the Kroger Plus Card.

Simply go to www.krogercommunityrewards.com, create an account if you have not already done so, link your card with the card number or alternate ID, and enroll the card with the Community Rewards and our agency by name (St. Francis-St. Joseph Catholic Worker House) or by number (39873).

And that's it! Kroger will contribute a small amount of what you spend to our mission, and those pennies can add up to real help. So sign up now and sign up a friend or two. Every little bit counts!

Memorial Mass for Father Mark

Father Mark Schmieder, our beloved founder, will be celebrated once again with a memorial Mass. After purchasing the St. Francis Catholic Worker House from Jim Mullen (whom we regard as Father Mark's co-founder) he merged it with his own St. Joseph House of Hospitality in 1991, forming the St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker House. Under his leadership the property was rehabilitated, the staff was assembled and the House would help over 1,000 men achieve financial stability and move on to permanent housing. He passed away on December 24, 2009 in Richland, Washington, where he was being treated for pancreatic cancer.



Saturday, December 19 at 5:00pm
St. Francis Seraph Church
1615 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202
(on the corner of Liberty & Vine in Over-the-Rhine)

SFSJCWH Christmas Party

Immediately following the memorial Mass, we will hold our annual Christmas party at SFSJCWH located at 1437 Walnut Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202 on Saturday, December 19 at 6:30pm. All are welcome to attend. We will have food, live music and fun! We hope to see you there!



FROM Father Frederick Faber's *The Precious Blood* (1860):

“I reckon failure to be the most universal unhappiness on earth. Almost everybody and every thing are failures—failures in their own estimation, even if they are not so in the estimation of others. Those optimists who always think themselves successful are few in number, and they for the most part fail in this at least, namely, that they cannot persuade the rest of the world of their success. Philanthropy can plainly do nothing here, even if it were inclined to try. But philanthropy is a branch of moral philosophy, and would turn away in disdain from unhappiness which it could prove to be unreasonable, even while it acknowledged it to be universal. It is simply true that few men are successful; and of those few it is rare to find any who

are satisfied with their own success. The multitude of men live with a vexatious sense that the promise of their lives remains unfulfilled. Either outward circumstances have been against them, or they have been unappreciated, or they have got out of their grooves unknowingly, or they have been the victims of injustice. What must all life be but a feverish disappointment, if there be no eternity in view? The religious man is the only successful man. Nothing fails with him. Every shaft reaches the mark, if the mark be God. He has wasted no energies. Every hope has been fulfilled beyond his expectations. Every effort has been disproportionately rewarded. Every means has turned out marvelously to be an end, because it had God in it, who is our single end. In piety, every battle is a victory, simple because it is a battle. The completest defeats have something of triumph in them; for it is a positive triumph to have stood up and fought for God at all. In short, no life is a failure which is lived for God; and all lives are failures which are lived for any other end. If it is part of any man's disposition to be peculiarly and morbidly sensitive to failure, he must regard it as an additional motive to be religious. Piety is the only invariable, satisfactory, genuine success.” (Father Frederick Faber, *The Precious Blood*, published originally in England in 1860, republished by TAN Books and Publishers, pp. 53-59; 63.)

Guest Story – Kevin Whitehead

Kevin has been to prison three times and struggled with addictions throughout his adult life. At age 49 and weary of the lifestyle, Kevin found the Catholic Worker House in the fall of 2014. He became involved in Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous and is now sober over a year. After departing the House last year, Kevin sustained an injury in a fall and spent three months in a nursing home. After his release, he had no home, but knew where to go. Manager John Clark welcomed him back and Kevin resided at the House for most of this summer. Grateful for the second chance, Kevin has made the most of the opportunity and now has his own apartment in Walnut Hills.



“I tried so hard and it just didn’t work,” says Kevin. “I had to let go and ask for help.” He found that help at the Catholic Worker House. “I listened and learned; my way led to destruction. I needed the structure and guidance.” Our experience at the House consistently demonstrates that seemingly hopeless men can succeed if they are willing and provided some basic life tools.

The camaraderie among the House guests can help overcome the inevitable challenging days. Kevin views Corey Johnson (next article) as his “little brother” and their mutual encouragement led to mutual success.

Kevin exudes positivity and gratitude for his new life: “I’m free now! I don’t worry if a cop is following me. No probation. I’m loving life!”

More specifically, Kevin is regaining the trust and love of his family. His mom and sister are “ecstatic” and he has renewed relationships with his five children and six grandchildren. He is thankful the House door was open and that our unique brand of tough love was offered.

We wish Kevin the best and hope that he continues to visit for an occasional AA meeting or dinner.

Guest Story – Cory Johnson

As indicated in the previous story, Cory is Kevin Whitehead’s “little brother.” Cory says “we leaned on each other; I needed a strong hand and someone to listen.” Cory entered the Catholic Worker House directly from prison after serving five years for burglary and theft. The House was founded thirty years ago by the late Father Mark Schmieder specifically as a vehicle for prisoner reentry to society.

In addition to Kevin, staff member Ron Brown inspired Cory to become involved in AA and take responsibility for his life. “Ron is a great guy; he is serious about recovery and helping the guests,” exclaims Cory. Cory has now been sober almost four years and continues to attend at least five AA meetings a week.



Cory was a House guest October to December of 2014. He credits House Manager John Clark for providing guidance upon his departure. John facilitated Cory’s move to Charley’s ¾ House to continue in a sober living environment. Now, Cory is working full time at Cobblestone Construction and attending the University of Cincinnati for addiction counseling. He has found his own place in Batavia and he is ready to live entirely on his own. Without the people and facilities provided by the Catholic Worker House, this success story is unlikely for a man returning to society after five years in prison.

Cory is proud to have a driver’s license and car and he has restored relations with his parents. His parents attend Al-Anon, a support program for the families of alcoholics and addicts. Al-Anon can help the family understand addiction and provides practical coping mechanisms in a mutually supportive group setting.

At age 32, Cory is poised for personal success and has developed the strength to help others.

Guest Story – John Wedge

John Wedge states without bitterness: “I have been in the system my whole life.”

John was born 52 years ago with fetal alcohol syndrome. His childhood consisted of dozens of foster homes and group homes. He was adopted at one time and the adoption was soon rescinded; right back to the foster homes. John’s adult life was much the same. He has spent 30 of the last 35 years incarcerated. He has been trapped in heroin addiction. Indeed, John has been “in the system” his entire life.



After his last prison term, John was sent to the Talbert House this past April. Having nowhere to go after Talbert, he entered the Catholic Worker House in May. “I developed a plan in prison. I did not want to go back,” John says, “The Worker House afforded me the opportunity to succeed; I felt comfortable here. This place is blessed.” He says he finally asked for help: “the staff talked me through some difficult times.” John embraces the tough love provided by House staff and the principles of AA. He has been clean and sober for over a year and returns to the House every Tuesday to lead the 7pm AA meeting. “I have to be grateful and give back.”

Finally free and out of the system, John is blossoming. He works in construction and attends Chatfield College. He intends to eventually enroll at Xavier or Mt. St Joseph to learn social services. John has renewed relations with his daughter and three grandchildren after an eleven year estrangement. Happily, John is engaged to be married within the next year.

This incredible story of overcoming adversity and redemption is both highlighted and symbolized by John’s work at the Justice Center. In collaboration with professional artists like Tina Westerkamp and sponsored

by ArtWorks, John participated in the creation of a series of beautiful and profound murals at the Hamilton County Justice Center. The mural themes of reentry, systemic struggles and redemption reflect John’s life while the art showcases his talent. We hope that all of our readers visit the Justice Center to take a look and reflect upon John and others like him who need our compassion and an opportunity.



The Reentry Transformation Mural at the Hamilton County Justice Center

"This mural is intended to encourage reflection and offer hope, illustrating narratives that explore the new beginnings and possibilities created through the process of rehabilitation and re-entry." Cincinnati artist Tina Westerkamp worked closely with John Wedge to find inspiration from his experience to create the design.



These photographs do not do it justice. If you would like to see the mural in its entirety, it can be found in the main lobby of the Hamilton County Justice Center, located at 1000 Sycamore St, Cincinnati, OH 45202.



Reunited: Champ & Father Mark

Champ, the loyal companion of Fr. Mark, who was the founder of our House, rejoined his best friend last summer. Champ was a goldendoodle who brought joy to Fr. Mark during the last four years of his life. They shared a love of the outdoors and especially activities on water. Together they spent many hours fishing and cruising the Ohio River on their boat, the Marco Polo. Every summer since Fr. Mark's death six years ago, Champ continued to enjoy spending time on the river, frequently serving as the co-captain on the Marco Polo

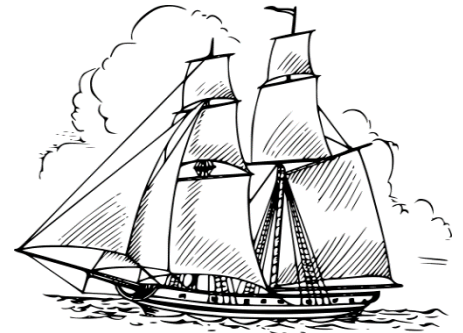
that is now steered by Mark's brother Carl. Pope Paul VI once told a young boy grieving the loss of his dog, "One day we will again see our animals in the eternity of Christ." Fr. Mark preceded Champ on this journey. They are now together again—for eternity cruising the waters of heaven and watching over us.

Marco Polo Circle

If they have the will, ***we are the way!*** Join the Marco Polo Circle to help us assist these wonderful men in becoming independent. Your monthly pledges will provide us with the means to carry on this important work. Simply go to our website at www.catholicworkercincinnati.org and click on the 'Donate' button. A recurring monthly contribution of any amount will make you a member!

Your ***monthly*** pledge IMPACTS LIVES daily!

- \$5** = feeds 300 people in our Soup Kitchen
- \$10** = assists with providing job search tools
- \$20** = provides 2 weeks of home cooked dinners for our guests
- \$50** = gives 20 men work boots, a prerequisite for hiring at many jobs
- \$100** = sponsors the cost of a guest's complete 60- day stay at the House



Note from the Board of Trustees

The generous and compassionate volunteers along with our diligent staff continue the impressive work started over 25 years ago by the late Father Mark Schmieder. The House continues to operate at a high level. Through November, 261 homeless men found hospitality at the House. Of the 193 that stayed, 62 were able to find work, save money and move on to independent housing. The others were given food, shelter, clothing and opportunity. No effort is wasted. SFSJCWH continues to see success rates above 30%. Great work everybody! We do request your utmost generosity for the coming year as our expenses currently exceed income.

- Bob Bertsch, Chairman

The St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker House vigilantly protects its independence and freedom from politics or distracting influences in order to focus on the mission of helping the homeless and poor.

The House receives no government or diocesan funding and operates with simplicity and frugality.

If you wish to help us continue the good work, please send your tax deductible donation to:

St. Francis – St. Joseph
P.O. Box 14274
Cincinnati, OH 45250



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