

Social Concerns Ministry

# LIVE THE FAITH

## Social Concerns Newsletter

Volume XIV, Issue 1

Social Concerns: What We Do

Fall 2011

Food Bank

Food Baskets

Camp Happy Times

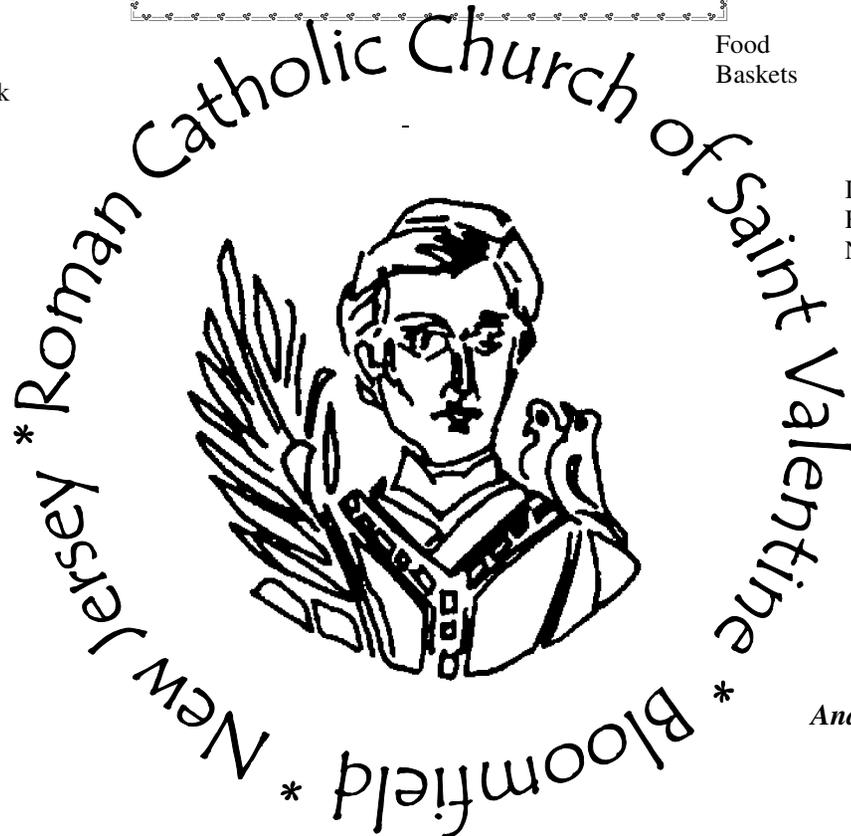
Interfaith Hospitality Network

Advent Tree

Soup Kitchen

Right-to-Life

And??



### Coordinators

<i>Chris DeAgazio</i>	<i>Chairman/Food Bank</i>
<i>Deacon Joe Malanga</i>	<i>Moderators</i>
<i>Deacon Lou Rusignuolo</i>	
<i>Cecelia Polizzi</i>	<i>Recording Secretary</i>
<i>Vicki Reilly</i>	<i>Right-To-Life</i>
<i>Emily Bajek</i>	<i>Food Baskets</i>
<i>Amy Deputato</i>	<i>Newsletter Editors</i>
<i>James Curran</i>	

### Mission Statement

We, the Social Concerns Ministry of Saint Valentine's Parish, are compelled by Christ's love and the Gospel message to compassionately respond to the identified needs of our parish community. We recognize all who work with us as partners in developing this Christian discipleship.

## Statement of Welcome

Father Juancho G. De Leon

Mindful of the Gospel and informed through our particular heritage as a justice-seeking people, we, the community of the Church of St. Valentine, commit to the practice and the celebration of an inclusive justice as we welcome the gifts and experiences of all people who gather for worship in this place, lifting up their struggles as our own and committing ourselves to their full participation in the ministries of our parish and the broader Church.

## What is the Social Concerns Committee of St. Valentine?

By Deacon Joseph J. Malanga

The Social Concerns Committee of St. Valentine helps the parish fulfill our responsibilities to act justly and to serve as Christ would serve. The mission of the committee is to promote and encourage social action and Christian service programs and projects. The committee acts by assessing needs, recommending priorities, sponsoring education and awareness programs, and facilitating parishioner involvement as volunteer leaders. We hope to be the model of inspiration and information for social justice in our parish and community. Our ministry will be the voice of awareness, advocacy, and action, providing opportunities to engage parishioners in the social mission of the Church.

Our committee fosters the pastoral mission and ministry of service by helping the parish community to:

1. Deepen its understanding of Catholic social teaching and its awareness of local, national, and international social concerns (**education**);
2. Identify and address the needs of people in the parish and wider community, develop programs of outreach and service, and/or cooperate with service groups and agencies (**direct service, works of mercy**);
3. Speak out for people who are poor and vulnerable and work for legislation and social policy that reflect justice and respect for human dignity and rights (**advocacy**);
4. Promote action on behalf of justice and participate in the transformation of the world (**social action, works of justice**).

## Welcome Deacon Lou!

As your recently ordained Deacon, Father Juancho has asked me to be co-moderator of the Social Concerns Ministry. I am happy to join my brother Deacon, Joe Malanga, and the other wonderful committee members in the social outreach programs of St. Val's.

Thank you all for your support.

God Bless, Deacon Lou

## **Soup Kitchen—Martha and Mary Ministry**

**by Cecelia Polizzi**

Father Paul Walker initiated the Soup Kitchen out of a need to feed impoverished people, many of whom reside in Belleville. A division of the Belleville Police Department was feeding and assisting people during the week, but there was no means of getting aid to them on weekends. The police asked Father Paul about setting up a soup kitchen at Christ Episcopal Church, located at 393 Washington Avenue in Belleville. As Christ Church had the necessary facilities, the soup kitchen became a center to nourish the needy.

As an outreach ministry, the Social Concerns Committee of St. Valentine's became actively involved. We have three groups of members who alternate volunteering on the first Saturday of each month. About twenty-five to forty people are served each Saturday. The groups establish a set menu that is cooked fresh each time. Our volunteers purchase some of the food items, and the rest are obtained from the pantry at Christ Church. Each month, the volunteers arrive at the soup kitchen at 10:30 a.m. and begin to cook, set up, and make whatever other preparations are necessary in this "restaurant of love and caring."

As the coffee perks, the guests arrive, and the meal is served from noon to 1:00 p.m. The food is lovingly served on china because these people are our dinner guests. Meals include cooked ham, sweet or mashed potatoes, vegetables, bread and butter, juice, coffee, milk, and a variety of desserts. There are usually students doing community service and others who come to help the St. Val's volunteers and do their part to help those less fortunate. After 1:00, the volunteers wash dishes, clean tables, and get everything ready for the next group. Jesus said, "Whatsoever you do for the least of your brethren, you do for me." And there is always room for more volunteers!

## **Children's Book Collection**

**by Jean Frucci**

The Social Concerns Committee has been collecting children's books, which are taken to Huhu-ini Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya and distributed to children who otherwise have no access to books. Our book collection for these children is a success, thanks to our always-generous parishioners. At the time of this writing, we have sent over 100 boxes of books. A library was built to accommodate the books. The children have written us notes of thanks, and we've received pictures of the children with their books and in their new library. We plan to set up a display so that the entire parish can see the pictures and letters from the children. Thanks again to all our parishioners—you came through again! Let's keep up the good work; look for the collection box in the Church vestibule.

## Telephone #'s that may be of assistance:

Geriatric Assessment @ Mountainside Hospital 1-800-247-9580

Various Support Groups 1-800-AHS-9580

### Bloomfield

Human Services 973-680-4017

Senior Citizen Association 973-743-3332

### ***Social Concerns Core Committee***

*If you are interested in us, call anyone below*

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Father Juancho 973-743-0220

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Maggie Ashby 973-338-3913

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Emily Bajek 973-748-0613

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Susan Bresko 973-259-9282

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James Curran 973-743-9002

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Chris & Sabina DeAgazio 973-338-3142

---

Amy Deputato 973-429-0219

---

Karen Eriksen 973-743-0797

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Jean Frucci 973-748-9032

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Pauline Funaro 973-429-0027

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Claire Graziano 973-748-3424

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Sr. Eleanor Kliminski 973-523-3879

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Deacon Joe Malanga 973-259-0069

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James Mauro 973-667-5141

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Cecelia Polizzi 973-661-1441

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Vicki Reilly 973-566-9321

---

Deacon Lou Rusinguolo 973-338-1677

---

Linda Simon 973-748-1128

---

Ade & Mercy Solante 973-429-8417

---

Angie Stanziale 973-893-6454

---

Kevin Sutton 973-751-7297

---

Mickey Villafuerte 973-743-5002

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### **CALENDAR**

1<sup>st</sup> Monday of each month:

*Social Concerns Meeting*

1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of each month:

*Soup Kitchen*

2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month:

*Right to Life Rosary*

3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month:

*Food Bank (September to May)*



## Pro-Life

by Vicki Reilly

Pro-Life is an ongoing chapter in the book of the Social Concerns Committee. Our main goal is to provide assistance to the unborn, the women and their families who choose life for their babies, and the women and men going through decisions regarding abortion.

We hold an annual Baby Shower each May; this is basically a collection of items, purchased and donated by the generous parishioners of St. Valentine, for unwed mothers and their babies-to-be. The items that we collect are donated to Birthright and to Good Counsel.

Additionally, Social Concerns members meet on the second Saturday of each month to pray in front of the Social Security Building on Bloomfield Avenue in Montclair, which is across the street from an abortion mill. It is a peaceful setting in which we recite the Rosary. Many times the mothers change their minds, returning home and choosing life for their babies.

## Cell Phone Collection

by Beverly Polite

St. Valentine's Social Concerns Committee has partnered with Shelter Alliance to recycle old cell phones. Shelter Alliance specializes in the logistics and underwriting of fund raising programs through the collection and responsible recycling of used cellular phones. Shelter Alliance currently works with over 2000 social service organizations in 50 states and has contributed over \$5,000,000 to participating organizations. They will pay us between 50 cents and \$30.00 per phone donated (depending on the make and model) **regardless of condition.**

The money earned by this collection is used to support the various programs that the Social Concerns Committee participates in. Proceeds from cell-phone collection can raise thousands of dollars for much-needed programs and services, so don't throw that old phone away! You will find our donation box in the vestibule of the Church.

## Christmas Card Drive for Prison Ministry

by Pauline Funaro

Each year, the Social Concerns Committee collects new religious Christmas cards, which are distributed to prisoners. These cards are not sent **to** the prisoners, but each prisoner is given one card to send to his or her family, who also suffers because of the prisoner's incarceration.

Remember, Matthew, 25:35-38—We are called to feed the hungry, ...visit the sick and those in prison." We cannot always visit prisoners, but we can do this small, kind gesture to help lighten the burden of the prisoners' families.

## **Advent Giving Tree**

**by Claire Graziano**

St. Valentine Parish Social Concerns Ministry has been putting up an Advent Giving Tree annually since 1998. Before Advent begins, we start organizing. We receive a wish list of gifts and must print up tags with the names of gifts to be purchased. We assemble about 350 tags, which are hung on our Christmas tree in the vestibule of the Church. Parishioners are asked to take a tag and return the gift, unwrapped, to the vestibule by a given date, usually a week or two before Christmas. Our parishioners are very supportive of this effort, and we thank all of you!

Among the organizations who have received the gifts are St. Martin's Soup Kitchen; Wish List—Sacred Heart, Jersey City; Division of Youth and Family Services, Passaic; Newark Beth Israel Hospital; and the group with whom we are currently working, the Valerie Fund. The Valerie Fund's mission is to provide support for the medical care of children with cancer and blood disorders, and it gives the members of our ministry great joy to see all of the children and families come together at the annual Valerie Fund Christmas party, where the gifts are distributed. Each child receives an overflowing 3-foot-tall gift bag. We pray that we will continue our efforts for many more years for this very special cause.

## **Eyes for the Needy**

**by Pauline Funaro and Karen Eriksen**

St. Valentine's Church joins with the Lions Club in collecting eyeglasses, sunglasses, and frames that patients can no longer use. Through a program named "Eyes for the Needy," these eyeglasses are collected, sorted, and cleaned by volunteers. Once the strengths on prescription lenses are determined, the glasses are sterilized, inserted into plastic sleeves, labeled, and packaged to be dispensed to medical missions overseas. The recycled glasses are sent to third-world countries, thus helping the poorest of the poor, people who have no access to eye care.

The opportunity to have their vision corrected with lenses is a life-altering experience for the recipients; giving them the ability to read and perform tasks not otherwise doable. Kindly consider this mission when replacing your glasses or lenses. Eyeglass donations may be placed in the receptacle located in the vestibule (front) of the Church, or you may give them to any member of the Social Concerns committee listed in this bulletin. Your donation will help someone to "see." Thank you for your generosity in sharing.

## **Community FoodBank of New Jersey** **by Chris DeAgazio**

One of the ways that the Social Concerns Committee helps the hungry is by volunteering at the Community FoodBank of NJ. Take a look at the following statistics, taken from a FoodBank information sheet entitled “Making a Difference”:

The Community FoodBank—

- Distributed 39 million pounds of food in the 2010-2011 fiscal year
- Helps to feed over 900,000 people in 18 New Jersey counties through 1,500 member agencies
- Serves close to 3,500 children each week as part of its Kids’ Division
- Has a Community Kitchen that offers a job-training program
- Had more than 29,000 volunteer visits, resulting in more than 75,000 hours of service, last year
- Distributes free clothing, school supplies, and backpacks filled with nutritious foods to children in need
- And much more!

The FoodBank goes on to say, “With the help of so many...we have distributed, since our incorporation, more than 400 million pounds of food and groceries valued at more than a billion dollars.”

Volunteers are at the heart of the FoodBank, and Social Concerns members visit its Hillside warehouse on the third Saturday morning of each month for a two-hour shift, doing whatever is needed that day—sorting food, packing boxes, assembling mailers, and more. Volunteers meet in the Church parking lot and carpool together, and everyone is welcome...join us and bring a friend!

### **CONTRIBUTORS WANTED!**

The Social Concerns Committee is looking for short contributions for the Winter 2012 newsletter. The topic is how recent events —namely, the earthquake, hurricane, and heavy rains/flooding—have affected us spiritually or how they may have motivated us to reach out to others. The deadline will be in late January. Please contact Amy Deputato [amygil@comcast.net](mailto:amygil@comcast.net) or [201-838-5562](tel:201-838-5562) for more information.

## **St. Valentine Food Pantry**

**by Karen Eriksen**

Our Food Pantry consists of non-perishable food items donated by St. Valentine's parishioners. The pantry is overseen by Emily Bajek. Assisted by members of the Social Concerns committee and other volunteers, Emily faithfully puts together bountiful packages of care for families of our parish who are in need of supplemental groceries, enabling them to enjoy healthy, balanced meals. Included in the grocery care packages are Shop Rite gift certificates—generously donated by St. Valentine's Athletic Club.

Although the baskets are put together for the major holidays—Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas—donations of non-perishable food items, canned goods, staple foods, and condiments are encouraged throughout the year for families affected by unforeseen circumstances or unexpected crises. Monetary donations are also accepted; these are used to purchase hams and turkeys or are given to families in the form of gift certificates.

The receptacle for food donations is located in the vestibule in the front of the Church—to the right upon entering. Thank you, in advance, for being mindful of expiration dates when donating food.

## **Newsletter**

**by Amy Deputato**

The Social Concerns Committee publishes a newsletter two or three times a year; it is distributed to the parish as an insert in the Church bulletin. We try to choose timely and relevant topics, presenting a faith-based perspective. Topics have included responsible voting, the environment, and finances. We also present topics related to our committee's work, such as Pro-Life and hunger here in New Jersey. We hope that our newsletter not only will provide thought-provoking reading but also will keep the parish aware of the committee's activities and encourage parishioners to participate. We've been thrilled to welcome several new volunteer writers, and topic suggestions / article submissions from all parishioners are encouraged and appreciated.

## **Camp Happy Times**

The Valerie Fund offers a weeklong camping experience for children aged 5 to 21 who have or have had cancer. Camp Happy Times is held on 200 acres in Wayne County, Pennsylvania, and hosts approximately 200 campers each year. The Valerie Fund's website describes the camp as promoting "friendship, independence, and a spirit of cooperation" while providing a "recreationally therapeutic environment ... [that builds] self-esteem, confidence, trust, and friendship." The kids form bonds with one another as they participate in a variety of activities without feeling self-conscious about their illness, and knowing that the others understand what they've been through.

The camp is offered free of charge, and through our long association with the Valerie Fund, we initiate a parish-wide collection for items to be used by the campers during their stay at Camp Happy Times. Look for the collection display each summer; we thank you, and the children thank you!