

The Thomas Merton Center

Serving men, women and children of Greater Bridgeport
Catholic Charities of Fairfield County

43 Madison Avenue Bridgeport, CT 06604 (203) 367-9036 Fax (203) 367-8828

Fall / Winter 2013

Changes At Merton

Greetings!

Incredibly, this year marks our 40th year of operation! Most of you who know the Merton Center know that it has been an incredibly stable place for the last 15 years or so. But even though it sometimes has seemed like things will forever remain status quo, change is inevitable, as we saw this past summer.

The biggest change was the closure of our Family Center. The Family Center was a feeding and skills building program for young parents and their preschool-aged children. We started it 20 years ago and developed skills building services in response to the shortage of public preschool options in Bridgeport. However, Bridgeport has upgraded its preschool programming over the last few years, which resulted in a large decline in 3 year old children visiting our Center. This age group was much of the basis of our programming, and as their school options increased, the need for our services decreased. This, combined with the changing needs of the parents we saw, many of whom we referred to successful community service programs in our city, had also caused our overall attendance to decrease dramatically over the past couple of years. Those of you familiar with the challenges faced by programs like the Merton Center know that funding is always an issue, and with the needs in the House of Hospitality and the food pantry increasing (the

pantry has twice as many monthly visitors now than two years ago), we decided we needed to use the funds we have to fill our greatest needs, and thus we closed the Family Center in July.

It was a difficult decision, and we still feel that sense of loss each day. However, it is buoyed by the knowledge that no families were “left out in the cold”, as the few remaining regularly-attending families had connections elsewhere and options for their children that were not there years ago. Also, we have been able to keep our commitment of financial support to the former Family Center students who attend Catholic schools with assistance from our Educational Assistance Program, and we will continue to support them throughout their schooling.

As you open this newsletter, you will see that there are a lot of good things going on at Merton! As always, thank you for your support, and know that even in the face of these changes, the need for support from you and others like you has never been greater.



Mark

Executive Committee

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Christine Hughes, Secretary

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United Way
of Coastal Fairfield County

TMC Staff

Mark Grasso – Director & V.P. Catholic Charities
Janet Barker – Office Manager
Lorraine Kelley – Cook
Lindsay Rivera – Security
Debbie Stokes – Program Coordinator – St. Stephen's Food Pantry
Anthony Walton – Case Management Leader
Christina Wills – Case Manager/Programs Supervisor

Pancakes and Sausage

Volunteer Team Prepares and Serves Special Breakfast

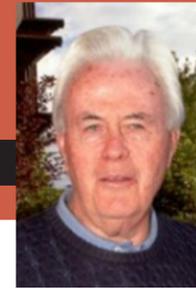
A mission team of volunteers from New Vision Ministries of Bridgeport prepares and serves a breakfast of pancakes and sausage to the guests of The Thomas Merton Center on the third Saturday of each month. The team has been providing this service for more than three years. Lorraine Kelley, the Merton

Center cook and a member of New Vision Ministries, said the volunteers enjoy “a wonderful relationship with the guests” and the guests enjoy a wonderful breakfast. During Christmas and Easter holidays, she said, New Vision Ministries offers religious services for those who wish to attend.



Volunteers from New Vision Ministries are, standing from left to right, Carolyn Banks, Lorraine Kelley, Ruby Brooks, Nora Roberts, Roberto Serrano, and Larry Murchinson. Seated, left to right, are Arthalia Davis, Jacqueline Jarrett, Liz Smith, and Sharon Rose.

In Memoriam



Joseph E. Mulcahy, a member of the Merton Center board of directors since 2008 and for two years its chairman, died last month at the age of 77. He was also a member of the board of directors of Catholic Charities. Joe grew up in Brooklyn, had a distinguished career with the Xerox Corporation, and was widely admired for his generosity and good heart. He is survived by his wife, Anne, five children and five grandchildren. Joe will be sorely missed. *Requiescat in pace.*

Award Granted

The **Norma F. Pfriem Foundation** awarded a grant of \$25,000 to the Thomas Merton Center to help underwrite the purchase of food and the cost of maintenance and building repairs at the Merton Center's headquarters. From left to right are Paul Miller, who presented the check, owner of Miller Nissan in Fairfield and a trustee of the Pfriem Foundation; his son, Kyle; Jane Ellen Collins, chairperson of the Thomas Merton Center advisory board, and Mark Grasso, Merton Center director and vice president of Catholic Charities.



Merton Center Staffers: Loving Thy Neighbor

My name is Christina Wills and I'm the Case Manager/Programs Supervisor at The Thomas Merton Center. My job includes facilitating support groups, supervising the dining room, and interacting with our guests, seeking to assess needs and provide help when possible through referral or coordination with community service programs.

I facilitate a Prayer Support Group, which I organized 20 years ago, and a Women's Group. The Prayer Group meets for one hour three days a week.

It's a community of warmth, love, and acceptance, inspired by scripture, the writings of Thomas Merton, and the work of my favorite poet, Rumi. I also facilitate the Women's Group whose awe-inspiring members meet weekly. Given what they've gone through, these women are incredibly supportive and loving of each other, choosing light over darkness.

Finally, as floor supervisor I focus on our gift of hospitality to everyone who comes through our doors. When our guests feel welcome, they respond in kind, helping themselves and others to heal and recover. But job descriptions don't mean that much at The Thomas Merton Center. Each staff member has plunged a toilet, washed dishes, mopped floors. All in a day's work of loving thy neighbor.

Christina Wills

Support the **Rock Out Hunger** concert with the Mill River Band at the Fairfield Theater Company on Friday, Nov. 22, for the benefit of the Merton Center. A pre-concert Reception will be held at 6:30 with the concert following at 8:30.

