

Reflections on a Day of Giving

Actually, it was for only a few hours. But it was an exhilarating exercise on behalf of the one hundred donors to Voice of Compassion - Bridgeport Fund. All 250 members of Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport can be deeply gratified by the simple act of philanthropy that took place on Monday morning, September 8, 2003. Mary Jane Range, Affiliate Treasurer and Fund Chair, Joe O'Callaghan, Affiliate Chair, and Jim Alvord, Fund Committee member and VOTF Regional Coordinator were exceedingly proud to represent the VOC of VOTF and submit financial support to two groups aligned with Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, Inc.

Not accustomed to distributing thousand dollar checks (let alone those to the amount of \$2,500.00 each), the meetings with the charitable organizations were humbling experiences. The recipient for The Thomas Merton Center was Director Maryann Furlong. Accepting for Family Stages was Director Maria Reyes-Medina. Both organizations are located in Bridgeport and both exhibited dire need and grateful appreciation for the donations.

The Thomas Merton Center was founded in 1974 by a group of concerned individuals who saw a need for services to the economically disadvantaged people in the city of Bridgeport. The Center is located in a former church with other services available in adjacent or nearby buildings. "Feed the hungry" was the initial effort but time and circumstance have demanded other concerns, such as a medical clinic affiliated with St. Vincent's Hospital, women's groups, men's groups, family support, after school programs, prayer groups, shower facilities, and literacy volunteers. Housing support has been a continuing effort and job opportunity and preparation are ongoing concerns. A paid chef augmented by 200 volunteers oversees weekday breakfast and lunch. There is a paid staff of about seventeen for all services. In the course of the tour, it appeared that the VOC monies would be very well spent.

Family Stages is located in the building that houses the city's Health Department and provides housing and support services to pregnant and post-partum women with substance abuse and mental health problems in the greater Bridgeport area. The agency is funded by grants awarded by the federal Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to a partnership of Catholic Charities, the City of Bridgeport and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The Director indicated that the check presented was significant. Most monies are achieved through the efforts of a New York grants consultant contracted for that purpose. The agency has approximately ten paid staff in a rent-free space.

The Merton Center has a budget of \$800,000 per year. The diocese through Catholic Charities supports The Center to the amount of \$100,000 (or 12 1/2%). St. Stephen's Food Pantry, claimed as a separate charity of Catholic Charities, is actually under the umbrella of The Merton Center. Family Stages is not in any way (or 0%) financially supported by Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, Inc. The chart on the diocesan website does not offer percentages of monetary distribution to the individual charities it supports other than income and expense percentages. These are indicated by asterisk (*) below for the most recent fiscal year from July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002. Full financial disclosure is important if the principles of transparency and accountability, enunciated by the bishops at their conference last year, are to be observed.

The third check for \$2,500.00 is slated for the Queen of Clergy home for retired priests but has yet to be delivered due to communications problems. The "joy of giving" will continue with the distribution of this check from Voice of Compassion - Bridgeport Fund. The outcome of this gift will be made known when it happens. The Voice of Compassion - Bridgeport Fund balance presently stands at approximately \$2,620.00 and is open to donations from members whenever the Spirit moves with loving compassion for the less advantaged.

Keep the Faith. Change the Church. Be attentive to the Spirit.

(*) Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, Inc. FY 2002

Reference: <http://www.cffc-ct.org/annualreport.htm>

Revenues by Source

7.4%	Contributions
4.0%	Grant Income
12.1%	Fundraisers
5.7%	Service Revenue
46.1%	Diocese of Bridgeport
8.4%	Program Revenue
9.5%	United Way
0.1%	Other Revenue
6.8%	Contributions In-Kind

Total \$10,651,490

Expenses by Service Type

17.7%	Behavioral Health
28%	Social Services/Workfare Program
24%	Food Services
20.5%	Central Services
9.8%	Family Services

Total \$9,648,946