



# BLESSINGS

OUR LADY OF MERCY COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICES, INC.

Spring 2009

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## We Are Celebrating 20 Years of Ministry

In 1989, Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach Services, Inc. began reaching out to the residents of the Sea Islands who struggle with the burdensome effects of poverty in their lives. From its simple beginnings in a small home office the Outreach has grown to include a multi-purpose building, education center and newly completed wellness center. From serving the emergency needs of 2,000 people in the first year, the Outreach organization last year reached over 11,000 residents through the direct outreach services program, 385 adults and children through the educational programs, and 2,815 patient visits/services through the Wellness program.

Jakki Jefferson, an original staff member, is “amazed at the growth of services as well as the number of partners who collaborate with us in providing services”.

Sister Carol remembers the small storage room and now “marvels at the expanded food pantry and the on-going generosity of so many donors”. “The Outreach is like having a good, faithful friend”, says Amy, a former farm worker who moved from receiving services to volunteering and now is an employee of a state agency which networks with the Outreach. Claudia, an employee of another one of our partners, Charleston County Adult Education, is pleased to have young adults who “consistently attend classes and enjoy coming to a place where they feel respected”. During the dedication

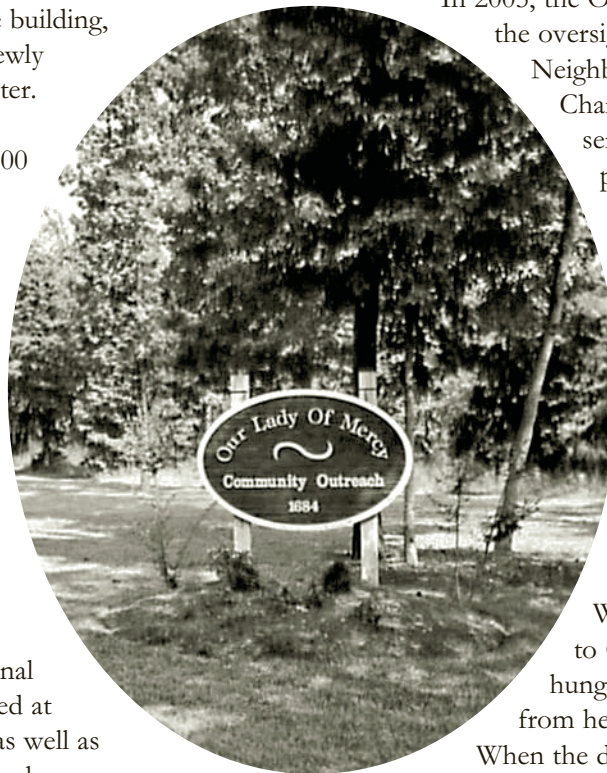
ceremony of the new Wellness Center, Allen Carroll, CEO of St. Francis Hospital remarked that he and the employees of St. Francis “take great pride in supporting the Women’s Health and Pre-natal programs”.

In 2005, the Outreach Board accepted the oversight challenge of the Neighborhood House in Charleston, where emergency services, education programs and a daily soup kitchen serve the neighborhood community. This ministry has its roots as a ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy and the Outreach and the Sisters are energizing it with new life and vision.

When the Israelites called to God for relief from hunger, copious manna fell from heaven meeting their needs.

When the disciples of Jesus asked, “How do we feed the multitude?”, Jesus told them to share what they had and to their amazement, it was enough for all. The Outreach experiences these miracles of generosity every day!

“God acts in mysterious ways, his wonders to behold!” was a favorite prayer of Christopher, an elderly James Island resident who graciously welcomed us to his home after Hurricane Hugo. Now Christopher’s words, sounding from his home in heaven, remind us of the wondrous works, bountiful goodness of God and all God’s people who have blessed us for 20 years and counting!



## LETTER FROM THE Director



**“Facing the Challenges Ahead”**

The economic pressures of these times greatly affect those served by the Outreach. While some of us temper our wants and adjust saving plans, our neighbors who experience poverty find themselves with less of the basic necessities of life. Residents who have never come for assistance before are humbly asking for help just to survive and their numbers are increasing daily.

The growing number of requests for essential needs is a great challenge to the Outreach. We are asking for your support and in a spirit of accountability we share with you our plans. Our Board of Directors has reviewed and revised our present Long Range Strategic Plan. Financial projections require even greater monitoring of our expenses and our present budget process reflects these efforts. All of our staff are on board as we cross-train and share responsibilities in cost-saving measures. Development and all it implies is our number one goal.

From the beginning, we have suggested that the recipients of our services, if they are able, donate within their means. As we strive to address growing needs, we are again encouraging a spirit of mutuality and our experience is, as it has been, that people want to help others too. Often the recipients of Outreach services volunteer their time and share their own unique talents to strengthen the mission.

Our Director of Development, Griff Hogan, offers an explanation in this newsletter of our efforts toward sustaining the mission. The “Circle of Blessings”, our annual giving program and the “Sisters’ Circle”, an innovative planned giving program are reviewed.

As we reach out to you, our partners in the community, we trust in your understanding and know you will help as is appropriate for you. One of the greatest blessings of our 20 years of service is your outstanding involvement and generosity. We ask for your continued prayers and support as we face the challenges of these unique times.

*Sister Mary Joseph*

## Education Is The Key



Around the Outreach, May is the month of celebrating many achievements in education. 35 adults will be recognized for their accomplishments in learning English as their second language. 12 young adults will complete a year long study of literacy skills in math, language arts and social studies in preparation for the high school equivalency exam and a better position in the workplace. 85 learners in the evening class sessions will receive certificates acknowledging their advancement of one or two levels in English proficiency. 26 elementary students will “graduate” to the next

grade thanks to the faithful assistance of 18 homework buddies in the after school program.

The Outreach Staff and many Volunteers believe that “Education is the Key” to personal growth and development. A good education also establishes the framework for healthier, productive communities. From health classes, focusing on nutrition and exercise to parenting sessions, strengthening the basic foundations of the family, local participants gather at the Outreach every day seeking skills for their lives.

Several members of the staff also participate in local community organizations and school programs that support the education of children and adults. We celebrate the hard work and achievements of all the students, young and older alike, served by the Outreach! Happy summer and see you in the fall!

## Childhood Learning Center

*“Sometimes looking into a classroom is a bit like looking into a beehive: the uninformed visitor might see lots of bees moving in many directions with no apparent logic, but the beekeeper knows what each bee is doing and how an activity fits within the over-all pattern.”*

*By Denise Cronen, Child Learning Center Director*

At the Outreach we run such a hive! It is known as the Childhood Learning Center, part of the Family Literacy Program that runs four days a week. This year we have about 25 children ranging in age from 3 months to 5 years old. Because parents and teachers play a very important role in child development we feature a weekly activity that allows parents and their children to work together. We call it “Lapsit”. As part of the adult Family Literacy Program the students of the Child Learning Center and their parents learn together for at least one hour per week. The mothers learn to read and the children learn that books are fun. During Lapsit, parents have their child “sit on their lap” while a member of the staff reads a book to the families. They practice each story for one month, eventually allowing the parents to take on the book reading task on their own. The success of Lapsit is that it increases the frequency of parents reading and telling stories to their child. It also improves the parent’s ability to help their children in school. Lastly, it helps parents realize the importance of reading to their children; learning that reading develops speech and comprehension skills while fostering a love of reading. The Lapsit experience combines the power of a relationship with the power of language. We know that early intervention is the key to success in our young learners. We are glad to be part of this initiative at OLM Outreach.



*Denise Cronen and students.*

\*Footnote. As this article was written, the Charleston County Adult Education Office received word that as of June 30th, the State grant entitled “First Steps” (a 3 year grant) will not be continued. This greatly impacts the Outreach Family Literacy Program as this program was selected to receive grant funding of \$33,000. yearly for 3 years. The Outreach, in partnership with Charleston County Adult Ed., has the reputation of being one of the finest “Family Literacy” programs in the state. We hope this decision can be reversed quickly.

## FAMILY Literacy Program

*By Brenda Montiel, Family Literacy Instructor*

The Family Literacy Program is an educational program intended to increase English proficiency in speakers of different languages. Our goal is to facilitate the assimilation to the American culture by providing our students with a multitude of diverse classes in the areas of health, parenting, life skills, conversation, civics and more, while they are learning English.

It is often difficult for one to understand the difficulties a limited English speaker may face with everyday tasks. Our mission is to help alleviate some of the anxiety caused by these stressful situations. Students work on English acquisition through the use of real-life scenarios and exposure.

The Outreach provides appropriate educational materials of books, tapes and conversation guides made available through grant funds. The participants themselves also contribute financially what they can and often prepare home-cooked treats for the class group. In partnership with Charleston County Adult Education, a thorough placement and evaluation testing system is in place. We can proudly note that all of the students have achieved at least one level above their original placement!

At this time our population of students is mostly from countries of Mexico, Latin America and Central America such as Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, among others. Many of our students have given testimony on how they are now able to do many things they thought they would never have the skill to do. They share that now they help handle household business matters, attend a conference with their child's teacher without the help of an interpreter, order at Subway, and communicate with medical personnel.

*We are proud of all our students!*

## “Yes, I Can” After School Homework Program

*By Sister Carol, Education Coordinator*

The yellow school bus stops at the driveway of the Outreach and out come 26 youngsters. They race to the door and greet their Homework Buddies, get their snack and settle in to their spaces for homework time. The after school homework program assists children from Angel Oak Elementary School, Haut Gap Middle School and Nativity School. A dedicated group of volunteers enthusiastically assist the children with their assignments as well as skill building exercises in reading and math. Although the children have already spent seven hours in school they really love coming to the Outreach for an extra hour of learning. Periodic



*Homework Buddy Liz Jenkins helps Nabor with his reading.*

reviews of their report cards and progress reports indicate that the extra time spent at the Outreach is very beneficial to the students.

## Summer Program '09

The “Yes, I Can”! Summer Enrichment Program will be held July 13-31, 2009. Each summer the program helps twenty four children enjoy reading, arts and crafts, math and science. We offer a wide variety of activities for the children



and they even get to build their own bookcase! This program relies on many volunteers so if you would like to be a Reading Buddy, Math Professor, arts and crafts helper or assist with serving lunch, please call Sister Carol. “We get to find the states on the large map and I learned the capitals too”, says one of last year's student participants. The theme of this year's camp will be “The Earth, Our Friend.”

*Come join in the fun and excitement of partnering with eager young minds as they explore and enjoy new knowledge and experiences.*

## ENGLISH as a Second Language

*by Katie Young, ESL Program Instructor*

You always hear the staff and volunteers say, “the students have taught me more than I could ever teach them,” and never have truer words been spoken.

Recently, one of the English as a Second Language students expressed her appreciation towards the Outreach in an unexpected gesture of generosity. This student, who asked to remain anonymous, has only been in this country for six months and came to the Outreach with the hope of learning English to help her family. She has been actively looking for a job since her arrival, but because of the hard economic times, was finding her efforts fruitless.

Finally, she got an interview and got a job! When she came to tell us the great news she also told us that she had promised her first paycheck to Our Lady of Mercy



*ESL students working with the Rosetta Stone language software*

Outreach if she got the job. She was so touched by the mission of the Outreach that she decided to give her paycheck to help the English as a Second Language Program despite the financial hardships facing her family. She continues to study English in the evening classes at the Outreach while working full-time. She is a constant reminder of selflessness during these difficult economic times.

## Life Skills

*By Deborah Harnish, LSW*

Each Friday, a group of students meet at the Outreach to discuss important issues facing each of us...things like parenting, health & exercise, budgeting, dieting, current events, and so much more. Many guest speakers have come through our doors, blessing us with their knowledge about topics such as medication safety, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, financial planning, voter registration, and even local political issues like the recent smoke-free ordinance and ongoing debate about the extension of I-526 through James and Johns Islands. Each session is concluded with a delicious lunch provided by The Mustard Seed Restaurant on Maybank Highway. We are thankful for their ongoing support! Many of those attending the Life Skills

classes have participated in the emergency direct services program. They chose to come to classes to further develop their personal skills and strengthen their self-esteem. "Life Skills class time always gives me a chance to think about new ways of managing my life!" comments one participant. Often there is laughter and conversation flowing freely as we recognize our own mishaps and blunders as good learning experiences. Other times, there are tears and supportive silence as we share personal struggles and help each other through the rough spots. But, at the end of each 10-week session held in the Spring and Fall, there is always a profound sense of gratitude for the opportunity to learn and grow through our work together.

## New Wellness Center Up and Running!

*By Annette Moranville  
Wellness House Director*

What an awesome opening! It is more than just a new Wellness Center—it is a place where the mission of Our Lady of Mercy Outreach is alive and well!

We celebrated the opening with a blessing of the building by Bishop David Thompson of the Diocese of Charleston. Donors, community members, volunteers and staff joined together in December for the special day. The 20 dentists who volunteer were honored on February 12th with an evening celebration sponsored by Patterson Dental Supply. The students of local schools provided the lovely artwork that hangs on the walls throughout the new building. They too were celebrated on February 25th along with their art teachers and Pat Van deGraaf who matted and framed all of the paintings.

The spaciousness of the building allows us to increase services to the Island residents. Health education for the community is the primary focus developed through the dental, women's health, pre-natal and wellness services.

Since July of 2008, the Center, in collaboration with Roper/St. Francis and MUSC has provided on-going pre-natal care through 1027 patient visits and women's health services to 107 local residents. Over 1951 dental patients have received treatment which included 6416 procedures.

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**The opening of the new Wellness Center is the new beginning of a journey that will create a health and wellness center for the entire community.**

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## The Neighborhood House

Our Lady of Mercy Outreach "Neighborhood House", located at 77 America Street in downtown Charleston, serves a hot lunch daily to 150 plus local residents. In the one month of April, 3650 meals were served with approximately 300 volunteers assisting each month. Directed by Sister Pat Keating, the Neighborhood House has a long history of providing a safe haven for downtown residents to gather and receive a nourishing meal. Food supplies, financial assistance and clothing are available in emergency situations. Several educational programs of health and wellness, parenting, sewing and literacy are conducted each week. Recently, the Neighborhood House was selected as a recipient of "Feed the Need", a program organized by the Manager of the Charleston Grill. Restaurants volunteer once a month to prepare and serve a healthy meal! "This is a real treat for our guests", says Sister Pat.

*The Neighborhood House serves a hot lunch daily to 150 plus local residents and assists with emergency needs.*



*Participants of the Senior Citizens Program at the Neighborhood House enjoy a field trip to Johns Island.*

# DEVELOPMENT and PLANNING *for the Future*

*By Griff Hogan, Director of Development*

During the past year, the Outreach established the “Circle of Blessings”, a group of friends of the Outreach who support our work with an annual contribution of \$1,000 or more if they choose. Donors may designate their yearly gift to a specific program – education, health/wellness or emergency services or make their contribution without restriction. This “annual giving program” invites our donors to form a circle of sustainability around the Outreach and our neighbors in the local community.

When the Outreach began in 1989, the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy made a planned gift from funds of their religious community designated to charitable giving. The interest from this contribution helps to support the ongoing administrative costs and initially gave the Outreach the opportunity to grow. The “Sisters’ Circle” is a program

*... donors to form a circle of sustainability around the Outreach and our neighbors in the local community.*

modeled on this gift to support the mission of the Outreach by making a “Planned Gift”.

The Outreach is a 501©3 non-profit whose services to those in need are provided without regard to color,

disability, national origin, race, or religion. Staff members from different religious denominations create an environment rich in diversity where the mission of respectful service to others drives their mutual efforts.

There are numerous, creative ways to participate in planned giving. As Director of Development, I am pleased to meet with you individually and explore options with you. You can contact me at 559-4109 or [griff.hogan@olmoutreach.org](mailto:griff.hogan@olmoutreach.org).



## “GOING GREEN” and Staying Connected

We are happy to provide you with the Newsletter via e-mail. Please contact the office and share your e-mail address with Margaret at 559-4109 - or e-mail us at [info@olmoutreach.org](mailto:info@olmoutreach.org)

The WEB SITE ([www.olmoutreach.org](http://www.olmoutreach.org)) is constantly changing so stay connected and informed. We also WELCOME your suggestions.

### Special points of interest:

- Each week 65 volunteers provide support assistance to the Outreach staff.
- We are collecting new toiletry items for families who come to work in the fields during the spring and summer months. Shampoo, toothpaste, brushes, soap and deodorant are all needed.
- Summer time also means that families will be preparing for the new school year! The Outreach offers school supplies as assistance and welcomes your donations of notebooks, pens, pencils, crayons, construction paper, etc!
- A Craft Fair, celebrating local artisans, will be held on October 17 in honor of the 20th Anniversary of the Outreach! Lots of handmade crafts, fun for all age groups and good food will make for a festive day of celebration. Look for further information on the Web Site in the days ahead.

### Craft Fair



## Welcoming the Stranger

By Sister Mary Joseph

The first time I visited one of the migrant camps on Johns Island I was struck by the extreme poverty and living conditions. Families were in cramped quarters with one mattress on the floor and no ventilation. The common bath facilities and kitchen areas were located in the center of the camp, away from the individual dwellings. A young mother greeted me with a broad smile and a greeting of welcome “Bienvenidos!” Annette, director of the Wellness Center and I had come to let the residents know we were bringing medical personnel to offer health screening the following week. Behind the woman’s smile, I saw an exhausted body and spirit. Her grateful expression of thanks for the sheets and towels we brought made me more aware of her many desperate needs.

Migrant farm workers travel from place to place, in difficult working conditions on farms for little pay. They make it possible for our families to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. Their lives are in constant motion with little security or hope of a better day. Most of the families visit the Outreach for food and clothing before they settle at the camp. Every year the Wellness Center Staff visits the camps, bringing health information, screenings and arranging for follow-up care when possible.

The children of farm workers represent an extreme example of a larger population in American society, where one out of five children lives below the poverty line. The “system” that brings food to our tables too often brings suffering and hardship to many. We ask you to join us in supporting their **need for food items, toiletry supplies, linens and recreational equipment for the children.** Many of the families tell us they return to the Islands because of the support they experience through the many service organizations. Help us welcome them as our sisters and brothers.



*Mark Dickson, Director of Mission for St. Francis Hospital, distributes fruit to the farm workers.*



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