

IN Formation - Vocation SCNJ

E-NEWSLETTER OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF SAINT ELIZABETH
WINTER 2016



How Hearts Can Build a Home

On August 29th, 2005, "America's Favorite City" of New Orleans, Louisiana was devastated by the infamous Hurricane Katrina. More than 80% of the city was underwater after Katrina hit, which resulted in leaving families with massive destruction. Today, it is estimated that over 6,000 New Orleans native families are still without homes. To combat the obliteration caused by Katrina, the St. Bernard Project was created in hopes to return families to their homes. The organization has rebuilt over 615 homes in the last ten years and promises to continue this progress. The St. Bernard Project uses the hardworking hands of volunteers to rebuild homes for these families that have lost everything. For many of the volunteers, it is their first time working on a construction site, but they are eager to learn in order to bring a family back to their home. New Jersey women from the Morristown area were given the opportunity to lend their hands to the St. Bernard Project. Sister Maryanne Tracey of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, Convent Station, accompanied two College of Saint Elizabeth students, Catherine Bialkowski and Alexis Lerner, to New Orleans in early January.

From January 4th-January 9th, Bialkowski, Lerner, and Tracey were housed in the House of Charity on Cambronne Street, New Orleans. At the house, there were other women from around the country who were connected with the Sisters of Charity. The entire group worked together on a house for homeowner Pamela Marshall who had met with the group to explain her story from Katrina. Extremely motivated by the homeowner, the ladies worked three seven hour shifts throughout the week. Marshall's house was still in the beginning stages



(l to r) Sister Maryanne Tracey, Alexis Lerner and Catherine Bialkowski pose in front of the house that they were helping to rebuild.

and much labor had to be accomplished. Hard work such as putting up drywall and mudding the seams had to be completed in order to move on to the next



construction phase. By the end of the week, the drywall was finished and most of the mudding had been done.

Although the work was difficult, it gave the women an eye-opening experience that they would never forget. With the strength of God in their hearts, these women dedicated their own time for building a stranger's home. Marshall was overwhelmed at the number of volunteers who took time out of their everyday lives to help bring light to the end of her tunnel. Catherine, Alexis, and Sister Maryanne agree that the trip to New Orleans was a life-changing experience that would remain in their hearts and memories forever.

Alexis Lerner - College of Saint Elizabeth, '18

Statistics from: <http://www.stbernardproject.org/new-orleans.html>



Sister Beverly Policastro gives her third grade students the new coloring book of Mother Xavier. The books are available to anyone in the Congregation. Just call Sister Maryanne Tracey at 973-290-5382 or email her at mtracey@scnj.org



Two new faces are gracing Saint Clare's Hall at the Motherhouse. Sheila Tracy (left) is the Program Director for the newly developed Choose Charity Volunteer Ministry. She will be reaching out to women ages 18 to 50 to see if they would like to live in our local communities and volunteer in some of our ministries.

Sarah Walsh (right) is a senior at Fairleigh Dickinson University and will be assisting the Vocation/Formation Team with Social Media.

We are very happy to have these women join us in the Mission of Charity.

Lessons from the 2015 Vincentian Family Gathering

My name is Veronica Mupazviriwo and I am an international student from Zimbabwe. I am a senior, studying Business Administration with a minor in Computer Science, at the College of Saint Elizabeth.

This October, I had a wonderful opportunity to attend the 2015 Vincentian Family Gathering that was held in Denver, Colorado. The theme of this gathering was "Going Deeper: Building Community and Collaboration for Systematic Change Around Homelessness."

As one of the speakers said, "Imagine a world where it is illegal to sit down. Could you survive if there were no place you were allowed to fall asleep, to store your belongings, or stand still?" This question challenged me to identify with the plight of the homeless, who find themselves with no place to lie down. In many cities throughout the U.S. homelessness is criminalized. Homeless people are criminally punished for being in public, even if they have no other alternatives. They are arrested for "camping" in public, sleeping in public, begging in public, loitering, and sleeping in vehicles.

Research has shown that criminalization of homelessness is not only ineffective in addressing homelessness, but it is even more costly than providing housing to homeless people. One of the examples that stood out for me was that in 2013, the Utah Housing and Community Development Division reported that the annual cost of emergency room visits and jail stays for an average homeless person was \$16,670 whilst providing an apartment and a social worker costs only \$11,000.

It is evident that criminalization is not the answer; there is need for constructive solutions to end homelessness. There is need for increased investment in affordable housing. There is need for policy changes around the issue of homelessness. At this gathering, we discussed four main steps that lead to systemic change:

Engagement → Care-Coordination → Service Integration → Systematic Change →

Once we become engaged in trying to find solutions to end



homelessness, there is need for us to work in collaboration with other organizations that are doing the same work. Often, we find that organizations tend to work in isolation, so that the services provided are not coordinated and lack integration. Once we collaborate, we become a force working in unison to combat homelessness. It is critical to engage with the homeless in order to know what their needs are, not to assume them. Systemic change will come when we engage other organizations, policy makers, volunteers and the homeless themselves.

Overall, attending the 2015 Vincentian Family Gathering was an invaluable experience for me. I learned a lot of new information about homelessness. I was inspired to educate others on these issues and to continue to do my part in bringing positive change. I found the Vincentian Family warm and welcoming and savvy in their efforts to bring systematic change around homelessness and other issues. This was a great experience indeed!

Veronica Mupazviriwo (pictured center in photo above)
College of Saint Elizabeth, '16

Post Script: In addition to Veronica attending the Vincentian Family gathering, Nicole Ayala, Chairperson of the Vocation Advisory Board and new Associate, together with Sisters Ellen Dauwer (pictured left), Roberta Feil and Margaret Welch (pictured right) also attended.

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