



Justice & Outreach Ministries Fiscal Year Report: July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

Thank you to all of our generous donors and volunteers who gave of their time, talent, and treasure last fiscal year to help families in need within our parish and in the surrounding community! This report aims to provide transparency about how donations were spent and whom we assist. If you are interested in learning more, **please contact Julie DeMareo, Pastoral Assistant for Justice and Outreach at jdemareo@christourlight.net.**

“Helping Hands” account donations:

Funds in this account come from the annual parish budget, Poor Box donations, and individual parishioner donations intended specifically for charitable works. Donations were spent on the following forms of assistance to benefit both parishioners and non-parishioners living in the community near COL:

- 49 nights in local motels for emergency housing assistance for chronically unhoused people
- \$1,466 for partial rent assistance
- \$1,440 in Wawa gift cards for gas assistance
- \$8,650 in grocery store gift cards for assistance in buying produce/dairy/meat/baby needs/special dietary items
- \$2,004.87 spent at grocery stores on non-perishable items to restock parish food pantry staples
- \$3,050 in Walmart gift cards for household necessities (back-to-school shopping, clothing, cleaning supplies, etc.)
- \$3,601 for miscellaneous bill assistance (utilities, prescriptions, car repairs/insurance, home repairs, transportation needs, storage unit for chronically unhoused people, etc.)
 - **Thank you to Parish Nurse Leslie Skolnik and the Chair Yoga participants** whose freewill offering contributes to the cash portion of this fund.

Justice and Outreach Ministry volunteer activities:

The parish food pantry met 162 food assistance requests. Individuals and families in need are permitted to access our parish food pantry up to twice a month. To accommodate each request, our twelve food pantry volunteers pack several bags full of non-perishable staples such as cereal, peanut butter, jelly, canned fruit and vegetables, beans, rice, pasta, pasta sauce, soup, toilet paper, and laundry detergent.

- Thank you to **Mt. Laurel Scout Troop 76** for their generous “Scouting for Food” drive donation in November 2024.
- Thank you to the **Diocese of Camden** for providing our pantry with a \$1,500 Rice Bowl grant to purchase food in Spring 2025.

The **Helping Hands Transportation Ministry** provided 37 total rides for parishioners to help them access employment, groceries, medical appointments, and other necessary errands in the local community. They also sent greeting cards to homebound parishioners during the holidays.

The **15th Annual Mitzvah Day**, our parish-wide day of service, was held on October 19, 2024.

- 101 individuals participated, in addition to several groups: Mrs. Hatch's 6th, 7th, and 8th grade RCS religious classes, RCS Girl Scout Troop 30311, Christ Our Light Boy Scout Troop 70, the COL 1st grade EFF class, and the Servus Dei prayer group.
- Service projects happened at parishioner homes, in our Parish Center, and out in the community. Project sites included Palmyra Cove, Saddler's Woods, Good Counsel Home, Ronald McDonald House, Joseph's House, Cathedral Kitchen, the Cherry Hill Food Bank, and Kids Alley.
- Parishioners gathered at home and in the Parish Center to make sandwiches for Joseph's House, Cathedral Kitchen, St. Bart's, and Last Stop in Camden. Volunteers decorated placemats, assembled hundreds of utensil packets, and donated winter clothing to unhoused individuals at several local shelters.
- We also collected and sorted donated goods for the Animal Welfare Association in Voorhees and created crafts for four local nursing homes where we serve Catholic residents.
- 65 handbags were filled with personal toiletries to donate to residents at local women's shelters such as Volunteers of America.

In November, **RCS classes created Thanksgiving meal baskets for 21 local families** in need and parishioners donated over **45 frozen turkeys, hams, and casseroles** to help others enjoy a festive holiday dinner.

The Fair Trade Committee, led by Betty Atkins and her extended family, coordinated our **15th Annual Fair Trade Holiday Sale** to support artisans and farmers around the world to help them get a fair wage for their work. Proceeds from the bake sale, basket raffle, and holiday wrapping table totaled \$3,832. The funds were donated to Beyond Borders to sponsor a family in Haiti and to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in Los Angeles to support wildfire relief efforts.

In December, **56 families** received Christmas gifts through the **“Adopt-a-Family” Christmas gift program**. That number represents over 95 children and grandchildren served. 68 parish families contributed to this effort by sponsoring gifts for an entire family or by donating via check or gift cards. Hundreds of tags were taken off the **Giving Tree** to provide diapers, clothing and toys to families served by Guadalupe Family Services.

The **“Gifts for Baby Jesus” Christmas Eve collection** resulted in many donations of diapers, wipes, and clothing/blankets/toys that were distributed among Good Counsel Home in Riverside, First Way in Collingswood, and Helpers of God's Precious Infants in Gloucester City in January 2025.

In May, the **Kentucky service immersion team** consisted of 21 participants, our largest group ever! The team of 12 returning and 9 new participants spent one week at the end of May assisting with home repair and community service projects in Eastern Kentucky. Our partnership with St. Vincent Mission has continued since the first parish service trip there in 2015.

The **Care for Creation Team** created a new webpage on the Christ Our Light website with information on recycling, energy consumption, energy saving tips, environmental hazards and simple water saving tips. They held their first ever “Green Kitchen” Swap on May 1, where parishioners cleaned out their kitchens of new or seldom used items and swapped them with each other. The past

two years they have had a team of volunteers taking a large number of donations to the Animal Welfare Association (AWA). Christ Our Light was again part of the Clean Ocean Action Beach Sweeps at Palmyra Cove that occurred in spring and fall at over 80 sites in New Jersey to clean up trash from our beaches. The team continues to coordinate the parish's Trex Challenge to collect 1,000 lbs. of recyclable plastic within a year. Christ Our Light has already earned three benches which parishioners can enjoy outside of the Parish Center. Since the team started collecting plastic, they have helped St. Thomas Moore, the Franciscan Sisters, St. Joan of Arc, and the senior retired priests at Sacred Heart Residence reach their Trex Challenge goals. Currently, they are helping Moorestown Friends Church. In the spirit of ecumenical cooperation, our neighbor church, Universalist Unitarian Church, has been a partner collecting plastic from the beginning of this sustainability initiative.

The **Leisure Club** is the largest outreach ministry at Christ Our Light, with over 170 members. Anyone over 50 years of age is welcome to join! They meet on the 2nd Tuesday from September through May and provide food and programs at each meeting. The programs vary from senior-related topics to guest entertainment and education. Members made sandwiches for Joseph's House as a Lenten Service Project and donated money to the Cherry Hill Food Pantry, the Sisters of St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center and to St. Mary's Parish and the Catholic Community of Christ Our Light. They also coordinated ~6 day trips to local places of interest and a 4 day overnight trip to Lake George, Lake Placid, and Saratoga Springs, NY.

The casserole ministry team led by Phyllis Sanders donated **350 homemade casseroles to Joseph's House**, in addition to other food staples such as coffee, tea, sugar, Splenda, creamer, baked goods, snacks, water and drinks, clothing, socks, shoes, and luggage.

Nancy Denton continued to coordinate our parish **Fair Trade-Certified Co-Op** by ordering coffee, tea, and other food items throughout the year from Equal Exchange so that parishioners could access Fair-Trade certified food products.

The **Caregivers Support Group** meets twice a month on Thursday afternoons and "**To Live Again**," a grief support group, meets weekly on Monday evenings. Both groups are wonderful, supportive groups that are always open to new members looking for a community that understands these unique life experiences "To Live Again" averages 10-15 attendees weekly and 15-25 attendees during their social gatherings.

The **Eucharistic Ministers to the Homebound** consist of six Sunday teams and one midweek team. Together, 35 volunteers complete 24 visits each week, which adds up to 1,200 visits each year

Eucharistic Ministry teams serve weekly at four local nursing homes/rehab facilities: Arden Courts, Barclays, Autumn Lake (formerly Dwellside), and The Addision (formerly Spring Hills) to provide Communion and companionship.

The **COL sandwich makers** have made 400-1200 sandwiches per month over the past year, at home and in person! They have been making sandwiches since November 2012 and have provided our partners in Camden well over 200,000 sandwiches in 12 years.

Our July 2024 **Blood Drive** collected 36 pints of blood, the Mitzvah Day 2024 Blood Drive collected 36 pints of blood, the MLK Day 2025 Blood Drive collected 21 pints for a yearly total of 93 pints.

The **Prayer Shawl Ministry** consists of 6-8 people meeting on the first Wednesday of the month in the Ministry Center Conference Room from 12:30-2:00 pm to knit or crochet prayer shawls and blankets to let people know how much we are praying for them. Many beautiful blankets and shawls were created, including a special donation of infant-sized blankets for the NICU bereavement staff at Virtua Voorhees Hospital. This year the ministry team also donated to VITALity Catholic Healthcare Services for the Diocese.

Four **Parish Nurses** visited many people who are in need and helped connect them to the important health resource. The nurses provided services such as attending our Caregivers Support Group twice a month, providing free Chair Yoga classes, and checking in with sick parishioners via phone calls and home visits.

Bereavement Ministers met with 72 families who lost a loved one this past year to offer consolation and help them prepare for their loved one's funeral at Christ Our Light.

A group of parishioners volunteer several times throughout the year as a part of our congregational commitment to support the **Cherry Hill Food Pantry**. The parish also collected financial donations on their behalf in October and June.

Since 2019, COL has collected toilet paper, red, black and white beans and white rice and t-shirts for the **SSJ Neighborhood Center** in Camden on the second weekend of the month. Parishioners Kathy and Steve Zippilli and Tom DeWolf transport the donations to the Center. Several of the RCS 8th graders, RCS teacher Karen Hatch, and several RCS parents help distribute the food on "pantry day" on the third Wednesday of the month, along with parishioner volunteers.