



# *Parish Heartbeats: Stories of Faith In Action*

## **An inspiring example of parish generosity.**

Are you looking for a way to celebrate the Christmas Season by sharing the gifts that God has given you?

Saint Margaret Mary Parish has had a Christmas Giving Tree Program almost since the inception of the parish. Over the years many volunteers have made this one of the most popular ministries here.

Currently a committee of six holds different responsibilities for managing the program. Mary Anderson manages the database of items needed, items collected and families to be serviced at the adopted parishes in Aurora. She has worked with this group since she retired 10 years ago.

Mary tells us she finds the prayer of St. Francis an important roadmap for following her faith. Many of you know the hymn we sing "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace". Mary says in a small way The Giving Tree program allows her to "sow love, sow hope, sow light and sow joy".

"Christmas is an important, joyful time for me and I want others, especially children, to have a joyful holiday" says Mary. "It is fun to give and while the time commitment is not too great, the rewards are". Mary points out that the committee meets 3 or 4 times during September, October and November to organize the registration program and the parishes to be gifted. The big day is Drop Off Day and that is a long, spirit-filled day with people arriving with smiles on their faces to share what God has given them.

The program has evolved over the years. In the past, the gifted families would actually come to SMMP and volunteers and donators would see the families receive their gifts. While this was an exciting event, the current program addresses far more families and their needs. Last year about 270 families in SMMP participated in the Giving Tree program. While we don't have exact figures on how many are served, the more we give creates more opportunities for families to have a meaningful Christmas.

This year unwrapped gifts and gift cards are dropped off on December 14 from 8:00am to 12:00pm. The donations are

collected, sorted and delivered to those in need.

Carol Naughton coordinates the volunteers for the drop-off day. For Carol, she volunteered nearly eight years ago when her children were small. The finite amount of time required appealed to her when her family demands were the greatest. She stays involved because so many people are helped. She reminds us that service to others isn't about your experience, but rather the experience of the served. The receiving parishes in Aurora handle our donations differently as well. One actually sets up a "store" where no money is exchanged, but based on the needs of the family each person can go in to the "store" and select gifts for their family members or themselves.

The other parish typically uses the gift cards and selects families based on their needs for the amounts and stores to redeem.

While more volunteers for the committee are always welcome, both women encourage you to get involved by making donations. Obviously, the more they receive, the more families have a brighter Christmas each year.

"Participating in The Giving Tree has enriched me as a person. I have met wonderful people (like Carol), become keenly aware of the fundamental needs of so many families, and have been inspired by the generosity of the

St. Margaret Mary parishioners" as Mary Anderson observes. This has proven to be an invaluable ministry to our parish and the parishes in Aurora we support.

**If you want to volunteer for the Drop Off Day on Saturday, December 14 or you need further information to assist you in helping this worthwhile endeavor, you can contact Tom Cordaro at 630-369-0777.**



**Parish Heartbeats is an occasional bulletin column that celebrates the ways St. Margaret Mary parishioners make a difference in the lives of others.**