

The JOSEPH HOUSE



Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary

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Dear Friends of Joseph House:

Last month the dreaded winter storm warnings took over the news for a while. Like many people, our first response was to go to the grocery store and get some milk and bread before the shelves were empty.

Sometimes this rush to the store is a bit unnecessary. Our pantry is usually pretty full and we are in no danger of going hungry over a few days. But you just never know what's going to happen.

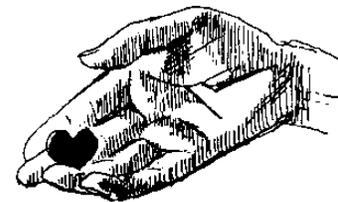
An actual food scarcity, however, is an everyday reality for a lot of people who are poor.

You may remember that last month we discussed the idea of "the desert" as not just a place but an experience of desolation and emptiness. The idea of a desert can be applied to many situations. Perhaps you haven't heard of it, but there is such a thing as a "food desert," and it's being used to understand and address the problems of people who live in poverty.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food desert as anyplace "without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease."

Food deserts can be anywhere, from urban neighborhoods to rural towns. They are certainly on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. They spread wherever people have low incomes and limited access to healthy, affordable food.

Food deserts highlight a number of key issues. These include the isolation and segregation of communities, lack of transportation, nutrition education, chronic health problems caused by diet and their effect on employment and quality of life. You can learn more about food deserts by going to this website: <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/fooddeserts>



What does love look like?

It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men.

That is what love looks like.

St. Augustine of Hippo



PRAYER REQUESTS: USE RETURN ENVELOPE OR E-MAIL TO LSJM@COMCAST.NET

O Lord, hear my prayer:

The bitterness of the cold weather drives home the need for urgency: help needs to be given now, it cannot wait.

During the extreme cold and snowy weather of the past few weeks, the Joseph House Crisis Center was open to welcome people who needed emergency assistance. Groceries were given out, hot meals were served, housing and heating bills were paid — all because of your compassion and generosity.

Nelson is retired and living on a small pension. He is able to pick up work from time to time as a truck driver to supplement his income. The tank for the oil furnace that heats his mobile home ran dry on a day when the temperature was dropping to zero. Nelson didn't have the money to get it refilled. He was able to make it through the snow to ask for help at the Crisis Center. We had a utility company deliver 100 gallons of heating oil that day. We paid the bill of \$218.

Adelia, 57, is homebound and in poor health. A monthly disability check provides her income. She called the Crisis Center with a desperate plea: her house was freezing inside. There was something wrong with the heating system, but Adelia didn't know what. With the outside temperature down to the single digits, our staff acted quickly. A repair company was called and a truck dispatched to Adelia's house. They discovered the heat pump was clogged with ice. Repairs were made and the Joseph House paid the bill of \$160.

We helped a number of people before snow and ice made driving treacherous. Here are a few stories:

Daren drove 30 miles because his house went into foreclosure. Daren has Crohn's disease and had stop working because of the severe pain he was experiencing. He qualified for disability, but the monthly check was not enough to cover his ordinary expenses. Daren has the care of his three young children. His wife left the family, and Daren believes she is mentally ill.

The least expensive rental Daren could find is an apartment in an old house. The rent will still consume 65% of his check each month. We sent \$300 to the landlord to cover the deposit so Daren and his children could get situated quickly.

Leona drove more than 40 miles to the Joseph House for help. She and her three daughters were staying in a women's shelter. They had to flee Leona's husband, who has a drug problem and was physically abusive. A court order of protection now bars him from having any contact with the family. In order to move into an apartment, Leona needed to pay off an old electric bill of \$450. She had paid \$200 from her wages, but the deadline was near. We paid the remaining \$250.

Milly, 50, was hospitalized recently for uncontrolled diabetes and a lung infection. Her health

has deteriorated to the point where she can no longer work at her job in a chicken plant. She lives alone in a trailer in a wooded area surrounded by farmland. The electricity was going to be turned off because of an unpaid bill. We sent \$179 to the utility company. Milly is looking for work and currently has no income.

Renaldo is 48. His back is killing him and he can hardly walk. He is trying to hold onto his job so he can support his two daughters. We sent \$230 to his landlord to halt Renaldo's eviction.

Your prayers and donations help the poor make it to another day. God bless you!

Old Man Winter can never put out the fire of love. And with the arrival of Spring his reign will come to an end, at least for now. Thank you for remembering the needs of the poor and those who have no other recourse but the charity of others. Winter has less of a bite when love warms the heart.

We dream of the days when the air is soft and the trees are in bud. They will come. Life is always renewed, thanks be to God. May the journey toward Easter fill you with hope and vitality. And to all children of the Emerald Isle, whether in fact or spirit, a Happy St. Patrick's Day. *Sláinte!*

Your Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary

Feast of Saint Joseph

March 19

*Joseph, the Savior rested
in your arms.
You nurtured the Bread of Life.
You protected Him so He might never want
for anything.*

*Help us to endure the cares of life
and to overcome problems of
money and health.
Keep our children going in their
search for happiness.*

*Watch over us with care,
as you did for Jesus and Mary at Nazareth.*

*Fulfill the requests that we entrust
to you today. Amen.*

Jacques Gauthier