



St. Mary Supports
PADS
LAKE COUNTY

Providing Advocacy, Dignity & Shelter

Through a global pandemic and beyond...



St. Mary PADS Changes but Carries On

Submitted by the Communications Ministry

Lake County PADS (Providing Advocacy, Dignity and Shelter), the only nonrestrictive overnight emergency shelter system in Lake County, is a quiet yet powerful network of focused and passionate missionaries who revolve around the Ghandian mantra: "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." The organization, which began as a crisis hot-line in 1972, is comprised of over 3,000 volunteers from religious groups, churches, and businesses. Its mission now encompasses more than an overnight emergency shelter, aspiring to help guests identify the barriers they are facing to get out of homelessness, then assist them in developing action steps to become independent.

Fueled by over a hundred dedicated volunteers and strong leadership, St. Mary's PADS ministry has been welcoming at least 35 guests, including children, one night a week for nearly 25 years. When Fr. Ron Lewinski became pastor of St Mary, he supported Sue and Deacon Bob Poletto's efforts to establish the parish as one of the shelter sites. Since then, a rotating squad of volunteers has prepped, cooked, greeted, provided bedding, laundered, and cleaned up after guests every Wednesday night from October through April.



As with many outreach agencies in 2020, Lake County PADS has been challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Serving over 200 guests at 15 rotating shelter sites in Lake County simply could

not continue due to state restrictions of social distancing and other safety guidelines. Despite the restrictions, Lake County PADS was determined to carry on with its mission and within two weeks the agency was able to secure safe housing for all their guests through generous offers from several hotels in Waukegan and Mundelein.

St. Mary's PADS ministry also determined to continue its mission,

even as the spacing restrictions closed its shelter site. "We tried to fit into the spacing parameters, but it just wasn't going to work, said Sue Poletto. "So we got sidelined for March and April. It was painful. We felt kind of helpless."

With the arrival of fall, the St Mary PADS brigade was eager to do something. Sue recalled how the ministry decided to meet the challenge. "We assembled the leadership team, Bob and myself, Pete and Bev Coughlin, Dick and Terry Slater, and Bob Macheck, and we all came to a resolution . . . we can't house our guests but we can sure feed them!"

The team immediately received authorization from Lake County PADS to begin delivering meals to guest families at Mundelein hotels and the word went out to the ministry volunteers at St. Mary that there was a need to create and package individually wrapped meals and desserts every Wednesday night. "The outpouring of support was immediate," said Deacon Bob Poletto. "We're so appreciative of all the families and folks who have donated dinners. Meals for God's people—we're so thankful!"

One of the groups to offer help was St. Mary's Moms. "We hadn't been gathering due to the pandemic," said ministry leader Karin Karecki. "I wasn't sure how much we could help. I called several of our ministry members and the next thing I knew we had a team of 20 volunteers! After our first meal delivery experience I had to call Sue and share with her what our guest contact said when we brought the meals, 'Oh, you're from St Mary, we're gonna have good food tonight!'"



"Of course we've gotten to know the hotel management, too," continued Sue Poletto. "They have shared with us that they're pleased to call their guests and announce, 'St. Mary is here with dinner!'" And, Sue added, "We've also found it beneficial to include sanitary items, like antiseptic wipes for our guests as part of the package."

With a bit of light at the end of the tunnel, the St. Mary PADS team eagerly anticipates a return to the feeding and housing of guests at the newly rehabbed basement of the little church. Fr. Jerry has affirmed the group's efforts and offered any support necessary to carry on the vital mission. "Once we can relax the social distancing requirements, we will go back," said site manager Pete Coughlin. "We have a lot of volunteers who have missed helping!"

Sue offered one last thought, "At the end of the day, it's all about results. Every time I go to the store and I see one of our former guests working there who has rebuilt her life, I think, 'Yes. Success! We thank God!'"

Visit the PADS page at the parish website for ways to support this important outreach ministry. Anyone interested in volunteering is invited to contact poletto@comcast.net for further details.