



The Magnifier

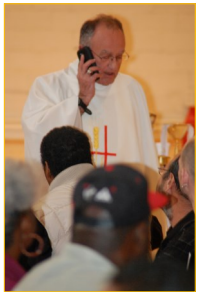
...news from Magnificat Houses

Magnificat Houses, Inc. (MHI)

Winter 2020

Our Decade with Father Frank Leaves a Legacy

When MHI's beloved chaplain announced his upcoming retirement, faces fell all around campus. **Fr. Frank Wittouck, S.C.J.**, has spent the last ten years serving the spiritual and the temporal needs of our residential community—and with a delightful flair! With one knowing glance, Father Frank brings humor to self-discovery as he counsels residents



(and often staff) through rough patches. He revels in “the pure joy of living with the poor.” He enjoys “hanging out” with his immediate neighbors in our prison release programs. He brings great depth to our jobs program, coaching residents in resume writing and interviewing, celebrating their triumphs and helping them move past disappointments. He has been known to phone Jesus.

Father Frank's wisdom was hard-won, from a tough Chicago upbringing to military chaplaincy during *Desert Storm*. As an only child in an alcoholic household, young Frank had a deep yearning for siblings to share his world. At age 14, he “ran away” to the seminary and gained 120 brothers overnight—and never looked back. He



Fr. Frank Wittouck, S.C.J.

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Department of Answered Prayers:

ADOPT-A-HOUSE Program Salutes 2nd Timers

Two **Magnificat Houses** welcomed their adoptive families in December with home cooked meals, and gratitude. The men of Bethany House—nine in all, were pleased to meet their two-year sponsors **Steve & Tricia Szymczak** for the first time. The Szymczaks dedicate their sponsorship (which includes covering meals, household expenses, repairs and operation costs) in honor of their parents Ru-

dolph and Elizabeth Szymczak and Jack and Dorothy O'Brien. **Executive Director John Boyles** officiated, as he did the following week at the Maranatha House dinner to thank second year adoptive parents **Paul and Netty Duplechain** (center couple below right). Maranatha provides home base

to men rebuilding their lives in respectable circumstances and with guidance.

The **Adopt-A-House Program** seeks new sponsors committed to helping others from the streets to independence. For more information on other houses available for adoption, please contact **Director of Development Annette Pieniazek** (below left) at apieniazek@mhihouston.org.



ABOVE: SOME OF THE MEN being sponsored during their movement toward independence, residents of Bethany House (L) and Maranatha House.



Success Story:

Big Bill Just Keeps on Winning

It starts with his winning personality—upbeat, hopeful, comedic and highly respectful of his difficult past and what he learned from it. **Bill Sommers'** great joy is helping others, whatever their needs, and sharing his journey is a big part of that. His house-mates in **Scanlan House** appreciated his openness, along with his culinary skills.



Under Bill's burly appearance lie many surprises. There's a degree in social work from **Texas Tech** in Lubbock, followed by a culinary certificate from the **American Cooking**

Academy in Dallas. And then there's his bent for acting, proven out by his *Best Monolog* award in a statewide high school drama competition, and accolades for his college role in "Come Back, Little Sheba."



Growing up in the mountains of Tennessee, Bill was shy and withdrawn especially after enduring cancer and chemotherapy at only age nine. He became a voracious reader then and, learning at his grandmother's side, he developed a lifelong passion for cook-

ing and service.

With all these advantages Bill, like so many, began exploring drugs and abusing alcohol and found himself with a 3-year prison term. There Bill took advantage of the many healing programs offered, and had his pick of four institutions for his early release. **Magnificat Houses** was his first choice—he'd heard good things from several sources.

At MHI Bill jumped right in, volunteering wherever most needed for the health of the community. Bill now resides right across from the Admissions Office where he interns as the data specialist coordinating with the **Coalition for the Homeless/Harris County** providing data needed for the countywide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Before office hours, he can be found encouraging the housing applicants waiting at our door.

Back to Winning

In December Bill Sommers won the HMIS *Super Star Award* for producing the best data quality in the Coalition. Yvette Fuentes announced his win at a countywide meeting, presenting his certificate. After that win, *of course...*

He chanced to win the door prize.



In gratitude for the
Magnificat Houses Madonna

painted by renowned fine artist

Stella Sullivan

1924 - 2017

and donated by her niece

Kay Lawler

Wondering what's up With Loaves & Fishes?

So are we! As you may know, TXDOT notified us of claiming our downtown property by eminent domain to further the extension of Highway 69. Their timetable is uncertain, so our relocation is too.



Yes, we are still in full operation at 2009 Congress. Yes, we still need your volunteer and financial help in feeding 250-350 hungry who line up daily for a hot meal, perhaps their only food of the day. Thank you!

And Miryam's Hostel?

Located above our soup kitchen, Miryam's remains in full operation as it has since 1995. Our emergency shelter for women still serves up to nine women per night, and may have months to go before the freeway forces a big move.



OUR CHRISTMAS POSADA VISITED MIRYAM'S as always. But this year was especially poignant, as the last year our sisters knock on this particular door — as they do on our 15 others. Our resident Missionary Sisters of

the Eucharist brought the Posada ritual from their Latin American roots. (BELOW) **The MEN OF MARANATHA HOUSE** welcomed the Posada procession and visitors into their home for ceremony, song, gifts and Christmas treats.



Celebrating Father Frank !!!

(though we're a bit mad at him for retiring)

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was ordained in 1965, and for 15 years found his calling in educating, training and coaching seminarians. The next 20 he served as **U.S. Army Military Chaplain**, from active duty serving in Korea, Honduras, Panama, Germany, Iraq and Kuwait. Military retirement began his service as a parish pastor in Texas.

Providence—and Founder Rose Mary Badami—brought Fr. Frank to our door in 2010. She needed a priest to say one Mass and urgently called around as far away as Cypress. Fr. Frank kindly volunteered, albeit he had never heard of **Magnificat Houses**, 25 miles away. Though he lost the



address along the way and started Mass late, he and Rose Mary quickly bonded and he became entranced with the community. Soon he moved in as chaplain...and suddenly was back living with 120 brothers (and even sisters this time).

Father Frank will have many brothers again at the home base of the **Sacre-Coeur de Jesus (SCJ)** in Hales Corner, Wisconsin. For his big move, Father Frank—noting *our* glaring need—bought *himself* a refrigerated box truck to donate back to MHI. That was just like him.

Father Frank's contributions to us all are lasting and legion.

A Man for All Reasons...



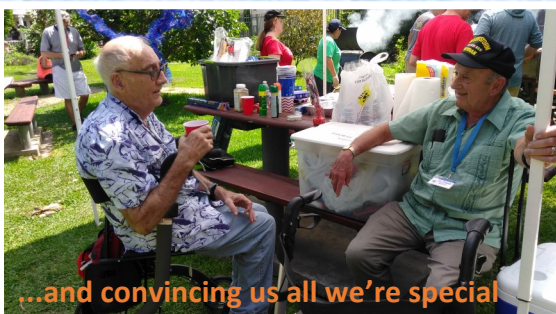
Soothing the Soul

...and lifting the Spirits



Teaching
Training
Retreats
(and near-
wanton
generosity)

Has Sacraments,
will travel



...and convincing us all we're special

Sponsoring a band of angels to work miracles...



...reviving our defunct Anawim Thrift Shop, now serving a poor community with affordable goods—free if needed. The four original Anawim Angels and spouses did some very heavy lifting. Other Angels flocked to their side.



MHI BOARD UPDATES 2020 . . .



Grant Kennedy, a longtime friend of Magnificat and former St. Joseph Clubhouse director, was elected chairman of the MHI Board of Directors, it was announced in December by outgoing chair **Roz Hill**. Member **Ed Cordes** moves to vice chairman, and the other incumbent officers remain—**Don Aubin**, secretary, and **Kimberly Dennison**, treasurer.

MHI Executive Director **John Boyles** welcomed two new board members (below, left) **Abigail Gunderson, CFP**, who is senior wealth advisor at Tangle-

wood Total Wealth Management; and **Susanne Young** (below right) who chaired our successful gala in 2018 and galvanized the team which brought the Anawim Thrift Store back to life. Continuing their board service are **Roz Hill, Mitch Ackal, Larry Cronin, Jermaine Davis, Rafael Garcia** and **Dr. Tony Kerrigan**.

Retiring from the board are **Deacon Darryl Drennon** and **Mike Frankovich**, whose dedicated service has been deeply appreciated, Boyles said.



Ways to Help

DONATE

Kindly visit our website:
www.mhihouston.org
(same site, new web address)
Or use the enclosed envelope.
Please write your check to:
Magnificat Houses, Inc.

VOLUNTEER

Contact Larry Cronin
Director of Volunteers
lcronin@mhihouston.org

STAFF NOTES: Welcome . . . and Welcome Back



Fred Jackson joins MHI as special assistant to Director of Housing Deacon Martin Lemond. After a 20-year career in the energy industry, Fred found himself eager for more soul-satisfying work.

He is overjoyed at pursuing his love of helping people hands-on through Magnificat Houses' Matthew 25 mission.

Susanne Mann re-joins MHI and St. Joseph Clubhouse members rejoice. A communications specialist, Susanne teaches publications and computer skills, producing SJC's member-written monthly newsletter, and enjoys her individual work with members and advocating for those with mental health diagnoses.



THRIFT STORES: Shop or Donate

The Mustard Seed
1410 Elgin @ LaBranch

Anawim Thrift Shop
2102 Common

We pick up estates & large items:
713-524-7333

Does Your Employer Offer a 'Matching Gift' Program?

Many employers will match, dollar for dollar, their employee's charitable contributions to nonprofits like us—and some even factor into their gifts volunteer time or donations made by spouses or retirees. Simply complete your company's Matching Gift form with signature, and send along with your gift to: **Magnificat Houses, Inc.**, P.O.Box 8486, Houston 77288. Or contact **apieniazek@mhihouston.org**. Thank you!

The Magnifier is published quarterly by Magnificat Houses, Inc. **Casey Kelly**, editor; **Gina Monti**, resident photographer and contributor. Tribute donations are recognized quarterly. Contact **ckelly@mhihouston.org**.

Thank you for all you do to support our mission!



As FATHER FRANK prepares to take wing from Magnificat Houses, this issue celebrates our blessed decade with him.