



The Magnifier

...news from Magnificat Houses

Magnificat Houses, Inc. (MHI)

Spring 2020

SPECIAL ISSUE: Keeping the Mission Alive in **Tedious** Times

A Personal Message from Executive Director John Boyles

We seem to have been partnered—you and I and the rest of the world—in a challenging new dance without benefit of lessons. Covid-19 leaves us little room for missteps. It's an awesome responsibility for all of us pledged to serving others through the Corporal Works of Mercy. Our mission statement calls for community, friendship and mutual growth—it's the music we've danced to for 51 years. We still do, in creative new ways....as this issue will show.



SIGN OF THE TIMES: Masked, John meets with Board Member Suzanne Young and Director of Operations Shane Maberry.

Magnificat moved quickly in early February, consulting with HUD and CDC experts to develop the MHI Covid-19 Emergency Response Plan, its priority being to get the maximum people off the streets before a shutdown became necessary. Because our population is especially vulnerable, often with underlying conditions, Magnificat huddled in on March 18, a week ahead of Judge Hidalgo's citywide stay-home order. By then we were already masked when conducting essential meetings, providing contact-free food and supply deliveries to our 16 group houses, 27 SROs and staff residences. Our small but vital staff was sent home with their computers. Daily all departments coordinate with me

through scheduled Zoom meetings (often from dining room tables like mine), although frequent emergencies have us all on call. Most urgently, we have intensified efforts to keep those with special psychological needs, our most vulnerable, close and stabilized. (See Clubhouse outreach, Page 2.)

God willing, we will soon get back to the elusive "normal" through a phased reopening process as facts dictate. For now we await guidance from the CDC and our helpful partners, HUD, the Coalition for the Homeless and the City of Houston.

I am sure you are as weary as I am of masks and mandates, but a handwritten sign posted in one of the houses made me smile:

This virus is a blessing and a curse.

The blessings inherent in a retreat—even an unintended one—are unfolding before our eyes. I am confident that ultimately they will strengthen our Magnificat community, your family and mine and, I pray, our country and our world.

Please help us get through this difficult period by contributing what you can. With love and gratitude—JB



AS HOUSTON HONORS ITS FIRST RESPONDERS...



So do we. These very responders are our next door neighbors and have long served our residents' emergency needs. Thank you all for being there for us, always, no matter what. You are a blessing and a comfort.

Department of Answered Prayers

WE ARE COVID-19 FREE—SO FAR

...but keep those prayers coming! Our quick action might be why, at this printing, we have had no confirmed cases among our residents or staff. In February, before testing was available, we moved two ill guests from their group home into a private apartment, where they were carefully tended to according to CDC guidelines (and Magnificat's TLC guidelines); both recovered naturally under strict quarantine. Another ill guest with underlying conditions was hospitalized but tested negative. We remain vigilant.

St. Joseph Clubhouse Finds Creative Ways to Stay Up Close and Personal

Shutting down the Clubhouse was unthinkable—yet vital in the shadow of a coming pandemic. For some members, even a temporary closure could feel cataclysmic.

St. Joseph's is where the faces of mental health recovery gather weekdays to work together on group projects, learn useful skills, help run the programs, lobby for supportive laws and fight the stigma of mental illness. The Clubhouse is no playhouse: staff and members mean business.

Now suddenly, overnight, members accustomed to productive daily activities with friends were homebound—the 30 members who live in the 16 Magnificat Houses as well as the 100 plus off-campus members who variously participate weekdays.

Breaking their chain of support was unthinkable to **Sr. Agnes Maria** and **Clubhouse Director Kevin Campbell**, who quickly launched a members-only Facebook group, gathered the staff for Zoom training, then began reaching out to every single member with reassurance that the Clubhouse would be spiritually—and virtually—open for the duration. No easy task. Some members cannot afford phones, let alone home computers (though most become computer literate at the Clubhouse). Some only have access to third party email addresses, or must be contacted through a friend, neighbor or social worker. Nothing stopped the staff from trying, and trying again.

In the last nine weeks staff has made over 1,000 individual member connections through phone, text, Facebook messenger, Zoom, email and face to face.

It's working bigtime. Facebook Analytics informed us our Clubhouse page had 1,400 "engagements" in a single week, up 572% from normal times.

Weekdays, staff monitors the Facebook Groups taking two-hour shifts (from 8-4) during which they suggest group topics, issue stimulating challenges, and move over to Messenger when a member needs private dialog.

Meanwhile, those able to live Zoom at 3 p.m. have enthusiastically devised their own programming which changes weekly, such as: Coping

Skills under Quarantine, Wellness programs like Tai Chi, Dreams and Goals and Art Shows.

When it's time to resume personal contact, our members won't miss a beat—thanks to Sr. Agnes, Kevin, Loretta, Sue, Natasha and Nicole!

The Clubhouse mission of supporting



member growth, wellness and community remains very much alive—even through this time of hardship, stress and challenge to our members.

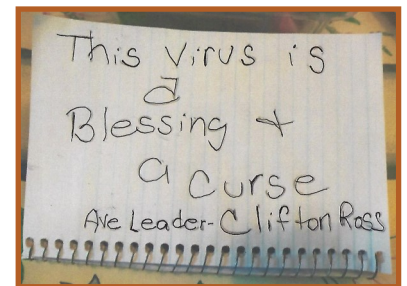
Yes, we still need donations!

Your donations to Magnificat Houses also benefit the Clubhouse and its programs. Kindly give what you can to keep us all Zooming and zooming forward in our joint mission of serving those who need it most. www.mhihouston.org/donate

PANDEMIC Musings from Residents

SCOTT TOWNS: *Living through the Covid-19 pandemic has been a trial, but it has helped me realize how grateful I am for all I have: food, shelter, good health and good company. Even though I feel tremendous pity for those around the world who have suffered and are suffering from this virus, I am also extremely grateful that no one I know has contracted it. It is admittedly a time to try our souls, but we will find a way to endure--and even to prevail.*

CLIFTON ROSS:



KENNETH HORTON: *In my five years here, I became accustomed to the overall sense of community as residents, staff and volunteers gather for all major holidays and frequently in between. I was rather apprehensive about having to go into isolation, due partially to underlying health conditions, but did so out of good common sense. Within a day I was already missing the smiling faces of my Magnificat family. But soon I discovered this was a sort of rare sabbatical in my life. Fear of the pandemic led to my appreciation of every moment being a precious gift. Life slowed down, and I found I had more time to catch up on correspondence with age-old friends. Even banal things took on greater importance with that dark cloud hovering above all our heads. Now I appreciate those moments when I encounter a neighbor, from 6-feet away, and can catch up a bit. I had previously taken it for granted that I would see these same people a dozen times per day, but now with everything slowing down, I give thanks that we can chat a little more. Each encounter is precious to me. I am especially thankful for our regular biz office teleconference meetings when I can see the faces of those who remain even more committed than before the pandemic. An inspiration of what can be accomplished in a time of crisis.*



Gary made giant dice for all our houses to motivate yard play. Guy, Michael & Steve roll 'em



Pete took up barbells to stay fit in lockdown



Larry thrills with his dance skills to Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'

The City's stay-at-home mandate changed everything but our love for community and each other. Here's how some of us are making lemonade.



MASK MAKERS FOR THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY!



Spring and the lockdown inspired serious household gardening, James at Ave Maria House (left) and at Scanlan House, where the guys awarded themselves a droll title...



First, a toast...

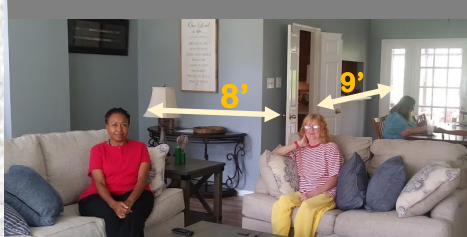
We lift our first glass of lemonade to toast our in-house first responders who daily risk themselves to deliver all essential supplies to our 16 houses: Greg Lueb, the sole driver, and food services volunteers James, Raymond, Alex, Natasha, Ellen and DJ



Oooh...the Blue Angels fly over Maranatha House



A+ FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING WHILE HANGING OUT



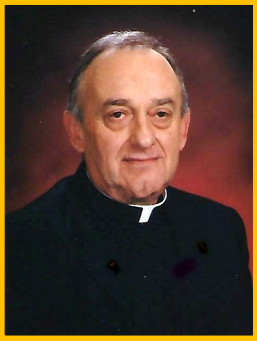
Weekly, benefactors Drew Dean and John Faletto (right) quietly deliver delicious foods to our confined SRO residents' doors, their mission sponsored by Zachariah House of St. Francis Ministries



James and Alex wrangled 1,378 cases of cherry vanilla Coke Zero and Powerade sports drink, kindly donated by Coca-Cola

STAFF NOTES:

The Fondest of Farewells To Three Campus Favorites



Dear Friends,

As you know I will be leaving Magnificat Houses on June 1st to return to my order's headquarters in Hales Corners, Wisconsin to help out in our seminary program. I had worked and taught there for 17 years and, although times have changed, in a sense I will be returning home. I have enjoyed my nine years here as a chaplain, counselor, teacher and hopefully a friend. You have

FR. FRANK WITTOUCK, SCJ

helped me learn more about myself (both strengths and weaknesses) and I pray that I

have helped you realize how good you are and how much God and people love you. I thank you for the help you have been to me. God be with you. Father Frank

New Address: Sacred Heart Monastery
7335 S. Lovers Lane Road, Franklin, WI 53132.



SR. LEOCADIA OTZOY, MSE

With the expiration of their order's contract, **Sr. Leah** and **Sr. Cristina** will be serving the poor in other venues. The two sisters have been a loving presence through several rotations at Magnificat, totaling 11 and 5 years respectively.



SR. CRISTINA LOPEZ, MSE

Volunteer and former resident Gina Monti did MHI proud (again) with her induction into the National Society of Leadership & Success at HCC, where she is an honors student set to graduate this year. She has been a member of the Magnificat family since 2014.



DONATE ANYTIME: www.mhihouston.org/donate

Thank you for your loving support of our mission!

THE URGENT STATE OF NONPROFITS IN COVID TIMES

(National leaders remarks excerpted from THE HILL 5-6-20)

Nancy Brown, CEO, **American Heart Association**; Tracey D. Brown, CEO, **American Diabetes Association**; Harry Johns, CEO, **Alzheimer's Association**; Gary Reedy, CEO, **American Cancer Society** and its Cancer Action Network; and Harold Wimmer, president and CEO, **American Lung Association**.

Nonprofit organizations are providing essential relief as part of the national response to the coronavirus pandemic. How effectively the nation continues to combat COVID-19, and how quickly we recover from this unprecedented health and economic crisis, will depend on the ability of charitable organizations to provide critical services and support in communities nationwide.

As leaders of some of the nation's largest volunteer health charities, we are witnessing the devastating impact of COVID-19 on individuals and families— particularly those with preexisting health conditions. **We are also experiencing firsthand the extreme pressures the coronavirus pandemic is putting on the nonprofit sector and its capacity to respond to the millions who need help.**

The people we serve are among those most at risk. They are individuals with one or more health conditions that may increase their chances of developing serious complications from COVID-19. For them, and for the millions of people nationwide living with a serious chronic disease, a battle with COVID-19 is a battle for their life.

Our organizations, and the thousands of other charitable groups serving communities across the country, have responded to this crisis at an unprecedented scale. Collectively, we are providing critical information about the virus and its impact on at-risk populations, answering questions from worried families and consulting with public health officials on keeping communities safe.... **We are providing vital services to help families protect and promote their health during the pandemic, and are sustaining the close sense of community that is the lifeblood of chronic disease populations.**

Patients and their families need us now more than ever before.... **The nation needs nonprofits to remain strong** and sustainable so groups like ours can continue serving the communities we are uniquely equipped to help. **Yet fundraising and other sources of income have dropped sharply in the wake of this crisis, resulting in severe restrictions on our ability to assist and putting the very existence of nonprofit groups in jeopardy.**

The Magnifier is published quarterly by Magnificat Houses, Inc. Casey Kelly, editor. Tribute donations are recognized quarterly. Submit photos and news items to ckelly@mhihouston.org.



**A BREATH OF SPRING as our Sisters
return home in their new blue habits**