

The Good Samaritan

“St. Jude was responsible for her life-change”: Donor shares his mom’s story



Bette Rentschler was known as “Mom.” “Bette is St. Jude’s House,” Kathy said.

That quote is an excerpt from a Courier-Journal article on April 28, 1985, featuring Bette, who was the first resident manager at St. Jude House (pictured top left Courier-Journal archives).

In April 1985, St. Jude House opened as a five-room shotgun house near the corner of St. Catherine and Clay streets. It’s fitting Bette ended up at St. Jude, who is the patron saint of hopeless causes.

Two years prior, Bette told the Courier Journal “there wasn’t anyone more hopeless than me.” Her father was an alcoholic, and she followed suit. She also spent time in jail. She was married on three separate occasions and had four children. She had no financial literacy, and was a cook by profession.

“She had lost everything, including her children,” said Vince England, her son.

As a young adult, Bette wound up in institutions in Lexington and Cincinnati on about 40 separate occasions. She moved to Louisville with two changes of clothes and a \$5 bill.

Shortly thereafter, Bette enrolled in a substance use program. She spent time

at Talbot House, a men’s shelter on St. Catherine St. Its founder, Bill Wallace, helped Bette and thousands of alcoholics achieve sobriety. Bill was her Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) sponsor in 1981. She started on a “straight path.”

“Bill advised her that she had to give back,” England said. “He told her to be the house mother of ... St. Jude House. And that’s what she did.”

Vince, who hadn’t spoken with his mom in several years, only heard of her transformation because the Courier-Journal reporter who featured Bette mailed the article to him.

“She mailed this article with a letter saying to give your mother another look ... because of what St. Jude had done,” England added.

To England, this was shocking news to say the least, who only knew his mother as an alcoholic. He drove down himself to see things firsthand. He visited her at St. Jude House and attended an AA meeting that his mother facilitated.

“St. Jude was responsible for her life-change, where she found purpose,” he said. “My mother stayed sober for the rest of her life.”

The program served up to 12 women who had alcohol problems. It became the first halfway house in Louisville for women seeking a new life in recovery.

“She was a tough love type of person for the women,” England said. “Her devotion to helping women recover was foundational to her success in staying sober.”

In 2020, we ended this program and launched a new program that helps those experiencing homelessness due to fleeing domestic violence.

Last December, England drove from Plainfield, IL, to McCreary County in southeastern KY, for a mission trip with a Christian nonprofit. On the way, he dropped off a donation check to St. Vincent de Paul. He said it was “incredibly emotional at the time” to be on campus.

“Through St. Vincent de Paul ... she was given stepping stones to get out of her addiction and find purpose or self-worth. The greatest thing about St. Jude is it gave her a purpose ... to help other women who were struggling with what she did. St. Jude provided her with everything for her future.”

Bette, who passed away 15 years ago, had a great relationship with England’s family, including her grandchildren.



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The Good Samaritan

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St. Vincent de Paul Louisville

Volunteer Dick Scherrer: Down to his last penny



Volunteer Dick Scherrer knows what it is like to be down to your last penny. He is not unfamiliar with poverty.

“We were always trying to make ends meet. You don’t know where the Lord’s going to lead you, but you have that faith,” Scherrer added. “When we moved here, we weren’t well off, living paycheck to paycheck. The job I took, I opened a plant in Shively. It lasted two or three years, then they decided to close it. So, I went from job to job for a year or two here, a year or two there. So, you don’t know what you’re going to have.”

It was a challenging season for Scherrer and his wife of 53 years, Maria Imelda, who had four children at the time. Those experiences have given him empathy for those in need.

Scherrer’s story has shaped his service.

“When you see families struggling, not having Christmas for their kids, all that financial pressure does is split up the family or make it tougher,” said Scherrer, who is 81 years old. “So, anything you can do to build up the family makes a difference.”

Scherrer wants to give people the feeling of relief when that burden is lifted.

“I want to be Christlike to somebody else, because I have been helped. Since then, the Lord has worked with me throughout that time ... just learning compassion.”

In 1995, Scherrer started serving with St. Agnes Conference, where he distributed Christmas baskets and responded to requests for emergency assistance.

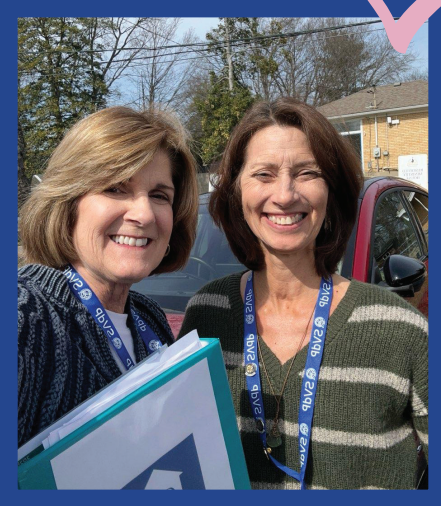
“The more that you get involved, the more you grow,” he said. “Every time I look at my closet and I see six coats in there, one for 50 degrees, one for 40, one for 30, I’m like, ‘I don’t need that.’ I think of those in need.”

For nearly 15 years, Scherrer has also been integral to the annual Santa Shop (bottom photo courtesy of The Record). He also sorts in-kind donations at the Food Pantry once a month.

“We can’t help everybody, but with the conferences and Archdiocese of Louisville—together as a community—we have a big impact on food and housing.”

If you would like to get involved, visit www.svdplou.org/volunteer.

Home Visits at the Heart of St. Gabriel Conference



When you see someone in need up close, it changes things.

As St. Gabriel Conference President, Melissa has seen the harsher side of the community.

“I cannot tell you how many times we have went on a visit and it was for rent. We walk in, and there was not a single piece of furniture in the home, they have no food in their refrigerator, and there are two little kids there. We can’t go home and go to sleep and be fine with that,” said Melissa (who preferred to remain anonymous and is not pictured).

In those instances, Melissa and another conference member act quickly. They use a SVDP Thrift Store Voucher and furnish the family’s apartment.

“The Thrift Store Vouchers have come in handy so much,” Melissa added.

Melissa says home visits are at the heart of St. Vincent de Paul’s mission.

“That feeling you get when you go back on the follow-up visit is the best,” she said. “When you see those kids claiming that couch. Their feet are up on that couch. It’s a beautiful feeling. It makes your heart completely joyful.”

Whether it’s a family on the brink of eviction, someone in need of utility bill assistance during the winter, or groceries to make it to the end of the month, the 27 parish-based conferences answer the call.

“We like to pull the person completely above water. If they’re drowning, then we need to give them a clean slate,” Melissa said.

St. Gabriel Conference has 14 members who serve people in three zip codes.

Its Vice President, Mary Beth Knight, had some free time after retirement. She saw her parents serve at SVDP, doing home visits and donating furniture.

“It’s been beneficial to me,” said Mary Beth, pictured on the right. “We do works of mercy and plant seeds of hope. That sticks with me. We bring God’s love ... it’s strengthening my faith every time I go on a home visit and doing something good for the community.”

In Feb., St. Gabriel donated \$2,500 in bedding and personal care items to support the residents in our Domestic Violence Program.

St. Gabriel Conference members also added the ministry of partnering with neighboring nursing homes. They do crafts with memory care residents.

“St. Gabriel’s proactive approach and their inventive outreach truly inspires me,” said David Neill, SVDP Council President. “They serve as a shining example for our mission. While all our conferences serve as the backbone of SVDP Louisville, St. Gabriel’s commitment to life-changing support exemplifies our Vincentian promise to ‘seek and find’ the suffering—bringing them God’s love and the hope they need to move forward.”

Visit www.svdplou.org/svdp-conferences.

St. Gabriel Homelessness Prevention

- **\$73,319** provided in rent, utilities, groceries, furniture, and car-related assistance
- **56 home visits**, including **149 in-person meetings** with those in need across three zip codes
- **573 people served** this past fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2024 to Sept. 30, 2025)



UPCOMING EVENTS at ST. VINCENT DE PAUL LOUISVILLE



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Sunday, April 26

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April Podcast

Thrive By 5 Executive Director Reylene Robinson

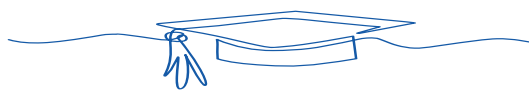
This month’s podcast focuses on what a lack of access to childcare has on the community and housing stability. >>> www.svdplou.org/svdp-podcast

- Stock the -

Shelves or Shelters

The need is year-round. Whether you would like to purchase non-perishable items for our Food Pantry, or support those in our housing programs with bedding or basic personal care items, your partnership is vital to serve those in need. >>> www.svdplou.org/ >>> “Get Involved”





Community Corner: Men's Shelter clients graduate from Goodwill KY's RISE Program

It takes a community to lift someone out of poverty.

On Wednesday, Feb. 25, Lorenza and John, residents at Ozanam Inn Men's Emergency Shelter, were a part of the graduating class from Goodwill Kentucky's RISE Program (Reintegrating Individuals Successfully Every Day) at its Downtown Louisville Opportunity Center.

"We couldn't be more proud of Lorenza and John," said Rena Sharpe, Chief Operating Officer at Goodwill Kentucky. "By working with our community partners, like the folks at St. Vincent de Paul, we create stability and opportunity for the people we serve."

RISE is a two-month job-readiness training program designed to empower individuals who have multiple barriers to obtain gainful employment.

"RISE showed me what I want to do, which is to become a peer support counselor," John said.



John, left, and Lorenza, right, graduated from the RISE Program.

"When I started taking classes at Goodwill, I started feeling a little bit better about myself. I was like, 'Man, I can really be the person I want to be,'" Lorenza added.

"YOU WILL OFTEN HEAR LORENZA SAY, 'IF YOU WANT SOMETHING, THEN YOU HAVE TO GET UP AND DO IT.'"

—Evelyn Peeler, Case Manager

At 62 years old, Lorenza worked for the past four decades, including as a supervisor of a manufacturing plant. After experiencing homelessness for several years, Lorenza came to Ozanam Inn last fall.

"St. Vincent allows you the opportunity to grow," Lorenza said. "When I came here, that's when I started going to Goodwill because I had a foundation. I could get some rest, you don't have to carry your clothes or bags everywhere you go, and you could take a nice, hot shower."

"You will often hear Lorenza say, 'If you want something, then you have to get up and do it,'" added Evelyn Peeler, Ozanam Inn Case Manager. "The best part of the referral is watching them blossom as they become successful."

John's Journey

Two months ago, John's life looked very different. He worked as a forklift operator at a reputable company, rented a home, and enjoyed playing with his two-year-old son.

"I'm always used to having my own place with my kid and girlfriend. When I became homeless, I didn't know what to do or where to go," John said.

Everything changed when he lost his job.

"I lost everything that we owned. I lost my car, all my furniture, and TVs," John added. "The only thing I have now is the clothes on my back and those under my bed."

At 46 years old, John initially struggled with suicidal thoughts. The light at the end of the tunnel is reuniting with his loved ones. John has utilized our community kitchen, SVDP Drop-In Center, and case management, including help with record expungement.

"St. Vincent de Paul has been helpful because I can come and go as I please," he said. "To go to Goodwill, I couldn't do that at the previous shelter I was staying at. It's been a nice place to be."

Next Steps

On March 2, Lorenza and John were hired as full-time sorters at local Goodwill Donation Centers.

"Your support is really helping," Lorenza said. "Everybody plays a little part in it. You're helping somebody change their life when you donate your money or time."

"I don't have any family. My mom and dad both passed away," John added.

"Goodwill and St. Vincent have helped me through it ...

they will always be a part of my family."



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