



Moms and volunteers intently wrap and bag gifts for kids at the 2014 Christmas with Mercy event on December 13, 2014.

Christmas with Mercy 2014

Providing the Gift of Love

"This is the first Christmas my children have received gifts".

The mom was talking to her "elf", a House of Mercy volunteer paired with her to assist in choosing gifts for her children. Mom, the single mother of an eight and ten year old, was close to crying, but these were being shed in gratitude and happiness. This gratitude belongs to you, our donors and volunteers who provided the gift of a toy, talent, money, baked goods or time. This mother's joy at being able to provide beautiful gifts to her children for the first time in their lives is the Miracle of God's Love you provided to a family.

On December 13, 2014, this simple act of Mercy, providing two gifts per child to the parents of Passport to Hope clients, produced happy tears and excitement for hours. A steady stream of clients and volunteers came together to give and receive, but it was never easy to tell who was receiving the most.

The majority of the families served through our Passport to Hope program are single mother families. In some cases, the food and clothing provided is temporary. The family has hit a rough spot due to a lapse in child support, or recent abandonment. Some of these clients are middle class college graduates, and could be one of your neighbors.

Another type of mother we see at Christmas is the hard-working mom who just doesn't make enough money to have any discretionary income. This is the Mom we met who told us her children had never received Christmas gifts. Finally, we have moms who don't have skills that can easily translate into a job, or who can work often enough to provide well for their families due to a lack of affordable childcare. These are the moms who typically stay in the program for six months (the longest time allowed at one stretch), take a six month hiatus, and then come back again. House of Mercy also serves some single dad families, and many traditional families, as well.

In total, we were able to provide 1,518 gifts, given with love to 863 children (some of the children didn't receive two gifts, due to the value of the gift). Our volunteers logged in 390 hours between the Tuesday before the event and 3 hours after the event. Our heartfelt thanks go to these Parishes who provided extraordinary assistance for this event: Holy Trinity, St Raymond of Peñafort, Our Lady of Hope, All Saints, and Our Lady of Good Counsel.

And our thanks as well to all of you who made it possible for several young children to have their first Christmas gifts.

HOM provides support for dance program at Georgetown South

Last July, House of Mercy (HOM) received this wonderful note from Jessica Friedman, a talented ballerina from Bristow, Virginia. "I would like to offer a program teaching the basics of ballet to the young girls of House of Mercy. Along with the technical aspects of ballet, they would also learn a positive self-image and how to use their bodies through dance to give glory to God."

Due to space limitations at the HOM facility, Jessica was introduced to Meg Carroll, the Community Manager at Georgetown South. Because a great number of the HOM clientele live in the Georgetown South (GTS) community in Manassas, and because GTS has a beautiful Community Center, it was a perfect match for the development of Ms. Friedman's dream, Leaping Leaders. We are so grateful for the unabashed welcome GTS and Meg Carroll provided for Ms. Friedman.

The goal, as Ms. Friedman explains it, is to create a positive learning experience to help instill passion, self-esteem, and confidence in the hopes of stimulating creativity and intellectual growth. Discipline, high expectations, and self motivation are the keystone of the process.

Unexpected virtues have blossomed as a result of the twenty weekly participants' interaction with ballet.



Leaping Leader ballerinas finish their lunches with their families during the Christmas Luncheon. Ms. Friedman provided dolls for each of the girls as a Christmas gift.

The young ladies, ranging in age from 7 to 10 years old, have learned to accept and value individual differences, and gain an awareness and appreciation of others' cultures. Most of the students have self-reported better academic success and more self discipline.

HOM has remained active, but in the background. We helped to acquire, through the generosity of Robin Strum with Asaph Dance and Susan Landess from the Hylton Performing Arts Center, tickets for all of the young ladies to go to a performance of "Clara's Christmas" ballet. We try always to provide a healthy snack for after class. We suspect that many of the girls don't always have adequate food in their homes for the weekend. And with the grace and beauty of ladies from the Legion of Mary, we were able to provide a Christmas luncheon for twenty girls and their families.



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For more information about Leaping Leaders, go to Ms. Friedman's site at <http://leapingleaders.weebly.com/>

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