

Local News

Ministry receives surprise \$30K, but still faces challenges during pandemic



Staff at St. John's Hospice in Philadelphia have been serving three times the number lunches every weekday due to the closure of a nearby shelter. The outreach, part of archdiocesan Catholic Social Services, received \$30,000 from the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia's Emergency Relief Fund to cover its April expenses. Demand for ongoing support will continue throughout the coming months due to the coronavirus pandemic, said hospice staff. (Photo courtesy of Martin Farrell)

By Gina Christian • Posted April 3, 2020

A longtime archdiocesan outreach to the homeless has received a surprise donation to keep going during the coronavirus pandemic – but the challenges for St. John's Hospice still loom large.

“Even when we aren't in a crisis as we are now, we're always functioning in a way that requires constant support,” said Martin Farrell, director of development and community relations at the facility operated by archdiocesan Catholic Social Services (CSS) in downtown Philadelphia.

St. John's Hospice offers residential services for more than 250 men transitioning from homelessness to independent living.

The facility also provides case management, on-site nursing, daily showers and a mail room for more than 1,300 men.

During the coronavirus crisis, demand for food assistance has tripled at the site, triggered by the closure of a nearby shelter and area business shutdowns aimed at containing the disease's spread.

Earlier this week, St. John's launched a campaign earlier this week to raise \$30,000 for its April operating expenses. The hospice's development board and several supporters pledged to match the first \$15,000 collected.

Yesterday, the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia (CFGP) announced that it would direct \$30,000 from its recently created Emergency Relief Fund to the hospice. The fund seeks to cover supply shortages among CSS food pantries, some of which have seen a 100% increase in client volume.

"We know this critical need for food is going to remain as the coronavirus spreads," said Sarah Hanley, the president and CEO of the foundation, which manages the annual Catholic Charities Appeal.

The pandemic has exacerbated Philadelphia's ongoing food insecurity, which rose 22% from 2012 to 2017.

Although it largely relies on donated food items, the hospice spends an estimated \$6 to \$8 per meal on side dishes, desserts, beverages and serving materials, Farrell said.

As the pandemic continues, "there's little chance the number of clients will decrease," he added.

For that reason, St. John's is continuing to accept contributions for which the \$15,000 matching gift will be honored, Farrell confirmed.

"We're extremely grateful for this support, and for our relationships with CSS and the Catholic Foundation, especially in this time of crisis," he said.

St. John's is "the front line of the church's charitable mission and social safety net," said James Amato, archdiocesan Secretary for Catholic Human Services.

Noting he was "grateful for the faith-filled support of donors," Amato described the hospice's team as "courageous staff who accompany the men we are privileged to serve."

To donate to St. John's Hospice's matching gift campaign, visit the hospice's website. To donate to the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia's Emergency Relief Fund, visit the foundation's website.

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