

Let the little

CHILDREN

Come unto Me

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BREAKING NEWS

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.”

This passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes reflects a reality at this point in history for two of Catholic Social Services institutions: St. Joseph Catholic Home for Children and St. Vincent's Home – Tacony. Both of these residential programs began as orphanages for boys and girls who needed a safe and secure environment in which to grow and learn. St. Joseph Catholic Home traces its origins back 200 years, while St. Vincent's Home – Tacony has operated for more than 150 years. Nevertheless, as many other things in our world have changed over those many years, so has the world of child welfare.

St. Joseph Catholic Home for Children has been a refuge for girls and young adolescents who needed a place to live because their own home was not a viable option. Under the leadership of the Sisters of St. Joseph and committed laywomen, Catholic Home helped young women mature into responsible members of the community. However, in the last decade, fewer and fewer girls were placed in group care and those who were had significant mental health diagnoses. These girls needed a facility that could provide a more secure environment staffed by persons specifically trained to work with youth of this type.

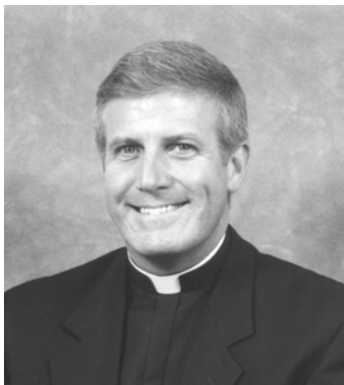
Changes in the child welfare arena have impacted another of our long-standing programs located along the Delaware River. When it was founded by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, St. Vincent's Home – Tacony served young children in need of emergency placement. Boys and girls came to St. Vincent's Home in times of family crisis. St. Vincent's developed a reputation as a fine emergency shelter for young children and family

groups. Over time, however, fewer boys and girls were placed in care on an emergency basis. At the same time that there was less need for shelter, there was increasing demand for residential programs able to work with children over longer time periods.

Because of these two converging trends, the leadership of Catholic Social Services, St. Joseph Catholic Home for Children and St. Vincent's Home - Tacony developed a plan to blend the programs in order to achieve mutual goals. Young women who would have previously been served by Catholic Home have moved into St. Vincent's. There they will receive the care and support they need in an environment that is safe and secure. Many of these adolescents are young mothers with infants.

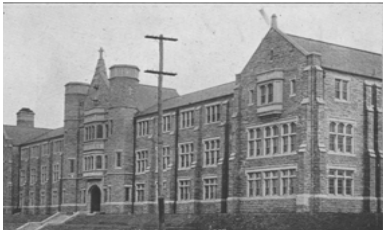
Social workers are able to assist them in learning parenting skills, planning for their future and the future of their child, and how to transition to an independent life.

Catholic Social Services is blessed to have the resource of St. Vincent's Home to serve the children who will be placed there. While the operations of two historic organizations have been combined, their common mission to serve children in a time of crisis and need continues. We are grateful to the benefactors of both St. Joseph Catholic Home for Children and St. Vincent's Home – Tacony for their long-standing commitment to both these institutions. In the interest of responding to current needs identified by Philadelphia's Department of Human Services and preserving the services offered in both programs, these kinds of changes were necessary. We will continue to adapt to serve young people in need in this evolving and challenging area of residential child welfare.



Msgr. Joseph Tracy

BITS AND PIECES OF HISTORY The Origins of Our Merged Agencies



Since St. Joseph's Catholic Home has now completely merged with St. Vincent's, we thought a look at the beginnings of the two agencies might be informative.

St. Joseph's Catholic Home can trace its roots back to 1797, making it the oldest child caring agency in the history of the Archdiocese. Children orphaned by the Yellow Fever Epidemic of that time were placed in private homes of Catholic women under the leadership of "The Roman Catholic Society of St. Joseph for Educating and Maintaining Poor Or-

phan Children." Their efforts were formalized in 1806 when the organization rented a building on 6th Street near Spruce in downtown Philadelphia. In 1814, the Sisters of Charity assumed responsibility for 15 orphans at the new "St. Joseph's Asylum." After several moves, mergers and name changes, in 1863 the Sisters of St. Joseph assumed responsibility for Catholic Home for Destitute Children and eventually St. Joseph's Hall.

St. Vincent's can also trace its beginnings from the efforts of Catholic women, who, under the direction of the Sisters of Notre Dame at St. Peter's School, placed seven orphaned children in a home on 5th Street near the church awaiting the construction of St. Vincent's in Tacony. Founded in 1855, it was not until 1859 that "The German Roman Catholic St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum

of Philadelphia and Vicinity" was opened. The Sisters of St. Francis staffed the facility for several months until St. John Neumann was able to bring more Sisters of Notre Dame from Munich to meet the needs of the large numbers of immigrated Germans settling in the newly formed German Catholic parishes of Philadelphia. Over the next 150 years St. Vincent's has been able to care for more than 10,000 children.



John Timothy Paul

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Stacie, a fifteen year old, came to St. Vincent's Mother/Baby/Maternity Program in December 2003. She was admitted as an emergency referral right from the hospital where she just gave birth to her second child. Stacie was unable to return home to live with her father due to deplorable living conditions in the home. Her first child was already living with a relative and in DHS care.

The plan was for Stacie to live at St. Vincent's and start to care for her newborn infant and then be reunited with her child in care with a relative. After four weeks with her newborn son, we were able to reunite her with her first-born child.

Stacie came from a chaotic home situation where her parent was actively involved in his drug addiction. She never had a serious and concerned role model to care for her or

Mother/Baby/Maternity Program

show her how to care for her new born baby. She had no one to keep track of her and survived day to day. Her life was on a collision course with disaster.

As was expected, Stacie's adjustment to a structured routine at St Vincent's was difficult and sometimes very problematic. Stacie had difficulty attending school, studying, and going to therapy and other scheduled activities. She also fought the many interventions of staff in their attempts to provide modeling behaviors and meaningful advice and insight.

However, with her and the St. Vincent's staff's perseverance Stacie started to make positive decisions about herself and her children's lives. She formed particularly good relationships with her psych tech staff mentor, her social worker and therapist. That was the secret she realized. She also

began to accept the modeling behavior supplied to her by staff. She started to ask questions about parenting and nutrition, education and life! Stacie began to access the "attachment therapy" offered by the staff psychologists at St. Vincent's. In this therapy staff video tape a youth's activities with their child and show the tape back making suggestions to improve the relationship process and noting strengths Stacie attended the life skill program offered in-house at St. Vincent's and graduated. Stacie allowed her social worker to develop close contact with teachers at school the same way any child and parent would for children who are experiencing problems. This contact helped Stacie attend the right classes and to progress to the 12th grade where she is expected to graduate with her high school diploma this year.



See **Stacie** on page 4

FROM THE DESK OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

You are reading the first edition of "Ripples from the River." This publication represents the first literary efforts of the newly formed entity of St. Vincent's – Tacony and St. Joseph Catholic Home for Children. We still accept emergency referrals; however, there is one change and that change is - we no longer accept boys. There are other agencies within Catholic Social Services that can respond to the varied needs of males. We felt that with two group homes devoted to maternity and mother/baby clients respectively, and three of four units on campus de-

voted to either teenage girls or teen moms and their babies, it was time to narrow our focus to address the needs of pre-teen and teenage young ladies exclusively.

This has turned out to be a wise decision, as it has allowed St. Vincent's to focus on the problems of young ladies, which are developmentally different than the problems and concerns of young men. St. Vincent's ability to adapt has been a cornerstone of our culture over the past several years. This adaptability has allowed us to change with the ever-

changing landscape of child welfare services in southeast Pennsylvania and to thrive. St. Vincent's is blessed with a rich history of caring for vulnerable children that spans over 150 years and we hope to continue this mission for many years to come. We ask all our patrons to keep us in your prayers as we proceed with this new direction and we will as always keep you in ours.



Joe Lavoritano

SPIRITUAL SPACE

During these last few weeks I know that our hearts and minds have been turned towards our sisters and brothers of the Amish community in their time of sadness and loss of innocent life.

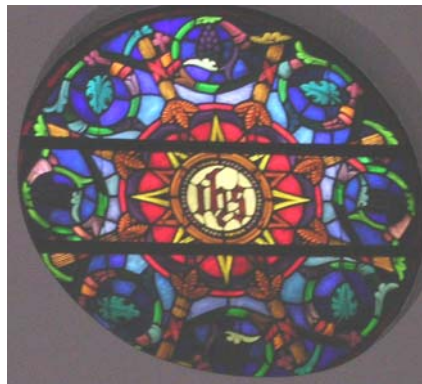
We have no words to express our deepest sympathy; no words to ease the pain of this peace-loving community but what we do have is a "powerhouse of prayer" for the families and friends of these children.

I believe our nation (world) which watched the news reports in shock and disbelief of this senseless, violent act was brought to its knees by the examples of unconditional love and forgiveness offered to the family of the one who was responsible for this

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST

heartbreaking tragedy.

In a sense we all seemed stunned yet deeply touched by the Christian generosity of this community. In their



own quiet way these people made a statement that shouts from the rooftops of Gospel values.

Perhaps this is what our often violent and revengeful society has been waiting for all along. I can think of nothing more powerful, or more Godly than the quiet, loving hearts of these authentically Christ-like people. The parents of these children *did* only what Jesus asks us to do - to forgive, and yet - we find ourselves wondering if we would have the courage and the faith to do the same.

Indeed, as we approach Thanksgiving we have a lot to ponder in the depths of our hearts. We have so much to be thankful for. May God draw good out of this tragedy and teach each of us through this example - how to forgive our enemies and accept "the peace that surpasses all understanding."

Sister Barbara Zurine

RESIDENTS CREATIVE CORNER

The residents of VI have become pen pals with the St. Timothy Parochial School 4th graders. Below are excerpts from the first letters we answered which happened to be around Halloween.

E'Shana wrote to David that "she hopes he has fun trick or treating"

and that "she hopes she has fun on her haunted hayride.

Josephine wants to know Chris's favorite movie, and hopes he enjoys trick or treating. Her best holiday is Christmas.

Tara is asking Samantha what kind of candy she likes; because her

favorite is Kit Kat bars.

Tiffany tells David she is in the 11th grade and loves school. Tiffany thanks David for his letter.



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Stacie

Stacie's hard work then paid off. Through the assistance of our family reunification department and her social worker a family friend came forward and asked to participate in a plan for reunification. The family friend attended bi-weekly family therapy and also participated in our home safety check and became an approved kinship care provider.

Stacie was discharged in September, 2006 with her two children into the care of her kinship parent. Congratulations Stacie!

We will keep Stacie and her children in our prayers!

Rick Pytlewski

CELEBRATE STAFF

Wanda Johnson, the cook and kitchen manager here at St. Vincent's/Catholic Home, has a long family history of service to the facility. Her mother, Dora, worked here for more than forty years as the cook.

"It all started back in the 50's for me at St. Vincent's when I used to come around here with my mother. I must have been around five or six years old. When I became a little older, I was permitted to walk to St. Vincent's alone, since we lived only one block away on Wissinoming St. Sometimes, when I would come to visit, my mother would put me to work along with the other children who resided here and were assigned kitchen duties. I can remember back when my

mom would say, "O.K., time to take a rest...sit down and have some ice cream."

"St. Vincent's had a lot of fun affairs back then. I remember the Christmas parties, cookouts, and May procession celebrations. We all had good times."

Wanda is a graduate of the Restaurant School in Philadelphia.

Ms. Johnson has four children (3 girls, 1 boy) of whom she is very proud. She is a very devoted member of Star of Hope Baptist Church in our neighborhood.

Paul Chick

Mission Statement

Inspired by the gospel message "let the children come unto me," St. Vincent's Catholic Home provides services to children, youth and their families. Recognizing the dignity and worth of all persons, we are committed to work together to help families and their individual members to develop to their fullest potential and to experience the fullness of life that is their heritage as children of God.

In this spirit, we accept each individual as Jesus did, and embrace every person of every race and creed in a community of faith, hope and love. Utilizing the core values of compassion, dignity, charity, justice and excellence basic to Christianity and the field of professional Child Welfare, St. Vincent's will continue to impact on social change and advocate for social justice in service to the children and youth and families of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

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