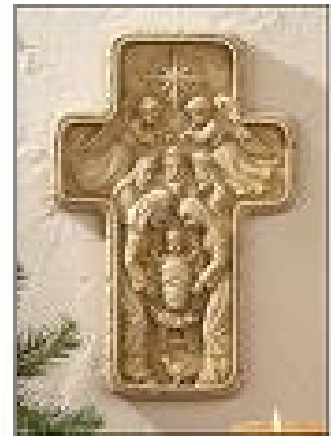


Socially Conscious Christmas



St. Matthew Catholic Church

Dear Friends,

The Advent Season with all of its preparations for Christmas is fast approaching. During this season of preparing and waiting for the celebration of the Christ Child, we often become besieged with the consumerism associated with exchanging gifts among our families and friends. At the same time we cannot help but be aware of the needs of so many men, women and children right here in our own community. For many of them, a hot meal and a place to stay for the night would be a gift beyond price.

This year, through the efforts of the St. Matthew Peace and Justice Ministry, we are providing a simple catalog of ideas and opportunities. Hopefully, these might foster in each of us the spirit of giving to those who, like the Christ Child on the first Christmas, find themselves wanting life's basic needs.

As we at St. Matthew strive to become a more engaged parish, I invite you to take a moment and look over the good works that you will find in this catalog. While you may still want to give a gift to your loved ones, I ask that you also consider giving gifts in their name that will further spread the spirit of the Christmas Season.

May God continue to bless you always and in all ways.

Christmas Blessings,

Reverend Monsignor John J. McSweeney

Pastor of St. Matthew Catholic Church

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A Child's Place

With no permanent residence, homeless children often stop going to school—the one place that should provide structure in a life of transition. Without the influence and stability of a classroom environment, these children lose more than a chance to learn. They also lose the crucial sense of belonging gained from interacting with friends and other students. But there is hope for these children—and help—through A Child's Place, founded in 1989, as a collaborative effort between the Charlotte, NC, community and Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS).

The goals of A Child's Place are to provide stable, appropriate education to homeless students; to provide support services to enhance their opportunities for academic success; and to provide services to families to ensure long term stability and self-sufficiency

With homelessness involving children swiftly increasing, there is a growing need for monetary donations, individually packaged food items, clothing, and other item donations as well as for volunteers. **Monetary donations** can be made on the website at <http://achildsplace.org> where you also can read about many ways to help throughout the year.

\$10	Will provide after-school snacks for two homeless children for a week.
\$25	Will buy a school uniform for a homeless child.
\$50	Will pay for a dental visit for a homeless child to get a tooth filled.



St. Matthew Contacts: Robin Essenmacher 704-839-1317
Valerie Zerbe 704-910-0737



The Angel Tree

The Angel Tree at St. Matthew benefits many organizations throughout our community during the Christmas season. The **donated gifts** go to children from Elon Homes, Smithfield Elementary, Sterling Elementary, Hawk Ridge Elementary, and to families through Charlotte Emergency Housing. Gifts also are given to our RAIN Care Team partners as well as to residents at Holy Angels in Belmont. Wal-Mart **gift cards** enable Senior Citizens to acquire medicine and other supplies. Other recipient organizations include the Mental Health Adolescent Division, Omni Foster Care for abused children and Thompson Children's Center.

St. Matthew Contact: Martha Bookout 704-542-6761

Burial Assistance Program

The Burial Assistance Program is a ministry of Catholic Social Services Charlotte Regional Office (CSS) which began in 1994 when Mecklenburg County discontinued funding assistance for indigent burials. The program assists families with limited resources in the final disposition of a family member who lived in Mecklenburg County.

CSS provides the social service support and eligibility verification for the program to serve families that have no insurance, are unable to negotiate financial arrangements with a funeral home, and have less than the cost of the burial charged through the program.

For additional information call 704-370-3262 or email csscro@charlottediocese.org. Make a **contribution** online at www.cssnc.org/burialassistance.html, then click on Donate Online; or mail a check to:

Catholic Social Services
Charlotte Regional Office
Burial Assistance Program
1123 South Church Street
Charlotte, NC 28203-4003

Family Assist Program

The St. Matthew Family Assist Program requests Wal-Mart and Target **gift cards** to help cover prescriptions and special food needs for parish families that have a member who cannot eat packaged food from the food pantry.

Donations also can be made to Catholic Social Services Charlotte Regional Office which administers a Direct Assistance Program for the community at large (www.cssnc.org).

St. Matthew Contact: Sharon Davis 704-543-7677 x1018
swdavis@charlottediocese.org

Food Pantry

The Food Pantry maintained at St. Matthew provides gift baskets to Catholic Social Services at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter and to parishioners as needed. Non-perishable items are collected the first weekend of each month and stored in the basement beneath the Daily Mass Chapel. **Volunteers** help sort the donated food the first Monday of each month. **Gift cards** from area grocery stores also are used to supplement the gift baskets and items in the Food Pantry.

St. Matthew Contact: Brenda Lehtinen 704-541-1551

Friendship Trays

Friendship Trays is a community program utilizing volunteers to deliver hot meals to shut-ins throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg. **Volunteers** are needed to deliver meals at noon – www.friendshiptrays.org.

\$22	Provides meals for one person for a week.
\$90	Provides meals for one person for a month
\$585	Provides meals for one person for six months.

St. Matthew Contacts: Robbin Burris 704-847-8058
Patti Olejniczak 704-443-5150

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity helps build low-cost housing for a needy family and provides meals for workers each weekend during the construction phase. St. Matthew has completed 6 Habitat houses.

Books to Bricks Project: Professional and Youth groups all over Charlotte are joining hands with the Habitat for Humanity Charlotte ReStore and organizing "**Books to Bricks**" book drives. Any type of book is fine as long as it is in decent condition. You can donate fiction, non-fiction, children's books, paperbacks, hardcover...even books on tape or CD. No dictionaries or encyclopedias please.

The **Charlotte ReStore** sells the books at Julia's Coffee & Used Bookstore (1133 N Wendover Rd) at a modest price. All the proceeds are donated to Habitat for Humanity of Charlotte. Last year nine new Habitat homes were funded by the sale of ReStore donations.

St. Matthew Contact: Bob Wilcocks 704-542-1541

Homeless Shelters

✧ At the **Uptown Men's Shelter** a group of parishioners prepares and serves dinner on the second Saturday evening of odd-numbered months and lunch on the fifth Saturday of any month. **Volunteers** also serve at the shelter front desk and with sorting and distributing clothing.

A quarterly (August, November, February and May) **collection** at St. Matthew of men's underwear is delivered to the Uptown Men's Shelter for distribution to their residents and clients. Any time during the year they can use the following items:

Men's underwear	Flip flop shower shoes	Small soaps
Socks	Belts	Toothpaste and toothbrushes
Gently used jeans	Gently used shoes	Deodorant

An extended list of items needed for the Uptown Men's Shelter is available at www.uptownshelter.org/howtohelp.html

St. Matthew Contact: Tom Ellis 704-542-9419

✦ The **Center of Hope**, housed at the Salvation Army, is a 24/7 facility for women and children who are homeless. The St. Matthew Women's Guild organizes a collection of bed and bath linens and toiletries each January and July for the Center of Hope. An extended list of items needed is at www.salvationarmycharlotte.org.

St. Matthew Contact: Jo Fulginiti 704-841-9007

Lunch To Go

Volunteers prepare and deliver sandwiches and cookies twice weekly to the Union County Community Shelter for residents to take with them to work. The shelter provides temporary shelter, food, and basic services to homeless men, women, and families. Call 704-283-5300 for a list of specific items they might need at the holiday season.

St. Matthew Contacts: Colleen Touranjoe 704-841-9344
Marie Lander 704-849-8211

Missionaries of the Poor

The Missionaries of the Poor (MOP) is an international monastic order of Brothers dedicated to Joyful Service with Christ on the Cross to serve the poorest of the poor. The order was started in 1981 by Father Richard Ho Lung and has now grown to more than 500 brothers. MOP has free missions around the globe with the main home in Kingston, Jamaica, where they maintain six mission homes. The Brothers also serve the Lord with their acts of mercy in India, the Philippines (Naga City and Cebu), Haiti, Uganda and Kenya.

The Brothers welcome visitors to come and **join them in their work**. And, they welcome **contributions and food donations**. For seven years St. Matthew has collected food and shipped it to Haiti where MOP Brothers distribute it to residents of their mission homes and to people in the community. Teams and individuals from St. Matthew have made mission trips to Jamaica and Haiti since 1998. A trip to Jamaica is anticipated in January 2010.

In 2008 the Brothers opened Guardian Angels Monastery in Monroe, NC, their first mission house in the United States.

At the MOP website www.missionariesofthepoor.org you will find a list of items always needed as well as music CDs and books for purchase. Father Ho Lung and friends have brought their concerts to Charlotte on several occasions, most recently "Isaiah" at the CPCC Halton Theater in August 2009.

St. Matthew Contacts: Peter and Lucie Tonon 704-814-9528

RAIN Regional AIDS Interfaith Network

RAIN is a Charlotte-based non-profit organization that works with groups of individuals (called **Care Teams**) from faith communities to support persons living with HIV/AIDS. Care Teams provide practical, emotional and spiritual support to a Care Partner (an individual living with HIV/AIDS). Members of the Care Team provide assistance to one or more individuals or provide specialized tasks such as transportation, pastoral care or companionship. RAIN currently has 64 Care Teams serving 74 Care Partners. In addition, 85 individuals are being served by RAIN's Pastoral Services staff and over 14,000 people have benefited from HIV/AIDS prevention and education programming.

St. Matthew has been a loyal supporter of RAIN for over 10 years and currently has one operating Care Team. RAIN needs committed, available people to share their time and talent by being good listeners, caregivers and friends. What a wonderful gift of self and community.

St. Matthew Contact: Helen Fritsch 704-543-0446

Refugee Resettlement Ministry

The Refugee Resettlement Ministry **adopts refugee families** during their first six months in this county. Services include welcoming the family at the airport, donating home furnishings and money, furniture pick-up and delivery, food, and friendship.

A list of needs is available by going to www.cssnc.org/refugee.html and clicking on "Refugee Resettlement Ongoing Needs".

St. Matthew Contact: Bill LaMay 704-995-0002

Urban Ministry Center

In the beginning there was only a soup kitchen. By 1994, the needs of the poor and homeless of our city had grown substantially, and that need was met by the establishment of the Urban Ministry Center (UMC).

Where would you go if you were homeless, hungry, sick, dirty, mentally ill or addicted? What if you lost most of your possessions, your ID and had no transportation or family? Thankfully, there is the Urban Ministry Center. This center provides Charlotte's homeless population with an array of services, including:

- ✦ **SOUP KITCHEN** — Serving lunch daily totaling 76,000 meals a year.
- ✦ **SUPPORT SERVICES** — An on-site social worker, showers, laundry, prescription and many more services that assist our neighbors to move towards greater self sufficiency.
- ✦ **COUNSELING**
- ✦ **HOMELESS HELPING HOMELESS** — The voice of the homeless whose mission is to educate and achieve security and success through advocacy, social and political action.
- ✦ **ROOM IN THE INN** — Providing over 14,000 beds for the homeless.

Find the items most needed on the UMC Wish List at www.urbanministrycenter.org/donate/wish-list

The **holiday honor card** promotion is one of the UMC's largest fundraisers. The holiday card features artwork by an artist in the UMC's art program. When you send in your donation you can request to have the cards sent to you for mailing or for the cards to be mailed by UMC in your name. Details at www.urbanministrycenter.org after October 1.

Contact: Lauren Cranford 704-926-0622
development@urbanministrycenter.org

Additional resources for a Socially Conscious Christmas



Fair Trade: A commitment to building relationships. The fair choice is the right choice. The daily decisions you make as a consumer can make a real, positive difference in the world. When you choose to buy fair trade products you are making a strong connection with hardworking, but impoverished workers around the world. Learn more at the Catholic Relief Services website www.crsfairtrade.org.



Equipping people of faith to challenge consumerism, live justly and celebrate in responsible earth friendly ways at www.simpleliving.org.



Heifer International provides livestock, trees, training and other resources to help struggling families build sustainable futures. Gifts range from \$10 for a share of a goat to \$500 for a heifer. For more information and/or to place your Christmas orders, go to www.heifer.org.



Crisis Assistance Ministry (CAM) offers holiday cards for purchase in lieu of traditional gifts. The festive cards feature the artwork of several children whose parents received emergency financial assistance at CAM. View the cards at www.crisisassistance.org. Volunteers also are needed to interview, to file, to sort clothing, and/or to work in the clothing store.



Matthews Help Center provides care for families and individuals in meeting life's basic needs. They accept monetary donations as well as clothing and/or household item donations for their *Backporch Treasures* thrift shop. Details at www.matthewshelpcenter.org.



Kiva is a person-to-person micro-lending website, empowering individuals to lend directly to unique entrepreneurs around the globe. To learn more about loans that change lives go to www.kiva.org.

Project Have Hope works to empower women in the Acholi Quarter of Uganda by providing education to both the women and their children and by assisting the women in establishing opportunities to promote economic stability and sustainability. One way to help is to buy Acholi jewelry made from recycled paper. Find out about hosting a bead party at http://www.projecthavehope.org/html/host_a_bead_party.html. Information about Project Have Hope is at www.projecthavehope.org.

Room At The Inn Room at the Inn is a safe haven and source of hope for pregnant mothers and their children. For a list of needed items go to www.rati.org/content/WanttoHelp/Donate/tabid/70/Default.aspx.

ADVENT SPIRITUALITY

The Advent Wreath

Advent wreaths are used in churches and in homes to represent the long time the people wait for the coming of Christ. Advent is a celebration of the waiting and watching for Christ. During Advent we pray that Christ will come into our hearts.

The Advent wreath is made up of four candles; three purple and one pink. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent. Often a fifth candle, a white one, is added to the center of the wreath and is lit on Christmas Eve.

During the first week of Advent one candle is lit; the second week two and so on. Appropriate prayers are said each week.

Advent Wreath Symbols

- The shape of the wreath reminds us that God has no beginning or end.
- The boughs of evergreens point to the fact that God is always with us as a sign of hope and new life.
- Unlit candles remind us of the many years people waited for the coming of Christ.
- Lit candles show us that Christ is the light of the world.
- As each candle is lit the intensity of the light grows until it is at its brightest on Christmas.



Advent Wreath Blessing

Loving God our Creator, bless us and this Advent wreath as we reflect on Christ's coming into our hearts anew. This wreath recalls the many centuries people waited to see the light of Christ, your son. May this wreath be a sign of our preparation and watchfulness as we prepare and wait for the glorious celebration of your Son's birth.

Let peace and justice reign on this earth as we continue to build your kingdom. We ask this blessing in the name of your Son, Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Secret Santa

This celebration originated in Germany and was called *Christ Kinder* or "Christ Child" because children were taught that the Christ Child brought gifts to the children. Later it became known as Kris Kringle and was popularized in the United States by the early Dutch settlers.

The custom involves choosing someone secretly and giving that person small gifts in secret throughout the Advent season.

On Christmas Eve the Kris Kringles or Secret Santas reveal their identity. This is a fun custom for families, for a niece, a nephew, a grandchild, or a friend. It is important to be sure that small, simple gifts are given in this tradition—handmade items, a single piece of candy, a photo, a small toy, etc. In a group setting or with a family, all recipients should get the same kind of simple gifts.



Make this year's crèche (manger scene) a "progressive" experience

Put Joseph and Mary far from the manger at the start of the Advent season (e.g., across the room). As the days go on, bring them closer to the manger. On Christmas Eve, place the baby Jesus in the crèche. Put the shepherds a short distance away and move them into the manger area on Christmas morning. After Jesus is born, start moving the Wise Men toward the manger from another far distance (preferably the East), coming closer each day until, finally, the entire manger scene is complete on Epiphany.

ADVENT PRAYERS

Before Breakfast Prayer during Christmas Season

The Word was made flesh, alleluia, alleluia!

And dwelt among us, alleluia, alleluia!

Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, before the face of the Lord, for He comes. Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

After Breakfast Prayer during Christmas Season

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will, alleluia! The Lord has reigned, and He is clothed with beauty. Almighty God, the Savior of the world, who hast nourished us with heavenly food, we give Thee thanks for the gift of this bodily refreshment which we have received from Thy bountiful mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Christmas Prayer

Moonless darkness stands between.

Past, the Past, no more be seen!

But the Bethlehem star may lead me

To the sight of Him Who freed me

From the self that I have been.

Make me pure, Lord: Thou art Holy;

Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;

Now beginning, and always,

Now begin, on Christmas day.

—By Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1844-1889

Prayer for Midnight Mass

Father, you make this holy night radiant with the splendor of Jesus Christ our light. We welcome him as Lord, the true light of the world. Bring us to eternal joy in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Prayer for Christmas Dawn

Father, we are filled with the new light by the coming of your Word among us. May the light of faith shine in our words and actions. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—Source: Catholic Online Prayers - www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?s=7



The **Peace and Justice Ministry** meets quarterly on the second Wednesday of January, April, July and October.

Mission Statement: The Peace and Justice Ministry of St. Matthew Catholic Church strives to shine a light on injustices as well as to educate and to engage our parishioners and our community on ways to achieve justice for every human person.

- As a part of this mission, we have assembled this Socially Conscious Christmas catalog.
- A DVD and facilitator's guide for the **Immigration Forum** presented February 12, 2008, at St. Matthew is available in the parish library. These materials can be used by individuals or small groups to explore the complex legal and moral issues at the center of the immigration debate.
- On Saturday, November 7, 2009, we are hosting a **Class Matters** Workshop from 9 a.m. to noon in the New Life Center Banquet Room. Class Matters introduces us to the different world of people in poverty, revealing how the survival-based mentality of poverty affects learning, work habits, and decision-making.
- Look for additional workshops and events in the parish bulletin and on the St. Matthew website at www.stmatthewcatholic.org.

For more information on the Peace and Justice Ministry, contact the coordinator, Terri Jarina, at tjarina@windstream.net or 704-243-4431.