



“Right now, we have 560 families visit a month (at St. Stephen’s Food Pantry). Three years ago, that number was 280.”

Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another.

Thomas Merton

The Thomas Merton Center

Serving the men, women and children of Greater Bridgeport for 40 years!

Bursting At The Seams...

Anyone who has been to the Merton Center knows it is a busy place. Luckily, we usually have room for everyone, but lately that has not been the case. It seems with each passing month, more and more people need our help. First, we saw a big jump in the number of visitors to St. Stephen’s Food Pantry. In the last few months we are now seeing a large increase in visitors to the House of Hospitality.

This has left us scratching our heads a bit. We know a big reason why our pantry is busier is due to cuts to people’s SNAP benefits, or “food stamps” as it is more commonly known. It is fairly common for us to get visitors telling us that the monthly SNAP benefits for their families were cut from around \$200 to \$40. As a result, not only is the pantry seeing many more people, we are seeing more people not used to looking for help and many of them end up asking us where else they can go after we provide them with food. Right now, we have 560 families visit a month. Three years ago, that number was 280. Most of this increased need has been met through our partnership with Community Plates, who delivers us surplus food from

local grocers 4 times a week.

The increase in the number of people we are seeing daily at the House of Hospitality is a bit more puzzling. It is becoming a normal occurrence that we do not have enough seats for the amount of people visiting us for lunch. We usually are able to cope because on these days the length of the lunch line ensures that some people



will have eaten and left before the folks in the back of the line are served. Right now, between breakfast and lunch, we are serving over 300 meals a day.

That is 20 meals more a day than last year. For us, that is a big jump. We have had numerous conversations about why we think we are busier, but we are still not sure why.

In the end, regardless of the specific reasons, the simplest fact remains: more people are visiting us because more people are hurting and not able to make ends meet. We thank those of you who continue to support the work of the Merton Center, and know that we will continue to meet the needs of all who come to us for help.

Our Food Pantry Is Moving!



What do you do when you run out of room? If you are lucky to have the space, you move! St. Stephen’s Food Pantry will be moving this spring into the former medical clinic in our building.

We will have about twice the space, and will have separate rooms for food deliveries, intake meetings with our visitors, and food storage. The main “shopping” area is pretty bare right now, but by the time you read this, it will be filled with food. Keep an eye on our Facebook page and website for updates!



The Thomas Merton Center is a program of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, Inc.



United Way of Coastal Fairfield County



The Thomas Merton Center
43 Madison Avenue
Bridgeport, CT 06604
(203) 367-9036

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Spring 2014

Save The Date

Did you know that November 2014 marks the 40th anniversary of The Thomas Merton Center? To celebrate, we are having a special 40th Anniversary Gala at The Patterson Club in Fairfield on Saturday, November 22nd. Check out our Facebook page or our website for more details as they become available!



Check us out online:

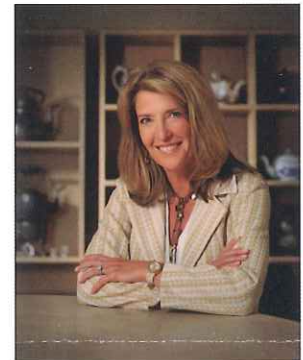
www.themertoncenter.org
Facebook: Under
"The Thomas Merton Center"
Catholic Charities:
www.ccfairfield.org

The Thomas Merton Center

2014 Merton Center Celebrity Breakfast is Coming!

Our 20th Annual Celebrity Breakfast is set for Thursday, May 22 from 7:30am-9am at the Holiday Inn on Main Street here in Bridgeport.

Our keynote speaker this year is Cindi Bigelow. Cindi is the 3rd generation President & CEO of family-owned Bigelow Tea, the US market leader of specialty teas. She holds a BS degree from Boston College, an MBA from Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management, and an Honorary Doctorate from University of New Haven. Socially- and community-minded, she frequently makes appearances speaking to students and industry leaders, sharing insights on business ethics and career development, and has received numerous awards for her years of community service.



The Gang from St. Mark's

Paul Kurmay (top right) of St. Mark's Parish in Stratford poses with a dedicated group of volunteers from the church. Paul coordinates crews of volunteers from St. Mark's that have been bringing the food, doing the cooking, and serving the lunch at the Merton House of Hospitality three days a month for the past six years. Three cheers for the gang from St. Mark's!

Three Things Meet

*It was a happy accident. They both wanted good. (Why?)
Because the children were from bad and good families.
Their lives were in danger.*

The mothers from both sides teamed up to fight on their behalf (so they did).

When they collected their thoughts together, and compared their notes, agreement on all of their parts stated, we want to fight for good on their behalf, so they did.

*And I walked down to the beach and pondered the thought of good and bad meeting;
and the ocean's waters were mixing salt with fresh as every day it did.*

By a Merton Center Guest

We hope you can join us! For more information, please call the Merton Center at 203-367-9036 ext. 15.