



# Blooming Hope

“Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy.”

- Thomas Merton



Well it is certainly an exciting time to be a resident of Connecticut!

Between our national victors UConn and Quinnipiac, there are a lot of champions to root for these days. I am proud to report that The Thomas Merton Center (TMC) is no different - we have a whole team of champions helping us deliver the critical services we provide each and every day. As this issue of our newsletter highlights, it is the volunteers and donors who enable TMC to fulfill our mission in an impactful and respectful way.

Our Eat Smart Marketplace Food Pantry was recently awarded a model food pantry distinction by the Connecticut Foodshare. This accolade would not be possible without the brigade of dedicated volunteers and donors who contribute with food, stock the shelves, and help our guests shop for their groceries in a dignified manner. It's because of our team of incredible volunteers that we are able to provide this vital service to over 350 families a month.

I would also like to take this opportunity to give special recognition to **Jason Lambert** (pictured below) for his years of dedication to the Thomas Merton Center mission. Jason has been conducting and organizing food drives since he was 13 years old and in 8th grade. Now a junior at St. Joseph High School in Trumbull and preparing for his senior year, I want to personally applaud and thank Jason for all his work on behalf of the TMC guests.

Jason, you truly embody the leadership skills and heart that will make this world a better place!

**Thank you to everyone who supports TMC through their time, talent and treasure!**

*- Bill Colson*

Director of The Thomas Merton Center



# Volunteer Spotlight

**Dear Thomas Merton Center Volunteers,**

You matter. You make a difference. You are needed. You are amazing. You care. You are generous. You are loved.  
You ARE LOVE.

Thank you for sharing your time, energy, wisdom, smiles, expertise, laughter, patience, support and love with those we serve. You are the engine that keeps Thomas Merton Center running. We serve those in need so that they may be guided on their journey to self-sufficiency.

When I watch the daily news and see all that is wrong in this world, I look to all of you and I see all that is right in this world. On behalf of all of us, thank you for all that you do to help at TMC.

**With gratitude and appreciation,**  
Karen M. Frissora  
Volunteer Coordinator

The Thomas Merton Center (TMC) was thrilled to work with nearly 30 volunteers from the Diocesan Young Adult Council (DYAC). They got right to work making and serving lunch, as well as mingling with the guests as they ate.

Other volunteers worked outside clearing out our garden area and the grounds around the church. Several others took on the enormous task of organizing donated coats. Needless to say, whatever job these volunteers were asked to work on, there was a lot of positive energy!

It was a pleasure to have these enthusiastic, energetic and fun young adults at the Thomas Merton Center. We are already looking forward to our next DYAC day!



Diocesan Young Adult Council

## You Are Never Too Young To Make A Difference!

Several recent food drives benefiting the Thomas Merton Center have shown us that you are never too young to help others in need. TMC is incredibly grateful, as well as extremely impressed, with our youngest donors.

You all exemplify the qualities of true leadership, generosity, and kindness.

And that's just what the world needs right now!



Honey Tree Preschool, Monroe



Lauralton Hall High School, Milford



St. Joseph High School, Trumbull

# Merton Moments

## Welcome Home, Maryann Furlong!

We are thrilled to have our long-time friend Maryann Furlong back at TMC, this time as a volunteer! Maryann was Director of TMC for 20 years and grew the program from just a soup kitchen providing lunch into the bustling beacon of hope it is today.

“Once I walked into the dining room I knew I was home, just like my first day in 1987. I saw a few familiar faces from my time there and many new faces. Most of our guests lead lives of struggle and challenges but what never fails to astonish me is the laughter and happy voices I hear in the dining room. Somehow they are able to rise above their struggles while they are at TMC. The dignity and respect that they are given there allows them to be the people God meant them to be for that moment in time.”

Maryann’s warm, compassionate and loving manner is a wonderful reminder of who we strive to be each and every day as we fulfill our mission at TMC. We are grateful to call Maryann family and will always have a place at our table for her!



Maryann and her TMC friend Maria

## A Merton Moment of Hope: Daisy Rodriguez, Case Manager

Meet Phyllis and her devoted son Michael. They have been part of the Bridgeport community for as long as anyone can remember. However, although they called Bridgeport their home, they didn’t have a home to call their own. Because of a rent increase that they simply could not afford, Phyllis, 84, and Michael, in his late 40’s, had been chronically homeless and living on the streets of Huntington Turnpike for two years. Although Phyllis was eligible for services, she declined because she could not possibly leave her son. They had always lived together and she was not going to leave him in their darkest hour. When the weather would become unbearably cold, they would seek refuge at a nearby laundromat or rented hotel room. Through it all however, they remained together - all they had in this world was each other.

And then Catholic Charities stepped in. Through the Thomas Merton Center’s case management and the financial assistance CAP program, Phyllis and Michael were placed in a two-bedroom apartment that would be affordable and sustainable on their Social Security.

Phyllis and Michael were given a chance at a better life through the support, guidance, and hope provided through the Thomas Merton Center. We could not provide this level of personal and individualized outreach without the generosity of our supporters. Thank YOU for helping us make these programs available to our guests.



Phyllis and Michael

## Celebrating the Groundbreaking at Our New Home

TMC was thrilled to celebrate the groundbreaking for our new building on March 31st. Fellow colleagues, clergy, politicians, donors, and friends gathered to officially kick-off the public phase of the Capital Campaign. The new Thomas Merton Family Center will offer an array of wraparound services including primary medical care and behavioral health care, immigration services, financial literacy classes, vocational job training, and ESL classes. We are excited to collaborate with Southwest Community Health and Housatonic Community College to offer our guests a hand up in life.

Through the generosity of our lead sponsors, we have raised over 75% of our goal of \$5.5mm. **Please consider helping us raise the final 25%.**

To donate, visit our website: [www.ccfairfield.org/tmccampaign](http://www.ccfairfield.org/tmccampaign)

Looking to make your gift have an even bigger impact? Every gift will be matched up to \$500,000! We are grateful to all our supporters who have helped make this dream into a reality!



Groundbreaking Celebration



Friends from Connecticut Foodshare and TMC staff

The Thomas Merton Center (TMC) is thrilled to share that we have been named a model food pantry by Connecticut Foodshare! **Thank you to all our supporters and volunteers who make the vital work we do in our food pantry each day possible!**

Sylvia Velky from Connecticut Foodshare said it best:

“The warmth that emanates from your organization is something that we value a lot. If this is how we felt as observers, I can only imagine what it must be like for the people we serve. There’s a lot of caring, respect, and compassion toward those who are in need, but also among staff and volunteers. I could go on and on, but one thing I can say for sure, each of you truly value the mission at Thomas Merton Center. It’s not a job, but a great purpose.”

Thank you to Sylvia and Connecticut Foodshare for this honor! We consider ourselves truly blessed to have forged such a wonderful partnership with Connecticut Foodshare!

## *Wish List*

### Food Pantry, Kitchen & Shower Program

If you have any questions about making a donation from our wish list, please call 203-367-9036.

- Full size cereal boxes
- Oatmeal (box of assorted flavors)
- Apple sauce cups or fruit cups
- Granola bars
- Bottled salad dressing
- Large canned coffee (ground, not instant)
- Small water bottles
- Vegetable/canola oil
- Boxed pasta
- Spaghetti sauce in can (Ragu, Prego, etc.)
- Pancake syrup (gallon or quart size)
- Canned fruit, canned vegetables
- Pretzels or chips (individual size packages)
- Disposable razors
- Men's white short-sleeved shirt (medium only)
- Men's boxer shorts / boxer briefs, all sizes (please no briefs)
- Travel size shaving cream

Please do not donate expired food items - thank you!

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