

Our Lady of Sorrows Spotlight Interfaith Hospitality Network

By Deacon Walter Wiggins
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In 1988 OLS joined the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) of Essex County, an affiliate of Family Promise, a national organization dedicated to offering help and hope to homeless and low-income families through a community-based response. Family Promise coordinates local efforts to help keep homeless families together and to regain their housing, their independence, and their dignity. OLS, along with other houses of worship in South Orange and Maplewood including St. Joseph, Prospect Presbyterian, Morrow Memorial, St. George, St. Andrew & Holy Communion, Congregation Beth El have all served as local host sites and most are still active sites.

OLS ceased participation in IHN for a number of years but with the support of Msgr. Emery, it resumed participation in 2009 in partnership with St. Joseph Church, Maplewood. Currently, OLS enjoys the services of some 80-100 volunteers from OLS & St. Joseph's parishes, the OLS/St. Joseph's Youth Group, OLS CCD, DOVE volunteers from Seton Hall University, and Columbia High School.

OLS currently hosts IHN families twice a year. Over 100 families have found a temporary home at OLS.



Construction of sleeping quarters



Anna Nelson began volunteering with her mother and aunt many years ago. Along with Liz Petroccia she is co-coordinator for the OLS host weeks. She loves her work with IHN because she is able to put her faith into action. Anna commented, "Jesus tells us in Scripture, '... whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Mt. 25:40) Doing it for Jesus. How much better than that can it get!"

Anna explained that unfortunately, families in distress are sometimes separated in order to provide adequate shelter for all family members. The IHN, however, provides a place for these families to remain together in a place that is welcoming, safe and comfortable. The sleeping quarters are a modular design that are easy to set up and provide a private living space for families from 3 to 8 people. OLS is able to accommodate a maximum of 14 people during a host week.



People look forward to volunteering and sharing the gifts of their time and talents with the families as their schedules permit. Some help with setting up and breaking down the living quarters. Some will prepare meals or do laundry. Others spend time with the children helping with homework, doing arts and crafts projects, or playing games during the days and evenings.

There are a number of other ways to participate if one is unable to contribute time. For example, a Giving Tree is usually placed outside the church entrance in the weeks leading up to a host week for donating specific items such as paper goods, laundry detergent or gift cards.



OLS IHN is always looking for new volunteers to support the host week activities. If you've been looking for an opportunity to live out your faith in a more active way the IHN may be for you. For more information on how you can serve with the OLS IHN, contact Anna Nelson at annanelson202@gmail.com.

For more information on IHN of Essex County, visit their website at <https://ihnessexnj.org>. For more information on Family Promise, visit their website at <https://familypromise.org>.

The next IHN host week at OLS will be October 13-20, 2019. Watch the bulletin and listen to the mass announcements for more information.