

# Bearing Witness

May 2019



## A Note from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the many ways in which you have supported

ImmaCare. Whether by preparing and serving a meal, offering needed goods or services, or donating funds, you are an integral partner as we provide services to those experiencing homelessness, and we are truly grateful. As our partner, I am pleased to share an update on our capital campaign. As you may know, we have been hard at work putting a plan in place that addresses three priorities:

- **The first is raising the necessary funds to renovate the shelter. After years of deferred maintenance, it's critical that we renovate the historic former church into a modern emergency shelter. These modifications will allow the shelter to become compliant with mandated HUD requirements, serve clients with dignity and efficiency, and support their health and safety.**
- **Secondly, there is an ongoing need to generate revenue for program expansion, including purchasing apartment buildings so we can offer housing options to more individuals in, or at risk of, a housing crisis.**
- **The third priority is legacy giving, which will help increase our operational and staffing capacity to ensure the future of ImmaCare's vital services to our community. Our goal is to grow the Endowment Fund to \$1 million.**



You might believe that these are “lofty goals” and I would have to agree. However, we have the most significant part committed by the state’s Department of Housing, and with the help of generous

donors and foundations, are close to reaching our goal for the construction portion of the project.

Since its inception in 1981, ImmaCare has evolved from a shelter that deals with symptoms, to an organization that provides solutions. We need the generous help of businesses, corporations, foundations and members of the community to help us grow our capacity for housing options, program expansion, and ensure our legacy.

Please help us fill our funding gap. If you want to learn how you can partner with ImmaCare on reaching our campaign goals, please contact Teresa Wierbicki, Director of Strategic Development, at [twierbicki@immacare.org](mailto:twierbicki@immacare.org) , or call 860-724-4823 ext. 103.

Sincerely,

Louis Gilbert

## Stay Informed About ImmaCare

Sign up for our mailing list to start receiving our e-newsletter “ImmaComm” to keep up-to-date with the Shelter Renovation Project and more!

<http://immacare.org/>

*(scroll to the bottom left corner for Mailing List sign-up)*



And if you haven't already, “Like” us on Facebook!

[www.Facebook.com/ImmaCare.CT](http://www.Facebook.com/ImmaCare.CT)

# Learning Through Serving

Submitted by Laurel Thomas Northwest Catholic High School



All sophomores at Northwest Catholic High School complete a service project that fulfills one of their corporal acts of mercy. I chose ImmaCare, as I get to “feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and shelter the homeless” -- all in one.

For my service project, I helped with a variety of projects around the agency, but was most excited to serve dinner at the shelter. One Friday night, the shelter had a donated dinner but the group was unable to serve; I volunteered to serve with my two best friends and my mom.

Not long after we arrived at the shelter, the food was ready and we began serving. With each “thank you” we received, our smiles grew. One of my friends was struggling with nervousness at first and a concentrated expression got the best of her smile. One of the men joked while waiting to be served, saying “Ahhh, this one’s serious.” By the time seconds were called, she had caught the hang of it and her smile had returned. The man noticed

and grinned back, saying, “Okay, so she’s a smiler after all!” We all had a good laugh and my friend felt like she had made a little connection, making her experience even better.

The best part of the evening was the excitement over dessert, which was a variety of cookies. I had volunteered once before and we had brought donuts for dessert. I remembered how excited the men were; many exclaimed that they were their favorites. Recalling this, I couldn’t wait to bring out the cookies and, to my delight, we received a similar, joyous reaction.

The first time around, we distributed the same set of cookies to everyone. They were happy, but we could see them staring longingly at the types they didn’t receive (and likely preferred). So, during seconds, they picked their cookies. The pure joy on their faces was worth having to wait the extra few seconds for each to decide. We noticed one man come back up with the hat he’d been wearing now off, looking for another serving of cookies. We complied with his request. He then

kept coming around, each time doing something with his clothes or hair to “disguise” himself. My friends and I couldn’t help but giggle and enjoy satisfying this gentleman’s cookie cravings while making his night by going along with his ruse.

Throughout our ride home we couldn’t stop talking about how great the experience was, telling stories about our interactions. We discussed that we wanted to serve again, next time bringing more friends, and maybe baking the dessert ourselves.

## Employer Support

Does your employer have a Matching Gifts Program, an Employee Giving Program, or a Volunteer Grant Program?

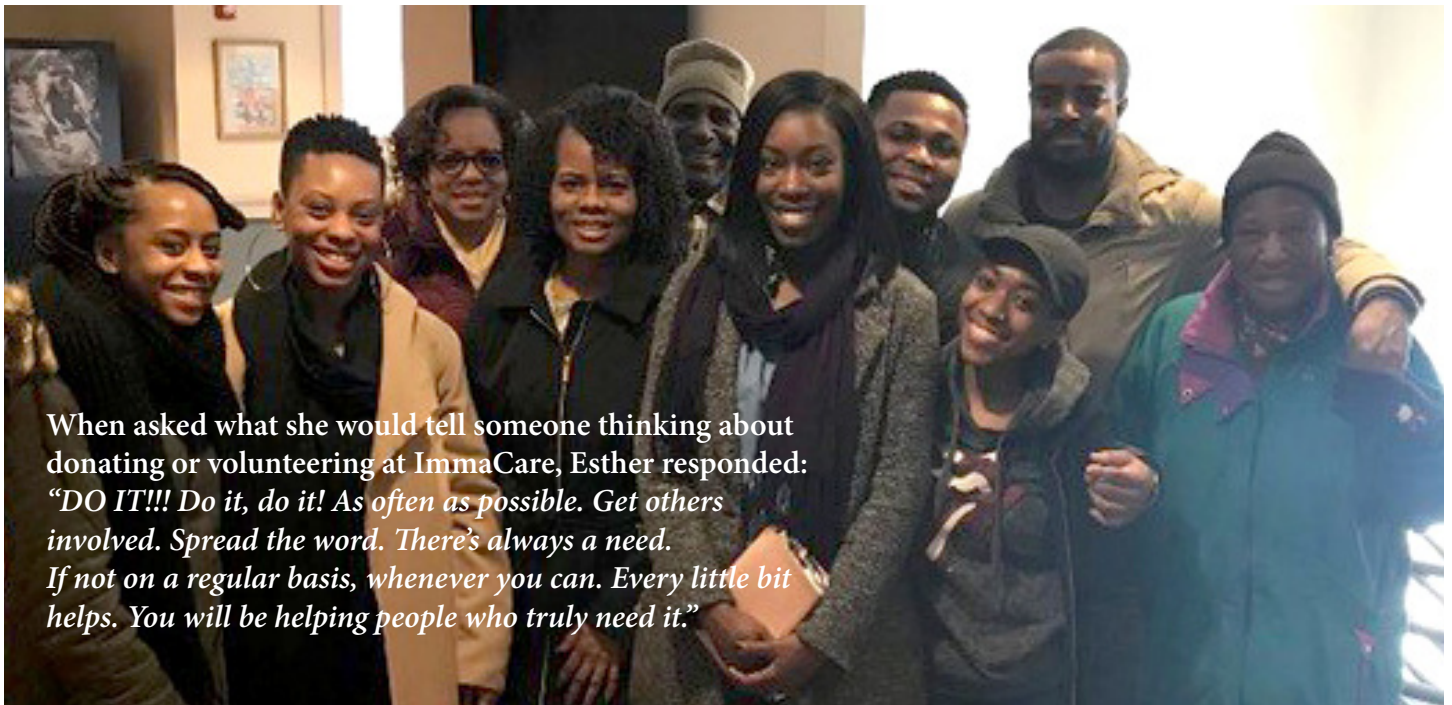
Thousands of employers around the country offer programs to their employees where they will match an employee’s donation to an eligible charity. Some offer grants to the organizations in exchange for your volunteer hours. Still others give employees the opportunity to donate a portion of your paycheck directly to an agency. ImmaCare Inc. is a tax exempt 501(c)3 non-profit organization that has donors who participate in a number of these programs.

Just a few of the local employers who offer such programs are: UTC, Prudential Financial, Apple, Travelers, Disney, Starbucks, GE, Aetna, Gap, The Hartford, Home Depot and many more!

Eligible Employers are very familiar with helping to set you up within their programs. Should you like a little guidance on where to start, please reach out to us!

Teresa Wierbicki  
twierbicki@immacare.org

# Giving Life to a Legacy



When asked what she would tell someone thinking about donating or volunteering at ImmaCare, Esther responded: *“DO IT!!! Do it, do it! As often as possible. Get others involved. Spread the word. There’s always a need. If not on a regular basis, whenever you can. Every little bit helps. You will be helping people who truly need it.”*

Seedtime and Harvest Ministries in Bloomfield, a small but mighty congregation of 25-30 members, is where former ImmaCare Inc. employee and now board member, Esther Darko, finds her spiritual home. She refers to the group as one big happy family; they are led by Pastor Paulette R. Bowman, wife of late Pastor Ronnie S. Bowman, Sr., who passed unexpectedly on Christmas Day in 2016. While working for ImmaCare, Esther connected with Pastor Ron who was excited to support the agency, but it wasn’t until the winter of 2016 that the church did their first blanket and coat drive for the agency. Since his passing, the congregation advances the legacy Pastor Ron wanted to have through continued involvement with ImmaCare.

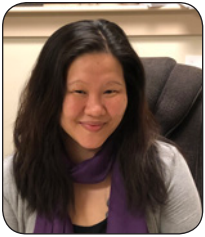
Teamed with Tracy Bempong, Esther leads The Shelter Ministry at Seedtime and Harvest Ministries (SHM), which organizes donation drives for ImmaCare while educating and inspiring the congregation about homelessness. Esther

urges people to, “recognize that there is a constant need for help, not just around the holidays. Extreme weather, cold or hot, both jeopardize the health and safety of individuals experiencing homelessness, and they need to eat no matter what the season.” She hopes people will stop judging others and begin to realize that there isn’t one solution to homelessness, and that those experiencing it are people, each with their own challenges, history and journey.

The congregation recently gathered some of our most in-demand items into “Welcome Kits” for clients who are being housed. When clients move from the Emergency Shelter into their own home, they often lack the most basic supplies and have a very tight budget to purchase items. With limited resources for these purchases, ImmaCare relies heavily on the generosity of our supporters to lend a helping hand. Within two weeks, SHM amassed a mountain of supplies. The donations

included everything from dishes, pots and pans, to a microwave oven and hamper. Also included were toiletries and cleaning supplies, along with glasses and utensils. The amount of items donated from such a modest congregation was inspiring. Esther noted that she was reminded how much can be done if people join together and put their minds to something, and how even a small group can make a big difference.

In a fast-paced world where people expect problems to be solved quickly, it’s important to understand that working with people is a slow process and people won’t change overnight. It’s often a slow process for our clients to work through their challenges and end their homelessness. We are eternally grateful that Esther, Tracy, Pastor Paulette and the Seedtime and Harvest Ministries community understand this and we are honored to be the beneficiary of their work to further Pastor Ron’s legacy.



# Housing-Centered: Focusing on Solutions

*Submitted by Rebekah Lyas, Director of Programs*

Often when we think about people experiencing homelessness, we think about mental illness and/or substance abuse. While people experiencing homelessness may deal with these issues, many others deal with these issues and do not end up homeless. A family member of mine was suffering from alcoholism, worked full-time, raised a family and was never homeless. Another family member has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and she also has never experienced homelessness. Because I've seen these family members never become homeless, yet still struggle with the same issues that I see some of our clients deal with, I truly believe that homelessness is a housing problem.

In 2018, ImmaCare participated in the Hartford Emergency Shelter Learning Collaborative. This initiative was created by Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, the National Alliance to

End Homelessness, and the Connecticut Department of Housing to bring together the emergency shelters in Greater Hartford to examine operations and make changes to improve outcomes, while getting support and training from national experts. The Learning Collaborative is working to provide low-barrier and safe shelter for clients and staff, reduce the average length of homelessness to housing, and increase the number of exits to housing.

Iain DeJong, President & CEO of OrgCode Consulting, said that, "Shelter should be part of a process of getting someone housed, not a destination." I've worked in the homeless system for eight years and while I don't think anyone ever thought that shelter was a destination, it sure seemed like it was. I was told a story about how, many years ago, someone was given a tour of the shelter and the staff member was proud to introduce this person to clients who had been in shelter four, six or even eight years. Today, we are no

longer proud to have the same clients in the shelter for years. We are, however, extremely happy to have supportive housing clients in our program for many years.

At ImmaCare, we have never had requirements of sobriety or income. We recently looked at our policies and eliminated any rules that are not directly related to safety, striving to be even more low-barrier. Our hope is to provide shelter to those folks who can't or won't find shelter elsewhere. We have looked at the physical shelter environment to make simple changes before the major renovations begin to make the shelter feel housing-focused. Our conversations are about housing, our signage is about housing, our case management services are about housing.

We understand that people will always experience homelessness. Our goal is to make those experiences safe, short and rare.



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