

Children and Families Find a Friend

Christ Child Society of Baltimore targets underserved community members.

by Nancy Grund
Community contributor



Event at Armistead Gardens School.
Photo courtesy of Jay Baker

“Nothing is ever too much to do for a child.” Those words from Mary Virginia Merrick, who founded the National Christ Child Society in 1887, still resonate more than a century later, especially for those members of the Christ Child Society of Baltimore. Revitalized last fall, the group is making a difference for hundreds of Baltimore-area residents through a wide range of primarily “hands-on” volunteer efforts – all designed to serve the needs of children and families.

“Our group is made up of women of all faiths,” says Pinehurst resident Cathleen White. “The Christ Child Society of Baltimore dates back to 1905, and we are excited to continue the tradition of helping children and parents in the Baltimore community.”

Some 20 women regularly attend the one-hour monthly meetings at St. Pius X Church in Rodgers Forge, and some 80 others join them in coordinating donations, volunteering at nonprofit sites and collecting needed items. At the suggestion of Homeland resident Melanie McKloskey, the group enlarged its volunteer base to include college students, youth and adult groups and even knitting groups. Its three main areas of support include education and literacy, infant care and parenting, and basic needs.

The group partners with a wide range of nonprofit organizations to fulfill its mission. Over the last 12 months, Christ Child Society of Baltimore volunteers coordinated and donated some 3,100 books to such places as Our Daily Bread, Beans and Bread and the Hampden Family Center; baked casseroles for Our Daily Bread; and provided more than 20 complete layettes for new mothers at the Family Crisis Center in Baltimore County; Turn Around, Inc., a domestic violence and sexual assault center in Baltimore; and Pregnancy Center North in Towson.

“The Christ Child Society has been a tremendous partner in our efforts to assist families who are trying to stabilize their lives and live violence-free,” says Rebecca Foster, shelter director for the Family Crisis Center. “The women often are surprised that others, who do not know them, are offering a

hand. That generosity can be a life-changing event.”

Social worker Amelia Rubinstein, who runs the anti-trafficking program for Turn Around, Inc., agrees. “Many of our clients are young mothers and children, who have suffered extreme abuse and violence. These survivors are so appreciative of the most basic donations, such as diapers and infant clothing.”

In addition to donations, group members have logged countless hours volunteering with children at local organizations, including a partnership with Armistead Gardens Elementary and Middle School. “The Christ Child Society of Baltimore not only helped us put together an anti-bullying program for our students with keynote speaker, First Lady Katie O’Malley, they have donated children’s books, read to Pre-K students in the Book Buddies Program and launched a wellness curriculum that reached some 700 participants,” says Principal Mark Bongiovanni.

At the Hampden Family Center, children look forward to their weekly visits with volunteers. “It is so helpful for the children to work with the same volunteers in the after-school enrichment programs and study buddy program on a consistent basis. It makes their impact even more powerful,” explains Lisa Ghinger, center director.

Volunteers reap benefits as well. Pre-school teacher and Stoneleigh resident Anne Costigan is a regular Homework Helper volunteer. “Each week I look forward to working with the children. The center atmosphere is so positive, encouraging, and respectful. I feel grateful to be a part of this project.”

This fall the group will benefit from an event sponsored by Towson-based Compton Financial Group. “Through our ‘Dreams in September’ event, we will collect children’s books and school supplies for The Christ Child Society of Baltimore,” explains West Towson resident Vicky Compton. “We are so impressed with this organization’s accomplishments in such a short period of time, and we are happy to host this event on its behalf.”

Interested in joining the Baltimore chapter of the Christ Child Society or making a donation? Visit facebook.com/BaltimoreChristChildChapter or write to P.O. Box 584, Riderwood, Md. 21139.

Information for this article was provided by Christ Child Society of Baltimore members Cathleen White and Anne Costigan. For more information, email Cathleen or Anne at baltimore@nationalchristchild.org. Nancy Grund is a Baltimore-based freelance writer, who was inspired by volunteer efforts to join the Christ Child Society of Baltimore.