



# BECAUSE *we are* CATHOLIC

## Montgomery County Parish Inspired by the Desire to Serve

As Archbishop of Washington, which includes five Maryland counties, Cardinal James Hickey was an advocate for the poor. A legendary story involving Cardinal Hickey is the inspiration for one Montgomery County parish's outreach ministry.

"Cardinal Hickey had gathered together a group of prominent Catholics because he wanted their financial support," St. Francis of Assisi pastor Fr. John Dillon said. "At the end of his presentation, one of them raised his hand and said, 'Your Eminence, with all due respect, I don't get it. Why do you want us to help these people? They aren't even Catholic.' Cardinal Hickey responded that we were helping them not because they are Catholic, but because we are. We feed the hungry, we give drinks to the thirsty, we clothe the naked, we visit the imprisoned, we bury the dead. I always thought that was a wonderful answer. We are Catholic and the people we serve might not be, but that doesn't matter."

Dillon is in his fifth year leading the Derwood parish, which takes great pride in serving poor and vulnerable populations through their outreach. During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, St. Francis parishioners donated nearly \$250,000 to 35 different organizations, including local ones like the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Rebuilding Together Montgomery County (RTMC), Action in Montgomery (AIM), and the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless.

"It is really impressive," Dillon added. "I try to encourage the best I can but try to stay out of the way of people doing really good work. People have a passion in the sense of Catholic social teaching, realizing that everything is connected. The people here are just very generous and very responsive to people in need all over the world."



*St. Francis of Assisi parishioner Pat O'Connor working during the Rebuilding Together Montgomery County project last April, one of the many organizations the parish outreach supports.*

For 30 years, St. Francis of Assisi has supported a sister parish, St. Paul in Leon, Haiti, raising funds to build the first high school in the region, sponsoring the poorest children in the area so they can attend school, and making medical mission trips several times a year during which hundreds of Haitians receive quality health care that they would not have otherwise received.

"There is a tremendous pride in that relationship. The volunteers who have been involved in this are very impressive," Dillon explained. "Hurricane Matthew destroyed many of the villages in Haiti, including the church itself. The local priest would like to rebuild and that is something we have been working with them to help."

The parish is also active in state and local politics. Dillon and St. Francis staffers Tony

Bosnick and Marie Yeast attended the annual Catholics in Annapolis event last week that has brought thousands from across Maryland to the state capital every year to learn about policy issues and meet with legislators to make their voices heard. Because St. Francis has parishioners from all over the region, Catholics in Annapolis attendees from the parish met with numerous legislators that represent the various legislative districts in which they reside.

"Many people come to Annapolis to lobby on behalf of the rich, powerful, and famous," said Dillon, who has been attending the event since 1996. "We as Catholics come to lobby on behalf of the poor, widows, orphans, the marginalized, and the vulnerable. In other words on behalf of people who have no voice."

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