



St. Mary's Center

A Community of Hope,
Healing & Justice

SUMMER 2022 NEWSLETTER

Celebrating holidays together

Community is an essential part of our mission here at St. Mary's Center and the joy of welcoming our members back over the last few months has been immensely re-energizing. St. Mary's Center began the gradual reinstatement of on-site services with Sunday Dinner in September, followed by a more official reopening in November for Thanksgiving. Attendees included seniors, staff, board members, community leaders, and a team of local celebrity waiters.

Since then, St. Mary's Center has had the pleasure of celebrating all major holidays and events with our beloved community members including Christmas, New Years, Valentine's Day, International Women's Day, Earth Day, and Mother's Day. Some highlights include a visit from Santa and his bag of gifts on Christmas, spoken poetry on International Women's Day, and a festival with games on Earth Day. Nearly 250 Seniors were invited to our first-annual Membership Meeting on June 30.

Being able to reconnect through social, cultural, and recreational activities has meant a great deal to our Seniors and plays a key role in improving their mental health and quality of life. We look forward to being able to spend many more Sunday Dinners, holidays, and weekday meals with our Seniors in the future. ●

Mother's Day



Thanksgiving



Christmas



Celebrity Waiters



Cleaning muddy spinach



Dear Friends,

Recently Earlene Dutton called to share her first experience at St. Mary's Center. As a junior at Holy Names College, she came to our original home at 7th and Jefferson Streets (near the now closed Oakland Jail) and was quickly put to work. She was assigned to clean an enormous sink full of muddy spinach that had been donated. She still remembers filling and draining the sink over and over to clean the spinach.

"I was hooked there and then. The people made St. Mary's special then and they do today, too," she said. Earlene went on to finish college, teach, and return to service at St. Mary's Center as a Board member. She was the original Christmas Elf at St. Mary's Preschool celebrations for many years, and is still an active supporter. Earlene got us wondering:

Who was at St. Mary's Center for the first Sunday Dinner in 1973?

We're looking through the archives as we prepare for our 50th Anniversary in 2023, but we need your help. We are excited to collect stories and memories of those early years and all the good work since then. We would like to hear from you about how you started serving meals, bagging groceries, or reading to preschool children, bagging groceries, or moving furniture for newly housed Seniors.

I am asking every supporter of St. Mary's Center to check your list of friends and family and help us honor these original volunteers and the work they started nearly 50 years ago. We will keep compiling records, but you can help us find the people.

While we celebrate the past, we look to the future as well. Our Board of Directors, led by Romi Hall, is wrapping up two years of strategic planning with an exciting vision based on being a community of hope, healing, and justice. Watch for more information.

I want to close with deep appreciation for everyone – Seniors, Preschoolers, Volunteers, Staff and Donors – who have been patient with the ups-and-downs, open-and-closed nature of the past two years. We have come through the storm and continued to provide housing, nutrition, and social support to people who need it most. Thank you for being a part of this mission.

In Community,

Sharon Cornu, MSHS
Executive Director



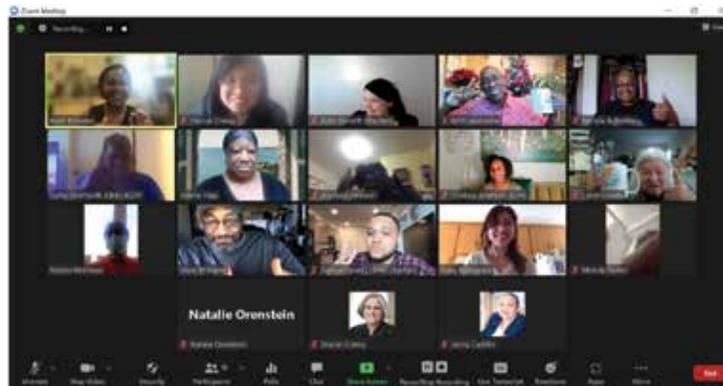
*Earlene Dutton, Ron Lommari
and Sister Marilyn.*

Becoming a leader with the Leadership Academy

From July to November 2021, St. Mary's Center partnered with EveryOne Home, East Bay Housing Organizations, and the San Francisco Foundation to hold a Leadership Academy for 15 advocates with lived experience of homelessness and poverty. Fifteen participants gathered every week to connect on lived experiences and learn from the diverse circumstances of those impacted by homelessness or at risk of homelessness. These participants spent five months critically analyzing the root causes of homelessness by discussing the intersection of housing, race, and class. They learned how to impact policymaking and direct resources toward effective solutions. Leadership Academy participants utilized the county

budget process to influence budget priorities, deepened knowledge of power-mapping tools, and improved their public speaking skills.

Though our first cohort of the Leadership Academy ended last year, the work has not stopped. Three of our participants have advanced to commission appointments serving as members under the EveryOne Home — Home Together 2026 Strategic Planning Committee to shape an allocation of \$43 million in homeless funding. Another graduate, Mr. Keith Arivnwine, was asked to participate



as a Residents United Network member in a press conference by sharing his story with the public release of AB1816 Re-entry Housing and Workforce Development Program. With the success of our first Leadership Academy, work is underway for a second Leadership Academy this summer, concluding with a policy forum in the fall. ●

A Head Start for our Preschoolers

Since August 2021 St. Mary's Center has been partnering with The Unity Council, a Social Equity Development Corporation based in the Fruitvale

neighborhood of Oakland, to bring their Head Start program to our preschool students. The partnership with the Unity Council's Head Start program has allowed St. Mary's Center to change the preschool from half day to full day, supporting more parents with the ability to work and have a safe, welcoming school for their children during the day. The partnership has also helped us provide additional health resources for our preschoolers such as dental, vision, hearing tests, and mental health consultations for both the students and their families.

The Head Start program allows us to better support our students' transition to kindergarten by providing a bilingual family advocate to help families navigate the enrollment process. The program has been a positive addition to our preschool, and we renewed our partnership with The Unity Council in June. Preschool

families also continue to receive food bags delivered every Tuesday by volunteers.

Preschool Director Quinetta Lewis and her staff have been working hard to prepare for the preschool's summer program. Beginning in June, St. Mary's Center's Preschool will transition into a 6-week program for students who are graduating to prepare them for kindergarten. Summer School also allows our students to continue building upon previous development, skills, and knowledge that they gained during the school year. Students who attend SMC's summer preschool program work on lettering, adjusting to a school schedule, and enjoy fun field trips around the Bay. This will be the seventh year St. Mary's Center has operated a summer school program thanks to our funders' generous support. ●



I N R E M E M

St. Mary's Center, as a community of Hope, Healing and Justice, mourns the passing of a Senior Advocate, a former Board member, and a longtime supporter.



Ortencia "Ortie" Hooppi earned the title of Matriarch of St. Mary's Center through her many decades of service as a Senior Advocate for Hope and Justice and her 7 years as a member of the Council of Elders.

Ortie, as she was affectionately called, engaged new Seniors by offering to sit with them while she regaled them with stories of how St. Mary's Center helped her. One senior, Milas Hackett, was enticed by Ortie to come to the center for a free coat, and then sparked a 25-year long friendship which took place almost entirely in the center during coffee, lunch, and social events.

Ortie was an example of tolerance and compassion. She held everyone in high regard. "Ortie was a role model for us all. She taught us how to accept seniors where they are and welcome them into our community unconditionally," said Janny Castillo, Director of Community Outreach and Services. "Seniors would light up at the sight of her entering the center. She had a beautiful way of making us all feel important."

Ortie would astound seniors and staff with her knowledge of natural remedies gleaned from her Mexican American heritage. She shared stories of how she faced racism growing up in southern California. Her early years as a Kindergarten teacher taught her how important it was to fill her life with things that made her happy. It was her work as a senior advocate that gave her the most joy. Ortie was a small, mighty firecracker of an advocate. At legislative meetings and public hearings, she would dress down a policy maker with grace and authority, holding them accountable to the needs of low-income seniors.

In her last years, Ortie fiercely held on to her independence living alone in her Oakland apartment. During the pandemic, she missed coming to her precious St. Mary's Center. The 2020-21 Emergency Food Program gave staff the opportunity to see Ortie while delivering much needed groceries. She passed away in 2021, outliving her beloved husband and several children, leaving an adult son that cherished and cared for Ortie all her life. She is missed by many, but her spirit and insistence that we must do what we can to help each other live on. ●

M E M B E R A N C E



Cathy Fisher, 1955 – 2021

St. Mary's Center and the East Bay social justice community lost a respected leader when Cathy Fisher passed last year. Her husband, Jim, and their daughters, Sarah and Ellen, were at her side when she slipped away peacefully after a valiant fight with cancer.

Friends recalled her volunteer work with several organizations, including the East Bay SPCA and the California State Parks Foundation.

Cathy Fisher served on the Board of St. Mary's Center from 2006 to 2013, including a leadership role as Chair. Cathy was a parishioner at St. Theresa's Church and a partner at Fisher Kong, a law firm that continues to serve the community and St. Mary's Center.

One of her many accomplishments was drafting the agency's personnel policy, a necessary legal document but also a statement of values. "Her words really brought the 'community of hope, healing and justice' to life," said Sharon Cornu, executive director. "She found creative ways to use legal and business acumen to bend the long arc of history toward justice."

We are grateful for Cathy's leadership in the community, her unwavering commitment to her members, partners, and employees, and we will miss her kindness, unflappable demeanor, and good sense in all matters. ●

Cornell Maier

St. Mary's Center mourns the loss of Oakland Champion Cornell C. Maier who passed away August 2021. For 15 years, Mr. Maier provided support to St. Mary's Center Programs, impacting the lives of hundreds of low-income and homeless Seniors.

Mr. Maier served as chair and chief executive officer of Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation from 1978 to 1987 and its successor company, KaiserTech, until 1988 when he retired after more than 38 years of service. He was widely respected as a socially conscious corporate leader.

Cornell Maier exemplified St. Mary's spirit of Hope, Healing & Justice. Upon retirement, service to others took hold of his life and came to define him within and well beyond his community. He was renowned for volunteering at Children's Hospital and holding ICU babies to comfort and encourage them.

"I believe every able-bodied person has a responsibility to give of his or her time, talent, or financial resources to help others. No exception," he told a reporter in 2009. St. Mary's Center is honored to have been one of the Oakland causes championed by Mr. Maier. We will continue to honor his legacy of compassion, humility, and advocacy through our work. ●



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—Cornell Maier

Direct cash assistance for Seniors



Since January 2021, St. Mary's Center has provided direct support to over one hundred Oakland households including 89 seniors and 19 families with preschool aged children through Oakland Community Action Partnership.

The funds St. Mary's Center received totaled \$75,000 and allowed us to give direct assistance to Seniors and Preschool families. This direct assistance included helping to find 18 seniors with homes and ensuring an additional 23 seniors received rent relief to halt their imminent evictions. These funds also allowed St. Mary's Center to distribute gift cards to seniors and families for groceries, pay for medical expenses, help with funeral costs, and purchase wheelchairs and beds. These funds made a tremendous impact on the lives of our members and created a crucial lifeline for St. Mary's Center throughout the pandemic.

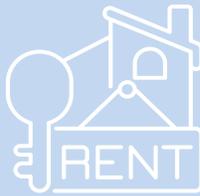
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One Senior came to St. Mary's Center shelter in 2020. We initially housed him at one of our Transitional Houses with the goal of finding him permanent housing. Thanks to funds from OCAP and the members' perseverance, he was able to pay a security deposit and first month's rent for an apartment. He moved into his new home in November 2021 and has continued to live there to date. ●



18 clients were housed (through paying for rental deposits)



25

clients received funds to pay for rent and avoided eviction



17

clients received needed household items, bedding, or had utilities paid



2

clients received new wheelchairs



2

clients received prescription eyeglasses



2

clients' vehicles were repaired



1

client received funds for dental work



1

client received funds to pay an ambulance bill



1

client's funeral expenses were paid



1

client received funds for employment training



78

gift cards for food and clothing were distributed

SAFE funds new Peer Support Circle with \$100,000

This March, Frank Mellon, Secretary and Chair of the Board at the Senior Assistance Foundation of the East Bay (SAFE), paid a special visit to St. Mary's Center with great news: **SAFE awarded St. Mary's Center \$100,000 for our new program, the Peer Support Circle.** With a smile on his face and nothing but kind words to say about our garden, community, and staff, Frank handed Executive Director Sharon Cornu the check along with St. Mary's Center staff members Terri Dunn and Jenna Littlejohn.

In focus groups we conducted in 2021, Seniors expressed that service navigation was a top priority for them but often felt discouraged during the process. They felt a lack of information, accessibility, and direct contact. St. Mary's Center staff will start addressing "navigation fatigue" by creating a comprehensive paper catalog of services, while our WeConnect technology program will help those with internet access. Seniors who have successfully received services in the past are eligible to become peers, using their lived experience to help others along the path to available mental, physical, financial, and housing stability resources.

Thanks to SAFE and Frank Mellon, St. Mary's Center's Peer



Senior Assistance Foundation of the East Bay Chair Frank Mellon presents a check for \$100,000 to St. Mary's Center Director Sharon Cornu and staff members Terri Dunn (l) and Jenna Littlejohn.

Support Circle will have the funding it needs to keep Seniors informed about services, resources, and local opportunities that can benefit their lives. ●

Senior Assistance Foundation of the East Bay is an organization that champions the work of nonprofits serving vulnerable Seniors. Their board includes President Julie Wang, Treasurer Le Roy Salido, Secretary and Chair of the Board Frank Mellon, Liz Lucero, Gregory Chan and Bob Strelow.

Friendly Manor closed pending repairs

In December, three simultaneous plumbing crises forced the closure of Friendly Manor and re-location of the women staying in transitional housing to new locations. All members were re-housed (and some have since secured permanent housing!) St. Mary's Center is working closely with Alameda County Office of Homeless Care and Coordination to secure more than \$3 million needed for health and safety repairs and upgrades to resume and expand services.

New projects spark community connection

Working with neighborhood partners, St. Mary's Center has expanded our programming for special events like Earth Day, Mother's and Father's Days, and Neighborhood Day. The Hoover-Foster Resident Action Council, West Oakland Neighbors, and Community Church are regular partners in work along the San

Pablo Avenue Corridor. A planning group is working with the City of Oakland, Community Vision Loan Fund, and interested parties about re-use of the Community Foods Market site since the grocery store's closure in February.

73 new homes for Seniors moves forward

In partnership with Satellite Affordable Housing Associates, St. Mary's Center will build 73 new homes for Seniors at 3135 San Pablo Av. The development has preliminary approval from planners and we are actively seeking funding through local, state, and federal sources to begin construction. The building will include studio and one-bedroom apartments, a community room with outdoor garden on the second floor, and first floor office space. We expect the development to be open in early 2025. ●



St. Mary's Center

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Healing & Justice

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To learn more or to make a donation
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or call (510) 923-9600

St. Mary's Center is a community of hope, healing and justice dedicated to improving the well-being of Seniors and Preschool Families in West Oakland by meeting basic needs for food, housing, and social connection.

We build on a strong foundation of direct service provision with participant-led advocacy that amplifies the voices of people directly impacted by hunger, homelessness, and inequity, to create a more just and caring society.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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- Mallory Trevigne, Secretary
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- Willie Pettus
- Sonya Simril
- Drew Tillman, Esq.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sharon Cornu, MSW

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Abbey Michaels

We're turning 50!

We are excited to announce that St. Mary's Center will be celebrating 50 years of serving the community in 2023. St. Mary's Center began serving Sunday Dinners in 1973 as a response to West Oakland Senior residents' need for meals on Sundays, when neighborhood stores and restaurants were closed. Almost 50 years later, St. Mary's Center has provided hot meals to Seniors nearly every Sunday come rain or shine. As part of our



50th-anniversary celebration, we are looking for any community members who may have attended the first Sunday dinner in 1973. **Please email us at amichaels@stmaryscenter.org and share with us the first Sunday Dinner you ever attended.**



*Sunday Supper at
St. Mary's Center 1973*



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