

DECEMBER 2022

SEASON'S GREETINGS

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM CRIMINAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

A Few of My Favorite Things

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and say goodbye to 2022, we celebrate examples of Christmas Love shown to those we serve.

- Mass celebrated inside the Transition Center St. Louis for the first time in recent memory.
- Welcome Home Meals made by volunteers and shared with clients.
- Apartments transformed into welcoming homes by groups of joyful volunteers.
- "Elves" leading baking parties and filling our office with cookies!
- A Christmas Party for our clients with gifts and delicious food.



Residents of the Special Needs Unit at Potosi Correctional Center were so happy with the cookies that they made us pictures.

We have so much to be grateful for as we close 2022. Our clients share how appreciative and inspired they are by the love shown to them. One man said of our volunteers, "I want to be like them. I want to love like that."

To say we are excited for what 2023 will bring is an understatement. With new volunteer opportunities and new programs for clients, we are determined to continue to empower and support those who have been incarcerated.

To see your impact please check out our **annual report for FY2022.**

NOTE THAT OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED FROM DECEMBER 23 TO JANUARY 3RD.

HELP US REACH
MORE PEOPLE IN
2023



"Tasting the Care" by Lyla

Thanks to the generous response of many individuals and groups, like the Sluggers and Holy Bakers from QAS, members of West County Collaborative and Social Justice For All, parishioners from St. Justin Martyr, St. Margaret of Scotland, and other parishes, and students from schools like SLUH, we delivered hundreds of cookies to the Special Needs Unit at Potosi Correctional Center for their Christmas party.

Nationally, 2 out of 5 incarcerated individuals have non-psychiatric disabilities. Most prisons are not designed to care for those with special needs, and typically these inmates exist in isolation, with minimal accommodations. There are countless examples of victimization, longer sentencing, and poor treatment. Being a special needs mom, I was expecting to be horrified; the idea of my son being incarcerated is horrifying by itself.

As I entered Potosi, walked around the yard, and noted the unit's garden, I was already surprised. What I found was a staff filled with compassion. The unit had dimmer lighting and was decorated with a garland of green and red links, and even a Christmas tree! A group of inmates stood proudly with Christmas hats and costumes, some in wheelchairs and others using the wall to support themselves.

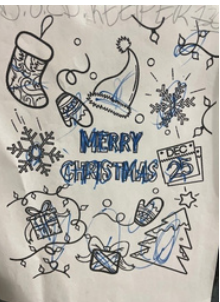
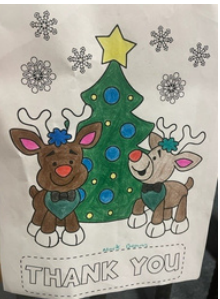
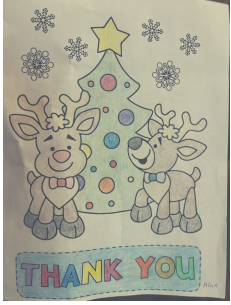
They sang jingle bells! There was even a keyboard. They did a brilliant rendition of the Grinch, starring one of the dogs from Puppies for Parole as the Grinch's dog! It was brilliant, hilarious, and exceptionally well done. I was moved by a gentleman who nervously sang one of the most beautiful versions of "Silent Night" I've ever heard. They ended with "We wish you a Merry Christmas." I felt honored to see the incredible show they prepared for us. They spent a long time practicing, and you could see their joy while the small crowd cheered!

Then it was time to eat! Multiple trays beautifully laid out with heaps of carefully arranged cookies were a massive hit! They said they had never had so many delicious cookies, and these chocolate chips were the best by far! Oh, and those brownies!!! Oh, and some of those sparkling cookies too! Their eyes lit up the room. They laughed, stacking the most cookies they could on their plates. Their innocence was everything. Not a single cookie left.

I ensured they knew that the community cared about them; after all I was only the smiling messenger. One guy, Markus, said, "Oh, I know they do 'cause I can taste it!"

The "why" they are incarcerated is heartbreaking and cruel. But if they must be incarcerated, I am thankful for the Potosi staff that watches over them. The activities coordinator told us "It's on us, I have to keep them safe, but I need to make sure they are happy." She continued, "The DOC is the state's number one mental health provider." This harsh reality is something I've known, but it was the first time I had seen something like this, and the first time I had witnessed such an outpouring of love from the community.

Matthew 25:40 says "When I was imprisoned, you visited me. When I was hungry, you fed me." Too often, churches fail to hear the pleas of those incarcerated. Today, every baker who broke themselves baking these incredible cookies was there, even though they couldn't see it. Their love was present, felt, and yes, also tasted.



Christmas Party for Clients



**QAS St. Vincent De Paul And Friends
Served The Criminal Justice Ministry
Christmas Party At The Cathedral Basilica
Event Center.**



Many of the men and women who participate in the Release to Rent reentry housing program have no family in St. Louis, and would spend the holidays alone. Thanks to our donors, staff, and volunteers, they were able to come together for one celebration,

Thanks again to the amazing response to our cookie drive, every client received a box of cookies as part of their Christmas gift.

We were all touched by the care and concern of the volunteers who served the homemade feast, which was prepared by our staff and board members.

We are grateful for the continued support of the STL Sluggers and Sisters who made the party go so well. The Cathedral Basilica provided a wonderful location, and we appreciate their hosting us.

Our clients went home full, with leftovers to enjoy for the coming days. They were so pleased to share a delicious meal surrounded by many smiling faces.

**MERRY
CHRISTMAS**