

# Heartbeats

Servants of the  
Holy Heart of Mary

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## *Bethany House of Hospitality*

By Sr. Evelyn Varboncoeur, sscm

We are all painfully aware of the numbers of refugees who are desperate to find a place they can call home for themselves and their children. Among these throngs of people are unaccompanied children. Between the years 2014 and 2017 there were 200,000 of these immigrant

they turn 18, if they have no one to “claim” them in the US, they are transferred to adult detention centers – in the Chicago area these are collar county jails – where they may wait for months before they are assigned a hearing date.

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children with no parent or legal guardian here in the United States. Children under the age of 18 are placed in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services and are housed in juvenile detention centers. During their time in juvenile detention they are cared for and provided with education while they await legal proceedings to determine if they can remain in the US. The day

On January 17, 2017, Viator House of Hospitality, sponsored by the Clerics of St. Viator, opened its doors to young men immigrants being transferred out of juvenile detention centers. Two years later, as of January 2019, Viator House had welcomed 46 residents.



Sr. Evelyn Varboncoeur, sscm

Sister is serving as active Vice-President of Bethany House board for the next year.

It was just a month later than Viator House opening, February 24, 2017, that a group of 20 women religious from 12 different religious communities met to discuss the possibility of opening a similar house of hospitality for young women. Under the tireless leadership of Sister Patsy Crowley, OSB, the group worked throughout that summer to identify a location for a home – to be named Bethany House of Hospitality – and once found, to prepare it for the young women who would be welcomed. Bethany officially opened on October 23, 2017 – with 2 residents already accepted.



The mission of Bethany House of Hospitality is to offer housing and support service to young immigrant women as they journey to independence.

Hospitality is offered to young women aged 18-22.

Bethany House has 10 bed rooms, (though at times occupancy has increased to 12) kitchen, dining and living space. A van provides transportation for shopping, medical care, recreational activities, Metra rides into Chicago for GED and other programs. Bethany House operates on an annual budget of over \$400,000. Funding comes from contributions from over 30 communities of women religious, personal donations and on-going efforts in grant writing and fundraising. Several parishes have welcomed speakers and provided monies in support of Bethany. Fundraising creativity is an on-going need.

Bethany House is governed by a board of directors composed of representatives of nine religious congregations. Staff includes an executive director, day and night house coordinators, office administrator, case manager – and multiple volunteers who help with travel, gardening, crafts, etc.



To date, 32 young women and 5 children have been welcomed into Bethany House. The average length of residency is 6 months as residents join friends, communities of their own culture, perhaps family members who have arrived. The countries of origin of these young women are displayed on a large map and include, at present, young women and children from Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Ukraine, Benin, and Congo. Religious backgrounds are diverse and include Muslim as well as Christian.



The needs of these young women are staggering, multiple, complex and unique. These include physical and emotional support, educational opportunities, legal documentation, work permits, etc. Most of the residents are following GED programs which entail daily travel into Chicago. Just recently one resident completed her GED program and another is ready to take her examination.

Over a year ago, one young woman arrived with a high school diploma.

Arrangements were made – through several generous donors – for a full scholarship for her to the University of St. Francis. She has already completed her first year of studies. Recently, arrangements have been made for a job readiness program for the residents, offered by World Relief.



Bethany House of Hospitality began with a determined commitment to respond in some small way to the desperate situations of these young immigrant women – the stories and experiences that filled their young lives are unimaginable. From the beginning our province has been involved in Bethany House. We are one of the 30 some congregations that are helping to support Bethany

financially. Early on, Bernadette became involved as a language and craft volunteer. Sister Anne is loving her work at Bethany as a day and/or night coordinator. Sister Linda was helpful in arranging for a contribution for medical care by Presence Health. And Sister Evelyn has served on the board of directors from the beginning. During the 2018 summer, those residents who wished, spent an afternoon in the pool at Holy Heart of Mary. And this year, they have been given a week at Nazareth, thanks to Sister Carol’s contribution of her week.

This is just one small response to one of the greatest needs of our times. We share this story with you, soliciting your prayers for those who have found Bethany House – and even more for those who continue to live in great need of a home. And perhaps you have ideas for additional ways to help the members of so many in our world who are only seeking a home for themselves and their families.

*A Note: One of the goals of the Provincial Council is to continue “financial and volunteer support of Bethany House, a home for young migrant women”. Recently*

*our province has re-pledged \$45,000 to be given to Bethany House over the next three years. As noted above, Sr. Evelyn in an active member of the board of Bethany House. Evelyn has written the by-laws and, for the next year, is acting vice-president of the board. Carol Karnitsky, sscm*