Coronavirus Update: June 17, 2020
A Message from Jeff Hassel, Executive Director

**Part One: As a ministry, we have weathered COVID-19 well**

The management of our ministries during COVID has been and continues to be an intense process. At one point or another, ALL of our front-line ministries were hit by COVID. The Soup Kitchen had multiple people fall ill (non-COVID) or have to stay home to take care of sick family members. We created two independent serving teams in case one team fell ill and were forced to quarantine. The Food Pantry had a staff member out for six weeks due to their battle with COVID, and a shelter employee has been out for eight weeks in a serious battle with the virus. Most of the rest of us have gotten sick at some point and stayed at home or have stayed at home because we’ve had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID.

To keep our ministries going has been a herculean effort, and I am proud of our staff for their work ethic and dedication to God’s call on their lives. With your generosity and support, we have been able to thrive in this crisis.

To keep internal communications healthy while separated, I doubled the number of our staff meetings and instituted a meeting of Director-level staff twice a week to hammer out strategy.

Our communications and development teams built on the reputation of Lazarus House as an organization to trust in a crisis. We’ve had a solid spring – with much needed increases in revenue over last year. We have seen 501 first time donors, and a resurgence of 213 past friends inspired to renew their support. These new donors add life and joyful potential for the future of LHM!

**Part Two: Lazarus House Food Ministries**

**Food Pantry:**
Before COVID, St Martha’s Food Pantry served about 750 people every Wednesday. Now, weekly food distributions average more than 1,000 families/individuals, and we expect this number to increase. The “Grab & Go” food distribution is here to stay for many months, and food inventory is solid for the rest of June because of successful food drives in May. The real struggle for our Pantry staff is the prepackaging of 1200 to 2400 bags of food for distribution every Wednesday while following COVID protocols for social distancing. We are exploring good alternatives. Cleaning and sanitizing of Food Pantry by ServiceMaster continues to be a priority for the safety of all and has given us peace of mind.

**Soup Kitchen:**
Typically, the number of guests who come to the Soup Kitchen was about 140/day. Since the end of April, we've seen a steady increase, and the number of Guests served a hot and nutritious meal has passed 200/day; a 44% increase! Keith D'Entremont, our Major Gifts Officer, has coordinated with Senator and Mrs. Finegold to hold an Andover food Drive in July, when we will need another boost in our food inventory.
Part Three: Preparing for the Future

With many of our staff working from home or on furlough, we have a unique opportunity to make improvements to our shelter and the Good Shepherd Center. Volunteers are anxious to help, and we give them the ability to work and social distance.

Shelter:
We closed our shelter at the height of the crisis because we could not isolate, given the interconnected rooms that make up our facility. Going forward, we have decided to change from individual rooms to five family suites, each including a bedroom, bathroom, and living room. The entire team at Lazarus House rallied around the idea and in record time, skilled volunteers have descended upon the Shelter to begin renovations!

With our shelter closed, Marcy, our coordinator of Volunteers, connected with Art Durkin, who volunteered to be the Project Manager for the Shelter renovation. Art has a vast network of skilled professional friends, and plans are well underway.

Good Shepherd Center:
With most of our administrative staff working from home and staggering their time in the Good Shepherd Center, we have an unprecedented opportunity to tackle long overdue renovation & repair projects around the building. This week, paint and repair crews began significant projects, and we are grateful for their help!! Please email Marcy to join in the fun!

Ishah House Recovery Center:
After six weeks of operation, the City of Lawrence closed the COVID recovery Center on June 10. It was good to work with the City in a time of national crisis, offering our building for this use. We are grateful to God for each of our properties and partnering with the City, sharing our resources for the good of all felt right.

Part Four: Current Priorities that reflect new Realities:

1. Keep the Soup Kitchen staff healthy and serving hot breakfasts and lunches six days a week. They are now serving about 200 meals each day, a 40% increase over our average spring volume. In partnership with MassHires, we are in the process of hiring sufficient staff to operate seven days/week and give our cook teams the depth and stamina to cope with the constant rise in the numbers of Guests coming for meals.

2. Keep the Food Pantry staff healthy and try to keep serving every Wednesday. Weekly food distributions of 1000+ families have pushed our team and our facility to the limit. This week, the Pantry will not distribute food, as they are regrouping and exploring options for how to continue responding to the increased needs over the long term. We have decided to hire new staff and create a special food sorting station in our thrift store garage so larger numbers of volunteers can help and remain socially distanced. We must ensure that we can prepare enough bags of food so we can continue this part of the ministry the “LH way,” meaning that the first person and the last person in line have access to the same variety and quantity of food. Not only is this part of our culture, but it also prevents a “mentality of scarcity” from taking over – as we see happening where food runs out.

3. We expect that when the special $600 unemployment supplement ends on July 31, we will see a surge in the number of Guests coming to the Pantry and Soup Kitchen.

4. Renovate our shelter to reopen safely. Our goal is to call staff back from leave, retrain to respond well to new COVID realities, and open our new Family Shelter by the beginning of August.
5. Renovate and repair the Good Shepherd Center while we have few people on the premises.
6. As we move into July, we will give thoughtful attention to the changes we will need to make to reopen programs and services now closed in ways that keep our Guests and our staff safe.
7. Create new safety protocols for all who enter our facilities.

Thank you for your support of Lazarus House!

Reverend Jeff Hassel
Executive Director

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- PRAY for our Guests, the Lawrence Community, and our staff
- Contact Marcy to volunteer for “The Shelter Project” (mailto:marcy@lazarushouse.org)
- DONATE

LAZARUS HOUSE – A Beacon of Hope in the darkness of poverty and homelessness.
In this era of COVID-19, Lazarus House continues its mission to help women, men, and children living in poverty restore their dignity and self-respect. We are concentrating our efforts to meet the basic needs of food and shelter for the people of Lawrence.