Dear Friend,

It has been awhile since we have been in touch with you to share changes and developments in our LEFSA Community. For our old and new friends, we would like to take this opportunity to let you know how your prayerful and financial support has helped us.

Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates (LEFSA) is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Charity of New York that promotes empowerment to those who are or who have been homeless.

LEFSA is led by a team of eight men and women, all but one of whom are formerly homeless. The team provides hope to those who are still working toward obtaining permanent housing.

Founded in 1986 by Sister Teresa Skehan, RSM and Sister Dorothy Gallant, SC, LEFSA celebrated its 30th Anniversary in September of 2016. The vision of Sister Teresa and Sister Dorothy was to provide a forum for people who are homeless to meet with one another to:

• focus on their lived experience and challenges
• seek direction and solutions to improve their lives
• help one another to believe in themselves
• work on developing ways to move out from underneath systems which are oppressive

This is all accomplished in the light and empowerment that comes from the strength of one another and God’s Word. Over the last thirty years, we have seen many of our brothers and sisters deepen their faith in God, regain their sense of dignity and self-worth, and realize there is real hope that their lives can be better.

The LEFSA Community looks at the real-life situations of people, including the social, economic, religious, and political contexts that are impacting their lives. LEFSA journeys with those living in shelters, on the streets or looking for housing. We also are there for people already living on their own, but still needing the support of the LEFSA Community.

Reflecting on the many blessing of the past year, we feel fortunate to have been able to help so many more people than in years past, but there is still much to be done! In just the early part of 2017, there were over 62,000 men, women and children sleeping in New York City shelters each night. (Coalition for the Homeless)

We thank you for partnering with LEFSA during this past year. Please join us in prayer as we continue to work toward justice and healing with our brothers and sisters in the coming New Year.

With gratitude,
The LEFSA Team
At the core of what we do are weekly gatherings in the shelters.

Gatherings take place in four New York City residential shelters, one drop-in center and one HIV/AIDS residence. Here, the groups average 20 participants (but we speak to countless people during outreach), and gatherings are centered around a theme (which may include faith, patience, encouragement, hope or self-evaluation to name a few) that is chosen by the participants. At all our gatherings and outreach, we distribute a booklet of daily spiritual readings, *Daily Words*.

**Team Enrichment**

Each week, we gather as a group for Team Enrichment, to study scripture as well as to discuss the tools for transformation. Discussions include scripture readings and prayer, as well as inviting people to share around issues such as forgiveness, developing a relationship with self, character development, and time and financial management.

Originally started as an opportunity for LEFSA team members to meet, this weekly gathering has grown to about 25 men and women and now serves as a community forum. We also had two community members facilitate workshops on “Dealing with Shame and Guilt” and “Healing.” We find time to celebrate community birthdays as well!
Our **Women’s Empowerment Group** meets monthly and is attended by 25-30 women. This group is an opportunity for women to gather to openly discuss issues affecting their lives. We focused our discussion this year on “The Remarkable Women of the Bible.”

A group of 25-30 men meet monthly at the **Men’s Spiritual Development Group**. The men also discuss issues that are most troubling to them, and topics this year included goal setting, building a solid foundation, and the importance of vision.

In addition to the separate groups for men and women, our **Leadership Study Day** is also a monthly meeting, with a social justice component. About 150 meet and discuss themes such as “extending the reign of God” through service or social justice action. Because of our 30th Anniversary in 2016, at one of the Leadership Days we honored many who have supported LEFSA throughout these many years. Honorees included Fr. Christopher Keenan, OFM, Sr. Cecilia Palange, Barry Markman, John Healey (Big John’s Moving), Joanna Saliani, Carl Petrus, and Alison Kelsic.

The **Daughters of LEFSA** (DOLs) is our choir of eight women (many of whom experienced homelessness) that was founded in December 2014. The choir director is Tara Robinson and the DOLs perform at every Leadership Study Day event. In June of this year, they were invited to perform at one of the Sisters of Charity Federation meetings held at the College of Mount Saint Vincent.

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**Retreats, Trips and Events**

The fall brings an opportunity for LEFSA to invite members of the community to attend a 3-day retreat at the Marindale Retreat Center in Ossining, NY. This year, 44 men and women were given the opportunity to leave the city to renew mind, body and spirit on the peaceful grounds of the retreat center. Having a private room and three meals a day is an experience many live without on a daily basis.

> “I needed to feel loved and I did this during the retreat. It was a strengthening experience. I was loved by all the people at each gathering. I am going back with a renewed sense of strength and hope.” —Retreat participant

A donation of **basketball and baseball tickets** from Catholic Charities of New York allowed over 50 of our community members to enjoy games of our favorite New York teams.

For the last two summers, our dear friend Barry Markman sponsored a **fishing trip on Long Island** for LEFSA. Seventy of our members “braved” the high seas for a day out on a boat. Although the haul was small, we had a great afternoon fishing and enjoying lunch on the water!
Because of our commitment to helping our brothers and sisters in our community, LEFSA is staying involved in many of the social justice issues on the local and state level.

Two of our team members attended Catholic Charities Albany Advocacy Day to discuss the issues of housing and solitary confinement with various state representatives and senators.

The community also attended a rally at Governor Cuomo’s office to support the release of funding for affordable housing units (the New York/New York 4 legislation). As of this writing, after over 2 years of advocacy, the new New York State budget finally includes 2.5 billion dollars for housing, including 1 billion for supportive housing for 6,000 units for the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

We also connected with the Center for Faith and Community Partnership at the Mayor’s office, after being introduced to their representative by our friends at Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing. The mission of the Center is to connect local organizations to various services and to inspire civic engagement. LEFSA will be working with the Center on setting up mental health workshops through the Department of Mental Health and Hygiene. The first workshop took place on October 6; 30 community members attended.

We also look forward to collaborating with another organization, Just Leadership, which is dedicated to reducing the U.S. correctional system population.
Visitors, Volunteers and Supporters

Nursing students from the College of Mount Saint Vincent and Fordham University completed community placement rotation as they volunteered in the shelters and with the LEFSA street ministry. Presentations by the students at the LEFSA office concerning hypertension, anxiety, diabetes, depression, and nutrition were very well attended.

LEFSA has been very blessed this year with many donations from our friends. We would like to thank:

- Uniformed Firefighters Association for toys donated to our Christmas party
- Much needed pillows and sheets for the people we serve
- Vincent, for a television to be used in the conference room at the LEFSA office
- John Healey of Big John’s Moving for the donation of the transportation needs for our retreat and other events. John also helped with a donation of Bibles for us to distribute during our ministry
- Sabrina for her help and donations of supplies such as water, towels, toiletries and hats for our street ministry
- Chef Jack McDavid and his family for their donation of food for our annual picnic in Central Park
- The Franciscan Friars for their generosity in providing a meeting space at St. Francis of Assisi Church for our Leadership Study Day. The Friars also supply food and drink for our street ministry
- Joanna Saliani, a Unity Chaplain, who regularly offers her time to pray with us and for us during our women’s group, Leadership Study Day, and retreats
- Tiffany and Carl Petrus along with members of their church for regular contributions of socks and toiletries packages for street ministry
- To all of our friends who donated toys, coats, and toiletries as well as those whose financial generosity helps to sustain our work

LEFSA Team Members

The team at LEFSA is happy to announce that Mario Pimentel joined us this May. Mario facilitates the groups in Paradise Transitional Housing, Boulevard Men’s Shelter, and Franklin Women’s Assessment Shelter. Welcome Mario!

We have been blessed with many wonderful team members and volunteers over the years. One of our long-time team members, Sister Cecilia, facilitated Spanish language gatherings at Wards Island Men’s Shelter for many years. Several of us visited Sister recently at Kittay Nursing Home.

LEFSA remembers those who have passed:

- Timothy Dunnington;
- Arnold Presha;
- Diane Marble;
- Jackie Smith;
- Pastor Chapman;
- Team Members Deborah Byrd and Georgia James also lost family members this year.
Networking

Our work and ministry depends on outside sources and agencies to help get the work done. The team, as well as members of the community, attend area meetings and connect with representatives of other organizations. LEFSA has also addressed many civic, religious, and neighborhood groups on how the LEFSA model operates. Some of these groups we have networked with or made a presentation to include:

- Sisters of Charity Sponsorship Conference
- Bailey House (Consumer Committee)
- Catholic Charities Presentation
- Urban Justice Center, Safety Net Project
- SOAR Enrollment program (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery)
- Life Skills Education Outreach Program (EOP) Alumni Meeting
- EOP Catholic Charities
- Emmaus House
- Bronx Lebanon Hospital
- Center for Urban Community Services
- Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness
- Home Base
- New York City Housing Preservation & Development (Housing Connect)

A Message from LEFSA Community Member Pamela Cotto

I got involved with LEFSA in March 2017 after I was introduced to them by another community member. I immediately felt welcomed and embraced.

I can’t choose just one favorite memory, but what I always remember is the way that people in LEFSA care. They go above and beyond to make sure someone has a meal, or receives a spiritually uplifting word. I feel that everyone here feels loved... there is togetherness in each and every group, and that never changes. It’s genuine, compassionate and heartwarming. I also think very fondly about the retreat, which was very healing. It is a place where you can really get in touch with your inner peace, and realize how the messages apply to you.

LEFSA is special to me because since the very first day I walked in, I was embraced and able to connect with people with similar experiences to the ones that I have been going through in my life. It’s special because you gravitate to people here very easily. It’s a place where you can come and get the love that you need, that you can’t even get from your immediate family. You can’t find this in any other place.
LEFSA Street Ministry has expanded. For the past 19 years, LEFSA has done outreach in Midtown Manhattan. In June of 2017, we expanded our outreach to Harlem because of the generous support from the Franciscan Friars' Breadline. LEFSA's street ministry is currently serving 220 people weekly where we distribute sandwiches, juice and dessert and invite people to our events. When available, we distribute toiletries and socks as well.

Housing Ministry, led by team member James Butler, has grown this year. James helps people with SSI, SSD, Public Assistance and works with those who have subsidy housing vouchers. The shelters that James works with include Lenox Hill, Boulevard, Franklin, Susan’s Place, Acacia Network, Green Hope, Pacific Family, Auburn Residence, Main Chance Drop-In Center, and Bellevue shelter.

Some of the successes we have had are:

- Registered Applicants: 125
- Number of Appointments: 80
- Waiting list participants: 83
- Number received housing: 22

Shower Opportunity

LEFSA was able to install a new shower in the office to offer close to 300 showers annually. This was made possible by the generosity of a benefactor and foundations.

EOP Alumni Support Network

LEFSA participated in the inception of an Alumni Network for all Educational Outreach Programs in the City of New York. EOPs are programs centered around several empowerment workshops, with a central component of personal storytelling. LEFSA has referred many participants to the Catholic Charities EOP program over the years.

Celebrations

LEFSA celebrated our 30th Anniversary in September 2016 with a gala event at Helen Mills Event Space in Manhattan, attended by over 150 of our friends, family, and benefactors. At this event, we honored Sister Florence Speth, SC and, from Catholic Charities, Mr. George Horton, for their many years of service to those who are poor.

We also held a special Leadership Study Day Program and presented awards to many who have been supportive of our work over these 30 years.

Please also visit our website, www.scny-lefsa.org, to view our video that was done to mark this occasion.
Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates (LEFSA) is a non-profit, interdenominational empowerment ministry that serves people who are homeless, living in city-sponsored shelters and on the streets of New York City.

LEFSA was founded in September 1986 as a response to the massive situation of homelessness which existed in NYC at that time and continues to exist today.

Visit our website:  https://scny-lefsa.org

Our Facebook page:  https://www.facebook.com/scny.lefsa

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Our LEFSA community would like to remember you and your special intentions in our prayers. Please share them with us by visiting the Contact Us page on our secure website:  https://scny-lefsa.org/pages/contact-us/