

History of St. Joseph Parish continued.

1925 – 2003

Catholic Charities

Not actually a parish organization, but very much a part of parish life is the Catholic Charities, originally called Catholic Social Services. This service opened at St. Joseph for Winter Haven in 1976. Before that, the program was administered from Lakeland. Ron



Horsley, who has a master's degree in Social Work, was in charge. About half of Ron's time was spent in counseling married couples, unwed mothers and those needing help with adoptions. He reported that about 40 percent of those seeking counseling were non-Catholic.

In addition to counseling, those suffering material hardships were assisted or perhaps referred to other agencies. Sometimes the program worked with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. A program originally overseen by Social Services was the Fellowship Dining program for retirees 60 years or older. In Polk County, the program provided 800 meals a day at two sites in Winter Haven. Meals on Wheels was also administered by Catholic Social Services at that time and supplied more than 100 meals a day.

Ron also was involved with the Good Shepherd Hospice program. He designed an eight-week course and trained the first 25 volunteer workers for Hospice.

Pam powers and Ginny Wolf would later administer the program. Today, Anne Winkler manages the program, now called Catholic Charities. Now the program focuses primarily on the material needs of those who visit the office. Parishioners assist in keeping the food shelves stocked and provide plentiful gifts for the Christmas Giving Tree by fulfilling requests. Ann is assisted by Carolyn Schmidt, receptionist. Those asking for assistance must provide identification and evidence of need. Some of the 400 – 500 who visit or call each month needs financial help paying utility bills or covering a mortgage payment. Others need food, prescriptions, diapers or toiletries. The Thanksgiving and Christmas food and gift programs bring happiness to many families. Still others are assisted in finding help through other agencies; For example, counseling is now handled in the Lakeland office and the St. Vincent de Paul Society still assists.