

Shower of Love Event Shines Light on Christ Child Society

COLLEEN JURKIEWICZ
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

The Christ Child Society of Milwaukee exists in order to shower the love of Christ on the families and children who benefit from their extensive services — they provide and facilitate everything from vision screening to tutoring. So it's fitting that their main fundraiser is known as the Shower of Love event and themed in the fashion of a giant, joy-filled baby shower for the vulnerable moms and babies who need love the most.

But it's also a way to shower some of that love back on the society itself — the proceeds from the luncheon and silent auction are crucial to the viability of its services.

“This is our major fundraiser, and it supports all of our programs,” said the event’s emcee Patrice Sisulak. “It’s so overwhelming to see all these ladies here supporting us.”

The 19th Shower of Love was held at the Italian Community Center in October, and welcomed more than 250 attendees who bid on thousands of dollars’ worth of silent auction items, donated much-needed baby items for the Christ Child’s layette program and learned from speaker Phillip Chard about the harmful effects of technology on children’s developing brains.

The Christ Child Society was founded by Mary Virginia Merrick in 1887, with the mission of serving needy children. Its Milwaukee chapter was founded in 1948 and is deeply engaged in direct services to vulnerable families throughout the community, with volunteer members devoting time to a variety of ministries.

In 2018, they distributed over 1,800 layettes to newborns and their moms; each layette is valued at around \$175 and includes clothing, diapers, receiving blankets, bottles and more. They also distributed 987 “My Stuff” bags through partner organizations to children in transitional housing situations; these bags provide needed stability, comfort and practical support through items like toiletries, pajamas and stuffed animals. In the past year, Christ Child Society members have screened 933 children at parochial schools in the area for vision problems, referring 101 for a complete eye exam. These free screenings help to fill a gap for kids who might otherwise suffer with undiagnosed vision issues.

“If you can’t see, you can’t learn,” said Christ Child Society president Betsy Haushaulter.



▲ Fundraiser attendees peruse the silent auction baskets during the Christ Child Society’s Shower of Love event in October. (Submitted photo)

The society’s promotion of healthy vision was echoed in the event’s keynote presentation given by author, psychotherapist and speaker Philip Chard, who addressed the current research on overexposure to technology, focusing on its impact on children’s brain development. Christ Child Society members have been reporting an increase in vision issues that they believe is caused by the widespread use of technology by young children.

“My central message is, if you’re not the master of the technology, it’s the master of you,” said Chard. “You have to make that fundamental choice — who’s in charge here?” People, he said, especially children, can “get trained” by technology.

“It’s almost Pavlovian,” he said. “We can’t resist that text, that Instagram.”

The society’s longtime spiritual director, Fr. Bob Gloudeman, praised the Christ Child Society’s female-driven membership base and female-centric mission. “I have seven sisters, so this is sort of natural for me,” he joked, adding the Church needs the influence of women like the Christ Child Society’s members who

“understand the personal needs of people.”

As essential as the money raised is to the mission of the Christ Child Society, the real driving force behind the organization is the volunteer members who coordinate these programs. The majority of members are Catholic, but women of all faiths are welcome to apply to join. Each new member undergoes a provisional year where they work with an active Christ Child member who will mentor them and help them explore the society’s various programs, deciding where they will focus their efforts.

Longtime Christ Child Society member and former society president Katie Clark urged Catholic women in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to consider applying for membership in the organization.

“As our founder, Mary Virginia Merrick, once said, ‘Nothing is ever too much to do for a child,’” she said. “We are an all-volunteer organization, working together, expressing our love of the Christ Child by service to all of God’s children.”

For more information, call 414-540-0489.