For the past twenty-seven years, Bethany House has been very busy growing and adapting to the changing needs of the homeless community here in Nassau County. However, the need for emergency and transitional housing and services for families has never been so great as at the present time. Since the tragedy of 9/11, Bethany has been called upon to open its doors wider and wider in response to the pressing needs of homeless families. In the past three years, we have grown almost 400%, from seventeen to sixty-five bed capacity nightly. In fact, we have been so busy that we have not published our newsletter since October 2001 - it was surely time to sit down and bring you all up to date! Permit me to begin with a short profile of Bethany’s history and amazing growth, and to then tell you how we “do what we do” because of your help and support.

Bethany House is a nonprofit agency that was founded in 1978 in response to a growing need for emergency shelter and services for women and their children who are caught in the crisis of homelessness. Bethany House of Nassau County was incorporated in 1987 and had developed a full, energetic Board of Directors by early in 1990.

Bethany House has defined its Mission as a call to provide a concrete response to the belief that every individual deserves and needs adequate food, clothing, shelter and safety. In addition, these essential resources should be provided in nurturing surroundings and a sustaining environment.

In September of 1978, before homelessness had become a common term, three Amityville Dominican Sisters rented a small house in Roosevelt, Long Island, and opened their doors and hearts to the frightened families who came to them in need of shelter, guidance and comfort. As the crisis of homelessness grew in the mid 1980’s, Bethany House expanded into a larger facility which is known as Bethany One. Two other residences, “Bethany, too!” and Bethany South, and the Bellmore Apartments have since been added, giving Bethany the present capability to house up to sixty-five women and children nightly.

With the additional bedroom space came the expansion of professional support services so that crisis of homelessness would not simply be alleviated, it would actually be ended. In fact, of the homeless women and children who have stayed with us for longer than two weeks, 94% have found safe, adequate permanent housing and have successfully stabilized their lives after their homeless crisis.

Each family’s case receives individual attention from Bethany’s seasoned case workers who have extensive experience in dealing with the unique problems faced by persons who have become homeless, particularly with families who have special needs. And, because Bethany is a community-based organization and an active part of the human services arena, we are in an excellent position to channel the resources from several other agencies to better serve our families and, therefore, to effect positive, lasting change.

What is it that makes Bethany “the place to come when there’s no place to go?” If you have never been there, it is difficult to understand. But once you have experienced the love and concern of our unique staff and volunteers, you will know Bethany’s sense of peace and well-being that softens the most hardened heart and revitalizes the most exhausted spirit. As one of our guests put it, “There is a presence in this house that reaches out and encircles you with its energy and strength - most say it is irresistible; all say it is from God.”

The CROCUS has been the symbol of Bethany House because this brave little flower breaks through cold, hard ground as it dares to push all obstacles aside and clears new ground for growth. This has been Bethany’s history as well, and the crocus has come to stand for the determination, strength, and quiet resiliency of Bethany’s spirit. Sister Aimee
Lasting Impressions . . .

I'm impressed! I'm a "newcomer." To me, the story of Bethany House is most astounding from its humble beginnings back in 1978, throughout its remarkable growth, up to its present and continued vital influence in this needy world. The concept of an organization that not only offers good quality emergency shelter to women and children in crisis but then guides them to a new beginning with permanent housing, education and skills for a good job, and an ability to function independently with dignity and purpose is unique. What a challenge!

And who had the vision to pursue such an inspiration? I'm impressed with the tenacity and energy of Sister Aimee who is never content with the status quo and is constantly searching for and organizing new ways to help women and children in crisis to change their lives. She is a wise and sympathetic woman who lives what she believes; her resourcefulness and influence have attracted many zealots to her cause. The dedication of the numerous volunteers and committed professional staff that surround her have helped to build a safe, secure haven for hundreds of young families who struggle with the crisis of homelessness.

While it may appear that Bethany House has succeeded far beyond its own expectations - there are three outstanding emergency residences and a four-unit apartment building which provides longer-term transitional housing - Bethany always discovers new ways to grow, to reach out and help save the children and their mothers from living on the streets.

Who wouldn't be impressed with this organization? It is a compassionate composite of The Bethany Board of Directors, 13 multi-talented people who are experts in their respective fields, a dedicated, professional staff, and a corps of 75 volunteers that are available to help on any level that is needed. I am happy to be joining them. I know that I shall be telling everyone I know about us and that includes quoting statistics.

And aren't the facts about Bethany House impressive? Not only do we own 4 houses, but we bought and renovated them. We offer services to more than 60 people per night at an additional cost to us of $23 per person, per night. We feed 70-80 people every day, and we have only 13 on staff! In 2004, we assisted 483 families including 553 children and helped them to achieve independent and productive lives. And, above all, we are a nonprofit corporation that must raise all of its needed capital through corporate and foundation grants, business and private donations, per diem reimbursements from government agencies and annual fund-raising events. Somehow we always manage to survive and grow and grow. We find a way - just like our symbolic crocus.

And isn't the crocus an impressive flower? Its colorful arrival restores our faith and lifts our spirits even before winter has turned to spring. How can such a tiny bulb survive the hardships of winter and push its way up through the difficult, thawing soil? How can it multiply and never cease to surprise us by emerging in new places every Spring? Perhaps it's because it has such an indomitable spirit . . . just like Bethany House.

Who wouldn't be impressed? - - Jessie Fentner

Did You Know?

- Long Island is the fourth least affordable of all the metropolitan areas in the nation.
- The present fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Nassau County is $1,085.
- 43% of all the renters on Long Island are not able to afford a one-bedroom apartment; 58% cannot afford a two-bedroom.
- A minimum wage earner can afford only $268 a month for rent. Social Services provides a single person with $288.
- Weekly rental on a furnished room for a single adult in Nassau County is $125 to $150.
- A renter earning a minimum wage would have to work a total of 147 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment and
- there are only 168 hours in a full week! [Source: The National Low-Income Housing Coalition]

The average person spends 365 hours a month at home -

...imagine what it's like
not to have one.
If someone expresses concern about a
“Homeless shelter” in their neighborhood -
Show them one of these:

- Bethany One -

There I was...sitting along the roadside...feeling
shabby, neglected and not wanted. I used to be new
once and had a family of my own living with me. But
tings happened and I ended up alone, feeling lonely
and hopeless. I didn’t want to be like this, but I
couldn’t see my way out of it...

Then something amazing happened. Some
Amityville Dominican Sisters who were living in
Roosevelt came by to see me and decided that I was
worth saving! They enlisted the help of many good
people to start things moving: they received three
grants totaling $18,000 from The Campaign for
Human Development, The Society of St. Vincent de
Paul, and Catholic Charities. The Dominican
Congregation offered to lend them $8,500 to pay off
the mortgage, and - they bought me for $26,500!
With the help of their many enthusiastic volunteers
and the people in my neighborhood, I was soon
reborn, restored, renovated, made to really feel
worthy. I was even given a new name: Bethany
House One, which soon shortened to Bethany One.

That was in 1981. I began my new life as an
emergency shelter for women and children in crisis.
It soon became clear that these families needed
much more than just a temporary shelter with a
warm bed and a hot meal. And so, the concept of
a full-service center was born, and I provided the
“model home.” I was called a “home” because that’s
the place to come when there’s no place to
go. It’s a place where families can live, recover
and regain strength, share companionship with others,
receive guidance, and learn new skills.

This philosophy of a “small home” made me into a
warm and welcoming structure for my “guests” and,
of course, for Bethany’s staff. As new families
arrive, our staff members welcome them, respond to
their immediate needs on intake, treat them with
dignity and respect and then determine what plan
needs to be put in place to restore and stabilize
them. Our staff members are available here 24/7.
Usually there are also Social Work Interns who come
from Molloy College or Fordham University to work
with our guests.

In addition to offices for our staff, I provide cozy
bedrooms for 7 families and I also have 3 bathrooms.

At dinnertime, 14 or more people share our delicious
meals and interact warmly at my long table, along
with some “little guests” in highchairs. My kitchen
has three refrigerator/freezers, an electric stove, a
large microwave, and dishwasher. My living room
has a TV with a VCR, toys and games, and lots of
places to sit and talk while the children play. But my
pride and joy is the laundry room...it has four
commercial washing machines and four huge dryers.
All of my families can do their laundry here, and it’s
no surprise that the house laundry from all of the
other residences is brought here as well.

The laundry is just one example of the many ways
my resources are shared with the other houses. Basically, I am the hub or Grand Central Station for
the Bethany House organization. This is its official
business address, and everything converges here.
I’m also a “program house” where caring people and
professionals come to teach, to tutor, and sometimes
just to give support and encouragement. For
example, there are workshops on nutrition, job
readiness, dressing for success, parenting, tutoring
where skills are needed, and arts and crafts. Eagle
Scouts, Molloy College students, Church groups,
high school volunteers, neighbors, and vocational
experts - all come to Bethany One. Daily we see
positive interaction and growth in our busy home.

And I am truly a home. Our guests learn what it’s
like to be living in our family. They take turns with
the chores like cooking, cleaning and laundry. They
help one another and develop good relationships that
give them a strong sense of belonging. Children feel
secure and have fun in our supportive environment.
Because our guests are treated with respect and
kindness, they again start to believe that they will
soon resume their productive lives. This is the whole
reason for my existence. I stand proudly by the side
of the road to welcome our guests when they arrive,
and how much I miss them when they leave!
[cont. from p.3: Show Them One of these]

Because this job is never finished and I am never without families, we always need supplies. Wednesday is Donation Day - but please call to check the needs before you come. However, we always need “everyday essentials” like Metro cards, tooth paste and brushes, laundry detergent, soap, shampoo, Pampers, baby formula and...sometimes special surprises like movie tickets or treats for the children like coupons for McDonald’s every once in a while.

The people who take care of me [John and Brian] are very watchful and they regularly schedule necessary renovations to keep me “happy.” Currently we are replacing some bathroom vanities and my kitchen cabinets. I am inspected regularly, and can boast that in the world of “shelters,” I am considered the model home away from home.

Lastly, I may now be the smallest home in the Bethany family, but I maintain a large influence in its outreach programs. Very early, I was perceived as the home that opened its doors and offered comprehensive services to all families who were without homes: I set the standard for developing programs. Today, this innovative concept has grown to include three more homes!

I’m sure that Bethany House will continue to thrive, serve, grow, and change; but I shall always have the distinction of being Bethany One.

**BETHANY HOUSE OF NASSAU COUNTY**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Officers:**
Daniel C. McDonald, SJ, President
Stephan Mayo, Chairperson
Meritta Cullinan, Secretary
Claire Pfundstein, OP, Treasurer

**Directors:**
Guy Ball
Clarice Curry
Margie Kelly, CSJ
Vera Rivers
Herman E. Tibbs
Jane Banfield
Joseph A. Hanshe
Constance Kerwick
Rev. Jerome Taylor

Since Summer of 2003, the Board and Staff of Bethany House have been involved in the generation of a Five-Year Plan for the future of Bethany. The purpose of this strategic plan is to examine Bethany House’s place in the community and to insure that it continues to provide the high level of service which enables homeless women to get back on their feet and once again become contributing members of their communities. Effectively planning for every aspect of Bethany’s operation is critical for its future.

For more than 25 years, Bethany House of Nassau County has responded to the needs of homeless women and children and has become a unique model for the way that care and empowerment can be utilized by women who, for a variety of reasons, find themselves confronting the challenges of homelessness. Bethany has consistently adapted to the changing face of homelessness and, through the efforts of its Director, Sister Aimee Koonmen, O.P., our dedicated Board and Staff, and the success of many fundraising efforts, we have been able to keep Bethany alive and its doors open. We now want to do this with even greater direction and purpose.

As Bethany House has evolved and grown, so has its Board of Directors. We have now determined that we need to become more pro-active in our planning so that we are better prepared to respond to the limitations in government funding, the changing needs that confront homeless women and children, the “cost-effective” way that services are now delivered, and the challenges of seeking and securing funding from the corporate and private sector. All of these issues require planning, and the Board has embraced this task with great enthusiasm and vigor.

We are nearing the completion of the first phase of our Planning Document, and it will be ready for acceptance and implementation by the Board and Staff at our October Board meeting. We look forward to sharing our plans with you as well as some of the proposals that will be contained in our new strategy. We will also be asking you to join us in our mission and our five-year vision for Bethany House’s future.

I also want to use this opportunity to thank each of you for your ongoing help and support for Bethany House. We could not achieve our positive successes in changing children’s lives and making their futures brighter without each one of you. We sincerely appreciate your generosity to us! May God continue to bless you.

Daniel C. McDonald, S.J.
President, Board of Directors
Bethany House of Nassau County
"UNLESS someone like YOU cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."  The Lorax by Dr. Seuss

someone like YOU...

Constance R. Kerwick, Esq. was introduced to Bethany House by her close friend, Patricia Megale who served on Bethany’s original Board of Directors. The Board was asked to search out individuals who could bring some needed expertise to this young organization, but these individuals must be persons of integrity who shared our love of God’s poor. Connie immediately came to mind.

Since 1991, Connie has served on Bethany’s Board in various capacities, usually those involved in fund-raising. Connie’s enthusiasm quickly spread to her husband Bill, and this winning team worked tirelessly to bring many levels of support to Bethany House’s difficult and challenging ministry. Golf Outings at several courses, Fashion Shows at the Marriott, Holiday Brunches at the Rockville Links, BOXTOWN at Molloy College, Christmas Tree Trimmings at Bethany - all of these found the Kerwicks both present and very much involved!

And, when the Kerwicks believed in something, they encouraged others to “come and see,” and to “stay and help!” So many of their friends and all of their children are staunch supporters and frequent visitors to Bethany House. In fact, many of you reading this can remember back to the day when Bill or Connie (or both) advised you that they were again “begging for Bethany” and needed your help.

Connie is someone like you who cares a whole awful lot about others, particularly others in need; and because she does so, things are always getting better. But Connie does many other things equally as well - she is the mother of four wonderful young adults who “have always been good kids,” as Connie frequently says. For almost forty-four years, Connie was wife, partner, and the world to Bill Kerwick until his untimely death in June 2002. The loss of Bill was devastating beyond words for Connie, but her deep faith in God’s plan for their lives and the enduring love of this man for this woman has brought her through the darkest days to a new place of acceptance and peace. For Connie, life has changed but has not been taken away, and her care and concern for Bethany’s women and children has never diminished.

Connie is also an accomplished professional. She and Bill, both lawyers, had run a successful law firm in Baldwin for many years, and Connie practiced Matrimonial, Negligence, Divorce and Elder Law. At present Connie is “Of Counsel” to the prestigious law firm, Mahon, Mahon & Kerins, LLP in Garden City. Recently she became interested in Couple Mediation whereby she uses her skills to prevent divorce or, when that is not an option, to make the divorce as painless as possible for the both partners. In her professional life, Connie is also known as someone who cares a whole awful lot!

In addition to all of this, Connie is an outstanding artist - she works in oils, pastels, charcoal, and watercolor, and has shared her talent and education in the field of art with many others as a high school teacher and as a mentor. Connie’s tremendous energy knows no bounds, and as her children say, “there is nothing she will not attempt and she puts 150% into all that she does” because she cares a whole awful lot. The chart below will give you somewhat of an idea of her Board responsibilities as Chair of the Resource Development Committee.

THE BETHANY HOUSE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR of THE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
[Connie Kerwick]

FUND RAISING COMMITTEE
[Linda Witkowski]

GOLF OUTING COMMITTEE
[Rudy McNamara]

FOUNDATION CONTACT COMMITTEE
[Jane Banfield]

GOLF OUTING COMMITTEE
[Hugh McNamara]

Corporate Sponsorship Committee
[Jan Banfield]

GRANT SEARCH COMMITTEE
[Jane Banfield]

FASHION SHOW COMMITTEE
[Liz Crowley/Carolyn Melle]

GRANT WRITING/PROOFING COMMITTEE

BOXTOWN COMMITTEE
[Steve Mayo]

RAFFLE COMMITTEE
[Joe Hanshe]

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE
[Jane Banfield, Brian Koenen]

THE BETHANY HOUSE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

[Connie Kerwick]

Thank you, Connie, for being someone who cares a whole awful lot!
Imagine...
WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO HAVE ONE.

[Each issue of Turning Point will feature the story of a family or individual who has struggled with homelessness and how life has changed because of/in spite of this crisis.]

Rebecca came to Bethany House with her two little girls because they had been burned out - a fire that had begun on the second floor had spread to Rebecca's first floor apartment - the family lost everything: their home, their memories, the children's toys, Mom's important papers, and, most of all, the comfort of feeling safe and secure.

Until that day, Rebecca thought that life was very good to her . . . she had an excellent job, she was studying for her nursing degree, and she had been blessed with two beautiful children whom she had named Dawn and Sunshine. At twenty-five, she was well on her way to living out her dreams and helping to create new dreams for her daughters.

But life changed quite suddenly for Rebecca, and she found herself asking the Department of Social Services to find her a place to sleep that would be safe for her and her children. Fear forced tears to her eyes when she heard that she was to go to "a shelter in Roosevelt." With no other options available [her family all lived in Maryland, and the children's father had left them two months ago], Rebecca brushed back her tears and took the slip of paper with directions to Bethany House.

It was cold and dark by now as this young family walked up the steps to the door that would open new worlds to them. A special warmth spilled out from this house called Bethany, and drew these frightened souls in as they were welcomed by our staff and several of our guests. For the first moment in this long day, Rebecca smiled - this was a good place to be if you couldn't actually be home!

Within a week, Rebecca, Dawn, and Sunshine were busy welcoming new guests to Bethany as if they had been there for a lifetime. Rebecca was back at work and school; Dawn was in the first grade [at her own school], and Sunshine was in a wonderful day care. Life was returning to normalcy even though this little family still had no home of their own.

But new challenges lay ahead for Rebecca - she learned that she was expecting her third child . . . Rebecca was stunned by this news, and came home to Bethany to talk it over with trusted friends. Rebecca tried to put things in perspective as she considered her future. Even though the path ahead would be difficult, Rebecca chose to walk that path and to nurture the new life within her.

About a week before Christmas, Rebecca gave birth to a healthy baby boy! Bethany became an extended family to little Josiah [named after the father who had left before knowing of his existence], and we all helped with the tasks of mothering so that Rebecca could return to college. As time went by, Rebecca continued her search for an apartment but, since she had stopped work to care for her baby, she had little money to put toward the $1,350 required for rent. Fortunately, a space opened up in Bethany's Belmore Apartments, and the young family of four moved into a beautiful two-bedroom apartment close to shopping, transportation, and excellent schools. But once again, the challenges surfaced. The day care that was provided while Rebecca was at Bethany and homeless was not available to her in permanent housing. And, day care provided for a mother to finish her education was likewise denied because Rebecca was in her third year of college and Social Services only provides day care for the first two years of study. In Rebecca's case, she had paid all her child care costs during her first and second years of college because she was working and not receiving any welfare assistance, but still she did not qualify for this cash assistance.

And so, Bethany began a search for day care "sponsors" to help with this necessary expense. Josiah's father was the first to step up and help his family even though he was living out of state. Bethany's staff was tireless in their efforts to gather the rest of the needed funds, and finally, Bethany "made the way" for Rebecca to finish her courses and to graduate with a degree in nursing.

At present, Rebecca is working part time in a busy hospital, helping her girls with their homework and projects, transitioning Josiah from a bottle to a "sippy cup," and still enjoying her beautiful apartment. Recently, Rebecca sent a special note to Bethany to say thank you for all the care and support she has received. She wrote:

As I walked up to the stage to accept my degree, I realized that I would never have reached this moment if I had not come to Bethany House - and so, I accepted this degree in the name of all of you who have believed in me and my family, and have loved us back to life! As the popular song says, "You raise me up so I could stand on mountains - you raise me up. . . to more than I can be!"
Can you help? Please support our Raffle - all proceeds go directly to support our HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project, begun in 2002 in memory of William G. Kerwick.

NAME: ___________________________  ADDRESS: ___________________________
PHONE: ___________________________

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:
BETHANY HOUSE
102 WHITEHOUSE AVE
ROOSEVELT NY 11575

The Golf Outing Raffle
Drawing will take place at
The July 25, 2005 Golf Outing
$10.00 each, 6 for $50.00

1st Prize: $500 cash
2nd Prize: $300 cash
3rd Prize: $200 cash

NAME: ___________________________  ADDRESS: ___________________________
PHONE: ___________________________

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To our friends:
We're working hard to see that you receive information on Bethany House and its many programs. We also would like to honor the request of anyone who prefers not to receive this Newsletter. If you want to be taken off the mailing list, please call and leave a message with your name and address at [516] 868-6866 or e-mail us at bethanyhouse@aol.com.
Thank you!

The Children's Corner

Hi! My name is Maritza and I'm glad that I am back again visiting all of you. Bethany has grown a lot since I last spoke to you - we now have room for sixty people each night at all the Bethany Houses!

We still have our puppy dog, but now she is getting old so we all call her "Momma Dog." She lives at Bethany South with Sister Aimee and travels to work with her every day. All the children love Momma Dog and she loves to play with us - she rolls on her back so we can rub her tummy. Maybe I'll have a picture of her next time - she's all white and fluffy with dark eyes like mine.

Summer is coming so we'll all be out in the yard soon, playing on our slides and swings that were a special gift from the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation of New York.

Stop by some time - I'll be waiting for you! Maritza

HOLD THIS DATE

Bethany House announces its 9th Annual Golf Outing
Monday July 25, 2005
at Tam O'Shanter Golf Club
Our honoree will be Thomas Sedita