

## FAMILY STORY ONE

*Joan Elgin, a Giving Tree Committee member, recently visited with one of our Giving Tree families when she delivered a toaster oven to them. This item was one of the extraordinary needs that the family requested so that they would have a way to cook meals. Here is the story of Joan's visit and of the family in need.*

Have you ever stayed at one of the economy motels? The rooms are very small, barely big enough for the two double beds, a table with surface for a few things, a vanity counter and a bathroom. Hardly enough room for a family. But yet this is exactly the living situation of one Giving Tree family this year. A wonderful family of four, a grandmother, her daughter, and her daughter's two children, ages six and 11, all call a motel room such as this home.

This very tight space also holds every possession this family calls their own. Make no mistake, they have done the best they can to make this room a home. Family photos adorn the walls along with a Kansas City Royals Hosmer pendant. A bunk bed is set up for the children, but to get into it the children must climb over the double bed. While this bunk bed takes up precious floor space in this very small room, they are grateful for the kids to have their own beds. Next to the other double bed stands a tall plastic shelving unit to store their food and other personal necessities. High on the very top shelf are a few simple board games for the two children. This room will be the six-year-old girl's childhood memories of a home.

The family has lived here for the past two years. The grandmother had a stroke and suffers from seizures, which renders her unable to work. She cannot drive unless she is able to go one full month without a seizure. So far, the longest time between seizures has been two weeks. This puts all the financial burden the adult daughter. She has been fortunate to have recently left her \$9.00 an hour job for more promising job at an auto supply company; there is a chance for promotion.

As the grandmother welcomed me into her home, pointing around to their belongings, she shared her feelings as well: "You know, some people call us 'white trash' but I don't care what people think. We aren't druggies. We put food on the table for our kids. My daughter works hard for us. We are...."

I finished the sentence for her by saying, "good people." She was tearing up and leaned over for a hug, which I gladly gave her. Besides having a very difficult living arrangement and financial hardships, this family has endured insults and attacks on their dignity, but they are standing together, doing the best that they can. Yes, this visit will stay with me for a long time.

May God watch over all of our Giving Tree families, especially this family living in the economy motel room.

## FAMILY STORY TWO

Since the beginning of this school year, this family of five has been living in a relative's basement. The mother is disabled, diagnosed with a deteriorating bone and muscle disease, which requires her to use an electric wheelchair. Currently this wheelchair is broken. Because of her condition, she spends several hours a day in bed. The father, working 50 hours per week, does not make enough money to support the family's needs. Two of the children are teenagers who enjoy playing sports, which can be a financial strain on the family. One of the teenagers is academically gifted and hopes to one day work in the field of stem cell research. She is in need of a laptop, which her parents cannot provide. Luckily Holy Family has found a used one for her!

The youngest child in this family, an eight-year-old, has a very compassionate heart. Despite her family's current situation, this child is concerned about the homeless of Kansas City. When she was just six-years-old, she decided that she wanted to start a "brown-sack lunch" charity so she could hand out lunches to the homeless. Her dream became a reality this year on her 8th birthday. The only birthday present she wanted was 30 sandwiches to be given to the homeless, which she was blessed to have handed out on Independence Ave. The mother asserts that this project is solely her daughter's creation. While the mother developed the website and does the bookkeeping, the little girl makes all the sack lunches, makes flyers and hands out the lunches. So far she has made three deliveries, 25 sandwiches each time. All this from a little girl who loves everything to do with My Little Pony.

As the mother spoke about her family and their current situation, such strength, acceptance and dignity could be heard in her voice. She is very proud of her children and would love for them to have a home to call their own. What a blessing it would be to help this family move from the basement and into a real home.

## FAMILY STORY THREE

A parishioner from Holy Family recommended this family for the Giving Tree program this year. Originally from Mexico, the couple both worked hard and earned their U.S. Citizenship. Living as a multigenerational family, they have three children, two sons (13 and 11) and a one-year-old daughter, as well as the wife's parents all under one roof.

This family is in dire need of help. The husband lost his job with the city of Kansas City, Missouri, and has been unable to find a similar paying position. A friend has been helping him to reapply for city jobs similar to his work before, however currently this family's only income is from the husband and grandfather's part-time jobs as dishwashers at a local restaurant. The grandfather is in his late 70s.

The wife stays at home caring for her one-year old daughter as well as her mother, who is wheelchair bound and has Type 1 diabetes. In January, the wife plans to return to Penn Valley Community College to finish her last semester of an intensive English language program that she started over a year ago and had to discontinue due to her mother's illness.

The only assistance the family receives is \$400 per month in food stamps. The grandparents are in the U.S. as legal residents and do not qualify for any type of assistance. While the grandmother has been able to attend a free clinic downtown, the family still has to pay for her insulin and other expensive medications. To pay for rent this past year, the family has had to sell their personal possessions and family heirlooms. They have exhausted all options of selling personal possessions and the family is having a hard time making enough money to cover rent. How wonderful it will be to help this family get back on their feet, so to speak.

## FAMILY STORIES FOUR

Several of the families in this year's Giving Tree program are grandparents who have taken on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren.

One set of aging grandparents have taken in their three young grandchildren because the parents are drug addicts. The mother, who is currently in rehab, has brain damage. The father is in jail. Both grandparents have severe health issues of their own and are attempting to raise the three children on a fixed retirement income. The two oldest children have ADHD, creating additional medical expenses for the family. They have almost completely depleted their savings account.

The grandmother worries about what will become of the children if something happens to her. She prepares all meals, helps with homework, takes the kids to doctor appointments and makes sure the children are able to attend religious education classes.

Another set of grandparents have taken in seven grandchildren, three of whom were previously in foster care. The wife's 78-year-old father also lives with them. While both grandparents have jobs and are grateful for good health, they struggle to make ends meet.

Holy Family is blessed to help these grandparents provide for their grandchildren.

## FAMILY STORIES FIVE

Several families in this year's Giving Tree program have been the victims of domestic violence.

One such woman is a single mom with two wonderful children: A 17-year-old boy who has been diagnosed with autism and a daughter who loves to dance and is really good! Even though the mother has osteo-arthritis and fibromyalgia, she remains very active in both of her children's schools. This lovely family needs furniture so please check the list of extraordinary needs to see if you are able to help provide for them. They are family number four.

Another mother was recently evicted from her home in North Kansas City. She was exploring the option of moving to a shelter in Liberty. The day she went to see the shelter, she saw a sign for a home for rent. With no credit, she investigated the possibility. By the grace of the Lord, the landlord agreed to take a chance on her and leased her family the house. While she feels very blessed to have moved into a home and not a shelter, she and her children remain in seclusion for fear that her husband will find them. Please consider all you are able to do to help this family at this time.