



# CHRIST CHILD SOCIETY<sup>®</sup> OF SOUTH BEND

WHERE LOVE LEADS TO ACTION

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Winter 2026

*Nothing is too much to do for a child.*

## Love Grows at Christ Child Society in 2025

*A message from Co-President Vickie Sleevi*

Love grew once again in 2025! The Christ Child Society of South Bend was busy, as recounted in this annual report. As usual, the year began with restocking inventory in preparation for the Fall distribution of clothing to clients. From January through July, new shipments arrived (in spite of all last year's challenges) which needed to be processed. This was only accomplished through the hard work of our members and the abundant community support of volunteers from local colleges and universities, high schools, grade schools, community groups, and businesses. We are so grateful for their help in everything from bundling socks and underwear and sorting donations to cleaning the red wagons that families use in our Center – and so much more.

As August arrived, it was time to greet the families and help them get the clothes and supplies we hope will benefit their children throughout the school year. It was a consistently busy clothing distribution season, with a final count of just under 5,000 children served from August 6 through December 10, which is another record year! The dedicated community support continued with many different groups coming to help us distribute clothing, which truly enables us to continue our mission. We undertook a Clothing Program evaluation in 2025 to ensure we offer what the community truly needs and that our program operates effectively.

To fund our increasing budget needs, a creative team of members held a magnificent *Let Love Shine Gala* in November. Once again, our community of supporters helped us raise the most money ever during a fun and exciting evening. If you did not attend, I'm sure the photos in this newsletter will encourage you to put *Let Love Shine* on your calendar for 2026.

Thank you to all our members and supporters for a successful 2025. We need each and every one of you to fulfill our mission.

## Clothing Program Brings Warmth and Smiles



Azarian loves her new shoes and her cuddly teddy bear.



Melvyn delights the Coat Department volunteers with his reaction to his new coat.

The Clothing Program is by far the largest program at CCS. Unique to CCS chapters across the country, the program provides underwear, socks, a winter outfit, a school uniform if needed, a sweatshirt, winter coat with matching hat and gloves, and athletic shoes. All of that is supplemented by gently used clothing donated by the community.

In 2025, 4,946 children were served at the Clothing Center. Families were first interviewed to determine sizes (and favorite colors!), then they were given red wagons to pull through the Center, stopping at Clothing, Shoe, Coat and Used Clothing Departments before picking out age appropriate books and dental supplies.

The last stop is Mary's Boutique, which is full of household items and adult clothing. What started as a place to give out items mistakenly put in donation bags of kids' clothing has become a favorite part of the clothing distribution process. Often, a parent who lacks a coat finds one or a woman starting a new job finds the perfect "first day at work" outfit. From Christmas decorations to baby supplies and toys, the Boutique helps stretch tight budgets. The Center is a happy place to "shop" and to volunteer.



Patricia models her find in Mary's Boutique where donated household goods and adult clothing are available to clients. "It's just my style!" she exclaimed.



Superman shoes are a big hit!

## Christ Child Society Financials at a Glance

For all of its 78 years, the Christ Child Society of South Bend has served as good stewards of the generous support of the community.

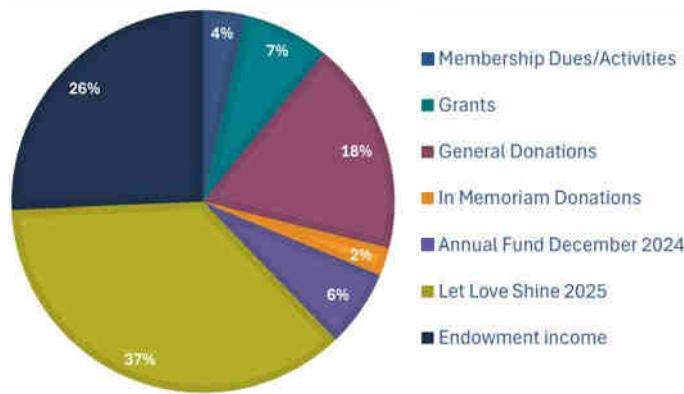
Without any government or United Way funding, the organization relies on donations, grants and fundraising activities to cover program and operational costs.

In 1990, an endowment fund was established to ensure the future viability of the organization and that has proven to be a wise investment, providing a significant portion of its annual income. Aside from being a charitable organization, CCS is a group of members who join for the benefits of satisfying volunteer opportunities, social activities

and friendship. Member support is not only monetary, but also a deeply personal commitment to children.

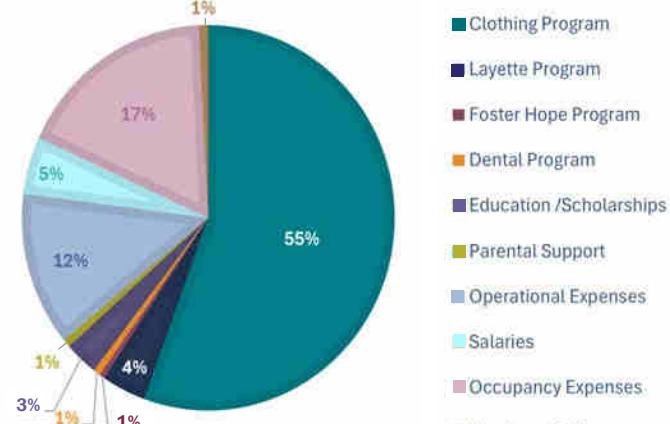
Challenging economic times have impacted the cost of clothing, dental supplies, shipping, office supplies and a skyrocketing rent. CCS is blessed to have robust community support to keep its mission alive.

### CCS Income 2025\*



\*does not include abundant in-kind donations

### CCS Expenses 2025



## How Did CCS Plant Seeds of Love in 2025?

### Number of Children served at the Clothing Center

(in the Clothing, Book and Dental Programs)

Foster Hope Children	168
Layettes Distributed at Hospitals	330
Emergency/ Refugee Children served	11
Scholarships awarded	11
SUCCESS Program children served	175
Layettes of Hope delivered to Women's Care Center	3,680



Volunteer Laura Trippel holds Zevion who received a Layette, a bundle of clothes, blankets and baby items.



Olivia, Amiri and Leniah enjoy showing off their new shoes.



A mother reads to her child who received a book in the Book for a Child Program at the Center.

## Community Support and In-Kind Donations

Community support comes in many different forms. Of course, monetary support of the Annual Appeal and *Let Love Shine* are responsible for most of the monetary income, as well as smaller fundraisers like Giving Tuesday and In Memoriam donations. Foundations and businesses find aspects of the CCS mission to support via grants and "big check" presentations.

In-kind donations of clothing, books and supplies are valued as they provide extra items outside of the budget such as toys for Foster Hope kids and boots for snowy winter days.

Among the businesses and organizations that have shared with CCS are Meijer, Tradehome Shoes, Buyers' Market, Closurdo Family Dentistry, Federated Media, The Lions Club, The Elks, Carter's Delivering Good program, the Santa Maria Council-Knights of Columbus, The University of Notre Dame, Sisters of St. Francis, the Wooly Knitters of Glen Ellyn, A Wee Bit Warped and Operation Warm.

Half Price Books has been generously donating boxes of books every two weeks to stock the Book for a Child Program. Over 7,000 books have filled the shelves! Adult books are shared with parents.

A couple years ago, a Girl Scout troop 'adopted' Foster Hope to earn a special charity badge. They collected many new and used items and cash donations. One of those girls still comes back with donations.

A few weeks ago, the girl's mom was dropping off donations and brought Grandma along to see Christ Child. Susan Coulter showed them the duffle we were preparing for a teen boy whose birthday was coming up soon. He'd never had a birthday party or a cake, and the foster parent was planning to celebrate but had little money for gifts. He was wishing for a belt and a remote control car. Grandma was so moved by this, she gave all her cash - \$130!

Laura Trippel

## Teddy Bear Toss Brings Cuddles

In what has become an annual event, Notre Dame Women's Basketball shared the stuffed animals tossed by fans at the November 9<sup>th</sup> game against Chicago State.

The Teddy Bear Toss brought in 646 cuddly toys which are given to young children with their clothing and to those served by the Foster Hope Program.

CCS members Betsie Pendarvis, Vickie Sleevi, Melissa Baltz, Kae Sobczyk, Barb Mickow, Lisa Smessaert, Kathy Seidl, Jackie Bankowski, and Colleen Toul pose with the collected stuffed toys.



*Every year since 2013, the Wings group at St. Bavo's Parish has celebrated the Christmas season by donating hats and mittens for CCS.*



*Tradehome Shoes at University Park Mall chooses a charity each month to be the recipient of new socks. The store donated a package of socks to The Christ Child Society for every package purchased during September.*

A woman dropped off a Christmas gift bag containing toys from her 5-year-old. She had told him no new toys until he gave some to a child in need! She says it's going to be a new tradition.

Betsie Pendarvis



*The Francis Branch of the St. Joseph County Public Library has set aside money to purchase yarn for its Knitting/Crocheting Group to use for making baby sweaters and blankets as well as children's hats and mittens for CCS.*



*In October, Meijer store 128 donated \$5,000 to support CCS's Clothing Program.*



*The Santa Maria Council - Knights of Columbus donated 16 boxes of new coats.*



A gentleman in a wheelchair with his four-year-old son was searching for jeans in his size in Mary's Boutique. I found some in storage, but when I returned, he was wheeling himself to the bus stop with his son's clothes in his lap. On a whim I ran through the parking lot to give him the clothes before the bus got there. The gentleman was grateful.

As I turned to walk back, his son took my hand and gently said, "I am going to take you back." Of course, I didn't expect that of a 4 year old, but his offer really touched me. Here we think we are helping them, but they are looking out for us, too!

Linda Haslanger



St Joseph Grade School South Bend 7th graders pose with Community Volunteer Chair Suzanne Wiwi.



Marian High School students highlight donors who raise their paddles during Bids 4 Kids at Let Love Shine.

## Community Partners

Engagement with the community is at the heart of the Christ Child Society mission. In order to best serve local children and families, CCS relies on local agencies and schools, those who interact daily with potential clients, to refer children who lack resources.

In turn, CCS uses its ability to reach out to the community about families' desperate need of diapers. The annual Diaper Drop has been an opportunity to support partner agencies and the families they have served for the past 6 years. In 2025, the Diaper Drop delivered 47,000 diapers to 11 agencies.

Donated items that CCS is unable to use are given to the Fig Leaf Boutique ministry in Mishawaka.

Women's Care Center distributes the Layettes of Hope infant onesies and prayer cards provided by CCS to remind women receiving pregnancy tests that they are carrying a life.

Local foster agencies and DCS contact CCS when children are removed from homes and enter the foster care system. These children receive a personalized large tote bag of clothing, personal items, toys and a comfort stuffed animal or blanket, something they can call their own as they meet the challenges ahead.

## Community Volunteers in Action

Operating the Clothing Center, from stocking shelves to helping clients, requires many volunteers. Community groups and schools have provided many energetic volunteers to supplement the work of CCS members.

**Community Volunteer Coordinator**  
Suzanne Wiwi manages to find tasks to fit every volunteer whether it's middle school students pulling wagons, high school Spanish students interpreting for clients, community groups helping to lift heavy boxes of clothing and coats or helping with fundraisers.



Volunteers from the University of Notre Dame's Balour-Hesburgh Scholars Program helped stock shelves and lift boxes.



Marian High School students prepared art kits for the National CCS United in Service project.

### Community Volunteers

Marian High School  
St. Joseph High School  
The University of Notre Dame  
St. Joseph Grade School, SB  
Mishawaka Catholic School  
Trinity Academy  
Christ the King School  
St. Pius X School  
Girl Scouts  
Homeschool Students  
Friends and Family

## Grant Funding Supports CCS Clothing Mission

Christ Child Society of South Bend was awarded a \$3,000 grant by the Pokagon Fund, a nonprofit private foundation supported by revenue from The Four Winds Casino in New Buffalo, MI, which is owned and operated by the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.

The Pokagon Fund envisions communities that are economically strong and socially vibrant, where all residents can access the resources needed to care for their families. "Supporting worthy causes in the communities in which we operate helps us empower residents in local neighborhoods across Northern Indiana

and Southwestern Michigan," said Dan Petersen, Executive Director of the Pokagon Fund.

During the fourth quarter of 2025 the Society also received grants totaling \$3,000 from Saint Pius X Catholic Church. The funding is being used to support three key CCS programs: Layettes, School Clothes and Foster Hope for children entering St. Joseph County's emergency foster care system.

Partnerships with these generous grantors enable the Society to serve an expanding client base now reaching nearly 5,000 children.

## United in Service National Project

Every November, the 44 chapters of The National Christ Child Society are encouraged to do a special project to honor founder Mary Virginia Merrick. The South Bend Chapter prepared art kits.

230 children who came to the Center for clothing were given bright yellow cloth bags filled with crayons, paper, colored pencils, markers, glue sticks, watercolor paints, scissors and stickers that were age appropriate for the child.

Thanks to all who donated supplies!



## Let Love Shine Benefits Thousands of Children

*Let Love Shine* had another record night on November 13, 2025! More than 300 people attended and, with so many lovely auction items available, many people were able to leave with treasures. Everyone was able to leave with memories of a great evening. More than \$400,000 was raised to serve children in St. Joseph County.

The Heart of a Child Award was presented to the Crowley Family Legacy. Rosaleen "Puddy" Crowley founded the South Bend chapter and members of her family have continued to be involved throughout the years. Their contributions have left a lasting legacy. CCS is grateful to former Presidents Maureen Cahir and Jane Zahl-Crowley and volunteer Maddie Crowley for accepting the award on behalf of their family.

Special thanks to Master of Ceremonies Tom Liddell for taking on the role again. He led a fun oral auction and inspired active participation in Bids 4 Kids. Thanks also go to Sara Conroy for her testimony of what it can mean to step up for a



Maureen Crowley Cahir, Maddie Crowley, center, and Jane Zahl-Crowley, right accepted the Heart of a Child Award.

child at just the right time of their lives. All of the community supporters, from those who provided items for the auction to the Harmony Healthcare IT team who created an inspirational video deserve gratitude for their contributions.

Thank you to all those who stepped forward, even before the evening's event, to sponsor *Let Love Shine* this year. Sponsors are listed below. Thank you to everyone who supported this



Tom Liddell coaxes guests to raise their paddles for Bids for Kids. Below, the crowd enjoyed the beautiful decorations and Tom's fun banter.



year's *Let Love Shine* through financial, in-kind, and prayerful support!

Next year, *Let Love Shine* is scheduled for November 12, 2026. Plan to join the fun!

### Thank you to the Generous *Let Love Shine* Sponsors

#### 1947 Founders Sponsors, \$10,000

Harmony Healthcare IT

Patrick Carrico

Kae and Mike Sobczyk

Mary Jane Stanley

In Memory of Sonny & Dee Tepe

#### Winter Coats Sponsors, \$5,000

Nancy Bichimer

Jamil Packaging Corporation

Kristy Botich

Joe and Martha Mamo

Bonnie Hay and Paul Cholis

Notre Dame Federal Credit Union

Hahn I Walz P.C., Honoring the

Barbara and John Phair

Brioli Family

Tire Rack

John and Catherine Hiler Family Charitable Fund

The University of Notre Dame  
Anita and Thomas Veldman

#### New Clothing Sponsors, \$2,500

1st Source Bank

KeyBank

Peg Claeys

Judy and Hugh Kuzmich

Barbara Dillon and Family

Lisa & David Smessaert,

The Doshi Family Fund

Metropolitan Title Co.

Family Footcare Clinic

Don and Carol Nash

Dr. and Mrs. Walter H. Halloran

Diane Quinn

Audrey and Rick Herzberg

Carol and Michael Rolfs

Margaret Hosinski

Kathryn and Paul Schoenle

Indiana Trust Wealth Management

Kathy and John Seidl

Sharon A. James

Thorne Grodnik, LLP

#### Mary Virginia Merrick Sponsors, \$15,000

Gurley Leep Automotive Family

Jim Fuehrmeyer

Edward and Joan Hardig



#### New Shoes Sponsors, \$1,000

Beth and Dan Barrett

Tom and Maureen Cahir

Randall and Loretta Chrobot

Fred Dean

Monique and John Deguara

Laura and Patrick Flynn

Granger Dental Group

James and Carol Groves

Jennifer and Fred Helmen

Carol Holt

Katherine P. Kagel

The Kinnucan Family

Teresa and Greg Kosse

Steve and Karen Kubsch

Nancy and Del Meyer,

Weichert-Dunfee

Betsie and John Pendarvis

Barb and John Reihl

Brenda Sands

Sue and Rick Seall

Mark and Suzanne Wiwi

#### Foster Hope/Layette Sponsors, \$500

Steve and Louise Anella

Joseph and Marie Burt

Rich and Susan Carlton

George and Katy Cressy

Sheila Emge

Betty Ann Gibbons

Eileen and Tom Hughes

Ann and Joe Iams

Norris Equity Partners LLC

Mary Pat and Dick Nussbaum

Bette O'Malley

Mary and Ken Ripple

Janet (Shafer) Sabo

Bonnie and Steve Seall

John and Carolyn Sherman

Terry Slamkowski

Phil and Susan Wendowski



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## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

### Calendar

#### February

17 Board Meeting - Desmond Conference Room 10:00 AM  
25 In Memoriam Mass - Little Flower Church 8:30 AM  
25 DAY OF REFLECTION - St. Joseph Church, South Bend 9:00 AM

#### March

17 SPRING MASS & LUNCHEON   
16 Board Meeting - Desmond Conference Room 10:00 AM  
25 In Memoriam Mass - Little Flower Church 8:30 AM

#### April

20 Board Meeting - Desmond Conference Room 10:00 AM  
22 INFORMATION COFFEE  
23 In Memoriam Mass - Little Flower 8:30 AM  
Newsletter deadline April 15  
Center is open for volunteers every Tuesday and Wednesday, 9:00 to 1:00.

### 2025-26 Executive Board

Co-Presidents  
Vickie Sleevi & Carolyn Sherman  
President Elect  
Karen Van Meter  
Vice President (Fundraising)  
Ellen Jessen  
Vice President (Membership)  
Tricia Shafer  
Vice President (Clothing)  
Sherry North  
Vice President (Communications)  
Mary Hazel  
Board Secretary  
Cheryl Stuckey  
Treasurer  
Sue Alwine



The Christ Child Society of South Bend is a nonprofit association of volunteers dedicated to supporting under-resourced families in our community by providing children's clothing, supporting education, and offering resources to affirm the human dignity of God's children in the love and spirit of the Christ Child.