

“Give It a Second Life” Collection

Tom McCarthy

This annual event began in 1989 with the collection of 8 used adult and children’s bicycles from St. John’s parishioners, which were repaired by parishioners and then taken to St. Edwards parish in inner-city Baltimore in time for Christmas giving.

[Editor’s Note: A 1993 article in the Catholic Review giving the history of this collection event stated that Tom noticed a bike needing small repairs sitting out on the curb waiting for the trash collection. He thought that with minimal repairs the bike could have been given to some child who didn’t have a bike. The next day he called Barbara Hope, our parish’s social ministry coordinator at the time, and together they launched St. John’s Bike Project. The 8 bikes they collected that first year were all repaired by parishioners and friends.]

A few years later the number of bikes in each year’s collection had grown to the point where parishioners could not repair them all and St. Edward’s was getting more than they could put to good use. It was then that local bike shops were recruited to donate repairs to the children’s bikes and the adult size bikes were passed on to “Pedals for Progress.” (Currently Race Pace Bicycles in Ellicott City, a partner for several years, repairs the children’s bikes at no charge.)

Our neighbor congregation in the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, St. John United Methodist – Presbyterian, joined us as co-sponsor shortly after. Ever since, the children’s bikes have been delivered to inner-city Catholic and Protestant churches in time for Christmas by volunteers from both congregations.



Donated Bikes Waiting to be loaded onto trucks

Around 2008 we started working with “Bikes for the World,” a Maryland based non-profit, which spun off from “Pedals for Progress.” They ship both the adult bikes and the portable sewing machines we collect to Africa and Latin America. Over that period we have joined with several other partners to distribute the other needed items we began to collect. One example is the Lions Club which distributes our collection of eyeglasses and hearing aids to the needy worldwide.

Over the years more than 1000 bikes and approximately 100 sewing machines have been distributed to the needy. The annual collection is no longer limited to items collected from the members of the two congregations as was done in the beginning; it has been publicized throughout Columbia and beyond. The collection has become a witness to the community of Christian concern and charity.

Please remember the collection during the year and save your bicycles, sewing machines, musical instruments, eyeglasses, hearing aids, purses, and baseball equipment. Our next annual Fall collection date will be listed in the Bulletin.