Lumen Christi Award

Mike Hentges and Steve Smith - Diocese of Jefferson City, Missouri

Want to help children in need? Start by caring for their mothers.

Since the first house opened in 2012, SRS has grown to three houses in the Diocese of Jefferson City. With 11 employees and more than 150 volunteers, they provide maternal and pastoral care to society’s most vulnerable women.

Smith and Hentges, who are each married with children and full-time jobs, realize that as men, they are slightly unusual founders of a women’s shelter. Their website reads, “Most guys that help single moms don’t start their story with, ‘Two bald guys walk into a restaurant, but ours does.” After several meetings together over lunch, they knew they needed to act.

“It is amazing what God can do with a little ‘yes’ from us,” said Smith.

The women they serve lack the social network and finances to have a healthy pregnancy and establish a family. Many were put out by scandalized families, abandoned by the baby’s father or could not afford medical bills or housing. These SRS houses provide a life-changing opportunity to redirect their lives. They not only receive basic supplies and counseling, but in this warm, loving, faith-filled environment, they are nurtured and given security and confidence. Here Hentges helps provide a safe, family setting.

These women learn about caring for themselves and about parenting. Most mothers stay for more than a year to fully engage in the benefits of this opportunity. Once their babies are born, they are cared for at the houses, until they are on their feet. These are true transitional houses that meet women where they are and move them toward self-sufficiency.

In 2018, the St. Raymond’s Society’s houses provided housing for 21 mothers and their 26 children. The Society also provided outreach assistance to 137 non-residential mothers in their communities and their 211 children, who did not need housing, but needed other assistance during challenging circumstances while pregnant.
Education is The Key to Economic Self-Sufficiency

We find that most single mothers have inadequate education or lack job skills or experience, and therefore cannot achieve Self-Sufficiency Wages without first addressing education and/or job training.

This is where St. Raymond’s Society enters the picture. Our first step is to stabilize these fragile families by assisting with their immediate needs; e.g., healthy food, secure housing, dependable transportation and safe childcare. As soon as we introduce the My RIDICULOUSLY AMAZING Life© program into the equation, extraordinary things start to happen!

Sakina comes to us originally from Tanzania. She has a handsome three year old son, Seleman. Sakina found herself without a place to call home after her high school graduation in May. After moving into St. Ray’s House, Sakina immediately found full-time employment, as well as applied for College. This amazing young woman loves helping people and has been accepted to the Accelerated Nursing Program through the Moberly Area Community College. Sakina believes that through hard work and focus, she will reach her Amazing Life goals!

Krystle is an amazing new mom who gave birth (a tad bit early) to a beautiful daughter, Kalayah in July. After her daughter’s birth, Krystle hit the ground running towards success. She recently enrolled at the Excel Center, a new program in Columbia, which allows adults to work towards obtaining their high school diploma. Krystle is not only focusing on education, but also on becoming debt free. She will soon have the opportunity to attend our Financial Peace University© courses which will certainly help propel her towards her debt free goal and living a debt free lifestyle.

Intentionally Designed to Calm the Chaos of Life

oasis noun: something that provides refuge, relief, or pleasant contrast.

Life is hectic. There is no going around it. St. Raymond’s Society understands the need to calm the chaos in the lives of the mothers we serve.

Research reveals that living a chaotic, stressful lifestyle harms the pre-frontal cortex of the brain which regulates memory, attention, behavior, emotions, and thoughts including decision making and planning. In fact, prolonged high stress levels prohibit the ability to think clearly and function effectively, producing a state of survival way of life.

And when a person is trying to survive – she cannot dream.

This is precisely what motivated St. Raymond’s Society to transform an existing public office space into an “oasis” for our House residents and our community clients. Providing a centralized, tranquil space gives her a place to unplug from the commotion and helps her to find clarity which enables her to make sound decisions about how to reach her self-sufficient future.

From the tranquil background paint color, inviting comfy furniture, clutter-free surfaces, and aromatherapy to soothe away her fight or flight urgings – to the bright pops of lively color that provoke a good mood and enhances her happiness as well as stimulates her desire to dream about a better tomorrow, and energizes her to create a plan and work it.

BIG things happen every day at our oasis!

We use this intentionally designed space to conduct applicant interviews, weekly Life Coaching sessions for groups and individuals that live at St. Ray’s House and in our community utilizing the My RIDICULOUSLY AMAZING Life© curriculum. This space is also used to train life skills, such as personal finance and budgeting utilizing Financial Peace University© by Dave Ramsey.

Meeting at the quiet, peaceful oasis and working with her Success Coach, she is able to unplug from chaos and focus on creating and living a ridiculously amazing life!
Community Coaching Changes Lives

It starts with a simple “yes” to give coaching a try.

Working with her Success Coach, she embraces our innovative approach to goal setting and action planning and she begins experiencing success like she never thought possible. And before you know it, she is a college graduate living a ridiculously amazing life!

SRS mom, Anitta, will soon be that college graduate living a ridiculously amazing life! After much hard work and dedication, she will be graduating in December having earned her Bachelor’s in Psychology from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She and her one year old son have recently transitioned into their own home. Anitta is inches away from self-sufficiency and her SRS team could not be more proud of her. Anitta recognizes that our life coaching has been a vital part of her success and she continues to participate in our community program.

Another SRS mom, Rita, has also regularly participated in our community coaching program which utilizes the My RIDICULOUSLY AMAZING Life© curriculum. After just one coaching session, Rita knew she wanted more and decided to do whatever it takes to get more! She understands that her first step is to improve her education. And that is precisely what she intends to do by enrolling in the Excel Center.

SPECIAL INVITATION:
Roundtable discussion with Vice President Mike Pence

“I went from being a homeless, pregnant, part-time waitress to a breastfeeding mom, a college graduate employed in my field of study with a 401K, a business owner, and most importantly, I am a baptized Christian!” ~ Faith, Banquet for Life, March 2018

But her journey didn’t stop there. Over the past eighteen, Faith has been extremely busy. Here’s a bit of what she has been up to:

- Received a promotion
- Earned two professional certifications
- Routinely contributes to her 401K
- Attended Financial Peace University© by Dave Ramsey
- Purchased a new vehicle with cash
- Paid off all debts (more than $20,000) and maintains a debt free lifestyle

Faith continues to publicly share her story. Most recently she and baby Noah traveled to Washington, DC to meet with our Congressmen to educate them on the importance of organizations like St. Raymond’s Society to mothers who are facing an unplanned pregnancy.

Faith was invited discuss the impact community organizations had on her decision to parent her son, Noah, rather than have an abortion. She eloquently explained to VP Mike Pence, “Without the assistance and guidance I received from my pregnancy center and St. Raymond’s Society, I would not be where I am today. I am a successful business woman and mother. I am twenty-three and debt free! I am living a ridiculously amazing life!”

Faith confessed to VP Pence that she was feeling a bit star struck, he replied, “I feel the same way, Faith.”
Miracles Happen Every Day

Faith recalls being put off at first by the idea of living at the St. Raymond’s Home. “I think I just had scales over my eyes,” she said, in reference to St. Paul’s conversion story in the Book of Acts (9:1-19). “It was hard for me to believe and accept that they wanted to give me help — real help — and did not want anything in return. I mean, who does that?”

Before long, she was excelling in her college studies and soaring through St. Raymond’s exclusive life-skills curriculum appropriately titled My Ridiculously Amazing Life.

“God really used my crisis to bring me closer to Him,” she said. “and He continues to do that. I want my Creator to understand that I appreciate this extraordinary life He’s given me, especially since I did not appreciate it before like I should have.”

Faith hopes her story will inspire other women who are pregnant and frightened to ask God for a miracle, and then work with Him to bring it about.

“Miracles happened every day at St. Raymond’s House! I’m so grateful He is using what little I had to offer in exchange for all these opportunities to draw closer to Him and become the woman He always intended me to be,” she said. – excerpts taken from Catholic Missourian July 25, 2019 article written by Jay Nies