



Volunteering One Family's Journey Together

THE SCHMIDT FAMILY – TED A PHARMACIST, MISSY AN EIGHTH-GRADE SCHOOL TEACHER AT CHRIST THE KING AND THEIR FIVE CHILDREN CHASE, MATTHEW, MARY MARGARET, CLAIRE AND EMILY – HAVE MADE VOLUNTEERING PART OF THEIR LIVES.

The Schmidts learned firsthand the joy of helping others as well as how their volunteerism enhances their strong family bond. Living proof of the proverb, “A family that prays together stays together,” the Schmidt family has been praying and ministering to residents and patients of Mercy Medical in Daphne for the past 16 years. Their volunteerism is so inspirational they have been featured in *Parents* magazine and in the *Press-Register*. Their story has encouraged others to follow suit.

An interview with Missy Schmidt chronicles her family's volunteer journey, and how God has rewarded them with cherished friendships and memorable experiences. – CM

What led your family to volunteer at Mercy?

My husband and I traveled to Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in August 1988 to pray for the gift of children. We had been married for three years, had difficulty conceiving our first child and were told he may be our only child. We spent ten days in pilgrimage renewing our faith. Nine and a half months later, on May 23, 1989, we had our second child Matthew; in December 1990 our third, Mary Margaret, in August 1993 our fourth, Claire, and in March 1995 our fifth, Emily. God and Our Lady are so good!!!

I sought out a place to go to daily mass with little ones in tow. Most parishes had daily mass at 7 or 8 a.m. which was too early. Mercy offered daily mass at 11 am – just right!

We began in September of 1990 attending mass two to three days a week. We grew close to the residents, patients, Sr. Carol Harbeck, RSM and each of the three priests.

In August 1999 we officially became volunteers as Mass readers, Eucharistic ministers, and transporters of patients to and from mass.

What is your family's approach to volunteerism?

We try very hard to put our volunteer commitment first before any other thing that arises in the course of our busy seven-member family's lives. My husband works as a pharmacist every other weekend, so he misses from time to time, but very rarely do the rest of us miss our scheduled commitment. Many times we bring others along with us – friends, family or some of my eighth-grade students who want to earn service hours in religion class at Christ the King School.

How has volunteering affected your family?

Volunteering has brought us many blessings. We have grown in our love for the infirmed and the elderly. We have also adopted many 'grandparents' who we still pray for as they have passed away. We have stayed close as a family even as our children grew into teenagers. We have become much more aware of our own blessings and self worth as we have seen the joy we bring to the patients and residents just by our presence and smiles. In the beginning, I sought to give to God in attending daily mass and in the end He has given us back much more.

Tell us about a memorable story you experienced while volunteering at Mercy.

One story in particular I would like to share. Mr. Carter Bryars' wife, Mary Katherine, was in Mercy Medical for seven years. We had grown quite close to them and invited Mr. Bryars over for dinner many times. We all have gone out to dinner together for his birthday and other special occasions. He has become such a special part of our family. After Hurricane Katrina, he offered his home for my parents and extended family that had lost everything. He remembers each of our birthdays with a \$2 bill; and for the last four years he has come to speak to my eighth-graders about his WWII experiences. He comes each year right after my students finish reading “The Diary of Anne Frank.” It has been a wonderful gift having Mr. Bryars in our lives. In March 2006, Mr. Bryars' wife, Mary Katherine passed away, the day after he spoke to my students.



The Schmidts reminisce with long-time friend and active Mercy volunteer, Carter Bryars about his wife Mary Katherine who passed away. Pictured from left back row: Chase, Mary Margaret; from left front row; Ted, Missy, Carter Bryars holding a photo of Mary Katherine.