



# CHRIST CHILD SOCIETY<sup>®</sup> OF MILWAUKEE

## WHERE LOVE LEADS TO ACTION

### Winter 2026 Newsletter

## From the Presidents

***Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. 2 Corinthians 3:5***

To paraphrase St. Paul's quote above, God does not call the qualified, he qualifies the called. Our founder Mary Virginia Merrick took this to heart when she said, "I resolved to do something every day for the Christ Child...I was confident it was His work, and He would supply my deficiency."

Whether we have belonged to the Christ Child Society for a few months or many decades, we are challenged from time to time to stretch ourselves and do something we may never have done before and don't feel qualified to do.

Mary and I have both been challenged in our roles this year as co-presidents in many different ways. Asking to meet with Archbishop Grob in mid-January is one small example. He was impressed by our organization and stressed how important the works of CCS are, though they may seem small. He was impressed at the longevity of CCS both nationally and locally. He had never previously heard of our group. We hope to have opportunities for collaboration with him and the archdiocese in the future.

We now ask you how the quotes above may apply to you and your involvement with CCS. Have you ever been asked or wanted to be on or chair a committee or have a position on the board? This may seem like a scary endeavor for some, but it really is not! We ask you to be open to sharing your gifts of time and talent with a committee or as a chair.

The nomination committee, chaired by Judy Keenan and Kathleen Semrad, would love to hear from you if you are interested in some capacity. As they cannot read people's minds, they would love for you to contact them. We appreciate fresh ideas and perspective!

Most importantly, THANK YOU for all you have done and continue to do for the Christ Child Society. You are appreciated!

*Julie Steinhafel and Mary Mertens*

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



*-Mary Virginia Merrick*

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## Layettes: Creative ideas bring bundles of gifts

Christ Child Society members and our friends exemplify Mary Virginia Merrick's mission in donating to and working as part of our Layette program. Here are a few examples:

**Book Club Donations** – New CCS member Mary Jo Quackenboss asked everyone at her book club's December get-together to bring a hardboard book to donate to Layettes. This was done in place of their usual gift exchange.

**High School Connections** – Marquette University High School and Divine Savior Holy Angels High School students are making wonderful contributions to the Layette program.

- During homecoming week, at MUHS, students collected approximately 20,000 diapers which helped the layette program, My Stuff toddler bags, Life's Connections and All Saints Food Pantry.
- Ten wonderful students from DSHA spent January 17 serving with such heart and enthusiasm! These amazing young women rolled up their sleeves to clip tags, sort and organize a large delivery of layette items.

**Committed Friends** – Over the years, Patsy Yahle, a CCS friend, has knit and donated over 5,000 baby hats!

Major collections for Layettes each year are the Shower of Love, the Christmas Mass and parishes who have collections for Layettes.

- St. Charles Borromeo Milwaukee had a wonderful baby shower and gave Layettes a large collection of items plus a wonderful monetary donation.
- St. Dominic's and St. Joan of Arc had made Layettes part of their Christmas giving. We are very grateful for their generosity.

If you have an idea for a giving program at your church, parish or friend group, contact Laurie Derus, [jderus@aol.com](mailto:jderus@aol.com) or 262-993-6200.



*Mary Quackenboss shows some of the titles her book club collected during Advent. The books will be packaged with other layette items for new babies.*



*DSHA students help sort the essential pieces that will soon become part of the beautiful layettes we deliver to local agencies for moms and newborns in need.*

## Resale Shop: Celebrating Our Volunteers

In January, the directors hosted a luncheon in the gathering room at the Merrick Center to thank our dedicated Resale Shop volunteers. Delicious food and lively conversation made for a wonderful afternoon enjoyed by all who attended. Over the past year, these remarkable women contributed more than **6,900 volunteer hours**, both at the shop and from home, helping make the Resale Shop such a success.



**Our volunteers wear many hats:** Sorting donations, pricing and displaying merchandise, assisting customers, cashiering, wrapping purchases, organizing greeting cards and books, photographing and listing furniture on Craigslist, along with researching, listing and shipping items on eBay. If any of these roles sound interesting to you, especially those you can do from home, contact Pat Dorr at 414-378-5284, and she'll be happy to help you get started. We use SignUp Genius to organize our volunteer schedule, but a phone call is just fine, too.



**We want to reassure everyone that even with the upcoming move, we are definitely accepting donations!** We are especially in need of smaller furniture items such as cocktail and end tables, chairs, dinette sets, headboards and bureaus, desks and bookshelves. As always, we also welcome clean, gently used men's, women's, and children's clothing, along with housewares and linens. If you're unsure whether an item is suitable, please call the shop during business hours and speak with a director, or contact Joanne Foran at 262-893-8699. Your donations are essential in helping us support the important programs of our chapter. Thank you for your continued support - as clearly seen during our February Member Meeting, when many women wore the wonderful fashions they've purchased at the shop!

## Relocation Update

We are continuing to navigate the next steps for our Resale Shop. A potential move to a St. Margaret Mary parish building is a big deal and will require many hands to make lighter work. For over 20 years, we were blessed to have actively operated our Resale Shop at Our Lady of Good Hope. But this was not our first home! We spent 10 years at Our Lady of Sorrows occupying a smaller space in their former convent. Before that, we were somewhat homeless (like Israelites wandering in the desert) but held very successful annual Rummage Sales.

The first hurdle of 2026 is applying for rezoning for the building. The parish will lead this effort, which may take several months. They are dealing with the closing of two churches and schools in their parish cluster, so we are a smaller piece in their large puzzle. Please pray for this to be a successful and easy process. Throughout the 78-year history of our CCS Chapter, God has closed multiple doors and opened many more windows. We trust that he will lead and guide our Chapter to where he would like us to serve, and we are confident that CCS members will rise to the occasion when it happens.

## My Stuff Bags: The Value of Giving

What a beautiful way to end 2025! My Stuff Bags collected hundreds of in-kind Advent donations from six parishes in December.

- St. Mathias
- St. Monica
- Lumen Christi
- St. Sebastian
- St. Jude the Apostle
- St. Martin of Tours

The value of these brand-new pajamas, shirts, stuffed animals and winter items was approximately \$22,500. They also donated many extra items such as toys, books, large stuffed animals, and clothing that were also distributed to all the shelters in January. Thank you to the 25 + volunteers who spent many hours clipping and sorting all the donations over several days.

### **December was a month of giving for our shelter program.**

- \$5,000 grant from the Herb Kohl Charitable Foundation.
- \$3,000 grant from St. Elizabeth Seton Parish
- \$500 from a couple in Park City, Utah, who read about our charity and were looking for a way to serve God by helping children in our community.

No amount is too small! We received a surprise monetary donation from the school children at St. Mathias for \$78.11. The principle, Tim Kasprzak said the school children wanted to help those children less fortunate than themselves.

### **Impressive Numbers**

From January through December 2025, we assembled 1,169 bags for boys and girls sizes 6 months through size 18.

- Of that number, 91 were toddler bags for boys and girl sizes 9, 12, and 18 months.
- Toddler bags were introduced to four shelters in April 2024, and in September 2025 these same shelters expressed a need for 6 month sizes. We fulfilled that need by delivering 17 size 6 month boys and girls toddler bags through December 2025.
- My Stuff Bags volunteers put in more than 1,807 hours of time and talent.

We have many new members and provisionals, each month helping to assemble the children's bags, including 85 bags on February 5. They make our assembly days go so smoothly.

All members are welcome to join our fun group of volunteers. Our next assembly is Thursday, March 5, 9 a.m. at the Christ Child Center in Brookfield. No need to register!



## Fr. Michael Wolfe: Lent Opens Our Eyes

In the Catholic Church (and other Christian traditions) we are right at the beginning of Lent.

Even though it entails fasting from some of my favorite things, as I look at the big picture, it is my favorite time of year, spiritually speaking. This is because it is a sort of reset for us to return to the basics of our faith and how we live it out. And as someone who is not so good at sitting still, this season of being more intentional about prayer, fasting and almsgiving serves me well to get to back to the basics of what means to be a baptized person.

The image we often use for Lent is the desert (or “wilderness”). It recalls the Exodus, the forty years the people of God spent on the way to the promised land, as well as the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert after his baptism and before beginning his mission (also pointing to the Exodus). The metaphor is that of a difficult but fruitful journey from slavery (i.e. to sin) to freedom.

What I consider most powerful in the imagery of being in the desert is that when one is in the desert, there is nowhere to hide. I am alone, with myself and with God. No more excuses or justifications - I must honestly face my temptations (as Jesus did) and my faults, both the things that I should not have done, and the good things that I have not done. Having no where to hide from my faults, I then have no other option but to seek forgiveness from God and from neighbor, if I wish to continue on my journey forward.

Lived out well, this is not easy. And I admit, I have a long way to go before saying I have “Lented well.” However, if we are intentional, there is an immense value in making an effort each year to return to the basics of who we are called and sent to be through our baptisms.

It forces us to set aside the details, frustrations, complications, nitpicking, etc. that distract us from the big picture.

Being a member of the Christ Child Society is a key part of how many of us live out our faith, so may I dare to suggest that we also take advantage of this time to reflect as members of the Society, and “reset ourselves” with regards to the basics of why the Society was founded, and how God is calling the Milwaukee chapter to live it out today? And how each one of us can be a part of that more fully if we are willing to go into the desert and face our temptations and faults to more freely (and thus joyfully!) participate in the mission?

With regards to the Catholic faith, I have found a guiding light in the particularly powerful and concise intercession found in one of the Eucharistic Prayers (Various Needs IV). I think it also speaks to the vision of Mary Virginia Merrick’s motto of “to see a need and fill it” in the recognizing the dignity of all children.

Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters; inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labor and are burdened. Make us serve them truly, after the example of Christ and at his command. And may your Church stand as a living witness to truth and freedom, to peace and justice, that all people may be raised up to a new hope.

May we all enter courageously into the desert the Lent, to be renewed in our faith and mission and in the joy of having been called by God to something so great as to serve “the little ones.”



## Feeding the Hungry

Christ Child Society members recently provided several boxes of food for the All Saints Food Pantry. These contributions included essential items such as peanut butter and tuna, which help meet the needs of local families. According to Fr. Mike, "The pantry has seen its numbers double in recent months, now serving between 50 and over 60 households every Tuesday and Thursday. Your support helps ensure that assistance is more complete for those who rely on this resource." Please consider adding your contributions to help address this growing need in our community. <https://allsaintsmke.org/food-pantry>

## Spiritual: Mary Virginia Merrick Novena

In honor of what would be Mary Virginia Merrick's feast day in January, many CCS members participated in a novena - a nine-day prayer focused on asking for intercessions from our founder, now a Servant of God on the path to sainthood.

Many of us have been reflecting on just how powerful and personal this experience has been. For some, it was the first novena they had ever completed. For others, it became a quiet but meaningful renewal of commitment to CCS and its mission.

What stood out most was reading Mary Virginia Merrick's actual words. Her prayers and reflections were holy, insightful and deeply humbling. One quote in particular resonated with members: "Take my hands and let them work for You... my mind... my memory... my will... that I may one day see You."

We're thrilled to share that the official website for Mary Virginia Merrick, founder of the Christ Child Society and Servant of God, has been beautifully updated! Mary Virginia Merrick's life is an inspiring story of courage, faith and service. Despite being paralyzed as a teenager, she dedicated her life to helping children and families in need, founding the Christ Child Society in 1887.

The new site offers:

- ✓ A fresh look at her remarkable biography
- ✓ Resources on her Cause for Canonization
- ✓ Ways to get involved and carry on her mission



Visit the updated site at

[www.maryvirginiamerrick.org](http://www.maryvirginiamerrick.org)



It is both inspiring and, honestly, a little intimidating. And yet, that challenge is what makes her such a powerful role model. Despite her physical limitations, she chose service over self-pity. She lived what she believed—that nothing is too much to do for a child.

Starting each day of the novena with good and prayerful thoughts made a real difference. It set the tone for the day and served as a reminder that even when we don't know if our prayers will be answered in the way we hope, we can trust that God has a plan.

Mary Virginia Merrick's life continues to call us higher - to serve more generously, to focus less on ourselves, and to place our talents, our limitations, and our very wills into God's hands. Her witness reminds us that true service is not about comfort or ease, but about love in action.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the novena and shared their reflections. It has been inspiring to hear how this time of prayer has touched hearts and strengthened our shared mission.

## Vision Screening: Clearly Seeing the Future

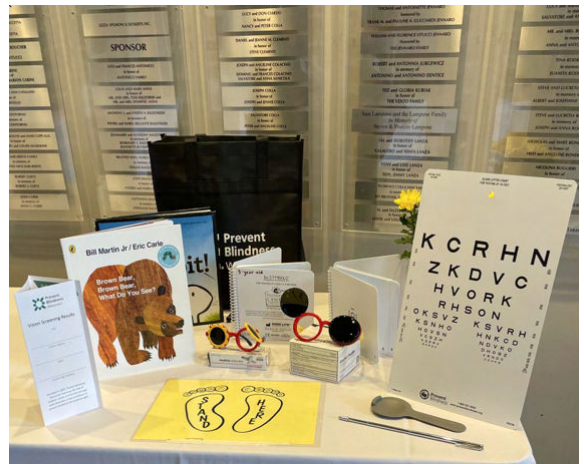
In 2025, our Christ Child Society Vision Screening volunteers screened 990 students in K3, K4, and K5 at 10 Catholic schools. Thanks to our 20 certified screeners, that added up to more than 320 volunteer hours focused on helping young children see clearly and learn more easily.

We've had a busy month!

- At the February Membership Meeting, Jean Phelan spoke about why catching vision issues early is so important. She shared what a typical screening looks like, how to sign up using SignUp Genius, and why working with the little ones is both meaningful and fun.
- On February 14, our screeners were also busy at Second Saturday's Health and Safety Day, screening pre-school children who aren't yet in school. Events like this give us a great chance to catch vision problems early.

Looking ahead, in early March our scheduler Mary Stroebel will contact the 10 schools we've worked with to set up spring screenings. As always, we'll need three certified screeners per visit. We currently have 26 certified screeners, and we hope the six provisionals who attended the January orientation will complete their prerequisites and join the team.

If anyone is interested, check page 23 of your handbook for details, or contact Jean Phelan - [jean.a.phelan@gmail.com](mailto:jean.a.phelan@gmail.com) or 262-853-7020.



## CCS Liaisons Make It Happen!

Thanks to the 45 members who are communications liaisons - spreading the word about the work of the Christ Child Society in Southeastern Wisconsin!

By sending monthly messages to their parish, retirement community, church or club, we are able to share information about our projects and how people can make a meaningful contribution through new baby clothes, stuffed animals or even financial gifts. Hundreds of items were donated this year when parishes posted requests on their Advent giving trees, like this one at St. Dominic.

Please be sure to include your parish or church when you send in your CCS registration form for next year. Questions? Contact Barb Haig - [barbh1836@gmail.com](mailto:barbh1836@gmail.com).



## Finance: New Calendar-based Fiscal Year

During the 2025 calendar year, we focused on two significant initiatives:

### **New Fiscal Year**

Membership voted to transition our chapter's fiscal year from a June 1– May 31 cycle to a calendar fiscal year - January 1– December 31. This change was made to align with the national Christ Child Society organization's fiscal year, thereby streamlining reporting requirements and improving overall administrative efficiency. It also simplifies the reporting and payment of dues, as well as the accounting for major fundraising events that previously often spanned the May 31 fiscal year-end cutoff. The transition was completed smoothly, and we've filed our tax return for the short period ending December 31, 2025.

### **2026-28 Budget**

As a result of the fiscal year change, we needed to develop a new budget. After much consideration, we developed a proposal and received approval from the general membership at the February 11 meeting. In future years, the budget will be presented for approval prior to the end of each calendar year.

### **Next Priorities**

Our next priority is to review our investment advisor relationship and assess the performance of our endowment funds. If you have any finance-related questions, please feel free to contact your directors.

The finance committee is currently made up of ten members:

- Marilyn Martin and Linda Lied, co-directors
- Sandy Schmitt and Jane Vosters, co-treasurers
- Mary Mertens and Julie Steinhafel, co-presidents
- Judy Keen and Kathleen Semrad, co-past presidents
- Jean Phelan, Rita Dragani, general membership

## Leadership: Board nominations

### **2026 CCS Nominations**

Past presidents Judy Keenan & Kathleen Semrad have gathered a great Nomination Committee, Rita Dragani, Ellen Johnson, Maria Strehlow and Kathy Powers to recruit members for the 2026-2028 Executive Board. They are seeking someone to serve as Fundraising Director, who oversees these exciting committees:

- Grant Writing (Ann Kissack, Susan Mountin)
- Amazon Wish List (Mary Cary, & helper entering items on list)
- Fall Fundraisers (Members to be determined)

If you (and maybe a friend!) would be interested in filling this role please contact Judy or Kathleen.

## Second Saturday: Winter escapes

### November

We had a heartwarming Thanksgiving gathering, including the joy of welcoming three new families to our community! Allene, one of our newer volunteers, led a beautiful fall-themed decoupage bowl activity for the moms, while the children enjoyed a cozy story time. Thanks to our amazing kitchen crew, everyone was treated to a classic Thanksgiving meal: hot turkey, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, cranberry sauce, and delicious pumpkin squares for dessert. But the highlight? A special treat from one of our moms, Ana Anaya, who lovingly made and shared 100 Bunuelos — a traditional dessert symbolizing unity, generosity, and good fortune, with roots tracing back to Ancient Rome. They were absolutely delicious!



### December

Despite the bitter cold, 23 families came together, and what a wonderful celebration it was! We visited with Santa (a huge thank-you to seminarian Phillip Cooley for making the trip from Chicago to be our bilingual Santa!), took festive photos, made ornaments for our trees, enjoyed a delicious lunch of mostaccioli with meatballs and Christmas cookies for dessert, sang carols, and shared special time with friends. A big shout-out to Divine Savior Holy Angels High School for an extra special treat: they collected beautiful necklaces and bracelets so the children could pick something for their moms. The smiles were priceless—and the moms were thrilled!



### January

Although it was cold and snowy outside, it was warm and bustling inside during Second Saturday! Some 15 moms/grandmothers and 27 children joined us for a delightful program featuring Bingo. After starting the morning with stretching exercises, we played several Bingo games where the winners could choose from some fabulous prizes. Everyone was treated to a delicious and hearty lunch of taco soup, veggies and dip, chips and salsa, fruit cocktail and Rice Krispie bars. The children also had fun creating their own snowmen and snowflakes.



## Second Saturday: Winter escapes

### February

It was a very special Second Saturday as we hosted our first-ever Health & Safety Fair for our moms and children - a huge success! We welcomed 25 moms and 52 children, including four new families (all with younger children - so wonderful to see growing families joining us!). The energy was amazing, and the day was filled with learning, connection and care.

Thanks to our incredible partners, in addition to our own vision screening in partnership with Prevent Blindness, we were able to offer a wide range of health and safety services:

- Children's Hospital screened 12 children for lead (ages 9 months–10 years), and we're happy to report no lead detected. Great news!
- Marquette University Hispanic Dental students shared dental health education
- A nurse from St. John's on the Lake checked vital signs, including blood pressure
- Milwaukee Police Department District #5 officers provided personal safety tips for women
- Coalition On Lead Emergency shared important lead safety information
- A mindfulness/stress relief instructor shared tips and tools to support mental health
- A local RN provided basic first aid education
- Fire Safety & Fire Department and Woman's Care Center shared helpful resources

We kicked off the morning with stretching, enjoyed a healthy and delicious parfait, and had some fun exercise with hula hoops! The day wrapped up with a fantastic lasagna lunch - huge thanks to our amazing lunch crew! Each family went home with a mini first aid kit as a take-home gift. We are so grateful to every partner, volunteer, and family who helped make this day such a success. It truly was a very special Second Saturday! Interested in volunteering next time? Contact Holly Ryan [hollyanneryan@gmail.com](mailto:hollyanneryan@gmail.com).



## Briefs: CCS Milwaukee in the community

### Winter Coats for CCS Partners

The St. Vincent de Paul Conference of St. Luke's Parish in Waukesha County generously provided several dozen more than 100 brand-new winter coats to CCS for distribution, thanks to the support of the National Knights of Columbus. After checking in with our My Stuff Bag partner shelters and agencies about needed sizes, we delivered coats to:

- Meta House
- Cathedral Center
- Milwaukee Women's Shelter
- New Horizon Center
- All Saints Parish Food Pantry

Each organization expressed heartfelt gratitude for the generosity during our frigid Wisconsin weather.



### Women of Christ Conference

On November 15, the Christ Child Society had a vendor booth at the Women of Christ conference in Brookfield. Judy Keenan, Jen Rentmeester and Mary Mertens hosted the CCS booth, displaying our signature program of Layettees, Toddler Bags and My Stuff Bags. We advertised our resale shop and gave away bookmarks, brochures pens, and chocolates. Seven women took a Fund card, 19 women signed up for more infor-



### Christmas Spirit

CCS Co-president Mary Mertens and her husband Michael brought Christmas magic to life in December when they played Santa and Mrs. Claus for the family of Doris Jome, winner of a Shower of Love prize—a visit from St. Nick! They surprised Doris's daughter's family, which includes six children ages 1 to 12, and the excitement was unforget-



### DSHA Presentation

CCS Co-president Julie Steinhafel recently had the opportunity to speak to a group of girls involved in service at Divine Savior Holy Angels High School. She talked to the young women about the Christ Child Society and volunteering, tying it all into their Advent theme of Walking Humbly with God.



### In the News

The Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service recently included our Second Saturday Health Fair in its Top 5 Events for the weekend of February 14-15.



### Red Shoe Award Nominations Due

First presented in 1968, the Red Shoe Award is inspired by a poem by Marie Mertel Ugarsky titled "The Red Shoes," which describes two women committed to serving God in their own unique ways. Kathy Powers was our 2025 recipient. If you would like to nominate a member who excels at service, no matter how, send an email with a brief description to [kpow444@msn.com](mailto:kpow444@msn.com) before March 20.



## 2025 Christmas Brunch: All Saints Celebration

What a beautiful way to celebrate the season! On December 6, we gathered at the historic Wisconsin Club for our annual Christ Child Society Christmas Mass and Brunch with more than 150 members and guests contributing layette items. Our spiritual advisor Fr. Mike Wolfe celebrated Mass, and the All Saints Catholic Church Choir filled the room with inspiring music during the liturgy, and we joined in festive Christmas carols afterward. It was a wonderful day of faith, fellowship and holiday joy!



## Volunteer

### My Stuff

#### 3315 N. 124th St.

9 a.m.

1st Thursday of the month

Except July

### Layettes

#### 3315 N. 124th St.

10 a.m.

3rd Monday of the month

Except February

### Resale Shop

#### 4033 W. Good Hope Rd

Tuesdays & Thursdays

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

1st & 3rd Saturday

9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

## Memorials

### In honor of...

Mary Lou Kennedy

Barb Pelton

Connie Schwaab

### In memory of...

Quin Barrett

Dick Beightol

Joe Burke

Maryann Chirichigno

Cheryl Ann Crucius

Lea Doucette

Laurance Geldermann

Jeanne Hoff

Carol Klemke

Mark Klernan

Audrey Koepke

Nancy McGinn-Lucey

Tom Mullahy

Mary Powers

Brenda Quick

Donna Schill

John Schmitz

*Send memorial requests to:*  
Eileen Jarosz  
N26W22350 Birchwood Ct.  
Waukesha WI 53186

## Spring Mass and Banquet

Spring can't come soon enough! Please mark your calendars for this enjoyable evening.

**Wednesday, May 13, 2026**

**St. Margaret Mary Church**

**4:00 p.m Mass**

**Dinner at Bluemound Country Club**



We will celebrate the induction of our new members and the installation of Chapter Officers and Directors. It is always so enjoyable to listen to our historian as she recaps the year – and we're all thinking we really did a lot this past year! And there's always the excitement of wondering who is going to be the recipient of the Red Shoe Award. It is an amazing event, and we hope every member will consider attending. For additional information about this event, watch your weekly newsletter or contact Beverly Denofre at 414-940-4650.



**CHRIST CHILD SOCIETY  
OF MILWAUKEE**  
WHERE LOVE LEADS TO ACTION

**OUR MISSION**  
To foster a personal love of Christ  
expressing itself in service for needy  
children regardless of race, color or creed.

## Keep Engaged in Social Media

### Facebook

[CCSMilwaukee](https://www.facebook.com/CCSMilwaukee)



### Instagram

[www.instagram.com/ccsmke](https://www.instagram.com/ccsmke)



### Website

[christchildmilwaukee.org](http://christchildmilwaukee.org)



### Christ Child Society of Milwaukee

Merrick Center at  
Our Lady of Good Hope  
4033 W Good Hope Rd  
Milwaukee, WI 53209

Return Service  
Requested

Phone: 414-540-0489  
E-mail:  
[ChristChildMilwaukee@  
gmail.com](mailto:ChristChildMilwaukee@gmail.com)

PLEASE  
PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE