

Dear Caring Friend,

Your help is desperately needed. However much you are able to offer could literally be life-changing for the boys who are depending on us to get them back home.

It's on their behalf – and on behalf of the dedicated people who work with me at St. John's Residence and School for Boys – that I'm in touch with you today.

If you know of St. John's, then you may already know that it's been a port in the storm for young people in need for many decades before Hurricane Sandy struck. We began in the early 1800s as a single orphanage on Jay Street in Brooklyn operated by the Sisters of Charity. Later, as need for our services grew, we established two separate homes – one for girls at the corner of Clinton and Conger Streets in Brooklyn Heights and one for boys at Bedford and Willoughby Avenues. The St. John's of today is an outgrowth of that home for boys, which relocated to its present – but sadly, now uninhabitable home – in Rockaway Park.

Please understand. Even as I say “sadly,” I realize that for all the destruction our St. John's boys have witnessed and all the displacement they and our staff are suffering, many others fared far worse. At least four of our Rockaway neighbors died in the storm. At least 100 families in nearby Breezy Point had to watch helplessly as their homes burned to the ground. Others, whose homes are damaged but still habitable, salvage what they can, add the rest to the growing mountains of rubble, shiver in long lines for a few cans of food or rolls of toilet tissue, and pray that the heat and electricity come back on before the nights get even colder.

Even so, the boys of St. John's are pleading to come home.

Not to be taken care of, you understand – but to help take care of others here, in what has truly become their community. Just as we hoped back when we decided to move St. John's here.

Here in Rockaway, people are hard-working and always ready to help their neighbors. It is home to many of New York's first responders – the police officers, fire fighters and others who always put others first and sometimes risk their lives in doing so. As we had hoped, as our boys grow up here, go to school here, and become part of the community, they see firsthand the kind of men we know they can become – and I'm proud to say are becoming.

As you can imagine, it will take a great deal more money to make St. John's safe and livable for the boys – and workable for our dedicated staff. The lives of some of the wonderful people who teach our boys and cook for them and counsel them also had their lives upended by the storm. For them too, St. John's feels like home. They too need safety and stability.

Here's what we're up against. Of our two buildings in Rockaway, the one that houses the boys, thankfully, suffered relatively minor damage. The worst of the damage was to the building that contains offices, classrooms and the kitchen. There, more damage was structural – and will be very expensive to repair, and we must begin work now.

Only when all this work is done will we be able to bring our boys home – and only when they're home will they be able to do what they can and so want to do to help their community.

Weeks, even months from now, there will still be wreckage and rubbish to haul away, fences to repair and new swing sets to put up so kids can play in their yards again, trees and bushes to plant, and eventually, gardens to prepare for planting so that next year's bounty can help heal this year's wounds. Our boys know that for every job that requires years of training and practice, there are many that just take a strong back and a willing heart – and they are eager to step up.

But they can only step up if caring people like you step in. That's why I'm asking you – urging you – for the most generous emergency gift you can manage.

Maybe you're fortunate enough to be able to send \$50 or \$100 or more.

Or maybe \$25 or even \$10 is a stretch for you right now. That's ok. We will know that however much you send comes from your heart – and we'll all owe you our heartfelt thanks for sending it.

Most important, please take a few minutes to send your gift today. Because remember, for all disruption to their already too often disrupted lives, for all the work they know awaits them, what the boys of St. John's most want to do is get back home where they belong. Home, where they can be of service to their community. Home, where in time, they can find their beloved statue of Mary buried somewhere in the sand, and put her back in her garden grotto where she belongs.

With deepest thanks for your kind generosity,

Alissa Deakin, Executive Director

Thanks to those who have helped us in this emergency!