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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ST. MATTHEW'S HOUSE AND IMMOKALEE FRIENDSHIP HOUSE ANNOUNCE MERGER

St. Matthew's House and Immokalee Friendship House are pleased to announce the merger of both organizations into a single entity, effective today. After examining the strengths and weaknesses of both shelters, it was determined that they could more effectively serve the community as a combined organization. This amounts to 164 beds in an emergency shelter and housing over 2,000 individuals per year. The combined feeding ministry will serve over 160,000 meals per year, both at the shelters and at the Old Firehouse Feeding Ministry, which is the original St. Matthew's House location. Three thrift stores will generate revenue for the mission, and 46 transitional housing units will continue to operate at Wolfe Apartments. This new organization will operate as St. Matthew's House, saving over \$100,000 a year in operating costs without the loss of jobs to existing employees.

Both Immokalee Friendship House and St. Matthew's House are celebrating over 20 years of serving the homeless and helping the needy of Collier County. St. Matthew's House was founded by a group of Episcopalians who started the ministry as a soup kitchen. Since then, St. Matthew's House has fed the hungry every single day. In 1994, the mission expanded, moving into the current facility, opening Wolfe Apartments as transitional housing, and setting up two thrift stores and a catering business to generate revenue. St. Matthew's House has been over-capacity since June 2005, but has however, fed the hungry every single day since its inception. This totals to over two million meals served.

The Immokalee Friendship House was founded in 1987 by Sister Marie McFadden, and a small group of caring community leaders. Working in the area, these individuals noticed that many men, women, and children, many of them hard-working migrants, had no place to sleep at night. To address the lack of emergency housing, the Immokalee Friendship House was created. Since its inception, Immokalee Friendship House has provided meals, clothing, and shelter to thousands of individuals in Greater Collier County. The shelter is nearly always at capacity, some of which are families with young children. Abused women and children, migrant farm workers, convalescents, people fighting addiction, and families that recently suffered a loss of income all come through the doors of the Immokalee Friendship House.

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