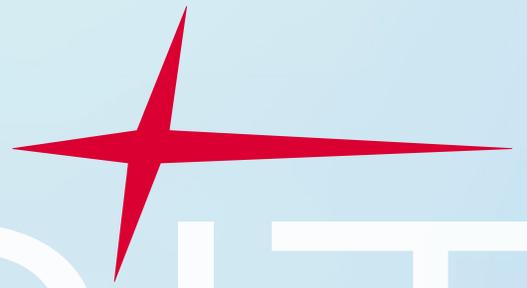


Spring 2023
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Catholic Charities
of the Archdiocese of Chicago



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in the Holy Spirit

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our work during the
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CATHOLIC CHARITIES
Archdiocese of Chicago

“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don’t hesitate. Give in to it... whatever it is, don’t be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.”

Mary Oliver, “Don’t Hesitate” (2010)

On the front cover:

Xochitl Villarreal

Case Manager, Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Xochitl joined Catholic Charities in March 2015, first as a receptionist in our Waukegan community center, and then moving up to Business Associate and Program Grants Assistant. In 2021, she applied for and was hired to be a Case Manager with the Family Self-Sufficiency program. She credits her tenure working in administration with a fuller understanding of the resources and heavy work that goes into serving clients. Plus, it helps her connect families with other Catholic Charities supports. “Because of my background supporting different programs, I know how much Catholic Charities offers people in need.”

At first, Xochitl had pursued a career in nursing, but during the pandemic she decided that it was not what she wanted long term. Now, she is completing her degree in social work at Northeastern Illinois University, “There’s a lot of similarity between social work and nursing. Both are about healing people.”



Spirit Magazine—May 2023

Spirit magazine, a triennial publication of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, features examples of our witness, designed to inspire our readers and offer a message of mercy and hope to a world in need.

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Natshun and her son Anthony | Berwyn, Illinois

New Hope for families facing homelessness

Natshun never imagined she would find herself without a place to live. She has a college degree and had worked as an accountant. However, after developing epilepsy, doctors told her she could no longer work.

At first, her disability payments allowed her to maintain a home, but rising costs caused her and her son Anthony to move in with family members. When the situation turned contentious and violent, concern for

Anthony's wellbeing and safety compelled her to move out.

Natshun and Anthony were living in hotels when she was connected with the New Hope transitional housing program. Her case manager helped her find an apartment in Berwyn and she received financial support for the security deposit and rental assistance. Speaking of that time, she says, "The blessings were flowing in one after the other."

Once settled in their new home, Thompson was able to focus on getting back to work. From New Hope she received job leads and help writing resumes and cover letters. Possibly more important, those who she worked with believed in her. Finding a job was not easy, but earlier this year she started a data entry position and she is optimistic. "Catholic Charities helped me remind myself of who I am and that I can do better."

Choosing Joy



Pictured, Catholic Charities' senior team, left to right: Elida Hernandez, Matt McCabe, Erica O'Malley, Anne Sweeney, Mary Anzilotti, Maria Simon, Tenisha Jones, Sally Blount, Ann Grelecki, Ami Novoryta, Gina Cleggs, and Phil Zepeda.

Dear Friends,

We've been taking spring's promise of rebirth and renewal to heart here at Catholic Charities. After three years, we are at the end of a long tunnel. Since March 2020, our front-line teams have been serving with courage and constancy to meet the much higher levels of need that continue to surround us. At the same time, our administrative teams have been transforming and equipping this amazing century-old organization to thrive as we emerge from this pandemic, envisioning how we might serve into 2030 and beyond.

This issue is full of stories of extraordinary service and internal transformation that have all been made possible over the last three years because of thousands of incredibly generous donors. On [page 11](#), we also share the exciting story of how our work and your gifts were bolstered by **an anonymous donor who provided \$25 million to sustain us through COVID**. This extraordinary support dramatically increased, by tens of thousands annually, the number of people and families we were able to serve and simultaneously provided critical funding to strengthen our infrastructure and assure our long-term vitality.

This spring, we're in the final sprint as we reopen the last of our sites that were shuttered during the pandemic, and as we finish the final year of our Three-Year Plan for Renewal. We are in the midst of a robust and insightful six-month strategic planning process with our Board, Cardinal's Council, and employees. We will share news of what we are learning from this exercise in our next issue. In the meantime, enjoy our stories of service and transformation.

With joy and gratitude,

Sally Blount
President and CEO



Drop-in Exercise Class | North Center Senior Services Center, Chicago

We are open!

Historically, Catholic Charities' eight drop-in senior centers in Chicago are hubs of activity. Yoga and Tai Chi are popular classes in North Center, Edgewood residents love belly dancing, and Austin and Portage Park can't get enough of line dancing. Bingo reigns supreme where English is the prominent language, but Lotería rules where most speak Spanish. No matter the offering, what seniors find is connection

to others, information to improve their lives, a warm meal with friends, and staff that know and keep an eye out for them.

As the most vulnerable population to COVID, our senior centers were closed to keep people safe. We know, though, that the centers and the communities they fostered were deeply missed. Now fully reopened, attendance is slowly but steadily returning to pre-pandemic

levels and the joy among both visitors and staff is everywhere.

For Elena Orzeo, pictured above, and her friends attending the exercise class, music, (gentle) cardio, and lots of laughter lift spirits on a gray day. Immediately after the class concluded, more seniors arrived. It was time for improv.

The joy of learning to (really) trust the Holy Spirit

Sally Blount
President and CEO

We've been talking a lot about joy at Catholic Charities recently. You see, those of us called to work here truly believe we can make the world a better place—one person, one family at a time.

But, as fulfilling as this calling is, our work can be difficult. Each day, we see the harsh realities confronting so many people—whether it be South-side parents, Latino migrants, West-side youth, or North-suburban seniors. In this time of high inflation and global uncertainty, the scope of need, both material and spiritual, is immense.

So we wrestle with the fact that, as human service providers, we can't fix everything; we can't meet every need—no matter how much we dedicate ourselves. There is always more assistance we could offer, if only we had more resources, more funding. This weighs on us.

And yet, God calls us to serve with joy. Not with a sense of duty, or

resignation, or even spiritual grit. No, we are called to serve with joy. So where do we find this joy? It can certainly feel elusive at times, especially now, when each news story seems worse than the last.

A few months ago, when I was struggling through a particularly challenging day, I had a late-afternoon appointment with Cardinal Cupich. As we were settling into our meeting, I said I needed to ask him a question: "How is it that you can stay so joyful and positive amid the hardship you see and carry each day for the Church?" He immediately smiled and answered, "Several years ago, I realized that I had to decide: Who do I really believe is in charge? Is it me or is it the Holy Spirit?" And he looked at me, "It's your choice—you get to decide."

That conversation has stayed with me; I have taken his point to heart. If I really believe all of Jesus's teachings as deeply as I believe I do, there is only one answer. And it is a wonderful

one. It is not me—I am not in charge! As Jesus beckons in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest..." You see, in those moments, when I allow myself to fully trust, to find that rest, my work is so much easier. I find joy all around me. It is the feeling I have when we help pay a family's utility bill, or the delight when a teammate surprises us with a cookie bake, or even the awe of an unexpected donation to support our work.

I love the words of the late poet Mary Oliver who wrote, "If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it... whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb." May we all give into joy—wherever and whenever we encounter it. It is truly a gift from God. Oliver is right, we shouldn't be afraid of its plenty. God did not make joy to be a crumb!

Reflections on our work in Lake County

Ami Novoryta

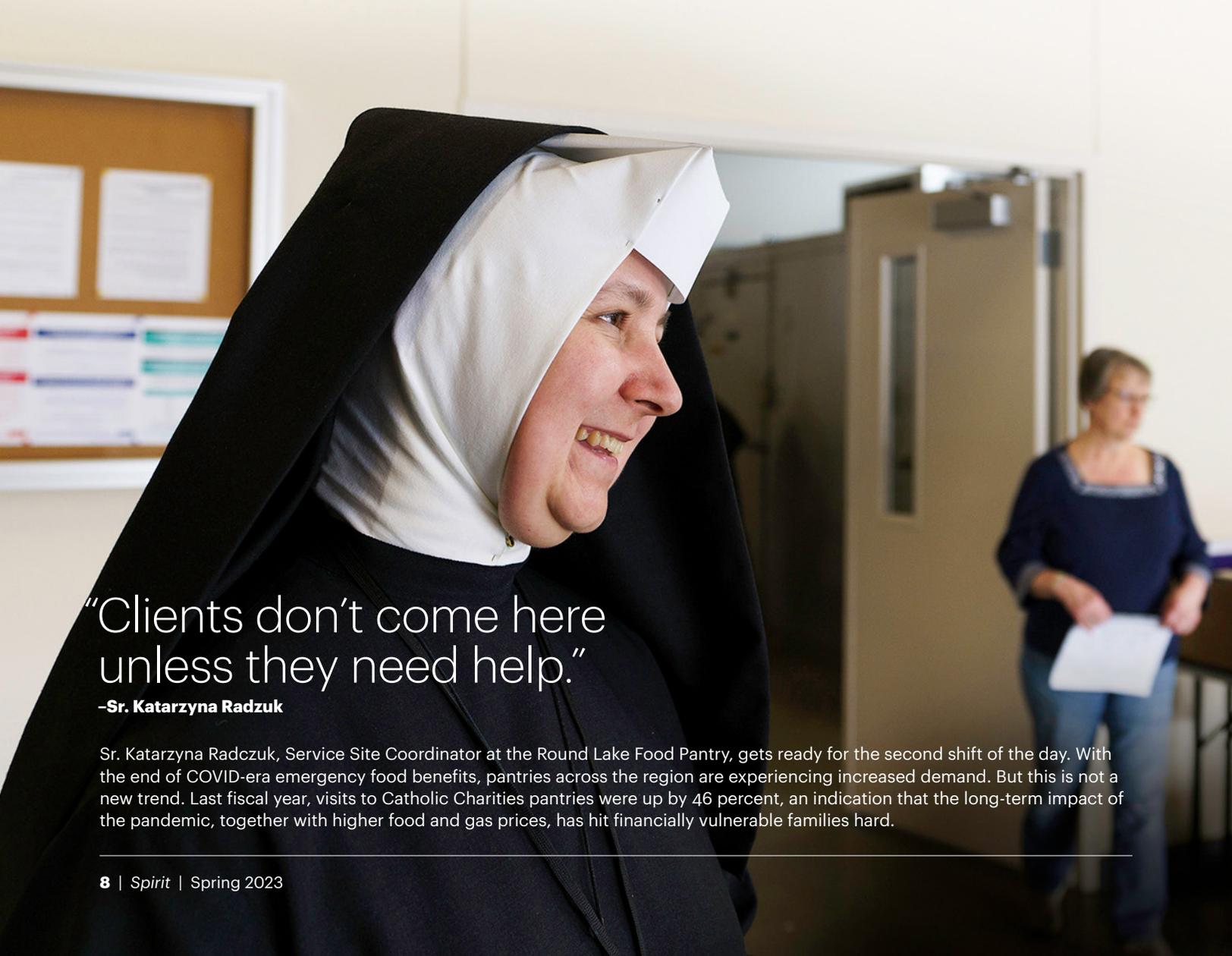
Chief Program Officer

Home to just over 700,000 residents, Lake County's diverse geography includes vibrant downtowns, rural communities, and rich natural landscapes with miles of bike trails, forest preserves, rivers, and yes, lakes (besides Lake Michigan there are 170 of them!). It is also a place of acute economic disparity, boasting the state's wealthiest zip codes, as well as some of its poorest.

Being poor in Lake County—or occupying the fragile line that separates one from it—has challenges that are unique from Cook County's more populous urban and suburban areas. Limited public transportation means a car is critical for employment. The starting minimum

wage is lower (\$13.00 vs. \$15.40 in Chicago and \$13.45 in suburban Cook). Affordable housing is limited and the costs of food and property taxes are higher. All of these factors make living in Lake County more expensive.

Catholic Charities is the largest private human service provider in the county. The photos here capture our operations at the John and Kathy Schreiber Center in Round Lake. While they offer only a snapshot of all that we do, they fully depict the compassion we are known for: sustenance to help families make ends meet, fellowship to combat loneliness, and personal coaching to help single parents break the cycle of generational poverty.



“Clients don't come here unless they need help.”

—Sr. Katarzyna Radzук

Sr. Katarzyna Radzук, Service Site Coordinator at the Round Lake Food Pantry, gets ready for the second shift of the day. With the end of COVID-era emergency food benefits, pantries across the region are experiencing increased demand. But this is not a new trend. Last fiscal year, visits to Catholic Charities pantries were up by 46 percent, an indication that the long-term impact of the pandemic, together with higher food and gas prices, has hit financially vulnerable families hard.



“Sometimes we’re the only person they see all day.”

-Kay Fischer

Kay Fischer, a volunteer dropping off the day’s meal with Cipe Corrales of Grayslake. Together with her husband John, and paid drivers, the Fischers are part of a volunteer network that delivers freshly prepared meals to seniors every day. These visits are also important wellness checks. As Kay says, “You get to know the people on your route and can report if something has changed.”



“Nothing cheers me more than when I hear friendships blossoming.”

-Susan Tangney

Susan Tangney, Nutrition Services Supervisor (in blue), and a volunteer serve guests at a communal afternoon meal. “Slowly but surely, we’re getting people back out,” says Tangney. Paused over the pandemic, communal meals and suppers are held weekly at sites across the county. “Social isolation among older adults is tied to depression, cognitive decline, and heart problems. These gatherings are important for nourishing spirits.”



“We want our clients to select food they like and can use.”

-Sr. Katarzyna Radzuk

A visitor to the food pantry learns about what produce and meats are available. The Round Lake pantry follows a choice model, meaning visitors select their own food according to their household size and nutrition preferences. In addition, clients can visit the center’s clothing room and the diaper bank. Visits to the pantry are also an opportunity to assess if individuals have other needs that Catholic Charities can address.



Tree of Gratitude | House of Peace, Waukegan, Illinois

“We are protagonists of something bigger than all of us.”

To go anywhere within the House of Peace, you have to pass by the Tree of Gratitude. As the program’s director, Aida Segura, explains, “When new families come, it is the first stop on our tour, and it’s when I explain what this place is, that it is a miracle.”

Created by residents at House of Peace, which houses mothers and their children leaving domestic violence, each leaf on the tree recognizes the individuals and organizations who have supported those who have passed

through House of Peace’s doors, whether through a donation, volunteering, or through prayer and intentions... “Everyone who helped ready this home to receive each one of our families,” says Aida.

After expressing gratitude for the tremendous community of people who have helped make House of Peace an intentional community that heals, empowers, and affirms the dignity of all, Aida moves on to the fruits of the tree, the butterflies. To each is affixed the name of a mother who has reached

her goal to move on to a new chapter of her life. “I don’t like to reduce people to numbers,” says Segura, “but we’ve had 120 women stay with us and when you include their children, those butterflies represent hundreds of lives that have been transformed.” The Tree of Gratitude is a reminder that living in gratitude allows us to affirm hope in the beauty of life, in our humanity, and in the strength of a loving community.

To read more about the House of Peace, see the profile of Aida Segura on the inside back cover.

An incredible, three-year **\$25 million** gift that fortified us to serve through the pandemic's darkest hours

When our world was in deep crisis, a historic gift to Catholic Charities set off a ripple effect of mercy and hope—helping thousands of lives across our region and catalyzing our path forward to the future.

Over the course of the pandemic's long weeks of isolation and ever-higher levels of need, it was difficult at times to see the whole of our work. During that period, we were engaged on so many fronts across our region—in shelters and in streets, in homes and in hearts. Being present in so many lives demanded both deep commitment and deep faith—to sustain us when we were weary, and to fortify our trust that the support we sought would come when it was most needed.

It is for such witness that we celebrate something incredible that happened behind the scenes at Catholic Charities. **In June 2020, Morgan Stanley approached us on behalf of an anonymous donor who was considering a contribution of \$5–10 million to support our work during the COVID crisis.**

Since then, this visionary donor has given Catholic Charities three gifts, totaling \$25 million over the last three years, contributing to

our programs and the future of our organization in ways we could have only imagined. When many of our peer organizations were struggling, our donor's remarkable generosity positioned Catholic Charities to respond strategically, serving tens of thousands more people annually and enabling us to invest in new capabilities. As a result, we are emerging from the pandemic stronger and ever-more convicted in our mission.

Serving those in need when and where it matters most

Two-thirds of our donor's giving was dedicated to enabling thousands of families in crisis to navigate the pandemic. This meant that \$15.4 million was invested in "immediate and basic needs" programs, the first line of response when people and families are confronting the most devastating levels of need; when access to food, housing, and financial sustainability are at risk. Through our donor's generosity, we were able to:

- Provide short-term financial assistance to hundreds of individuals and families when paychecks fell short to cover rent, utilities, mortgage payments, and deposits on new apartments.
- Expand meal and food pantry services with the purchase of new equipment and refrigerated trucks that extended and improved our operations.
- Support families who lost loved ones to COVID and other tragedies. We know that even the most basic funeral and burial arrangements now cost \$10,000. We were able to help families honor the lives of those who passed without putting themselves in financial jeopardy.

An additional \$7 million of giving went to deeper programming for children, youth, and families. This included expanding behavioral health services for individuals and families on

Amplifying Our Impact

Our anonymous donor's generosity has touched nearly every aspect of our operations at Catholic Charities. Below are just some of the myriad ways this historic gift benefited the lives of our teams and those we are called to serve.

Breakdown of Investment by Impact Area

\$15.4M

Immediate and Basic Needs

\$7M

Children, Youth, and Families

\$2.6M

Organizational Renewal and Capabilities-building

Community Gatherings

To foster connections and communication during our leadership transition (and the pandemic), we used funds to institute monthly Community Gatherings for all staff, providing opportunities to build community, promote fellowship, and "break bread" as a Catholic Charities family.



Homelessness Prevention

When calls to our homelessness prevention hotline reached 9,700 per month at the height of the pandemic, our employees kept the lines open, directing those facing homelessness to the programs and people who could help.

Financial Assistance and Housing Access

We gave financial assistance to more than 2,000 households for emergency rental, utility, and motel assistance, preventing further financial stress and keeping them sheltered and safe.



Domestic Violence

Support helped with the ongoing roll-out of education, outreach, and counseling for survivors, especially within Chicago's South and West Side communities, where there is an acute lack of mental health resources.



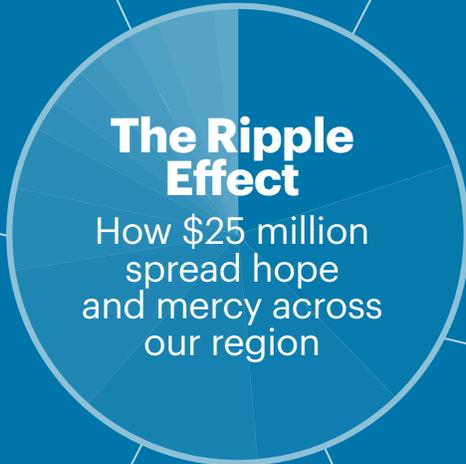
Behavioral Health

We invested in equipment and systems to pivot to virtual sessions in a time of unprecedented demand. We also expanded community-based violence prevention programs for youth and young adults at heightened risk of engaging in violence, as well as victims of street-level violence.



Food Insecurity

Not only did we use funds to keep our pantries open three days a week during hours that would be most accessible to those we serve, but we also realigned our operations to a "choice" model, allowing visitors to select their own groceries instead of receiving pre-packaged parcels.



The Ripple Effect

How \$25 million spread hope and mercy across our region

Chicago's West and South sides, especially those affected by violence, and setting us up to invest in a new initiative focused on mentoring middle-school youth on the West Side. When calls and texts to the Domestic Violence Hotline increased exponentially, we were able to keep the doors to our residential programs open and increase education and outreach through our community-based counseling programs.

Amplifying our impact beyond the pandemic

With our donor's support and encouragement, **\$2.6 million was also invested in the long-term vitality of our organization**, with funding going to new employee roles, training, and systems development, including new investments in fundraising and data-warehousing capabilities.

After conducting a comprehensive review of all our programs from fall 2021 through early 2022, we used these insights to better understand where and how we are uniquely equipped to serve. With this knowledge, we launched a streamlined program structure last summer. This has resulted in a removal of barriers that makes it easier for those we serve to find the services they need. It has also sparked collaboration and innovation across our teams, leading to new initiatives like the Charities Hub, our team leader training program, and a data-forward approach to measuring outcomes and impact for the people we are called to accompany and serve.

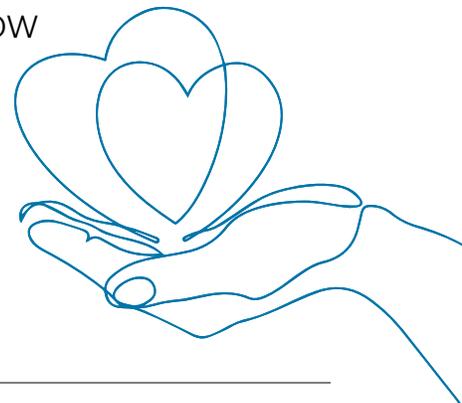
Every donation we receive—whether it be your time, your financial support, or your prayers—is critical to our work. Jesus calls us to build a community

focused on service and accompaniment where we commit to being present each day to our times through the eyes of faith.

However, when a gift of this magnitude is given to a human services organization like ours, and in a time of global crisis, we find ourselves in a place of awe. We feel awe at the significant trust that our donors bestow on Catholic Charities, and we feel awe at the provision of the Holy Spirit. **The timing of these three years of extraordinary giving strengthened our confidence at a critical time. These gifts also fortified us financially, as they limited how much we needed to draw down our modest endowment to meet the heightened levels of need.**

Our gratitude for this donor's recognition of our need is heartfelt and deep.

We ask you to join with us in expressing our gratitude for this remarkable donor's generosity and what it meant for how we were able to serve during the pandemic. We have emerged stronger, more focused, and better equipped for our next century of service.



Our team philosophy

Our goal is to build strong, mission-driven teams grounded within a strong team-based culture. To accomplish this, we started by clearly articulating what team leadership and team membership require at Catholic Charities. For us, this is rooted in four essentials.

Clear Goals



Mission-focused

Centered on those we serve, "What brings you here?"



Grounded in Catholic Charities

Our history, purpose, and values



Tied to action

Shared goals and measures, each member understands their part in team success

Joy-Filled Culture



Respect and inclusion

Celebrating the gifts, perspectives, and contributions of each member



Pride in our team

Our shared purpose, "delivering our best"



Community spirit

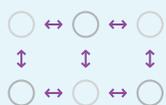
Striving each day to love and serve together—we are "God's hands"

Effective Collaboration



Excellent process

Well-run meetings, regular check-ins, and timely reporting on team progress



Accountability

"Yes means yes" + "I/We got this" + "Goals that are set, get met"



Constructive conflict

Differences are lifted up and addressed with respect and compassion

Commitment to Growth



Learning

Members receive and give feedback with grace



Forgiveness

Members admit when mistakes are made



Reflection

Space is regularly set aside to observe, assess, and grow

Putting our teams at the center of our work means investing in the 165 people who lead them

Erica O'Malley

Senior Vice President, People and Culture

I take so much pride in our 1,250 employees, which is why I'm excited to share the launch of a pioneering new initiative—called Equip Our Teams—that will deliver professional development for each of the 165 leaders at Catholic Charities who oversees a team of five or more people. The goal is to increase the know-how and capabilities within each of our team leaders and their teams by investing over a six-month period.

Through this training, every team leader will learn what it means to be a strong team leader, and every employee will learn what it means to be a strong team member.

Dynamic and thriving teams are what make organizations effective

At its essence, any great organization is a “team of teams.” For each of us, our experience of work is about the culture, collaboration, and outcomes that we create with the people we work with each day. To be effective at serving all who come to our doors, we need strong teams at the front line—teams where every member feels valued, connected to our mission, and

committed to growing in service. We also need strong teams in administration and middle management, all the way up to the top of our organization, so that together we can support our front-line work. Yet, experience and research tell us that effective team leadership is not something that people automatically “get” when they are promoted to manage others. People need training, easy-to-remember frameworks, and ongoing coaching.

World-class team leader training adapted to a Catholic human service organization

With the support of our Board, our senior leadership, and a cadre of visionary donors, my team has partnered with BTS, a global, people-centered consulting firm, to design an in-house leadership training program that is 1) informed by the latest research, 2) aligned to our specific workplace needs, and 3) centered on our unique mission and calling. Working in partnership with BTS, we have developed a “team philosophy” (pictured left) that is rooted in four essentials: clear goals,

a joy-filled culture, effective collaboration, and a commitment to growth.

One reason why this initiative is so groundbreaking is that a program of this caliber—while common in the corporate world—is nearly nonexistent in the human services sector. Not because it is not needed, but because there is limited funding and limited experience with this type of training. We are fortunate to have a Board committed to leadership development and donors ready to offer the financial support needed to make this investment possible. The cumulative effects of strong team training will reverberate across Catholic Charities for years to come.

In empowering our team leaders, we are also investing in developing diverse talent. Considering that 82 percent of our employees represent communities of color—and 65 percent of our team leaders are people of color—we have a unique opportunity to support their professional growth and goals, which will only yield positive outcomes for us and those we serve.

Revitalizing community outreach and engagement: Localizing our touch

Tenisha Jones

Vice President, Community and Government Engagement

One of our guiding principles at Catholic Charities is recognizing that, in serving others, we are not in competition—whether this be in raising private philanthropy or securing government funding. There is plenty of need to go around... we need simply to trust. Our colleagues, peer organizations, and advocates are partners; through collaboration with them, we are able to amplify our impact. The new Community and Government Engagement team, which I am honored to oversee, is central to Catholic Charities' renewed commitment to partnership and outreach. Our work focuses on providing opportunities for mission-driven individuals and organizations to engage more deeply with us and building coalitions to raise awareness about need in our region. Since joining Catholic Charities this past February, I have been working with my team to set in motion four tracks to achieve this:

Building strong relationships with parishes and communities

Led by Brittany McGhee, our Mission Engagement team is charged with increasing our presence and impact across the Archdiocese of Chicago. This means growing

partnerships with parishes and aligned nonprofit organizations to deepen and extend our reach. Our parish partners have the potential to provide Catholic Charities with an unparalleled network with which to respond to need in our communities. To achieve this, we must invest in our relationships with priests and other parish leaders. We are in the process of recruiting a team of six regional directors who will build out these relationships at the local level. The Mission Engagement team will also serve as the primary steward of our Regional Mission Boards and Catholic advocacy initiatives.

Informing decision-making on issues that matter to those we serve

As the largest human services provider in the Midwest, Catholic Charities' perspective is critical for shaping legal and economic policies that impact the lives of those we serve. The Government Relations team, led by Brendan O'Sullivan, is charged with building and sustaining our relationships with key elected officials at the local, county, state, and federal levels.

Elevating our voice in local, regional, and national dialogue about the future of our sector

As a member of Catholic Charities' internal Identity, Reputation, and

Culture steering committee, I am excited to work with colleagues, external media, and stakeholder groups to share our impact, impart best practices, and raise awareness about our programs.

Providing meaningful opportunities to live out our faith in action

Simply put, our incredible volunteers are what distinguishes Catholic Charities from secular service providers. We are building out a new Faith in Action team charged with launching a renewed volunteer program that will incorporate best-in-class systems, onboarding, and training. It is our goal to provide service and accompaniment opportunities that are thoughtfully designed and align with our mission.

On a personal note, answering God's call to live out my faith through action is the reason I joined this incredible organization. I have dedicated my career to designing and activating programs and initiatives that lift up communities, empowering their residents to build economically viable, healthy, safe, and joy-filled lives. I can think of no better place or people with whom to do this vital work.

Our Community and Government Engagement team



Tenisha Jones

Vice President, Community and Government Engagement
tejones@catholiccharities.net

Tenisha has nearly two decades of experience in non-profit/civic engagement. Most recently, she worked as Chief Operations Officer at West Side United, a Chicago non-profit committed to building vibrant neighborhoods on Chicago's West Side. She also worked at the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation and consulted with the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. As a leader with Mayor Lori Lightfoot's Internal Education Transition and Racial Equity Rapid Response teams, Tenisha played key roles in shaping the city's educational policies and ensuring a just response and recovery from COVID-19.

Tenisha holds a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from National Louis University and is pursuing a Master of Urban Planning and Policy at the University of Illinois Chicago. She was a Fellow at the Civic Leadership Academy at the University of Chicago and also a Chicago Urban League Impact Fellow. She sits on several volunteer and professional association committees, including the Chicago Equity Network, Chicago Cares, and Austin Coming Together.



Brittany McGhee

Senior Director Mission Engagement
bmcghee@catholiccharities.net

Brittany is an impact-driven leader dedicated to building bridges between communities, organizations, and thought leaders.

Brittany began her career at Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County in California as a case manager resettling refugee families. She has worked across nonprofit, mission-forward, and faith-based organizations, including international church ministry with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Prior to joining Catholic Charities in early 2023, Brittany was the Director of Community and Strategic Engagement Initiatives at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Loyola University Maryland and a Master of Arts in international relations from the University of Chicago. She serves on the University of Chicago Library Council, is president of the University of Chicago Alumni Club Board, and is a founding board director of Chicago Artists for Action. She is a member of St. Thomas the Apostle parish in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood.



Brendan O'Sullivan

Director Government Affairs
bosullivan@catholiccharities.net

Brendan is a strategic thinker, focused on building relationships and deepening Catholic Charities' relationships with key government stakeholders in Chicago and at the county, state, and federal levels.

Prior to joining Catholic Charities in March 2021, he worked as a campaign manager and media consultant on political and issue campaigns throughout the United States. He has served as the Executive Director for the Illinois Senate Democratic Victory Fund and as Political Director for former Illinois Senate President John Cullerton.

Brendan received his Bachelor of Arts in political science from Loyola University Chicago. Brendan, his wife Kathleen, and their two children are members of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity parish on Chicago's Northwest Side.

Parishes respond to the migrant crisis and answer Jesus’s call to welcome the stranger

Ricardo, his wife Amanda, and their young daughter Darienny arrived unannounced at the door of the Mother of the Americas Parish in Little Village in January 2023. The three of them had made the long and treacherous trip from Venezuela, only to have their vision of the American dream crash into the reality of the Chicago winter.

A different kind of wave

“The wave of migrants we’re seeing now is different,” says Cristian Garcia, a seminarian working at Mother of the Americas. “Where people and families used to arrive in Chicago with some kind of connection—an uncle who lived here, for example, or a cousin—more and more we’re seeing them arrive with nothing: no connections, no support, and in summer clothes.” Marilu Gonzalez, Catholic Charities’ City

Southwest Regional Director, says she and her colleagues were conscious of a steady increase leading up to the current flashpoint. “Well before this crisis stage, more and more migrants were showing up at our doors.”

As political turmoil abroad pushes the migrant situation in the U.S. to new levels of urgency, Catholic organizations in Chicago have been escalating their aid efforts. The Archdiocese has launched Welcome the Stranger as a coordinated Catholic response to assist families like Ricardo’s. The initiative brings together parishes that want to aid migrants, either through funding or through accompaniment. Rose Marie Lesniak-Mendez, Catholic Charities’ North and Northwest Regional Director explains, “Accompaniment can include support in the form of housing, food, clothes, tutoring, help

with arranging medical appointments, navigating transit, and advocating for their children in school.” “All the everyday how-to we often take for granted,” adds Gonzalez, “but also showing these families they can do it themselves. We want them to feel that we are walking with them, not just doing for them.”

Participating parishes are being asked to raise \$10,000 to cover six months’ rent, food, and utilities or to apply for a grant to cover this amount. Catholic Charities is overseeing the program on behalf of the Archdiocese.

An authentically Catholic response

In March, Mother of the Americas was approved for a \$20,000 grant. With this, a team including Garcia, pastor Fr. Thomas Boharic, and volunteer coordinator Maribel Lemus is spearheading a multi-family effort. “Our goal is to provide a practical,

From Welcome to Integration: Leading at Every Step of the Journey

Since Fall 2022, Catholic Charities has been working closely with the State of Illinois and City of Chicago to coordinate a comprehensive and compassionate response to asylum seekers crossing our borders from countries throughout Central and South America, including Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, and Venezuela. In addition to the Archdiocese’s Welcome the Stranger program, we have been designated by the Illinois Department of Human Services to lead the State’s initiative to transition families out of shelters into stable housing.



4,000+ welcomed
to Chicago
since August 31, 2022



700 reunited
with loved ones in
other states
via virtual outmigration services



770 families
received housing
case management
since December 2022



achievable, small-scale but authentically Catholic response to the current migrant crisis in Little Village,” Garcia says.

Parish participation extends beyond those that are situated in majority Latino communities. Patrick McGowan, Director of Lifelong Faith at St. Barnabas in Beverly,

explains, “We’re always looking for ways to grow our works of mercy. When we found out about Welcome the Stranger, we saw it as an extension of our peace and justice work.”

St. Barnabas is in the early stages of working toward accompanying a migrant family. “Helping immigrants is something our individual

parishioners have been doing quietly on a smaller scale,” says Fr. James Donovan, pastor at St. Barnabas. “But given the immediacy of the issue now, this seemed the right time for a more concerted effort to take care of God’s people, to do what Jesus tells us to do.”

Pictured above: Seminarian Cristian Garcia and Mother of the Americas parishioner Maribel Lemus (holding flowers) with two migrant families from Venezuela that the parish is accompanying: Ricardo and Amanda and their daughter Darienny (back); and Eimer and Robeisi (front), who are expecting a child. Once considered the richest country in South America for its petroleum exports, more than 7 million migrants and refugees have fled Venezuela since 2014 due to political persecution, extreme economic hardship, and limited-to-no access to food, medicine, clean water, and electricity. About three-quarters of the population lives on less than \$1.90 a day.

Valuing the richness and beauty of the religious life

Core to our work is the mandate to bring people together... to cultivate, as Pope Francis says, the “seeds of a shared life.” We reached out to three faith leaders who partner with Catholic Charities to reflect on how Catholic organizations are uniquely positioned to repair the schism between concern for one’s personal wellbeing and the prosperity of the larger human family.



Fr. Michael Trail

Pastor, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Hyde Park, Chicago

With the exception of the city bus, the Church is one of the few places where all can gather together equally. As I think about those who make up our congregation, I see the breadth of humanity come together under the roof of the Church: people who struggle with isolation sitting next to a family of seven; someone with a “summer home” next to a person experiencing homelessness; a university professor next to someone who was not able to afford college.

Catholic organizations are uniquely poised to help communities “value the richness and beauty of the seeds of a shared life” because we are able to walk with, and minister to, the entire spectrum of humanity. The Church is a place where all are welcome, celebrated, valued, protected, and nurtured. Our Catholic faith does not limit us to minister to only Catholics, but calls us to see the dignity and value of all. Our shared life together under the love of God is a reminder that we are called to love one another equally as friends to one another and beloved children of God.



Fr. Wayne Watts

Pastor, Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish, Wilmette

Jesus invites us, as a community of disciples, to see his face in the eyes of those who are in need. From this 25th chapter of Saint Matthew’s Gospel, we as Catholics, and as Catholic social service agencies, receive our marching orders: “Whatever you do for my least ones, you do for me.”

I receive much joy connecting my parishioners with the people who come to the doors of Catholic Charities. Recently, an eighth grader in our parish school asked when he would be able to return to his place on the meal-serving line at our supper program. Being in relationship with the guests at our supper and through other opportunities to encounter the poor, becoming one with them, brings him and so many of my parishioners great joy.

We are uniquely positioned, as Catholics, to connect our parishioners, eager to serve Jesus through service to the poor, with our own amazing social service programs. Together, Catholic Charities and the people in the pews of our churches can change the world.



Sr. Marie McKenna, PhD, LCSW

Partner, Catholic Charities

Our Catholic organizations are a testament to the presence of God in the world and our resolve to live according to God’s faithful benevolence. We have faith and that faith leads us to “value the richness and beauty” of all creation and to tend to what we are graced with: other people and all creation. Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, wrote in *Religious Life for our World: Creating Communities of Hope*, “Missionary discipleship calls us to proclaim the reign of God characterized by justice, peace, and joy.”

As a Clinical Social Worker, I have witnessed how God’s boundless love can bring profound peace and joy to those served. We have the privilege of shouting from the rooftops every day how important each person we meet is. The hope is we truly reflect the Risen Christ to all we encounter—that joy often comes with knowing you don’t travel the roads of hardship alone. Our Catholic organizations reflect God’s loving presence in our world in tangible ways.

Ways to serve



Connect with your local Regional Mission Board

Would you like to accompany the people we serve, individually or on a Mission team? Do you have leadership and organization-building skills to contribute? Regional Mission Boards are local networks of individuals who are passionate about charitable works and meeting the needs of their communities. They work in partnership with our staff across the Archdiocese of Chicago's six vicariates, connecting and vitalizing Catholics within and across parishes.

Email partners@catholiccharities.net to be connected with your local Regional Board leader.

Join our Faith in Action team!

Do you feel called to provide ongoing accompaniment and service on behalf of someone in need?

Catholic Charities offers an array of volunteer opportunities for individuals or groups of varying levels of commitment and duration. These include serving at a community supper, stocking shelves at a food pantry, teaching English to refugees, mentoring young adults, or delivering meals to our homebound seniors. But that's just a start!

You can see all opportunities at ccofchicagovolunteer.com, which is updated weekly.

Become a member of our Junior Board

The Catholic Charities Junior Board engages young professionals grounded in faith and service across Cook and Lake counties. Members share a desire to join others interested in charitable work within a faith-based setting, connect to the broader secular community, and renew interest in personal and spiritual growth.

For more information, send an email expressing your interest to juniorboard@catholiccharities.net.

Ways to give

Help us improve lives and nourish spirits across Cook and Lake counties

Donate online, by phone, or by mail

Secure donations can be made by visiting our website at catholiccharities.net/give or calling (312) 655 7525. Checks made out to Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago can be sent to:

P.O. Box 7154
Carol Stream, IL 60197-7154

Make a planned gift

The Legacy of Hope Society honors people who include Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago in a will or trust or make another type of planned gift to help ensure our programs flourish for years to come.

For more information, contact: **Nancy Haws**, Director of Major Gifts at nhaws@catholiccharities.net.

Saint Katharine Drexel Society

The Drexel Society recognizes individuals and families who have contributed \$10,000 or more during the past fiscal year. Named for the patron saint of racial justice and philanthropy, the society convenes our most generous and loyal donors through exclusive events and communications.

For more information, contact: **Melissa Mares Stambor**, Associate Vice President, Institutional Advancement at mmares@catholiccharities.net.

Make a corporate gift or sponsor an event

Catholic Charities offers sponsorship opportunities for fundraising events throughout the year. Contact Donor Relations at (312) 948 6864 or donor.relations@catholiccharities.net to learn more.

You're Invited!



2023 Charities Golf Classic

Join us Monday, July 17!
**Shoreacres and
The Knollwood Club**

Scan QR code to learn more and purchase tickets





“What’s beautiful about House of Peace is that it reminds us that when we support the agency of women, they are able to flourish and turn their lives around—for themselves and for their children.”

Answering the Call to Serve

Aida Segura Director, House of Peace

I did not plan on a career supporting survivors of domestic violence when I completed my degree in pastoral counseling, but now I could not imagine a more spiritually fulfilling role than the one I have at House of Peace in Waukegan.

House of Peace is one of Catholic Charities’ two transitional homes for survivors, but it is not a shelter. We welcome six families every six months and offer them the space and resources to heal, empower, and sustain themselves. It is truly a magical place.

House of Peace is community-run. This means the women organize themselves and take turns with cooking, cleaning, childcare, and other tasks. They have access to counseling, art therapy, and other trauma-informed care, as do their children, who are deeply affected by living in homes that include violence. They also receive employment, housing, and case management assistance. I’m proud to report that not one woman who has come through our program has returned to a relationship with domestic violence. We also offer a support group

called Phoenix that is open to current and former residents and those seeking resources but remain in their relationships. When women decide to attend Phoenix and discover the supportive community that accepts them, they keep coming. Many eventually find the strength to leave their abusers. What’s beautiful about House of Peace is that it reminds us that when we support the agency of women, they are able to flourish and turn their lives around—for themselves and for their children.



Archdiocese of Chicago

721 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60654

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