

Spring 2025  
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Catholic Charities  
of the Archdiocese of Chicago



# SPIRIT

## Sharing God's hope and mercy

Remembering  
Pope Francis



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“Our acts of love for our brothers and sisters in community may well be the best and, at times, the only way that we can witness ... our love for Jesus Christ ... I never tire of repeating that Jesus told us this in the clearest terms possible: ‘Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40). He now asks you to meet him there, in every one of our brothers and sisters, and especially in the poor, the despised and the abandoned members of society. What a beautiful encounter that can be!”

— **Pope Francis**, *Dilexit Nos: On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ*

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#### **Spirit Magazine — Spring 2025**

*Spirit* magazine is a triennial publication of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago that is designed to inspire our readers and offer a message of mercy and hope to a world in need.

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#### **Editor**

Rose Sweeney

#### **Photography**

Deacon Randy Belice, Kathleen Hinkel, Catholic Charities Communications

#### **Get In Touch**

*Spirit* Magazine  
Communications Department  
Catholic Charities of the  
Archdiocese of Chicago

721 North LaSalle Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60654  
communications@catholiccharities.net  
catholiccharities.net

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“You must try to seek God in every human life.”

**Pope Francis** (1939–2025)

Early in his papacy, Pope Francis was asked in an interview, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” After taking a moment to reflect, he replied, “I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon,” and then he added, “This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

With these humble words, the Holy Father brought himself, and by extension the Church, closer to all of us. The excitement with which the world responded reflected our longing for the hope and mercy this proximity offered.

Through Francis’s words and actions, he showed us that, just as we are all sinners, we also are agents of God’s love. He went to the peripheries and modeled how to open our arms wider, showing us how to serve and experience encounter. “Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads,” he said.

Even though we mourn Francis’s passing, we know we have not been abandoned. “[Christ] is present everywhere. He is alive and is with us always, shedding the tears of those who suffer and adding to the beauty of life through the small acts of love carried out by each of us,” Francis said, in his final homily this past Easter. “We must not give into sadness,” he counseled, but rather “run, filled with joy” to what lies ahead.

Dear Friends,

At Catholic Charities, our job is to be present each day, for each person we encounter — to see, to accompany, and to love without any expectation of reciprocation.

This month, we are saddened by the passing of Pope Francis. He inspired us so much in our work — with his commitment to the humility of serving those most in need, to protecting and improving the lives of the vulnerable and marginalized.

While his perspective may feel out of step with the secular world’s emphasis on the self and achieving ever greater (and quicker) returns, at Catholic Charities, we trust in God’s call to serve and the promise it brings. It is through the work we do today that we sow the seeds of hope and possibility for tomorrow.

When we alleviate a mother’s worry about how she will feed her children this month, she can focus on pursuing a higher paying job that might realize a better life for her children over the coming years. When we give a veteran the stability of home, we provide him with a safe space to heal from trauma and ready himself for a return to joy and community.

Witnessing how God speaks and acts through the works of Catholic Charities, and has for generations, never ceases to fill me with awe ... and joy.

As Pope Francis taught us, we are all in need — we each come in humility — hoping to feel and, by some miracle, to see and be part of God in action. As he wrote in *Dilexit Nos*, “What a beautiful encounter that can be!”

With gratitude,



Sally Blount  
President and CEO



Sally Blount; Brittany McGhee Dino, Senior Director of Mission Engagement; and John DeCostanza, Vice President of Faith and Mission, join Church of St. Mary parishioners and Catholic Charities supporters in prayer during the March 2025 Mass & Mission event.

# For those who have nowhere else to turn, Catholic Charities shares hope

**D**ealing with a broken water heater. Replacing worn-out brake pads. Taking off work to help your wife recover from surgery.

For many, experiences like these are an inconvenient, albeit normal, part of life. **But for hundreds of thousands of people across Cook and Lake counties (including many whom Catholic Charities serves), these experiences can snowball into much bigger problems.** “Even for working families, an unexpected expense of \$1,000 can quickly become a crisis,” says Catholic Charities President and CEO Sally Blount.

## **When there’s nowhere else to turn**

“Research shows that emergency financial assistance can be highly effective in softening the impact of financial shocks,” Blount says, explaining the genesis of the **Giving Hope Fund**, Catholic Charities’ privately funded emergency financial assistance program.

**Since its launch in the summer of 2023, Giving Hope has disbursed nearly \$400,000 to individuals**

**from 500 financially vulnerable households.** Giving Hope recipients must be participating in other Catholic Charities programs. Grants are capped at \$2,500, but the average amount requested is \$720.

## **Flexible, efficient, and quick**

Giving Hope differs from government financial assistance programs in several ways. **First, because it is privately funded, there is greater flexibility in what is covered.**

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“Giving Hope wouldn’t be possible without visionary philanthropic support.”

— **Sally Blount**, President and CEO

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“Philanthropic funding has allowed us to build out Giving Hope’s model in a way that honors our commitment to radical hospitality,” Blount says.

“There are government relief programs that address utility and rental arrears, but they are limited in what they can cover,” says Nelly Guzman, Director of Case Management at

Catholic Charities Resource Hub, which manages the Giving Hope program. “For someone needing to purchase a work uniform or furnish an apartment after a fire, however, there are not many programs like this out there.”

**In addition to Giving Hope’s flexibility, its application process is straightforward.** “If you are being served by Catholic Charities, you are eligible,” says Guzman. Requests are referred by staff who attest to the hardship. Guzman’s team of case managers evaluates requests and determines if alternative resources are available. If there aren’t, Guzman’s team pays the expense. “So, if it’s a car repair, we call the garage and pay the invoice on behalf of the individual.”

**Finally, funds are disbursed quickly.** “Our goal is 48 hours,” says Guzman, “but we can take care of urgent requests the same day.” Being able to provide this type of help to people in need is a gift for Guzman’s team as well. “Hope shouldn’t be hoarded,” she says. “We want to share it with everyone.”



## The Giving Hope Fund at a glance

### Last year, Dianne experienced five unexpected deaths in her family.

Dealing with the impact, she fell behind on managing her expenses. A Catholic Charities case manager recommended her to the Giving Hope Fund, which provided financial assistance to help pay for her lights and gas. "I never felt so much love and respect," she says.

Now Dianne passes that love on, including to her son, whom she encourages to pursue his goals: an eighth-grade diploma, a high school diploma, a college degree. "I want [my son] to get something more out of life than what I had," Dianne says. "He is my pride and joy."

### 2024 impact

*For activity from January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2024*

**229**

Requests fulfilled

**\$164,670**

Total disbursed

**568**

Individuals served

#### Top requests ..... Total disbursed

Utilities.....	\$34,030
Transportation, car repair .....	\$24,560
Furniture.....	\$17,590
Hotel stay .....	\$12,260
Appliance.....	\$10,600
Security deposit, rent.....	\$9,540
Health, medical .....	\$4,450
Funeral.....	\$3,610
Work equipment.....	\$2,330
Daycare.....	\$1,000

### The average Giving Hope request is \$720.

What has it covered?

#### A new laptop

for Belinda so she could complete an online course to become a certified patient care technician.

#### A sofa, bed, and linens

for Anthony, who was homeless prior to moving to a Catholic Charities senior residence.

#### Help with rent

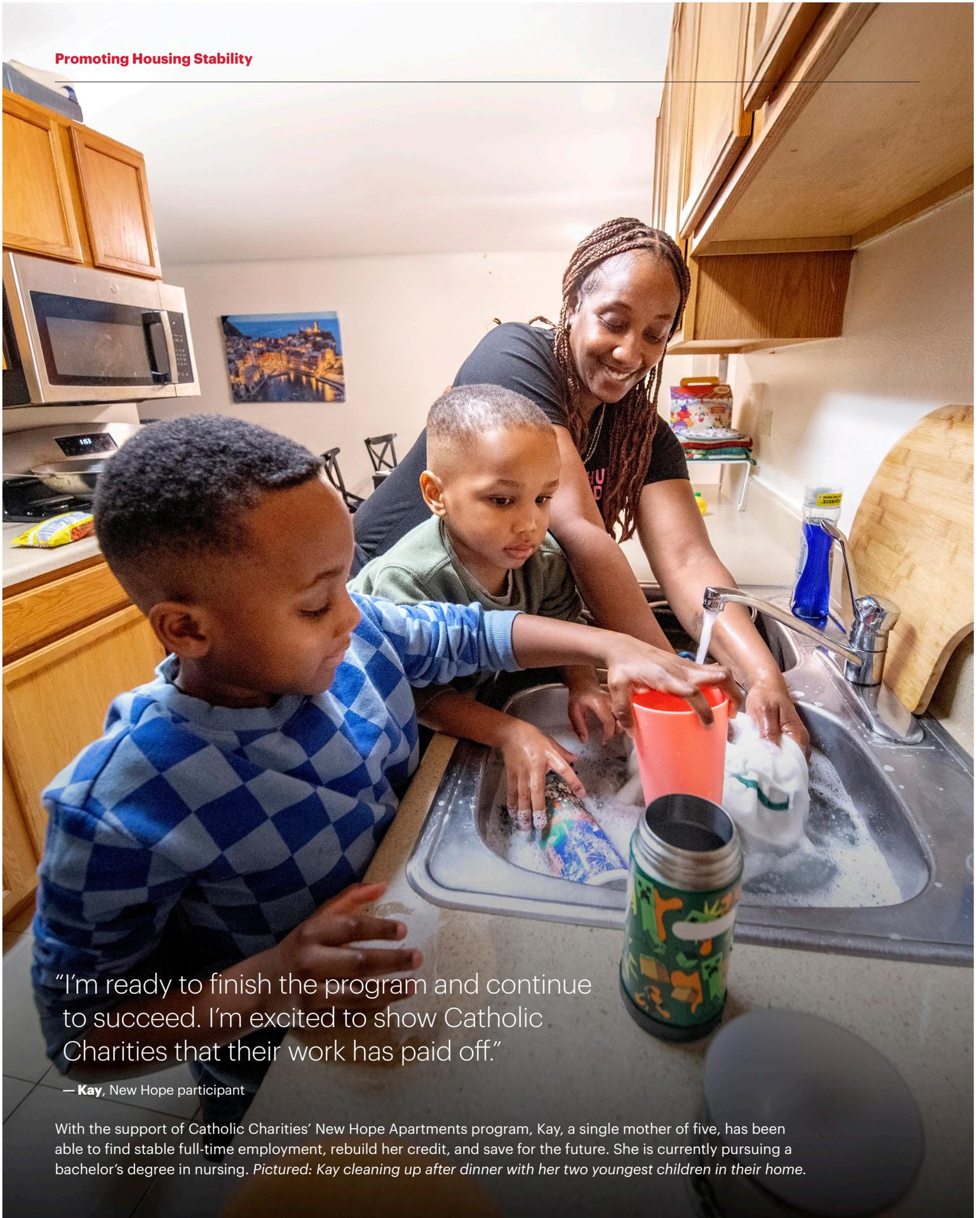
so Mary and her sons could stay in their home after her hours at a fast-food restaurant were reduced.

#### Driving lessons

for Andrea, a survivor of domestic violence, whose spouse did not permit her to learn to drive.

#### A refrigerator

for George to keep his groceries from spoiling on his back porch where he had been storing them.



“I’m ready to finish the program and continue to succeed. I’m excited to show Catholic Charities that their work has paid off.”

— **Kay**, New Hope participant

With the support of Catholic Charities’ New Hope Apartments program, Kay, a single mother of five, has been able to find stable full-time employment, rebuild her credit, and save for the future. She is currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree in nursing. *Pictured: Kay cleaning up after dinner with her two youngest children in their home.*

# Hope and home: New Hope Apartments

**A**fter Kay\* fled an unhealthy relationship, she and four of her children, then ages five months to 15 years, moved in with her sister. But the combined family of 11 crammed under one roof was not sustainable. Kay and her children soon found themselves without a home.

On a given night in Illinois, more than 25,000 people like Kay — individuals and families, adults and children — spend the night unhoused. In addition, tens of thousands more are behind on rent, moving frequently, or staying temporarily with friends or family members, without a permanent place of their own.

**Homelessness is on the rise in Illinois**  
**In 2024, Illinois homelessness surged 116 percent over the prior year,** according to a HUD housing inventory. Chicago accounted for more than 90 percent of that increase.

The number of unhoused Chicagoans quadrupled from 2022 to 2024, according to the Point-in-Time Count, which counts sheltered and unsheltered people on a single night every January. But the problem isn't only affecting the city. In January

2024, Lake County reported a record number of people who were unhoused: more than 700 living in shelters or on the street, which was fully 50 percent more than the previous year, according to the Lake County Coalition for the Homeless.

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To afford an average two-bedroom Chicago apartment, a person must earn \$32.96 per hour, more than double the minimum wage.

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The primary cause of homelessness in Cook and Lake counties is a shortage of affordable housing, according to the Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness. Low wages, unemployment, lack of access to adequate healthcare, and other issues exacerbate the problem.

### **How Catholic Charities is helping**

Catholic Charities knows housing is a critical first step to achieving long-term stability and self-sufficiency. Every year its New Hope Apartments program connects more than 1,200 people with housing and supportive

services to guide their successful transition into permanent housing.

New Hope's mission is to motivate, encourage, and provide resources to participants as they transition to and, ultimately, maintain permanent housing in the community on their own.

**With the pressure of housing alleviated, New Hope participants can focus on their health, gain new skills, finish a degree, save money, become self-sufficient, and live fulfilling, empowered lives.**

### **A path toward self-sufficiency**

Many New Hope participants are families. Catholic Charities cultivates relationships with more than 50 landlords and pays rent for two years. The goal is that the family can remain in their apartment until they complete the program, and then beyond, if possible.

**Eighty-five percent of those who complete the New Hope program increase their income and can sustain permanent housing independently.**

In Kay's case, she received counseling, rental assistance, access to a food pantry, diapers, and support to become

## Promoting Housing Stability

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a licensed practical nurse. With a stable job, she is rebuilding her credit, has been able to save, and is working toward a bachelor's degree in nursing.

### Participant-driven goals

New Hope apartments are located across Chicago and its suburbs. The city and county shelter systems refer people to the program.

“Regardless of where participants live or how they are referred to us, they come through ‘one door’ so everyone has equal access to services,” says Deloise Crosby, New Hope Director in the southwest suburbs.

Participants choose the neighborhood they'd like to live in — an important step toward their long-term success, says Sharon Love, New Hope Senior Director. “This is a true partnership. We set goals *with* participants, not for them,” says Love.

Upon finding an apartment, families are connected with resources,

many under the Catholic Charities umbrella. Partners like the Chicago Furniture Bank and Digs for Dignity help with furnishings.

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“New Hope is transforming lives and has been doing so for decades. The generosity of our supporters makes it possible for this program to continue.”

— **Millicent Ntiamoah**, Associate Vice President, Housing Stability

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Participants meet regularly with their case managers to learn about budgeting and saving, work on resumes, search for jobs and prep for interviews, and review their rights as tenants. After completing the program, participants are eligible for six additional months of support. The road to self-sufficiency “takes patience and commitment,” says Tracey Blackburn, New Hope

Director for the northwest suburbs. “It’s beautiful to witness when things click, paths open up, and progress suddenly is easier.”

Transforming homelessness to hope is not easy, but New Hope participants earn success on their own terms. Brianna, a 25-year-old single mom and New Hope participant, earned her GED, is getting her certified nursing assistant license, and is looking forward to her daughter’s preschool graduation.

“I went through whatever in life I had to go through so my child doesn’t have to go through it,” she says. “God chose me, and it’s OK, because I won. I made it. It’s only going to be greater from here.”

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*\*Kay’s name changed for privacy.*

## How one New Hope graduate is helping others by sharing her story

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“I have three sons and a daughter. I think about what messages I’m giving them by standing up for myself.”

— **Xavia**, New Hope Graduate

More than 10 years ago, Xavia, a single mother and survivor of domestic violence, came to the New Hope Apartments program after fleeing her abusive partner.

Since graduating, she has written two books and launched her own publishing company. Her work

focuses on empowering single mothers to break the cycle of poverty. Read more about Xavia’s story at [catholiccharities.net/the-future-starts-with-mom](http://catholiccharities.net/the-future-starts-with-mom).

*Pictured: Xavia (left), a New Hope graduate, with Millicent Ntiamoah, Catholic Charities Associate Vice President, Housing Stability.*

## How Catholic Charities is responding to rising rates of housing insecurity

Catholic Charities' portfolio of housing programs promote housing stability in diverse ways. Together, they deliver a multipronged response that helps individuals and families secure and maintain a place to call home.

<h3>Keeping people housed</h3>	<h3>Promoting housing stability</h3>	<h3>Providing affordable housing</h3>	<h3>Partnering and advocacy</h3>
			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Giving Hope Fund</b> provides emergency financial assistance to prevent economic hardship that could lead to eviction (see story, p. 4).</li><li>■ <b>Charities Resource Hub</b> connects callers to trusted resources that offer rental and utility assistance.</li><li>■ The <b>Bridge Program</b> helps adults with mental health issues, substance abuse challenges, and disabilities transition to independent living by connecting them to apartments and administering rental payments.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The <b>House of Peace</b> and <b>House of the Good Shepherd</b> offer transitional housing and support to survivors of domestic violence and their children.</li><li>■ <b>New Hope Apartments</b> assists unhoused families and individuals with finding subsidized rental properties along with intensive case management to help them achieve their financial goals.</li><li>■ <b>Parish-Family Sponsorship Program</b> connects immigrants with parishes that provide housing and other supports to help with the transition to new communities.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Catholic Charities owns and manages <b>21 housing communities for low-income seniors and adults with disabilities</b>. Rent is never more than 30 percent of a tenant's income and care coordinators help residents access assistance to continue to live independently.</li><li>■ <b>St. Leo Residence for Veterans</b> provides affordable housing and onsite case management for unhoused veterans over age 60.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Catholic Charities works with the Archdiocese, City of Chicago, and county and state partners to <b>respond rapidly to housing crises</b>.</li><li>■ <b>Housing workshops</b> for families leaving the shelter system share information about how to secure a place to live, tenants' rights, and landlord responsibilities.</li></ul>

# WIC Grocery's Mobile Market launches on Chicago's west side

The weather that Wednesday morning was bitterly cold in a way only early spring can be. But that didn't matter to Marlisa, who had run out to pick up some fresh produce, eggs, and a carton of milk. It took her all of five minutes and she was able to use her WIC benefits to purchase everything.

This was because Marlisa was shopping at Catholic Charities' new WIC Grocery Mobile Market parked outside Sinai Community Institute's WIC clinic, which she and thousands of other mothers and children visit to enroll in what is widely considered one of the nation's most successful and effective nutrition programs.

## **WIC promotes healthy growth and development**

Since 1974, the USDA's WIC program (short for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), has helped moms, babies, and children under five access healthy and fresh food, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support.

**Extensive studies show WIC participation is associated with healthier pregnancies, improved growth and cognitive**

**development, and lasting positive changes to household diets.**

To enroll, participants visit a clinic like the one at Sinai, where they undergo a health assessment. **"We want to identify and address nutritional deficiencies early to prevent chronic problems later in childhood," says Kimberly Howard-Shores, Director of Family Services at Sinai.**

Participants are then prescribed a food "package" aligned to their nutritional needs and receive an Electronic Benefit Transfer card (similar to a debit card) loaded with vouchers for the items in their package. This can be used anywhere WIC is accepted, including at WIC Grocery, Catholic Charities' network of specialty grocery stores that exclusively serve people shopping with WIC.

WIC Grocery is both a store and hub for moms. Stores are often co-located with other Catholic Charities programs and WIC clinics. In addition to food, there's nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, and access to other Catholic Charities services that support families, including pregnancy, parenting, and doula programs.

## **Going beyond brick-and-mortar stores on Chicago's west side**

Catholic Charities operated a WIC Grocery in the Garfield Park neighborhood on Chicago's west side for several decades. When safety concerns in the surrounding area led to a significant drop in shopper visits, the difficult decision was made to close the location.

While the idea to launch a mobile WIC Grocery store had been under consideration for a while, the Garfield Park store closure gave the initiative more urgency.

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"Because there are so few grocery options on Chicago's west side, finding new ways to help families procure fresh and healthy food was very important to us."

— **Shivonnia Dickson**, Vice President for Empowering Mothers

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"Catholic Charities is committed to supporting families by offering resources that help them thrive. WIC Grocery is one way we do this," says Shivonnia Dickson, Vice President for Empowering Mothers at Catholic Charities. "While traditional brick and



Catholic Charities' WIC Grocery Mobile Market is a fully stocked grocery truck. No cash is accepted on board, only WIC benefits. Operating Monday through Friday, the truck travels to community partner sites on Chicago's west side. Pictured: The Mobile Market parked in front of Sinai Community Institute's WIC clinic on the Mount Sinai Hospital campus.

mortar WIC Grocery stores have been successful for many years, we felt the need for a more innovative approach to serve this community.”

**Meeting families where they are**

When program leaders held focus groups with WIC participants to gauge the viability of a mobile store, the response was overwhelmingly positive. They felt a traveling store would make shopping more convenient and safe, plus it would help them use all their benefits. This is because it can be difficult to find the products WIC

food packages allow for at smaller neighborhood and dollar stores, which are often the only retail outlets in communities with low food access.

**Community partners key to success**

Before the WIC Grocery Mobile Market launched in late January, Catholic Charities established partnerships with complementary community organizations on the west side that are also committed to promoting food security for mothers and children. These include Sinai Community Institute, health clinics,

day care centers, and food banks. The Mobile Market makes scheduled visits to their sites, sometimes several times a month.

“Witnessing moms shop on the Mobile Market — redeeming their WIC benefits and accessing nutritious food — has been a source of deep personal and professional fulfillment for me,” Dickson says. “Being a mom when you’re fighting to make ends meet is hard. We’re here to help.”



Marlisa, who is pregnant with her first child, works at a daycare near the WIC clinic at Sinai Community Institute. She visited the Mobile Market on a break from work to pick up healthy foods that will give her the iron, vitamins, and calcium she needs for a healthy pregnancy.

## What can you buy with WIC?

WIC benefits can be used to purchase only certain brands and sizes of foods. For example, a 16-ounce bag of rice is allowed, but not a 14-ounce box. Similarly, Mission brand tortillas are approved, but not ones from El Milagro. WIC Grocery makes it easy for moms and caregivers to shop with WIC because it only stocks WIC-approved products and produce. The Mobile Market carries the top-selling items in each category, including many name-brand products.

### Grains

- Whole-wheat bread and buns
- Whole-wheat pasta
- Whole-wheat tortillas
- Soft corn tortillas
- Bulgur
- Brown rice
- Oatmeal
- Whole grain cereal
- Infant cereal

### Dairy

- Milk\* (including lactose-free)
  - Soy milk
  - Yogurt\*
  - Cheese
- \*Full-fat allowed for one-year-olds only.*

### Meat and beans

- Dry beans, peas, and lentils
- Canned beans
- Peanut butter
- Tofu
- Eggs
- Chunk light tuna
- Pink salmon
- Infant meats

### Fruits and vegetables

- Fresh, frozen, or canned, any variety
- Cash equivalent of \$25 for children; \$44 for pregnant, postpartum women; and \$49 for fully or partially breastfeeding mothers.*

### 100% juice

- Fruit or vegetable
- Must have at least 72mg+ of Vitamin C and no added sugars.*

### Infant formula

*Specialty formulas covered with a medical prescription.*



“Last year, nearly 53,000 women and children got food from a WIC Grocery store. That’s a lot of families.”

— **Shivonnia Dickson**, Vice President for Empowering Mothers, Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities’ WIC Grocery is the second-largest provider of formula to WIC households in Chicago. It procures and manages inventory for its 14 neighborhood stores and the Mobile Market from its warehouse in Chicago’s Austin neighborhood.



“We should make shopping for WIC participants convenient.”

— **Kimberly Howard-Shores**, Director of Family Services, Sinai Community Institute

In North Lawndale, where the Sinai Community Institute is located, 25 percent of residents live more than a half mile from a supermarket. In adjacent East Garfield Park, this jumps to more than 50 percent. “In our surveys of WIC participants, transportation to grocery stores is always a leading barrier to redeeming benefits,” says Howard-Shores.



“Food is expensive and my boys eat a lot.”

— **Mariuxi**, WIC Shopper

Mariuxi visited the WIC Grocery Mobile Market after dropping off her three-year-old son at daycare. She also shops at the WIC Grocery in Douglas Park. With the high prices of food, she uses her WIC benefits to supplement her other grocery shopping.

“I believe I was meant to go through everything I did so I can be here for moms today.”

**Gwendolyn “Dream” Milton** | Nutrition Associate, Catholic Charities WIC Grocery

“I didn’t know I was pregnant until I was five and a half months along,” says Dream Milton, about her first pregnancy at the age of 14. This was in 1980, and luckily, her grandmother, Loretta Miller, worked as a secretary at Catholic Charities. She enrolled Dream in Arts of Living, a former school for pregnant teens, and referred her to the Roseland Adolescent Parenting Program (RAPP), which is still in operation.

At Arts of Living, Dream studied home economics, her baby’s development, and what to expect during delivery. After school, she went to RAPP, where she prepared herself for the emotional transition to motherhood. Looking back, Dream doesn’t know where she would have been without Catholic Charities. “I was so lost,” she says.

Two years ago, Dream returned to Catholic Charities, but this time as a nutrition

associate for WIC Grocery. In her job, she shares recipes, nutrition and shopping advice, cooking tips, and lots of hugs.

“The parents I meet are carrying so much,” she says. “I tell them WIC Grocery is not just a food store, we’re part of Catholic Charities. We can help.”

Forty-five years after she asked for help for herself, Dream says she’s living her calling. “I’ve never been happier.”



Gwendolyn “Dream” Milton with a shopper at Catholic Charities’ WIC Grocery store in Chicago’s South Chicago neighborhood. “When I meet parents who are overwhelmed, I tell them I’ve been in their shoes and I know this is not the end of their story.”



A volunteer serves guests coffee at Catholic Charities' new community meal program at Lord of Mercy Catholic Church in Harvey, Illinois.

## The Shared Table expands to the south suburbs

The guests began arriving at the parish hall around 6 p.m. After sharing a prayer of gratitude, volunteer servers began distributing the evening's meal: pizza and Caesar salad from a local restaurant.

The gathering marked the fourth month of the Shared Table, Catholic Charities' weekly community meal at Lord of Mercy Catholic Church in Harvey, Illinois, and the evening was running smoothly.

### Part of a strategy to deepen connections

Just 20 miles south of Chicago, suburban Harvey was once a booming blue-collar town. Starting in the late 1970s, however, businesses and manufacturing plants started to close, jobs dried up, and families who could leave, left.

Today, Harvey and its neighboring communities have some of the highest rates of poverty and food insecurity

in the region, including the city of Chicago. **According to the U.S. Census, close to 40 percent of residents live below the poverty line or at the fragile line just above it.**

Like other struggling municipalities in south suburban Cook County, Harvey is facing a shrinking tax base and mounting debts. This impacts the resources it can offer residents.

While Catholic Charities has been working in the area for decades, it

## The Shared Table

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has identified a service gap it can fill. “There are not as many resources in the south suburbs for families experiencing hardship as there are in some parts of Chicago that have seen a rise in local, if not municipal, investment,” says Keara Ette, Director of Faith and Mission Initiatives at Catholic Charities. “Launching the Shared Table is one way we hope to serve more people in need, especially those facing food insecurity.”

### A two-way partnership

The number of guests at the Lord of Mercy meal has grown steadily since November. Lupita (Maria) Macias, Catholic Charities’ Meal Coordinator and Lord of Mercy parishioner, helps promote the meal and cultivates relationships with guests, checking on them if they don’t attend and sharing information about other Catholic Charities programs.

For Lord of Mercy, hosting the Shared Table has been an opportunity to bring the parish community together. Formed in 2021 through the consolidation of three parishes, Lord of Mercy is finding its way as a congregation.

**“People need the presence of the church more than ever. We view the Shared Table as part of this mission,”** says Kevin Larson, Director of Parish Operations at Lord of Mercy. “Whether as volunteers or guests, it has expanded the soft entry points that invite people into the parish.”

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“The proximity Lord of Mercy has to the people we hope to serve is why parish partners are so important.”

— **Keara Ette**, Director of Faith and Mission Initiatives, Catholic Charities

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Larson also notes that without Catholic Charities, getting a community meal program up and running would have taken considerably more time and effort. “Having people bring structure and organization right from the get-go made a huge difference.”

### A first step, but more to come

Catholic Charities plans to continue to expand its presence in the area. **This spring, it will be a launching**

**the Curbside Pantry, a mobile pantry, to serve the south suburbs.**

This initiative will provide more people, particularly those with limited transportation options, with access to food and other resources. Catholic Charities is collaborating with the Greater Chicago Food Depository to identify area locations where demand for food is greatest.

**Like the Shared Table community meal, the Curbside Pantry will serve as an entry point to the other services Catholic Charities provides.** A case navigator will be on board to connect people to the Charities Resource Hub and other trusted partners. As Ette says, “If someone trusts us enough to share a hardship, that gives us an opportunity to ask, ‘Would you allow us to help you with that?’”

Read more about the Shared Table at Lord of Mercy at [catholiccharities.net/shared-table-harvey](https://catholiccharities.net/shared-table-harvey).

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## About the Shared Table

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The Shared Table is Catholic Charities’ community meal ministry and one of its signature volunteer opportunities. Meals are open to anyone facing food insecurity. Everyone who attends is a welcome guest deserving of a warm and dignified dining experience. Volunteers are integral to the program, setting up,

greeting guests, preparing and serving meals, and making sure everyone’s cup of coffee is filled.

Catholic Charities hosts Shared Table community meals at five locations across the region. **To learn more, visit [ccofchicagovolunteer.com](https://ccofchicagovolunteer.com).**

Pope Francis urged us to find Christ in the poor, to “embrace the mysterious wisdom that God wishes to share with us through them.” We asked lay Catholic leaders to share how, through their ministry, they witnessed this mystery.

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**Deacon James Norman**

Vicar for Deacons, Archdiocese of Chicago  
Deacon, Our Lady of Sorrows Basilica

For more than 30 years, on the second and fourth Saturday of each month, parishioners, friends of parishioners, and high school students wake up as early as 4:30 a.m. Through darkness, cold, rain, and snow, they come to prepare breakfast for more than 200 homeless men and women on the west side of Chicago. They come with willing hearts, cheerful smiles, warm hellos, and joyful laughter.

When the doors open, the guests are greeted with smiles, as well as eggs, sausage, toast, grits, coffee, and orange juice. They are welcomed by name and quickly update the volunteers on their week.

There’s so much more going on than a meal. The Holy Spirit is at work serving both the guests and volunteers. These men and women, who are often ignored, are treated as welcomed guests and friends. For the volunteers, the cares, concerns, and worries of their lives fade away as they commit themselves to service.

The guests minister to the volunteers by their strength, endurance, and fortitude. The volunteers remind the guests that they are not alone. God cares. Over the last three decades, I’ve seen both the lives of guests and the lives of volunteers changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been fed.



**Peggy Burke, Ph.D.**

Co-chair, Immigrant & Refugee Ministry, Old St. Patrick’s Church  
Member, Catholic Charities Parish-Family Sponsorship Advisory Group

If we truly pay attention, God whispers to us all the time. These whispers are an invitation to build the Kingdom of God wherever and whenever we can.

In 2020, I joined the Immigrant and Refugee Ministry at my parish, Old St. Patrick’s Church, thinking I could help newly arrived immigrants in some small way. It was when I started to help an asylum-seeking family that God’s whispers became loud and clear.

The family had just arrived in Chicago from Central America after living at the Mexican border for two years. I would accompany them as they were to start a new life in the United States. My first thought was, “What have I gotten myself into? I don’t know Spanish, and I really don’t know anything about accompaniment.” But then God whispered... “Feed my sheep.”

Since that evening, the family and I have journeyed together through birthday parties, soccer games, court appointments, and English lessons. I have been evangelized by this family to do whatever I can to serve where God needs me. And, hopefully, I have done a small part to help this beautiful family build a new life.

Together, we are building the Kingdom of God in our own small way. To be able to answer God’s whispers is a blessing beyond all compare.

# Recent and upcoming events

## D’Vine Affair

**February 2, 2025**  
Venue West, Chicago



More than 200 supporters gathered at the 2025 d’Vine Affair, helping raise more than \$125,000 in support of Catholic Charities programs. Special thanks to the members of the Event Committee, especially chair **William Montana** and founders emeritus **Helen and Joseph Glunz, Sr.**, **Jean and Joseph Imperato**, and **Teddi and John Scholz**.

## Mass & Mission

**Sunday, March 16, 2025**  
Church of St. Mary, Lake Forest



Earlier this spring, more than 100 members of the Catholic Charities community gathered to celebrate Mass, meet with program leaders and volunteers, and learn how their partnership advances Catholic Charities’ mission.

## Blossoms of Hope Brunch

**Sunday, April 27, 2025**  
Westin Chicago, Lombard



More than 400 survivors, champions, and friends gathered to connect and support the Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide (LOSS) program. **Carol and Brendan Deely and family, founders of Gabriel’s Light**, were honored with the 2025 Charles T. Rubey LOSS award.

## Partner Gathering

**Thursday, June 5, 2025**  
6 to 8 p.m.  
St. Cletus Parish, La Grange

Join us to learn more about our work in the southwest region, including a new community center under construction in Summit.

## 2025 Charities Golf Classic

**Monday, July 14, 2025**  
Knollwood Club, Lake Forest  
Shoreacres, Lake Bluff

Join Catholic Charities supporters for golf, skill contests, lunch, and dinner at two premier courses.

## Art of Caring

**Friday, September 26, 2025**  
Knollwood Club, Lake Forest



Mark your calendars to join the Catholic Charities Women’s Board of Lake County at this fall’s Art of Caring, a beloved annual tradition that celebrates the power of community and compassion to make a difference.

## Spirit of Saint Nicholas Ball

**Friday, December 5, 2025**  
Hilton Chicago, Chicago

### *Spirit of Saint Nicholas Ball*

The Christmas season might seem far away, but planning for the Spirit of Saint Nicholas Ball is in full swing! Save the date to join Catholic Charities to kick off the holiday season and support families across Cook and Lake counties.



**Scan to learn more about, purchase tickets, or view photos from past gatherings or visit [catholiccharities.net/attend-an-event](https://catholiccharities.net/attend-an-event).**

## Staying grounded in routine and ritual

**Aden Smith** | Resident, Porta Coeli Senior Housing Community

Mr. Aden Smith, a 91-year-old Korean War veteran, met his wife Ceola Smith in Memphis, Tennessee, in the late 1940s. He followed her back to her hometown of Chicago, where they got married on December 29, 1950. They had four children — two sons, two daughters — and Mr. Smith supported them through a 25-year career in criminal justice.

Almost 10 years ago, one of their daughters found Mr. and Mrs. Smith an apartment at Catholic Charities' Porta Coeli senior housing community in Chicago's South Deering neighborhood.

In line with his background and experience, Mr. Smith became a floor captain, keeping an eye out for neighbors, making sure doors are locked. If something doesn't seem right, he works with Site Director Regina Farris-Smith to address it. "We work as a team," he says.

Ms. Farris-Smith says she worried about Mr. Smith after his wife died in September 2023.

Although he doesn't say a lot about his wife or her passing, it is easy to imagine Mr. Smith's unspoken grief. Being at Porta Coeli helps, he says. His daughter and grandkids visit, and he still has his routine, checking in on his neighbors, taking a daily constitutional, and starting every morning with a coffee with Ms. Farris-Smith.

"She makes the coffee. We have a little chat. It wakes me up," says Mr. Smith. "It's helpful to have that community here."



Mr. Smith was photographed January 2025 in the community room at Porta Coeli. Porta Coeli is one of 21 Catholic Charities senior housing communities and is home to 86 residents with low incomes.

## Join us to improve lives and nourish spirits across Cook and Lake counties

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### Ways to give

**Donate online, or by phone or mail.** Secure donations can be made by visiting [catholiccharities.net/give](https://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 in a will or trust to help ensure our programs flourish for years to come. Contact Andrea Wynne, Planned Giving, for more information at [anwynne@catholiccharities.net](mailto:anwynne@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. The society convenes our most generous and loyal donors through exclusive events and communications.

**Make a corporate gift or sponsor an event.** Catholic Charities offers sponsorship opportunities for fundraising events throughout the year. Visit [catholiccharities.net/attend-an-event](https://catholiccharities.net/attend-an-event) for more information.

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*Questions? Contact our Donor Relations team at (312) 948-6864, [donor.relations@catholiccharities.net](mailto:donor.relations@catholiccharities.net), or visit [catholiccharities.net/give](https://catholiccharities.net/give).*

### Ways to serve

**Faith in Action Team.** Catholic Charities welcomes all to help provide vital supports to individuals and families across Cook and Lake counties. The Faith in Action team provides opportunities to live your faith in the world, engage with your neighbors, and deliver meaningful impact to your community.

**Visit [ccofchicagovolunteer.com](https://ccofchicagovolunteer.com).** At Catholic Charities' newly redesigned volunteer hub, volunteers can create a profile, learn more about different roles, and view current openings.

Opportunities are available for individuals or groups at varying levels of commitment and duration. These include serving at the Shared Table, delivering meals to seniors' homes, assembling care packs, and providing essential undergarments and diapers to adults and children in need.

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*To inquire about how you or your group can get involved, contact Kelsey Rodriguez, Director of Volunteer Engagement, at [krodriguez@catholiccharities.net](mailto:krodriguez@catholiccharities.net).*



After nearly four decades with Catholic Charities, Nancy Gavilanes, Program Director, Immigrant and Refugee Services, is retiring this spring. "I am so thankful for Catholic Charities and for my team. Some have been colleagues for more than 20 years! I will miss them all," she says.

### Answering the Call to Serve

"The barriers immigrants face can be overwhelming. Their resilience is inspiring."

### Nancy Gavilanes | Program Director, Immigrant and Refugee Services

"An acquaintance told me Catholic Charities was looking to hire an immigration consultant and she encouraged me to apply," explains Nancy Gavilanes about joining the organization 39 years ago. "I got the job offer on a Saturday evening and I agreed to start the next Monday. My daughter was just about to turn one. I had to scramble to find childcare!"

Even though she has met thousands of immigrants in the years since, Nancy's voice still cracks when sharing the story

of the first immigrant, a mother, whom she worked with. The woman had come from Mexico and she was being sponsored by her son, who was an American citizen. But this wasn't her only child, the woman explained. There had been another, a baby, who had drowned when they were crossing the Rio Grande River at the border. "That affected me so deeply. I am still heartbroken for her."

For many of the immigrants Catholic Charities serves, it can take years to

complete the immigration process. Nancy's team leads them through it, helping with paperwork, providing counseling, and advising on the latest aspects of immigration law. She also oversees Catholic Charities' refugee services, helping resettle families who have refugee status.

The stories she has heard have changed her, Nancy says. "People suffer for things that I have taken for granted. I am humbled."



Archdiocese of Chicago

721 North LaSalle Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60654

Donate online securely today! **Scan the QR code or visit [catholiccharities.net/mothers](https://catholiccharities.net/mothers)**

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