

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Enlighten | Empower

Newsletter of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio – an Agency of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati

CEO MESSAGE

Love in Action: Catholic Charities to Accompany Parishes in Advancing Works of Mercy



This summer, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati launches its Beacons of Light parish reorganization. As nearly all archdiocesan churches begin a five-year journey

to merge into new Families of Parishes, it's a challenging time for many. Yet, it's also an historic opportunity for the faithful to re-imagine how the works of mercy can be multiplied in these faith communities. As we forge new relationships across former parish boundaries, it's an invitation

to rediscover together the gospel of love and to make a greater impact in our communities and world.

"Love in Action" is what we are calling all those parish ministries that serve those in need, change systems that marginalize and oppress, protect human life from conception until natural death and build bridges of solidarity across the beautiful diversity of our one human family. The Archdiocese envisions that Families of Parishes will grow in their efforts to promote the human dignity of every person; educate and form parishioners, staff and clergy in Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching; create spaces of belonging; organize ministries of charity and justice; and

inspire all parishioners to solidarity, locally and globally.

As the official human services agency of the Archdiocese serving people of all faiths and backgrounds across 11-counties, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio celebrates its many parish partnerships that have advanced our work to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and empower those in positions of vulnerability. While those relationships will continue, we also aim to support Families of Parishes in building social ministry structures that expand parishioner involvement, increase coordination among all involved and elevate the works of mercy to the forefront of every parish's life and identity.

May the Holy Spirit guide these parishes into a brighter future together. And, may a new fervor to expand Love in Action ministries lead to more people in our communities experiencing God's love more fully through our works of mercy.

Tony Stieritz, Chief Executive Officer



**FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES #6:
LOVE IN ACTION**

If you are interested in learning more, please contact our Parish and Community Engagement Coordinator, Mary Anne Bressler at 513-672-3714 or mbressler@ccswoh.org.

You Walk with Immigrants and Refugees on Their Journeys



Rosa was exhausted — the dark circles under her eyes made that obvious. She was working all night, then going to school during the day. At just 17 years old,

she'd already been through a lifetime of challenges and trauma.

She'd come to the United States from Guatemala with her father, seeking the chance to get an education. At home, she'd helped her mother manage a coffee plantation and wasn't able to go to school regularly. Living in the U.S. would move her closer to her dream of becoming a lawyer.

Then the unthinkable happened. Rosa's father abandoned her. She was left with no friends or family, very little money and only limited English. Yet ...

Thanks to Catholic Charities supporters like you, Rosa wasn't alone.

Su Casa Hispanic Center's Bilingual Case Manager Yudith Escobar Leon has stayed by Rosa's side ever since. She checks in with her every few weeks to make sure she sticks with her schooling, pays her rent and has access to the information and resources she needs to achieve her goals.

Now 19, Rosa is close to graduating high school. She wants to go to college. To pay for it, she plans to open her own artisanal popsicle business.

"My help has been guidance," Yudith says. "She's been very self-sufficient. A lot of people get stuck, but she keeps trying."

Your support allows Catholic Charities to walk with immigrants and refugees on their journeys to rebuilding their lives and creating the futures they've always dreamed of. Thank you for making sure people like Rosa don't have to walk alone!

DID YOU KNOW?

Su Casa Hispanic Center is the primary provider of social, case management, family reunification, educational, and health promotion services to the Hispanic/Latino community in Greater Cincinnati.

A Happy Ending Thanks to Immigration Legal Services



HOW WE HELP

The work of Immigration Legal Services, including pro bono representation, is made possible by generous Catholic Charities supporters like you.

If you know someone in need of services such as deportation defense, naturalization, deferred action and more, please visit ccswoh.org/programs/immigration-legal-services.

In immigration law, there are at least as many losses as there are wins. But in February, Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services (ILS) attorney Stephany Martinez got a big win when she secured green cards for two sisters from Guatemala after a six-year process.

"These wins for Mariza and Alejandra give us that driving force to say, 'Okay, there are happy endings!,'" Stephany says.

Maritza, now 22, and Alejandra, 23, came to Catholic Charities with their mother in 2016. ILS first helped their mother get a custody order from a juvenile court judge in Hamilton County. The order included legal findings that it was in the best interest of the sisters to stay in the United States. Next, ILS helped them apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Approval for that petition took nine months. That's when the real wait began.

Navigating the U.S. immigration legal

system is extremely difficult and often demands expertise. Because of the backlog of cases from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, the young women weren't allowed to file for their green cards until August 2021. Stephany took over their case last summer, filed the paperwork in August and got the good news in February of this year.

Now, the sisters are focused on getting better jobs so they can support their mom, their older sister and their nephew as they work through their own immigration processes. In five years, Maritza and Alejandra will be able to apply for U.S. citizenship.

"They were ecstatic when I told them, 'Your green card has been approved,'" Stephany says. "And they're very vocal about how grateful they are. For young ladies who have gone through so much trauma, they are very optimistic and very positive in their outlook on life."

Empowerment through Mental Healthcare

For someone like Jasmine, finding mental treatment is very difficult. She doesn't have health insurance and doesn't speak much English. So when Jasmine began having delusions and dangerous, intrusive thoughts, Catholic Charities was a life line.

"We are one of the few resources in the community for a Spanish-speaking, uninsured individual to get psychiatric treatment for mental illness," says Laura Hershberger, Mental Health Services Director.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the Mental Health Services team was able to assess Jasmine and get her the psychiatric help she needed. Rosa Reyes-Santana, bilingual mental health therapist, began working with Jasmine in therapy. She referred her to psychiatrist,

Dr. Roberto Soria who prescribed her medication to manage her symptoms of psychosis.

Today, Jasmine is working full time and has moved back in with her family. She continues to take her medication, and Rosa has taught her valuable skills, like practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques, to help her manage her anxiety. Best of all, Jasmine's intrusive thoughts are gone and she's reconnecting with her child, whom she once feared she might harm.

"It is great to see her smile and eager to come and participate in treatment," Rosa says. "She knows she can use different tools to calm her mood. It's just so cool to see that."

Because of the care you help Catholic Charities provide, Jasmine now has hope

for a healthier, more successful future. That also means a better life for her child and their family. And the impact doesn't stop there.

"The services we provide nurture a healthier community at large," Rosa says. "That's important for all of us."



DON'T WAIT TO GET HELP!

If you or someone you know needs mental health support, please call Catholic Charities' bilingual intake specialist at **513-489-8898**.

VITA Tax Program Helps Clients Receive More Than \$228K in 'Life-Changing' Refunds

Taxes can be complicated. But for Debbie Eaton, the reason to get involved with Catholic Charities' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program is very simple.

"The amount of money people get back — it's life-changing," Debbie says. "It doesn't get any more rewarding than that."

Debbie, a longtime Catholic Charities volunteer, led the VITA program this past tax season.

VITA is a nationwide IRS program that trains volunteers to provide free tax help for limited English speakers, people with disabilities and people making less than \$57,000 per year.

Thanks to Debbie and her team of intake representatives and tax preparers, 79 clients received refunds totaling \$228,707 — an average of \$2,895.

Like many volunteers, Debbie had no background in taxes or accounting. But

she taught computer classes to immigrants and refugees through Catholic Charities. There, she saw how great the need is for newcomers to have a trusted person who can walk them through the complex processes most of us take for granted.

"Taxes are complicated for Americans who speak English," Debbie says. "So immigrants really struggle with understanding what's happening. 'What's withholding tax? Why am I not getting this much back when my friend's getting this much back?'"

In some cases, VITA volunteers help clients use their phones to log on to payroll portals and download their W-2s. Or they might help a client search their bank account to see if or when they received a stimulus check from the government.

It's in those interactions, Debbie says, that clients realize they're in good hands in a safe environment. "It helps people

feel more secure. They've had enough insecurity," she says.

"There are lots of things you can give your time to," Debbie adds. "But at the end of the day, this is a really concrete thing you can do to help someone."

GET INVOLVED

You don't need experience with taxes or accounting to make a difference. United Way provides comprehensive training for VITA volunteers, beginning in November.

If you'd like to help in 2023, please contact Case Management Supervisor Rachel Burgess at rburgess@ccswoh.org.

LEADERSHIP

Most. Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr,
Archbishop of Cincinnati

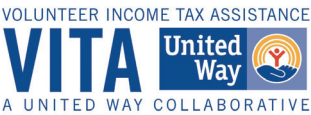
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Our Lady of Lourdes Makes Generous Gift to Support Refugees



Tony Stieritz, Erin Dwyer & Fr. Len Wenke

Our Lady of Lourdes parish recently presented Catholic Charities with a check for over \$37,000.00 to support housing for refugee families through Refugee Resettlement Services (RRS).

The parish held a special collection throughout Lent to raise money to help newcomers in Greater Cincinnati. They were inspired by a presentation about immigration and refugees given by members of the Catholic Charities team.

“We’re not talking about issues. We’re talking about people.”

– Mary Anne Bressler

“It was very exciting. It’s wonderful,” says Mary Anne Bressler, Parish and Community Engagement Coordinator. “Obviously, it’s great to receive such support to advance

our work. But it’s also just so gratifying to know people cared enough about refugees to be that incredibly generous.”

Our Lady of Lourdes had set a goal to raise \$15,000. That’s approximately what it costs to house three families through RRS for 90 days. But the outpouring of generosity was stunning. Parishioners were moved to do more than anyone could have expected.

The parish has a history of helping refugees. After the Vietnam War, the community helped support a Vietnamese family as they resettled in Cincinnati.

“That was a very powerful memory for the parish,” Mary Anne says.

Today, as the global refugee crisis worsens, news stories about places like Afghanistan and Ukraine are keeping refugees top of mind for many Americans. Mary Anne hopes that as awareness continues to grow, so will local interest in supporting RRS and the families they serve.

“We’re not talking about issues. We’re talking about people,” Mary Anne says. “They’re human beings going through struggles that we can’t even imagine. People care. They just don’t always know. When they find out, they’re like, ‘Yes, we want to help.’”

HELP WELCOME YOUR NEW NEIGHBORS

- Refugee Resettlement Services can always use your help! We need:
- Donations of cash and household items
- Volunteers to set up housing, mentor youth, drive families to appointments and more
- Advocates to spread the word and mobilize more supporters

Please visit ccswoh.org/programs/refugee-resettlement-services to learn more and get involved.

Changing a life, one interpreted sentence at a time...



In May 2022, longtime AccuracyNow Language Services interpreter, Seydina Diop came across a story in the news about a French citizen who found herself in legal trouble. The news video showed that, despite the French woman noting that she spoke some English, she also said that she spoke French and repeatedly misunderstood basic English.

“When it comes to court legal terms, it’s a problem if people say they speak English in a casual way, but don’t understand that more specific language,” Diop said.

That is when Diop decided to get involved. He reached out to the reporter who wrote the initial story and volunteered to interpret on the French citizen’s behalf. Diop speaks French—along with Wolof, Bambara, Mandinka, and English—as it is the national language in Senegal where he grew up.

But Diop emphasized that just speaking French is not enough in helping people. It is his training and experience as an interpreter that makes him effective.

“Some people might not see the importance,” Diop said. “They think I just speak French or this or that language and that makes me a good interpreter. No. You must speak the language but also take the next step to try and get other factors like ethics, reputation, and being on time... People need training to be a good interpreter.”

Trainings like these are provided by and emphasized within AccuracyNow because it not only equips interpreters to be confident and capable, but it also benefits the community at large. Whether in a school, hospital, legal service, workplace, or anywhere else, when someone is faced with a language barrier it is essential they are provided with a well-equipped interpreter.

While there is no way to know how the situation for this French citizen would have developed if she had been provided with interpretation every step of the way, what is certain is that as a part of her due process, she had a right to an interpreter. As hers and many other cases progress, it is people like Diop and programs like AccuracyNow Language Services that work to ensure that right is provided.

Cases like these, when someone is in need of interpretation, are also why Diop got involved in this career and why he continues to work in this field.



MAXIMIZE YOUR SOCIAL IMPACT WHILE ACQUIRING YOUR LANGUAGE SERVICES NEEDS AT ACCURACYNOW.COM!

AccuracyNow Language Services, a social enterprise of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, ensures language is never a barrier. The program is available 24 hours a day, for all interpretation, remote interpretation, translation, and transcription needs in more than 150 languages – and the dollars you spend go back into your community.

“It’s a good thing to feel like you are doing something you like that’s also helping people and making a career for your life,” Diop said. “When I help somebody in a situation by interpreting, I feel a joy. I’m doing something very good.”



SU CASA 25TH ANNIVERSARY AWARDS DINNER

Friday, September 16, 2022 | 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. | TQL Stadium

Dinner includes reception with cash bar and auction, entertainment and awards presentation, and an after party with DJ and dancing.

Tickets are available at: ccswoh.org/su-casa-25-awards-dinner. If you are unable to attend, please consider making a donation to Su Casa at ccswoh.org/donate.



25TH ANNIVERSARY AWARDS DINNER & SILENT AUCTION



Pam Mortensen Recognized for Decades of Service to Local Families

Catholic Charities’ Pam Mortensen was honored in April with the Lifetime Service Award presented by the National Alliance on Mental Illness Butler County.

Pam is the Family Development Services Director. She has been a cornerstone of the program for more than 17 years. Before that, she served the community as a social worker, a parent educator, a family life educator at LifeSpan and a manager at Butler County Educational Service Center Head Start.

“It feels like a hopeful time to me,” Pam says. “Somebody’s got to stand up for this, and I’m still up for the task.” — Pam Mortensen

“I’m really honored and humbled,” Pam says. “What’s important is that the work is honored. The work is important to me personally because the children and families are so important. They’re my neighbors, my

kids’ neighbors, my grandchildren’s neighbors.”

Pam is particularly passionate about reaching young children as early as possible to make an impact on their lives. She’s inspired by the opportunity to expand the services Catholic Charities provides to families. And she’s dedicated to supporting the team members who work with families in the field every day.

After almost 40 years of championing children and families, Pam is as devoted to her calling as ever.

“It feels like a hopeful time to me,” Pam says. “Somebody’s got to stand up for this, and I’m still up for the task.”

Please join Catholic Charities in congratulating Pam on this honor. And thank you for supporting the critical work of Pam and her team through your generous gifts to Catholic Charities.



THE CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIFFERENCE

Her strong faith has informed the way Pam Mortensen has approached her work since she entered the field in 1983. Even in her toughest moments, she reminds herself that everyone she encounters is a child of God.

“When I came across a really challenging parent,” Pam says, “it helps me to acknowledge the Christ in them. That God loves them as much as God loves me. That’s really helped carry me through. One of the things I love about Catholic Charities is the faith element that does ground us, that resets us at times. We need to be the light.”

New Opportunities for Seniors in Clermont, Butler counties



Two new grants are increasing opportunities for local seniors to get involved in their communities through Catholic Charities.

Thanks to funding provided through the American Rescue Plan, the AmeriCorps Seniors Senior Companions program is expanding into Clermont County, and the AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparents program is expanding into Butler County.

Senior Companions provide in-home non-medical services to neighbors in need. Tasks might include light housekeeping, driving someone to a medical appointment or simply offering friendship and someone to talk to.

“Companionship is our largest need,” says Jeanne Cairns, Senior Companions Coordinator. “It’s alarming the number of clients who have had no socialization during the pandemic. Being a Senior Companion isn’t just a service, it’s a relationship.”

Jeanne is recruiting about 55 volunteers to serve 75-100 clients. In Butler County, Foster Grandparents Director Aaron

Glauber needs 30-40 volunteers to connect with 90 students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Foster Grandparents work in classrooms during school hours, serving as mentors and tutors. As with the Senior Companions program, socialization is a key component for both the volunteers and the young people with whom they work.

“Companionship is our largest need”

—Jeanne Cairns, Senior Companions Coordinator

“The programs really make an impact not just on the client, but on the volunteers themselves,” Aaron says. “The tax-free stipend, the ability to stay active — all of the benefits seniors get out of volunteering.”

Both programs offer an hourly stipend for volunteering, in addition to mileage or bus-fare reimbursement. Benefits also include paid leave time, supplementary insurance and paid training.



IN NEED OF VOLUNTEERS 55 AND OVER

Catholic Charities is seeking new Senior Companions in Clermont County and new Foster Grandparents in Butler County. Volunteers must be 55 or older and meet income requirements. (Income earned will not affect your eligibility for Social Security, SSDI or other programs.)

Interested in learning more?

Senior Companions:
Call 513-535-2291

Foster Grandparents:
Call 513-672-3832



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"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall
obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

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