

Summer/Fall 2025 Catholic Charities
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SPIRIT

Being present
with joy to the
need around us



“Before all else, beloved, love God and then your neighbor,
for these are the chief commandments given to us.”

— Rule 1, Saint Augustine

On the cover: Catholic Charities Food Pantry Associate Sister Maria (Laurenti) Okeke restocks shelves at the Casa Catalina food pantry in the Back of the Yards neighborhood on the city’s southwest side. Learn more about the pantry on [page 5](#).

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community to witness a message
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“All of us are in God’s hands. So, let us move forward, without fear, together, hand in hand with God and with one another!”

— **Pope Leo XIV**

Especially in Chicago, the election of Pope Leo XIV was a wonder — a man from south suburban Dolton, whose background mirrored so many of our own, had been chosen to lead 1.4 billion Catholics around the world. Commentators rushed to consider how his American identity would influence his ministry.

What has emerged in these first months of the papacy, however, is anything but partisan. Rather, Pope Leo is showing the same steadfast wisdom that has guided the Church since its founding: Love God and then your neighbor.

So much is written about what divides us. The continuity that Pope Leo represents offers an alternate story: With God, we are one.



Dear Friends,

At Catholic Charities, we are called “to witness a message of mercy and hope to a world in need.”

This task seems even harder now, as we receive each day’s news. The world seems so askew — there is so much fear, so much anger. All the patterns of how things used to operate no longer seem to apply.

Yet, as Pope Leo XIV reminds us, we are called to meet each day without fear — with hope — confident in God’s power, might, and transcendence.

This past month, at my annual prayer retreat, I offered up all of the uncertainty, the exhaustion, and bewilderment that I have been feeling. And I committed to simply be present to God for six days. As I sat, two prayers from our faith’s great mystics kept coming to mind:

**“All shall be well, all shall be well, all manner
of things shall be well.”**

— Juliana of Norwich (~1342–1416)

**“Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you,
all things are passing. God alone is unchanging.”**

— St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

I wondered, how can this be? And as I sat, I was given a small glimpse of understanding. Across eternity, the complete timeline of all existence — God is present. He sees all, feels all, and heals all. To God’s eyes, all that has been, is, or will be — it has already happened. And it has all been redeemed. God has prevailed.

There is nothing that we nor anyone else can do that will surprise Him. There is nothing that will break Him. “... All things are passing. God alone is unchanging ... God alone suffices.” Alleluia!

Secure in this knowledge — let us witness with joy!



Sally Blount
CEO



Sally Blount and Colleen Kennedy, Catholic Charities Vice President of Annual and Major Giving, together with Tom Mazur, Larry Kearns, and Carlos de la Rosa at St. Cletus Parish in La Grange.

Public food benefits are changing

What does this mean for Catholic Charities and the people we serve?

by Brendan O'Sullivan, Director
Government and Corporate Relations

This past Fourth of July, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) was signed into law, ushering in the largest change to the social safety net in the U.S. since the Clinton administration. Included in the legislation were significant cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), once known as food stamps.

SNAP Fast Facts¹

- In Illinois, more than 1.93 million people, or 1 out of 7 residents, receive SNAP.
 - 88% of SNAP participants are children, people over age 59, or non-elderly individuals with a disability.
 - Most SNAP households (73%) live at or below the poverty line.
 - The average SNAP monthly benefit is \$332, or \$177 per person.
-

Who receives SNAP and how much money is the benefit?

SNAP is a public benefit paid directly to people who need help to afford adequate food to feed their families. In Illinois, eligibility is determined by income, expenses, and the number of people who live and eat together. Households with very low incomes receive more SNAP benefits because they need more help affording adequate food.

Beyond household composition, SNAP benefits are also linked to the Thrifty

Food Plan, which is the cost of groceries needed to provide a healthy, budget-conscious diet. In 2021, the USDA adjusted the Thrifty Food Plan to reflect changing diets and eating habits. As a result, the maximum SNAP benefit increased from about \$4.80 to \$6.20 per person per day.²

How will SNAP change?

The OBBBA's changes to SNAP will impact people in three major ways:

People with children over the age of 14, adults up to age 64, adults experiencing homelessness, and veterans are now required to work at least 20 hours per week to receive SNAP. Previously, parents of children younger than 18 and seniors over 54 were exempt from these requirements.

Immigrants who are in the U.S. legally under official humanitarian protections (e.g., refugees, asylees, or victims of human trafficking) are no longer eligible.

Outside cost-of-living adjustments, **the Thrifty Food Plan is permanently frozen.** This means changing nutrition

standards, systemic fluctuations in food costs (like last year's increase in the price of eggs), or food purchasing patterns will no longer be accounted for.

With these changes, state lawmakers estimate 360,000 Illinoisans will lose SNAP benefits.

What does this mean for Catholic Charities?

Catholic Charities expects a significant increase in visits to its food pantries and immediate needs programs. With food prices at an all-time high, many families who receive SNAP were already visiting pantries to stretch their food budgets. Going forward, as more individuals lose eligibility and household budgets tighten, they will be turning to Catholic Charities to do more than fill in the gaps.

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Characteristics of SNAP Households: Fiscal Year 2023, published April 2025.

2. *ibid.*

3. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP: State by State Data, Fact Sheets, and Resources, published January 2025.



Visitors and volunteers in front of a selection of canned foods at Catholic Charities' Casa Catalina food pantry.

Casa Catalina continues the tradition of welcoming all in Back of the Yards

// **T**his has always been a landing place for people coming to the city," says Joe Gonzales about Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood where he serves as a volunteer at Catholic Charities' Casa Catalina food pantry.

Joe knows this because it's his story, too. He grew up in the neighborhood. When his circumstances improved, he, like generations before him, moved away ... but not so far that he couldn't come back to serve every week at the pantry and attend mass at Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel (part of St. Oscar Romero parish) nearby.

Many people associate Back of the Yards with its depiction in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which exposed the horrific conditions at the nearby stockyards in the early 1900s. Less known, however, is that 60 years later, the neighborhood was lauded

by urbanist Jane Jacobs as an example of how residents join together to advocate and care for each other. This tradition continues today.

'A place where people meet as community'

The blocks surrounding Casa Catalina are some of the poorest in Chicago. In the last few years, the Southwest side neighborhood has taken in thousands of new immigrants, this time from South and Central America.

In her writing on what makes communities vibrant, Jacobs argued that strangers foster trust with each other through countless casual public interactions. Over time, this trust comes to serve as a vital resource in periods of personal or community need.

Neighborhood resident and pantry visitor Alicia Ibarra knows this kind of trust. Alicia has lived in Back of the Yards since she immigrated to the

U.S. with her family in the 1970s. "There is such a warm fabric of support [here]. We keep an eye on each other and each other's kids."

Casa Catalina is an important part of this fabric, she says. "Everybody goes there. It is a place where people meet as community."

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Pictured: Elizabeth Rodriguez, Casa Catalina's Pantry Manager. "People from so many different cultures come here. If someone is unfamiliar with a particular food, I tell my team to share how they would prepare it themselves," she says.



Food moves quickly. Whenever the stream of visitors slows down, volunteers work in concert to restock the shelves, freezers, and refrigerators. Amelia (pictured in an orange shirt) has been a volunteer for years and is known by many of the visitors. She visits the pantry herself to get food for her family.

When people visit the pantry, they are accompanied by a volunteer who ensures they understand their choices and receive the food to which they are entitled.

Volunteer Maria (wearing a green shirt) is offering a visitor, Raul, the choice of sandwich bread or bagels. David injured his leg a year ago. Now in a wheelchair, he hasn't been able to work since. He lives alone and has no family in the area.

Every inch of the space is put to use. With little-to-no storage, workstations were removed to make room to receive, sort, and stage food.

In addition to food, Casa Catalina offers diapers through Catholic Charities' Diaper Depot and hygiene kits, when they are available.

Visitors are asked to leave their carts and strollers on the sidewalk (where they are watched by a volunteer). Once inside, they are given a shopping cart pre-loaded with shopping bags. This small adjustment reduces congestion and keeps lines running smoothly.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

After the morning rush

Every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, the team at Casa Catalina helps families choose food to cover about two days' worth of meals for the people in their household. Families can visit once a month.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the pantry has two shifts: the first from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m., and the second from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Visitors are lined up before the doors open (sometimes around the block).

Even though it occupies an important position in the community, Casa Catalina's facilities are modest. Its footprint is similar to a typical 7-Eleven store. Still, it offers a robust selection of food in every major category (e.g., produce, dairy, bakery, meat, shelf-stable goods, beverages) that exceeds what you would find in a store of its size.

Elizabeth Rodriguez, Pantry Manager, has a background in retail management.

Through small, thoughtful changes, she has micro-engineered pantry operations to move visitors through as quickly as possible while still providing a respectful, personalized experience. "We consider everyone who comes here a customer. We want them to come back for as long as they need," she says.



“Every community should have a Casa Catalina. We look out for each other. We don’t want anybody to go hungry,” says Alicia Ibarra, Back of the Yards resident and pantry visitor (pictured).

(continued from page 5)

It has this significance, she says, because Catholic Charities welcomes everyone. “Sometimes, people get judged by the way they are dressed or because of their religion. They don’t do that at Catalina.”

Small connections add up

At Casa Catalina, one can witness the casual interactions Jacobs describes. People waiting in line talk about finding work. A mother gets information about a back-to-school event. A visitor looking for baby formula learns about

WIC benefits for moms and babies and Catholic Charities’ WIC food stores.

Elizabeth Rodriguez, Casa Catalina’s Site Manager, attests to this. “In the immigrant community, information is often shared by word-of-mouth.”

Case in point: This summer, when the pantry was distributing \$25 vouchers to seniors to shop at farmers markets, people were lined up around the block before the doors opened at 8 a.m.

Elizabeth hadn’t done more to advertise the event other than put up a flyer.

Word-of-mouth is also how people find out about Casa Catalina in the first place, says Elizabeth, noting that she’s heard stories of visitors being stopped on the street by people who need help but don’t understand how food relief works.

As Alicia says, “When I do my walks in the morning, you see where people sleep — even when they are dressed nice, you see they are homeless. I know they probably are hungry. I’ll say to them, ‘Do you know about Casa Catalina?’”

Meals bring couples together

Gerry Cushing and John Schintgen | Volunteers, Lake County Senior Community Meals

Gerry Cushing and John Schintgen have Catholic Charities to thank for bringing them together. They've been engaged for seven years, and although they don't plan to marry, they are committed to one another and to Catholic Charities, where they have served as volunteers for more than nine years.

"It keeps us active," says Gerry, 83, of volunteering for Catholic Charities. "You

meet new friends, that's what I like about it. It's always something new."

Every month at senior community meals in Lake County, the couple greets more than 150 guests as they arrive for the luncheon, collecting the suggested \$7 donation.

"Some guests say, 'I don't have it,' or 'Sorry, I forgot it,' and we say, 'Don't worry about it, enjoy your meal. That's what we're here for. If you can give more

next time, do it," Gerry says. "We want them to come in and enjoy."

John, 87, has been coming to senior community meals for 20 years. "I enjoy the people, and it's important to keep yourself going and busy," he says.



So much more than a hot meal

Catholic Charities' weekday meal deliveries double as well-being checks and opportunities for connection

On one of the hottest days of the year, Catholic Charities' driver Ramiro Gonzalez Avila knocks on the doors of seniors living in Lake County — some without air conditioning — and delivers a smile and a nutritious meal.

Some on his route are private, extending their hands from behind their apartment door to accept the meal or stepping into the hallway and closing the door behind them. But others open their doors wide, welcoming Ramiro's company.

"He's a great conversationalist. I look forward to seeing him every morning," says Erma, 64, who started receiving meals in her Waukegan home six months ago.

A Day with Ramiro

Ramiro has been a driver for the senior home-delivered meals program for 12 years.

He starts his day at 8:30 a.m., loading up his truck with enough meals for the 54 seniors he visits Monday through Friday. Many of them are in their 80s and 90s, although he does serve some younger individuals who have disabilities and live on fixed incomes.

Ramiro travels to apartments in Waukegan and Zion, mobile homes in Beach Park, and to some areas in North Chicago. He never knows what he will encounter each day on his route, but he brings his smile to everyone he meets.

"They're like family," Ramiro says of the seniors he serves. "For some people, I'm the only person they see — no daughters or sons visiting for months. That's why, every day, they're so happy to see me. We talk about the weather, we talk about some sickness they have, but the main thing is, I ask, 'Are you OK?'"

'It's an eye-opener'

Ramiro and his fellow drivers for Catholic Charities' senior home-delivered meals program deliver so much more than a hot meal five days a week. They conduct well-being checks and brighten the days of the more than 800 adults ages 60 and older whom they serve every weekday in Lake County.

"You need to have a relationship with the people we serve. We see them. If they need us, we're here for them."

— **Brenda Meyer**, Director of Senior Meals and Nutrition in Lake County

"Sometimes the seniors we serve don't have family, friends, or the right resources," says Valery Hernandez, Program Manager of

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“With seniors being on fixed incomes and medication costs so high, if you don’t get the right balance, it can put you behind the eight ball.”

— Beverly

Beverly is on a fixed income and a strict diet. The former taxi driver has been relying on Catholic Charities’ home-delivered meals for the last two years. Beverly watches what she eats because she has diabetes. She has lost 95 pounds in the last 16 months and says the meals helped her achieve this.



“If I have an emergency, he’d be the person I call.”

— Rafaela

Rafaela was discharged from a nursing home last October and now lives independently in a small apartment. “He’s very kind,” Rafaela says through tears, about Catholic Charities driver Ramiro Gonzalez Avila. “I’m having a hard time with money, and it helps a lot.”



“To have somebody to chat with, smile, laugh and talk with, it’s a great thing. I look forward to hearing that beep and coming out to just say hello.”

— Erma

After her mother passed, Erma moved in with her nephew. She shares the veggies and fruit from her home-delivered meals with her four-year-old niece, whom she babysits often. “They’re good meals, they last, it’s enough for two meals a day. It comes in handy.”



“It’s important that he checks on me. When he knocks and sees me sitting on the couch, he knows I’m still alive.”

— Beulah

The only high school graduate of 12 children, Beulah moved from Mississippi to Chicago in the 1960s. Months after graduating with a master’s degree in healthcare, she suffered a heart attack and could no longer work. A mother of two children, Beulah lost her son to gun violence in 2008. She is now helping raise her 18-month-old great grandson.

Community Food Programs

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Nutrition for Senior Meals in Lake County. “Sometimes when the driver makes a delivery, he may be the only person they see in weeks. This gets them out of their shell and gets them to know the driver.”

“It’s also a wellness check,” Valery says. “The driver looks into the house, sees the living conditions, and reports back to us. We get in touch with the senior to see if there are other resources they need.”

One hot day this past June, a driver found her client who suffered from

dementia wandering alone two blocks from home and guided the client safely home.

“There’s so many different limbs to this program, it’s an eye opener,” says Brenda Meyer, Director of Senior Meals and Nutrition in Lake County. “It sounds easy, but you need to have a relationship with the people we serve. We see them. If they need us, we’re here for them.”

Serving with compassion

There have been times when Ramiro found seniors on the floor. He even found a man once who had passed

away in his favorite chair. “He was so kind,” Ramiro says, “he’d give me a donut and coffee.”

Many of those Ramiro serves plan their days around his visit and appreciate his consistency and the predictability of his schedule.

Ramiro reminds his seniors at the end of the week, “Today is Friday, don’t wait for me tomorrow,” but they forget,” he says.

And then Ramiro loads up his truck again that next Monday, bringing his winning smile to 54 doors.



PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

Lake County Home-Delivered Meals

Referrals: Individuals are referred by Catholic Charities' Care Coordination Unit in Lake County. They must meet certain qualifications, including being unable to grocery shop or get to a food pantry by themselves.

Nutrition: Participants are screened for their nutrition

needs, including their diet, if they eat alone, and if they have mouth or tooth problems that make it difficult to eat.

Menu: Every day, participants receive one hot meal and a cold lunch bag with milk and salad and either bread and butter or juice and a vanilla wafer. Menus are approved by

a registered dietitian. Twice a year, participants receive a shelf-stable food box with five complete meals, soups, and juice boxes.

Delivery: Meals are delivered to more than 800 homes every weekday by 24 Catholic Charities drivers and a team of 75 volunteers.

How You Can Help: To learn more about volunteering with the Senior Home-Delivered Meals program, contact Patricia Fuller, Associate Director of Volunteer Engagement for Lake County, at pfuller@catholiccharities.net.

Featured article

How are we, as people of faith, called to respond to all the people we meet on the street?



The face of need feels closer these days — at our grocery stores, on our sidewalks, in our parks. It seems that everywhere we turn, we see more people who are struggling and more charities looking for donations. The sheer volume often feels overwhelming. As Catholics, we are called to be present and respond with compassion and generosity. But how? Where do we begin?

It all starts with Matthew 22: Love your neighbor

When Jesus was asked by a Pharisee how to make sense of the vast number of Biblical teachings, He responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul ... This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Interestingly, Jesus’s answer was not a call to action about *what to do*. It was, and is, a call to our hearts and to our minds about *how to be*.

With this commandment, Jesus does not ask us to solve or erase all the pain we see on the street around us. He beckons us instead to simply respond with love.

It is not our human calling to “solve” the problem of poverty. Even Jesus did not solve it: “The poor will always be with you” (Matthew 26:11). The roots of poverty and inequity are embedded within generations of human sin, and we don’t get to solve sin.

The love Jesus calls us to is deeper: it is to learn to love our neighbor with our whole hearts. And, through that love, thoughtfully respond to the pain and need we encounter.

Three guideposts for growing in love for our neighbor

Just as learning to love God is a lifelong journey, so too is the journey of truly loving our neighbor. It is a spiritual knowing that only strengthens with time as we commit to growing closer to the heart of Jesus, as we ask Him to teach us how to be. Fortunately, there are many writings and tools within our faith to help us on this journey. Consider these three:

The practice of seeing, acknowledging, and praying for our neighbors

It can become easy to pass people by on the street, to become inured to the need we see. But we all long to be seen, recognized, treated with dignity. As people of faith, it is important that we never stop seeking to see, looking



Just as learning to love God is a lifelong journey, so, too, is the journey to truly loving our neighbor.

into the eyes of each person we meet and greeting them with warmth and joy. After encountering someone, we can find consolation in pausing to say, ‘Hello, Jesus. Thank you,’ and offering a prayer for their well-being.

The practice of face-to-face generosity

Giving alms to those in need has a long spiritual tradition. When someone is begging, they are in need in some way. Charity does not require that we give to everyone, but neither are we to harden our hearts and give to no one. We can and should use our judgment about to whom we respond.

One way to cultivate this habit of charity is to set aside a fixed number of \$1, \$5, \$10, or \$20 bills each month (depending on our means) that we commit to giving away when we meet a person or family who touches our heart.

Beyond cash, we can:

- Carry water bottles and nutrition bars in our cars to hand out at stoplights
- Carry \$5, \$10, or \$25 gift cards from grocery stores, Walmart, or Target
- ... or carry Chicago Shares vouchers for people to redeem for food (available to purchase at select churches or chicagoshares.org)

After distributing your monthly “budget,” you can rest knowing you’ve answered Jesus’ call with generosity and be ready to start afresh next month.

The discipline of donating regularly to organizations that address need at scale

The Old Testament teaches the practice of tithing or giving away a certain percentage of one’s income each year. Our regular donations

are critical not only to our parishes, but to enabling other mission-driven organizations to sustain our region’s safety net, including the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Charities, and the Greater Chicago Food Depository. This helps them provide vital services and resources to thousands of people in need every day.

Disciplined giving may not always “feel” rewarding, but as Jesus reminds us, loving our neighbors is not about how we feel. It is about the discipline of regularly offering up the fruits of our labors to God, thereby loving God with all our hearts and all our souls.

Loaves and Fishes

Growing our partnerships in service

People come to community meals at Catholic Charities' St. Vincent Center for all sorts of reasons — hunger, warmth, fellowship — but one often overlooked reason is that many of the guests don't have access to facilities to cook a meal for themselves.

Catholic Charities estimates most guests at its downtown meals are unhoused. "When considering how to support their basic needs, we knew food from a traditional food pantry that needed to be prepared wasn't sufficient," says Kelsey Rodriguez, Catholic Charities' Director of Volunteer Engagement. This guided the design of Loaves and Fishes, a new ministry offering grab-and-go sack lunches at the St. Vincent Center. "They are available to everyone, just like our community meals," she says.

Building on a tradition

"There is a long tradition of volunteers making lunches for Catholic Charities," says Kelsey. "The intent of Loaves and Fishes is to scale this to serve even more."

Every week, Kelsey works with volunteer groups to assemble and package around 250 lunches. "Loaves and Fishes has expanded who is able to volunteer with us," says Kelsey, noting that groups appreciate the flexibility

around when and where the service is undertaken.

This was the case for members of the University Club, which recently hosted Loaves and Fishes on its premises. "Club members, especially the younger generation, really want to give back," says Shalu Mirza, chair of its volunteer committee. "We were excited to have the opportunity to partner with Catholic Charities."

Deepening partnerships

The new ministry has also deepened relationships with long-time partners like Northern Trust, which has supported Catholic Charities for decades. Audri Williams, Vice President, Global Volunteerism, explains, "Volunteering is integral to Northern Trust's culture. Giving back to the communities where we live and work is important to our employees."

In addition to serving at Catholic Charities' community meals, Northern Trust team members view Loaves and Fishes as another way to help their neighbors. "Knowing someone we encounter on the street may benefit from the sandwiches we've made adds to the Loaves and Fishes experience," she says. "It's meaningful to know our service has an immediate impact."



Pictured: Northern Trust team members pack grab-and-go lunches for Loaves and Fishes. "Catholic Charities' programs touch so many people, which is one reason our employees want to be involved," says Audri Williams, Northern Trust Vice President, Global Volunteerism.

What to know about volunteering with Loaves and Fishes

Perfect for: Groups of 10 to 30 volunteers, including businesses, schools, parishes, and other service organizations. Children ages 10 and up may join with adult supervision.

Where: Lunches can be assembled off site or at Catholic Charities' centers in downtown Chicago and Round Lake.

Sign up: To learn more or to schedule, email volunteer@catholiccharities.net.

Loyola University campus at dusk

Photo by Mary D., a participating artist in After Supper Visions. Although she has fond memories of playing with her grandfather's camera when she was a child, Mary had no formal photography experience before starting the program. Now, she goes out every day to photograph, sometimes meeting up with other participants to explore new views of the city.

After Supper Visions

Inviting our unhoused guests to share their stories

For more than 20 years, amateur and professional photographers alike have gathered on Tuesday afternoons at Catholic Charities to talk about their art in the After Supper Visions program.

At a recent session, one artist, Denis, was sharing a series of photos he had taken of an iron railing. After showing a photo of the railing in context, he shared another, this time zoomed in on a squirrel figurine atop one of the balusters. Denis was delighted he had spotted the whimsical detail on something most people pass by without noticing.

Looking at things in a new way

In many ways, seeing something that is often overlooked or taken for granted is what After Supper Visions is all about — not just in photography, but also for the people behind the camera. This is because many participants are unhoused or have been in the past.

On Tuesday afternoons, though, their living situations are of no importance. “When we’re in the classroom, we are photographers,” says Linda Roxe, a long-time volunteer teaching artist.

“We want to hear why you were drawn to a particular subject or what you were hoping to communicate in your photo,” says Linda.

Art to bring people together

After Supper Visions’ model has evolved over the years. Jody O’Connor, one of its founders, explains, “Originally, we wanted people to share their lives, so a lot of photos were taken under viaducts or in run-down living quarters.”

Now, however, photographers are encouraged to take pictures of whatever they want, especially what they find beautiful or striking. “When I first started volunteering, I thought more about our differences than our similarities. But now, I have come to realize how we all have hearts and eyes to see what is around us,” says Jody.

Teaching artist Natalie Battaglia says After Supper Visions has invigorated her own professional photography practice. “I am definitely more inspired,” she says. “Setting time aside every week to talk about photography has helped me look at things differently.”

After class, program participants head down the hall to continue their discussion at Catholic Charities’ Sister Joyce Dura, O.S.F. Supper program. They also meet up outside class to shoot. This was the case when two photographers, Mary and Vernon, went to photograph Buckingham Fountain. They arrived early and waited for the sky and sun to align. Says Vernon, “If you allow the moment to present itself, you’ll see the universe open up.”

Interested in sharing your creative passion? Join Catholic Charities in accompanying our neighbors through art!

Catholic Charities is seeking volunteer teaching artists to share their artistic talents with guests of its community meals programs. To learn more, contact Kelsey Rodriguez of the Volunteer Engagement team at krodriguez@catholiccharities.net.

Reflections on our faith

As Catholics, our calling to be present to the need before us stands apart from geopolitical interests and cultural discord, especially now, as Pope Leo has said, when the “logic of exclusion seems to dominate.” Catholic Charities asked religious leaders how their faith is focusing them in their work.



Reverend Gary Graf

Pastor, Our Lady of the Heights
Chicago Heights

I agree with Pope Leo that the logic of exclusion is indeed dominating public discourse. When this occurs, the expectation in most serious social, political, and religious matters is that someone, or oftentimes some group, is excluded.

Someone must be right and the other wrong. One must be on one or the other side of the argument. The end result almost always directly contradicts what we, as Catholic leaders, teach our children about conflict resolution. We become hard and condemning of the person and soft on the issue, seemingly incapable of mutual healthy dialogue that leads to a solution.

Perhaps the most polarizing of all issues facing our nation and consuming our national discourse at this present time is immigration. However, it is not an issue, it is a person, many persons — indeed, other than Native Americans, it is all of us.

When the starting point of the conversation involves all of us, there is no logic in exclusion. Suddenly, we find ourselves in the middle and not taking sides. We are not hard on the person but rather the issue. Our desire is no longer that one lose so the other can win, but rather, as was once described to me, “a solution that no one is going to like but the majority will accept.”



Sister Christin Tomy, OP

University Minister, Community Life & Pastoral Care
Dominican University

My religious community, the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, is fond of saying: *at the heart of ministry is relationship*. It sounds so simple! But in a society increasingly shaped by individualism, exclusion, and oppressive power, it is a radical notion.

Remembering that *relationship* — with God, with others, and with creation — is at the heart of not only my ministry, but my entire life, keeps me grounded. It reminds me that I was created not for self-sufficiency, but for interdependence. It cautions me not to pursue efficacy and success as ends in themselves, but as means to living out the Gospel faithfully.

It also reminds me that needing other people is not a weakness, but an invitation to spiritual growth. As Saint Catherine of Siena writes in her *Dialogues*, God has given us different gifts and virtues precisely so that we would need to exercise mutual charity with one another. In other words, the receiving is as important as the giving!

It seems to me that now, more than ever, we are invited to turn toward one another, to embrace the dynamic give-and-take of the Christian life and, above all, to remember our utter dependence on God.

Recent and upcoming events

2025 Charities Golf Classic

Monday, July 14, 2025

Knollwood Club, Lake Forest
Shoreacres, Lake Bluff



This year's Charities Golf Classic raised more than \$525,000! Thank you to everyone who planned, participated, sponsored, donated, and bid, especially event co-chairs, **John Cortesi, Matt Davis, Tim Finnegan, and Fred Marks.**

Art of Caring

Friday, September 26, 2025

Knollwood Club, Lake Forest



NEW AUTUMN DATE — Join event chair **Thérèse McCall O'Sullivan and the Catholic Charities Women's Board of Lake County** at the 33rd annual Art of Caring to support Catholic Charities' programs in Lake County.

Fall Partner Gathering

Tuesday, September 30, 2025

St. Thomas the Apostle, Hyde Park



Join us to learn more about our work across Chicago and why partners are essential to advancing our mission.

Visions of My Life: Annual Photo Exhibit

Friday, October 3, 2025

Catholic Charities
St. Vincent Center, Chicago



AFTER SUPPER VISIONS

Visit the annual exhibit of photographs by participants in the After Supper Visions photography program. Meet the artists, learn about their creative process, and support their work. See *story on page 17* to learn more about this program.

Fall Mass & Mission

Sunday, October 19, 2025

St. Teresa of Avila Parish, Lincoln Park



Celebrate Mass and then join Catholic Charities program leaders to learn about their work, who they serve, and what they are seeing in the field.

Glow of Hope Brunch

Sunday, November 2, 2025

Four Seasons, Chicago



HOUSE OF
THE GOOD
SHEPHERD

The Women's Board of The House of the Good Shepherd invites you to this beloved annual gathering in support of the domestic violence shelter's programs.

SAVE THE DATE

56th annual
**Spirit of
Saint Nicholas Ball**

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2025
COCKTAILS, 6:30PM
DINNER, 8:00PM

at the
HILTON CHICAGO
720 S. MICHIGAN AVENUE
CHICAGO

Join 2025 Chaircouple
Debbie & Quinn Stepan
and Vice Chaircouple
Patrick & Jenny Nicole Fisher
to kick off the holiday season
with cocktails, dinner,
and live entertainment!

*All proceeds support
Catholic Charities*

To learn more about, purchase tickets, and view photos from gatherings, visit catholiccharities.net/attend-an-event or scan the QR code below.



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

Ways to give

Donate online, or by phone or mail. Secure donations can be made by visiting 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.

Be part of the 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 for more information.

Questions? Contact our Donor Relations team at (312) 948-6864, donor.relations@catholiccharities.net, or visit 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. 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.

To inquire about how you or your group can get involved, contact our Volunteer Engagement Team:

For opportunities in Cook County

Kelsey Rodriguez at krodriguez@catholiccharities.net

For opportunities in Lake County

Patricia Fuller at pfuller@catholiccharities.net

A photograph of Sharon Holmes, a Black woman with short dark hair, smiling and standing outdoors. She is wearing a white long-sleeved top tied at the waist over a grey and white striped dress. In the background, there is a brick building and several people, some of whom are blurred, suggesting a busy outdoor setting like a food pantry.

Sharon Holmes outside Catholic Charities' Casa Catalina food pantry. "There's a certain way we should respond and act when we are dealing with our neighbors," she says, "it makes us humans."

Answering the Call to Serve

"We give out food with respect and dignity; otherwise, there's no purpose, reason, or relationship going on."

Sharon Holmes | Director, Food Pantries

Sharon Holmes recently celebrated her 25-year work anniversary with Catholic Charities. Today, she is the Director of Food Pantries and manages a team of nearly 50 staff and volunteers, but her first job with the organization was as a driver, shepherding mothers who were in substance abuse recovery to appointments and other errands.

Even though she felt compassion for the mothers she served, it was when she started working at Catholic Charities' Saint Sabina Social Service Center that Sharon realized she was in the right

place. "Before, this was just a job, but at Saint Sabina, I learned why I was here. I realized this is what I want to do. It felt like it was divine purpose."

With the support of her mentor, Sharon Tillmon, she set out to learn everything she could about the center's programs, "I worked in the pantry, helped with financial assistance, processed SNAP applications ... I wanted to wear all the hats," she says.

She asked a lot of questions, listened, and prayed constantly. "I started to understand what people were

experiencing and how I could help them learn and grow."

In the years since, Sharon has gone on to manage programs across Cook and Lake counties. But no matter the role, she refuses to compromise on her purpose. "When I visit our pantries, I roll up my sleeves and get to work alongside my team to show that we do this work with smiles and gratitude. I tell them, 'How does it make you feel to give out a bag of food to someone? Our visitors help us just as much as we help them.'"



721 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60654

Scan the QR code or visit catholiccharities.net to support our vital work

Live your faith in the world

The mission of Catholic Charities is brought to life through the prayers, service, and financial support of thousands of individuals every year.

All are welcome to join us in our witness of hope and mercy!

