

A Publication of **Catholic Charities** of the Archdiocese of Chicago

Delivering food curbside to those in need

Seventy-nine-year-old Joseph doesn't have a car and struggles to walk, but he makes it a priority to visit the new Catholic Charities Curbside Pantry to shop for food that lasts him up to two weeks.

With the support of a generous donor, Catholic Charities launched its first mobile food pantry truck to increase access to nutritious food and essential goods. The Curbside Pantry made its first stop in south suburban Park Forest on Oct. 16, 2025, serving more than 90 Park Forest families that day. In partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the Curbside Pantry offers visitors milk, eggs, fresh fruits and vegetables, bread, frozen chicken and fish, canned foods, juices, cereal, rice, pasta, beans, and peanut butter. There is no cost for residents to use the food pantry.

Catholic Charities partnered with Victory Christian International Ministries which provides its parking lot, washroom facilities, and office space for use by staff, volunteers, visitors, and the case management team every Thursday. Catholic Charities is piloting the Curbside Pantry in Park Forest and is looking to expand to other communities in need.



Photo by Kathleen Hinkel
Chanda shops for her family at the Curbside Pantry in Park Forest and shares with her neighbors.

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Greetings from the Editor

ELIZABETH OWENS-SCHIELE

Wishing each of you a new year filled with happiness and good health!

In this issue, you'll read about our new Curbside Pantry and the ways our food pantries are serving those who are hungry. Learn how Chicago social service agencies are providing a safety net to those in need in a recent World Day of the Poor panel discussion hosted by Catholic Charities. Read the stories of adoptees served by St. Vincent's Orphanage as infants and now by our Post-Adoption services as they connected with their peers at our annual Homecoming Mass and Reunion. Explore the Words for the Spirit by Sister Julia Walsh and celebrate the success of the daughter of a domestic violence survivor served by Catholic Charities who recently graduated from her dream school.

Be challenged by our "ex-tra" special Word Search this issue and treat yourself to some sweet Valentine's Day cupcakes for that special day in February. Stay warm!

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SPECIAL DATES

January 2026

Birthstone: **Garnet**

Flower: **Carnation and the Snowdrop**

- 1/1** New Year's Day
- 1/19** Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February 2026

Birthstone: **Amethyst**

Flower: **Violet, Primrose, and Iris**

- 2/2** Groundhog Day
- 2/12** Abraham Lincoln's Birthday
- 2/14** Valentine's Day
- 2/16** President's Day and George Washington's Birthday

For more news and information about events, visit catholiccharities.net

Six ways to manage mental health

Making mental health a priority can help us age with greater joy, contentment, and purpose.

As we age, we encounter new challenges — such as retirement, loss of loved ones, or physical limitations — that can impact our emotional and psychological health. But with these challenges come opportunities for growth, resilience, and new ways to find joy and purpose. To help manage stress and anxiety and improve mental well-being, follow these six tips.

Seek treatment if you need it.

Up to 25% percent of adults age 65 and older are living with a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression. If you're experiencing lasting feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or anxiety, talk to your health care provider. They can connect you with a counselor, therapist, or psychiatrist who will evaluate your symptoms and provide a proper diagnosis and treatment. Many providers offer telemedicine — video or phone chat — which is a convenient and safe alternative to an in-person appointment.

Limit your media consumption.

According to a survey of therapists by Grow Therapy, 99.6% said that watching or reading the news can negatively affect mental health. While being aware of current events is important, it's vital to recognize how it affects your mood. If you're noticing you feel more anxious after consuming the news — it's a good idea to set limits.

Disaster Distress Helpline

Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to reach the Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH).

Engage in healthy activities.

- Get seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Do not use tobacco or vaping products.
- Consume no more than one alcoholic drink per day (or none, per doctor's instruction).
- Exercise your body and mind. Meditation, walking, gardening, and exercise classes are all beneficial to your mental health.

Take your medications on time, every day.

Whether you take prescription medications for a mental health or a chronic health condition, be sure to use all your medications as directed by your health care providers. Go to BenefitsCheckUp.org if you need help paying for your prescription medications.

Stick to regular routines.

Routines give our days structure and predictability. As much as possible, keep a routine for daily activities such as work, exercise, caring for grandchildren, etc.

Stay socially connected.

Having people to spend time with and talk to about our needs and feelings is vital for our mental health. If you don't have close friends or family members nearby, try branching out. Visit your local senior center, volunteer in your community, or see what adult education classes are available in your area. Places of faith are great places to meet like-minded people and find opportunities for group activities.

Reprinted with permission from The National Council on Aging, ncoa.org.

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Dial 988 (phone or text) to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Upcoming Events

Learn more or register for an event at:
catholiccharities.net/attend-an-event

D'Vine Affair
Sunday, February 1, 2026,
2 p.m.

Venue West, Chicago
Featuring 90 vintners and 250 wines and beers from around the world.

D'VINE
AFFAIR
2026

First Look for Charity
Friday, February 6, 2026,
7 p.m.

McCormick Place

Be the first to see Chicago's 2026 Auto Show by attending First Look for Charity, a black-tie event featuring cars, cocktails, and delicacies from some of Chicago's finest restaurants — benefiting Catholic Charities and 17 other nonprofit agencies.

CHICAGO ****
AUTO SHOW
First Look
for Charity

Feeding those who are hungry

Voice of Catholic Charities

SHARON HOLMES

Director of Food Pantries,
Catholic Charities
of the Archdiocese of Chicago



When I started working at Catholic Charities, I realized I was in the right place at the right time. I discovered helping people is exactly what I wanted to do. It felt like it was divine purpose.

I knew I could make a difference in the lives of the people we were assisting in our social service centers and food pantries. It wasn't easy, but the blessing behind working for Catholic Charities is that I can speak about the goodness of God, how He manifests in my life, and how I use Him as my guide every day. I believe God has me at Catholic Charities' for a purpose and a reason: This is my season to be where he wants me to be to serve others.

Twenty-five years later, I'm celebrating a work anniversary with Catholic Charities and continuing the mission, and my passion: To serve people in need with compassion.

For the last five years, I've served as Director of Food Pantries, managing 50 volunteers and staff. Last year, Catholic Charities food pantries distributed food to nearly 53,000 people in 20,000 households in both Cook and Lake counties.

I've worked in the pantries, helped people access financial assistance, processed applications, and worn all the hats. Many of the people who visit our pantries not only want to feed their families, but they may need clothing and rental, utility, or transportation assistance. I understand what people are experiencing and how I can help them learn and grow.



Sharon Holmes assists a client at one of the Catholic Charities food pantries.

Photo by Kathleen Hinkel

I pride myself on making sure we have a welcoming environment when our guests visit our food pantries. When they walk through the door, they're graced with dignity as we greet them. We invite them to sit down and we ask, "What can we help you with?" We do our very best to try to make people feel encouraged, feel as if they belong, and not necessarily that they're being shunned because they need help.

We've extended our reach to those in need with the launch of our new Curbside Pantry in South Suburban Cook County. It's a food pantry on wheels. Guests are greeted by a Catholic Charities' team member, and a personal shopper — usually one of our dedicated volunteers — who assists with picking out food, fresh produce, and other non-food items they may need.

We're going into communities where there is food insecurity and not enough affordable grocery options. Park Forest is one of those communities, and we are also planning to bring our Curbside Pantry into Robbins. We want to make sure people can still receive food when grocery stores are miles away.

Our communities are hurting, and many will be impacted by cuts in SNAP and Medicaid. We're here so that folks are not going hungry and know they can come to a safe establishment to meet their needs.

That's what my ministry is all about: To continue to fight to make sure we have what we need in these communities so that no one is wondering where their next meal is going to come from.

Catholic Charities relies greatly on volunteers to staff our pantries, and food and financial donations to keep our shelves stocked. I welcome you to consider sponsoring a food drive in your church or school, making a financial contribution, or joining our team of volunteers.

Please visit ccofchicagovolunteer.com for more information. We'd love to have you join us — help us witness a message of mercy and hope to people in need.

Sharon Holmes is the Director of Food Pantries for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

† ST. JUDE NOVENA

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved, and preserved throughout the world, now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on us; St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us; St. Jude, helper of the hopeless, pray for us

CEL

The Novena is a nine-day devotion. Say the prayer nine times a day. If you would like to acknowledge your gratitude for its influence in your request, contact Keenager News at keenager@catholiccharities.net and we will include your initials in the publication of this Novena. No payment required.

How to be joyful about change in the new year

Words for the Spirit

SISTER JULIA WALSH
Franciscan Sister
of Perpetual Adoration



When I am out for walks in my neighborhood, I notice the noise and the dust. In my neighborhood, old buildings are being torn down and new buildings are being constructed. I see trucks hauling away so much waste. It’s a hospital campus that’s shifting around me, and I should be grateful to live near quality medical care. But I’ll be honest, I don’t like the change. I feel quite sad. And the new buildings don’t always fill me with hope or excitement, either.

As we begin the year 2026, we are offered a chance to reflect on the changes that shape our human experience. It’s not just the destruction and rebuilding of neighborhoods, either. In the past year, you have likely confronted changes to your body, mind, living circumstances, family, friendships, neighborhood, Church, and nation. It can be difficult to keep up with changes in technology, social concerns, and news. Plus, headlines about

climate change and disasters remind us that even the planet is unsteady. “The only constant is change” says the adage and God knows we’re all becoming pros at going through changes.

Yet, because of how our human brains work, experience doesn’t actually make it easier for us to deal with change. From infancy, the human mind seeks out patterns and categories to understand, so many people are most comfortable when things are familiar and predictable. Even if a change is expected, such as a change in the calendar or the experience of getting older, we can often feel disturbed, uncomfortable, or disoriented as we adjust. Sometimes changes stir up fear, grief, and loss. It can be very tough to accept the new realities.

As we cope with change, we are given choices about how to respond. We can pause and pray with the feelings, allowing the storms of emotion to pass through us. We can consider the pros and cons of what’s new and find ways to pray with the new reality.

When change is especially overwhelming, we are advised to remember that practicing gratitude has a positive impact on our brain health. No matter how difficult a change may be, if we are able to name what we are grateful for, we are helping our minds regulate the sympathetic nervous system, boost serotonin, and activate the production of dopamine. All this helps improve our mood and can calm the storm of difficult

emotions such as fear and grief.

In his book *The Dance of Life*, spiritual teacher and author Father Henri Nouwen admits that it took him some time to learn that gratitude is a spiritual practice that can be lived as a discipline versus a spontaneous feeling in response to a positive situation. “The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy,” Nouwen wrote.

Many people create resolutions and goals for themselves at the start of a new year. Yet, when we’re going through so many changes, we may want to start by looking back at the blessings. Let’s pause in the present moment to consider how we’re grateful. Then, we’ll likely start to feel better and grow to accept what’s new and different: new buildings, new health situations, new year. We may even find ourselves celebrating and filled with joy.

Julia Walsh is a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration based in Wisconsin. A storyteller, poet, and community-builder, her ministry experience includes teaching, retreat facilitation, preaching, spiritual accompaniment, justice advocacy, and caring for people who are unhoused and incarcerated. Sister Julia is the author of two books including, For Love of the Broken Body: A Spiritual Memoir and is the founder of Messy Jesus Business, a website and podcast that explores modern Christianity.

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World Day of the Poor discussion offers hope for the future

Inspiring hope and casting a wide safety net to support our neighbors in need was the message from leaders of four of Chicago's largest social service providers who met for a panel discussion hosted by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Sally Blount, CEO of Catholic Charities, moderated the Nov. 12, 2025, event that coincided with Pope Leo XIV's World Day of the Poor. Kate Maehr, Executive Director and CEO, Greater Chicago Food Depository; Ric Estrada, CEO, Metropolitan Family Services; and Josh Hale, President and CEO, Big Shoulders Fund, discussed the status of the safety net each of these organizations provide at a time when federal funding is declining and the need is as high as ever. Leaders also emphasized that now is the time to speak up, engage, advocate, volunteer, and donate to support our neighbors in need. More than 130 guests attended the event held at Loyola University's Schreiber Center.

Sally launched the discussion with some sobering statistics about poverty — 40% of U.S. households have an income of less than \$48,000 and poverty in Chicago sits at 17%, compared to the national average of 12%. Poverty, she said, disproportionately impacts seniors who live alone, Black and Latino households, and those led by single mothers.

An estimated 100 million people in the U.S. — one out of three people — participate in government safety net programs, she said, which make up 90% of the safety net supporting these neighbors in need. The extended family safety net of family and friends helps with temporary housing, finances, and childcare, while charitable safety nets — including these social service providers — work to address the gaps.



(From left) Kate Maehr, Executive Director and CEO, Greater Chicago Food Depository; Josh Hale, President and CEO, Big Shoulders Fund; Ric Estrada, CEO, Metropolitan Family Services; and Sally Blount, CEO, Catholic Charities, gathered for a panel discussion for Pope Leo XIV's World Day of the Poor.

"Together, we serve more than 1.5 million people a year across these four organizations," Sally said. "We distribute over \$750 million in goods and services, we partner with over 1,000 community organizations not to mention each other, and most of us rely heavily on government funding — 20% of our combined spend is privately funded."

All four social service providers recognized the importance of partnering with other organizations to fulfill their missions to serve those in need.

"As a silo, we're ineffective; as a collective, we are deeply impactful," said Josh Hale of the Big Shoulders Fund, which invests more than \$40 million annually in student scholarships and leadership development, academic programs, and operational improvements to support 72 Catholic schools in the Chicago region — many in communities that have experienced historic disinvestment.

One of those schools is St. Francis de Sales High School on Chicago's Southeast Side, which operates a food pantry for area residents. Principal Dr. Roni-Nicole Facen said 70 students work at the pantry, serving 10,000 pounds of food to over 1,000 families every week. Facen said it was important for her to attend the World Day of the Poor event.

"To have a room of like-minded people who believe in what you believe in, believe in families, believe in community — it's a room you want to be in, and then we figure out how to grow that mission," she said. Ric Estrada's

personal story of visiting a food pantry and making sure he "looks back in that rear view mirror," resonated with her.

"I see that kid going to the food pantry carrying my box," Roni-Nicole said. "That's always in the back of my mind. I'm serving that kid."

Ric said he was that kid heading to the food pantry as a seven-year-old living in Englewood, and later in a basement in Little Village. He's built upon that foundation to grow Metropolitan Family Services from a \$37 million organization to a \$210 million organization.

"There's more need and the need has shifted," Ric said. "There are other people out there that are suffering and need our help."

Metropolitan Family Services provides early education services, emotional wellness programs, domestic violence services, a Legal Aid Society, and violence prevention. He believes the main levers to success are partnerships and being advocates for communities and people in need.

Kate Maehr, CEO of the Greater Chicago Food Depository, which delivers food to over 800 partners, agrees. "We need to advocate for better education so that people graduate from institutions of learning, being able to be qualified for jobs that are available to them," Kate said. "We need to advocate for jobs that pay thriving wages. We need to advocate for a safety net that works."

'The babies are back'

"It's coming home," Julie McGue said when she attended the annual Homecoming Mass and Reunion for adoptees from the former St. Vincent's Orphanage, now home to Catholic Charities' headquarters. Julie, along with her twin sister, were adopted in 1959 from St. Vincent's Orphanage. She has authored three memoirs about her adoption journey and the support she's received from Catholic Charities along the way.

At times emotional, the Homecoming Mass and Reunion brought together many who left the doors of St. Vincent's as infants in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s only to return when they were connected by Lisa Francis of Catholic Charities Post-Adoption Services.

"Many of you are back here for the first time since your original stay," Lisa said at the start of the Homecoming Mass. "This is no ordinary building — this is St. Vincent's. It's always been filled with warmth and love. It is our hope, for the rest of the day, you feel that love."

The Catholic Charities Post-Adoption team walks with families, honoring its long history of providing programs and services to those who were adopted at Catholic Charities, including search and reunion services, mediated communications between birth and adoptive families, individual counseling, support group meetings, and the Homecoming Mass and Reunion celebrating adoptees.



Julie was among nearly 100 reunion guests Sunday, September 21, 2025, who included adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, and former childcare staff. Many guests traveled from across the country to reconnect with their birthplace. Catholic Charities staff and volunteers offered building tours and visits to the St. Louise de Marillac Chapel's baptismal font where they received their first sacrament, shared nostalgic photos, hosted a Homecoming Mass, a candlelit procession, and a reception where guests connected and shared stories of their journeys.

Founded in 1881 by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, the orphanage served women and children with the support of Catholic Charities' social services until it closed in 1972 when the state moved to a foster care model. St. Vincent's Infant and Maternity Hospital was a starting point for babies born to teen and single mothers, left as foundlings by its doors, or serving as temporary housing for children who could no longer be supported by their families due to war, poverty, and illness. With the capacity to serve 232 children and 35 mothers-to-be, St. Vincent's was a safe haven for many, serving "tens of thousands" of children over the decades, Lisa said. Its history is filled with memories of babies in buggies being trotted down Michigan Avenue and its halls filled with children's laughter and music from the young childcare technicians who cared for the children as if they were their very own.



Adoptee Stories

Joseph "Joey" Wood makes it a priority to leave his home state of Arkansas, where he served as a county judge, ran for Lieutenant Governor, and now is chairman of the Republican Party of Arkansas, to return to Chicago every year for the reunion at St. Vincent's to connect with other adoptees he considers "my brothers and sisters."

"This is what ties us, this is where we got our start," Joey said of St. Vincent's. He was found as a newborn in a Chicago apartment building and brought to St. Vincent's in 1965. He authored two children's books and a documentary about his journey, and with the help of a prominent forensic scientist and genealogist, he finally connected with his birth family just three years ago after a DNA test. He now attends reunions with his extended family and was joined by his birth sister at the Catholic Charities Homecoming Mass and Reunion.

"We share this common piece that sometimes our adoptive families don't understand," Joey said. "We have a fellowship to connect with others who get it, they get the journey you're on because they're on that journey, too."



Joseph "Joey" Wood returns annually for the reunion to connect with other adoptees.



"Plus, it's important for me to support Catholic Charities; they do the hard work," Joey said. "I spent a lot of time in public service and government, and as much as they attempt to do this work, they can't put the heart of it that Christ puts in it. This is a calling."

Julie witnessed the courageous compassion by the Catholic Charities Post-Adoption Services early on.

"The incredible compassion demonstrated by Catholic Charities didn't stop with their insisting on adopting my sister and me into the same family," Julie said. "Through its Post-Adoption Services, the organization continues to minister to me."

Julie began her search for her birth family soon after the state of Illinois made original birth certificates available to adoptees in 2011. She began participating in quarterly support groups led by Catholic Charities Post-Adoption Services and found strength in the peer support from other adoptees on the same journey.

"I got involved with Catholic Charities Post-Adoption services ... because I needed to understand why my birth mom didn't want to know us and my adoptive mom was not supporting me finding my birth mom," Julie said. Through the support groups, she discovered empathy

for the unique experience of birth parents, and for the challenges adoptive parents have in parenting.

"I wrote the book to not just tell my story, but all of the people here," Julie said of their shared journeys. "We've all struggled so hard to find our story, to make contact with birth relatives, it's important for me to be a spokesperson about it."

If you would like the support of the Catholic Charities Post-Adoption Services, call (312) 655-7088 or email Lisa Francis, LCSW, lfrancis@catholiccharities.net

To find out more about the history of St. Vincent's Orphanage, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/StVinAdopt>



Lisa Francis invited more than 100 adoptees to return to the former St. Vincent's Orphanage for the annual Homecoming Mass and Reunion.

Photos by Kathleen Hinkel

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“It’s important for me because I’m always helping the community and there’s always someone who needs something,” said Chanda, another pantry client. “I’m getting food for my family and whatever I can share with anyone else. The vegetables are very important. It’s been a nice new addition and I do appreciate it.”

Catholic Charities relies heavily on a team of volunteers to support the three-member pantry team with stocking, personal shopping, and accompanying visitors to their cars with groceries. In addition, volunteers, like Mary from Saint Veronica Parish in nearby Flossmoor, pick up groceries from the Curbside Pantry and deliver to area families and seniors who are homebound.

“My mom and I thought it was a good way to give back to the community,” Mary said. “I’m fortunate; I can go out and buy my groceries, but a lot of people are going through rough times and food is expensive. We deliver food from the pantry to families — some are elderly and can’t drive. There’s always something for everybody here.”



Catholic Charities case managers are also on site at the Curbside Pantry, so pantry visitors can be connected to other programs and resources if they have other needs, said Hilda Diaz Nieto, a Charities Resource Hub case manager who has served for more than 22 years. She’s witnessed people in need of assistance to pay for their gas, light, and water bills, car repairs, and clothing for their family. “People are scared, they don’t know where to go, and they don’t have many resources. That’s why we’re here.”

Eshanté, a first-time visitor to the Curbside Pantry, was glad she was there.

“Food is extremely high right now and I have [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)], but that doesn’t last long,” she said. “If you want to eat healthy and organic, it’s even more expensive. And the grocery store, the food is high and the store is very far, and I don’t have a car.”

Eshanté and her three-year-old son came for the fruits and vegetables but stayed to meet with Hilda.

“I haven’t used other Catholic Charities services, but I would like to,” Eshanté said.



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1244 E. 93rd Street
Chicago, IL 60619
(773) 721-0903

St. Ailbe Love Apartments
9240 S. Kimbark Avenue
Chicago, IL 60619
(773) 721-0903

Bernardin Manor
1700 Memorial Drive
Calumet City, IL 60409
(708) 832-1700

Matthew Manor
271 N. Albany Avenue
Chicago, IL 60612
(773) 533-0001

St. Francis Of Assisi Residence
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Palos Park, IL 60464
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Des Plaines, IL 60016
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Ozanam Village
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Chicago, IL 60612
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Northlake, IL 60164
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Lawrence Manor
21425 Southwick Drive
Matteson, IL 60443
(708) 481-1200

St. Vincent De Paul Residence
4040 N. Oakley Avenue
Chicago, IL 60618
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SHORT WAITLIST/INDEPENDENT SENIORS

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Applications may be obtained by calling the properties directly.

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www.catholiccharities.net/housing



Eligibility for residency will not be based on race, color, religion, national origin, marital status, age, familial status or disability.

A story of survival

When Kaitlyn and her family were living at the House of the Good Shepherd, she received a letter that would change her life.

"I was accepted into my dream school — the University of Chicago," said Kaitlyn, who just graduated last June after earning a full-ride, four-year scholarship to the prestigious university.

Her experience as the daughter of a domestic violence survivor and as a resident at the House of the Good Shepherd Ministry (HGS) inspired her to pursue a career in advocacy.

"I continue to expand my vision of accountability and justice in my pursuit of a legal career, and I hope to be as humanizing and present as the people I met at HGS," she said.

It was not the first shelter Kaitlyn and her family lived in, but it was the last.

Kaitlyn, her brother, and mother moved into Catholic Charities' House of the Good Shepherd in 2019. There, they found rhythm, community, and healing.

The House of the Good Shepherd Ministry welcomes survivors of violence and abuse regardless of race, ethnic origin, and religious affiliation. The recovery program empowers women and their children to leave behind the cycle of violent homes, step out of poverty, and embrace a future of hope and independence.

"The House of the Good Shepherd was the first time in a while my family had a space to call our own," Kaitlyn said during her remarks at the annual Glow of Hope fundraising brunch on November 2, 2025. "It was the conflux of communal and private space that provided the collective healing my family so desperately needed."

On-site case managers provided an empathetic and culturally competent ear during one-on-one counseling sessions. Kaitlyn's mom attended a variety of classes including English as a Second Language, completed her GED, and participated in healing circles.

"My mother was able to focus on different programming because she knew her kids were in good hands," Kaitlyn said. "HGS gave my brother and me space to focus on our studies."

"It was the conflux of communal and private space that provided the collective healing my family so desperately needed."

Escaping domestic violence and traveling to multiple shelters forced Kaitlyn and her brother to often transfer schools until they arrived at HGS.

"Attending one high school, just one, was a blessing made possible by the longer term stay and physical stability at HGS," Kaitlyn said. "I could end the school day knowing I was going home to a quiet environment where I could do my homework and submit college applications to institutions that, at the time, seemed out of reach to me."

Meanwhile, HGS connected her mother with employment and rapid re-housing, which assisted with rent payments until she was self-sufficient.

Kaitlyn recently joined a law firm in Berkeley, California, as an assistant with plans to eventually attend law school and "strive for a future without violence and stronger communities."

Members of the Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide gathered for an Evening of Remembrance on November 3, 2025, at St. John of the Cross Catholic Church in Western Springs and lit candles in honor of their lost loved ones.



Photo by Kathleen Hinkel

WORD SEARCH

Answers are found forward, backward, up, down, and diagonal

T E X C E S S U G O C D T E E X I T
E E G E X X E X P E L E E X X C O O
N X Z L U P C X I X A X N C P A K R
D P T H L I T L P P I P T I E V E T
L L E E T P E Z U E M A T T N A X T
Z O K O R K G T K D N N R E S T A E
S D X E Q N I H S I E D Z M E E L X
B E C M B O A U K T O F E H F E T E
E X T O L U D L P E X Q V U T C E R
E G E P M O V E X T R E M E N O X C
X O X X X E X P L O R E R E E E T I
E E K E P E X H O R T C A H H X R S
E X I L E R H T R E X P I R E P A E
I L I O G X E T Z E X P E R T E A Q
Z N X S V E A S E X H A L E R C T S
E X A C T Z D M S E X H I B I T H K

- ex ex ex
- EXACT

EXALT

EXAM

EXCAVATE

EXCEED

EXCEL

EXCERPT

EXCESS

EXCISE

EXCITE

EXCLAIM

EXCLUDE

EXCRETE

EXERCISE

EXERT

EXHALE

EXHIBIT

EXHORT

EXHUME

EXILE

EXIST

EXIT

EXODUS

EXOTIC

EXPAND

EXPECT

EXPEDITE

EXPEL

EXPEND

EXPENSE

EXPERT

EXPIRE

EXPLODE

EXPLOIT

EXPLORE

EXPRESS

EXTEND

EXTENT

EXTERNAL

EXTOL

EXTORT

EXTRA

EXTREME

EXULT

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from The Recipe Box

Do you have a recipe you would like to share with Keenager readers?
Feel free to email us at keenager@catholiccharities.net

Valentine's Day
Cupcakes

INGREDIENTS

For the cupcakes

- ½ cup seedless strawberry jam or preserves, warmed
- 1½ sticks butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 3 large egg whites, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup 2% milk
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- red food coloring, optional

For the frosting

- 2 cups heavy cream
- ½ cup confectioners' sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- Fresh strawberries, optional, to taste, halved, for garnish

PREPARATION

Time: 2 hours Yield: 16 servings

Step 1

Preheat the oven to 350°.

Step 2

Line a 16-cup muffin tin with paper liners.

Step 3

Strain warmed jam through a fine-mesh strainer and discard the pulp.

Step 4

In a large bowl, add the butter and the granulated sugar and use an electric handheld mixer to beat until light and fluffy, about 5-7 min.

Step 5

Add the egg whites, 1 at a time, to the butter mixture and beat well after each addition.

Step 6

Add the strained jam and 1 teaspoon of the vanilla to the butter mixture and beat to combine.



© 2026 Big Recipe

Step 7

In a small bowl, add the milk and the sour cream and whisk until smooth.

Step 8

In a separate bowl, add the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and the salt and whisk to combine.

Step 9

In thirds and alternating between the two, add the flour mixture and the milk mixture to the butter mixture, beating well after each addition to create a batter.

Step 10

Add 4 drops of the red food coloring to the batter and stir to combine.

Step 11

Fill each of the prepared muffin cups about ¾ full each.

Step 12

Bake the cupcakes until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 20-25 minutes.

Step 13

Allow the cupcakes to cool in the muffin tin for 10 minutes.

Step 14

Transfer the cupcakes to a wire rack to cool completely.

Step 15

In a large bowl, add heavy cream and by hand or using an electric handheld mixer, beat until slightly thickened.

Step 16

Add the confectioners' sugar and the remaining vanilla to the whipped cream and beat until the cream thickens to stiff peaks.

Step 17

Dollop or pipe the frosting over the cupcakes.

Step 18

Top the cupcakes with the fresh strawberries and serve.

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A life shaped by service



Photo by Kathleen Hinkel
Shariff, once served by Catholic Charities, now delivers meals to seniors in Lake County.

Shariff’s mother was a single mom of three children in Waukegan while he was growing up, he says. Their family relied on Catholic Charities for support until his mother was able to find work and the family was able to get back on their feet.

Today, at 48, Shariff has come full circle, now working for Catholic Charities as a driver for the senior home-delivered meals program in Lake County. “When I was five years old with my mom, we couldn’t afford to pay our rent and Catholic Charities stepped in,” he says. “So, for me to now be able to help deliver meals to seniors is a blessing.”

He says he enjoys his work of doing well-being checks for the seniors he serves. “I have a good working relationship with my clients,” Shariff says. “I believe Catholic Charities is a good program and a good platform to get assistance.”



KEENAGER NEWS

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Ink Umbrella Design

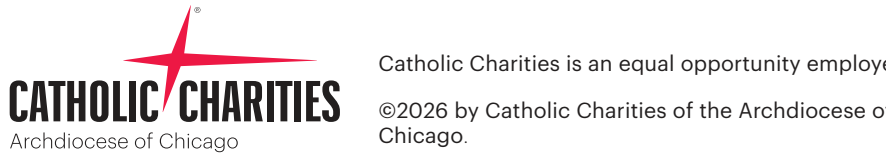
Keenager News is a free publication mailed and emailed six times a year to persons 55 and older by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, a non-profit organization.

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Catholic Charities Mission
Catholic Charities partners with mission-driven people and organizations across Cook and Lake counties to witness a message of mercy and hope to a world in need. We are called to serve and accompany anyone, regardless of their faith, gender, race, or ethnicity.



Birthdays and Anniversaries

To protect the personal information of our readers, we list the first names and last initials of all who have submitted birthdays and anniversaries to us.

Do you have a birthday or anniversary to share with Keenager News readers? If you do, please call (312) 655-7425.

Birthdays

NIFTY NINETIES		EXTRAORDINARY EIGHTIES	
Carl L.	93 on 12/22/25	Elaine B.	87 on 2/6/26
Jerry A.	91 on 1/10/26		