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Notes from the Heart

News from Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans

Most Rev. Gregory M. Aymond Archbishop of New Orleans

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Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans provides life-giving programs that deliver health and human services to the most vulnerable and needy throughout 8 civil parishes in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. We serve people regardless of race, religion, age, ethnicity or economic status.

Open Your Doors This Easter Season

Dear Friends of Catholic Charities,

Thank you for joining Catholic Charities in our Unity through Prayer Lenten Campaign. Inspired by Pope Francis' words during his 2017 Lenten message, "Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then, we will be able to experience and share the full joy of Easter." We've asked you all, our community, to join with us in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to support the most vulnerable among us.

...let us feast on empathy and compassion

Every year for Lent, we fast or abstain from some luxury in our lives to mimic the sacrifice Christ made during his 40 day journey into the desert. While giving up certain comforts allows us to experience on a minute scale what the destitute and starving have to endure, we should remember to pair the act of physically abstaining with spiritual fasting. Fasting should "wake us up," as Pope Francis said in this year's Lenten message, it should "make us more attentive to God and our neighbor." Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are tools meant to aid in self-examination, repentance from sin, and, ultimately, a return to the Lord. During this Lenten season, as we reflect on our own shortcomings, let us fast from judgement, intolerance, and negativity. Giving up something for Lent should demonstrate compassion and enrich others.

and compassion; as we fast from harsh criticism doled out in a reactionary manner, let us feast on considered constructive praise. Fasting from judgement can be as simple as making an effort to be conscious of the way you react or treat people based on their accent, manner of dress, or other outward signifiers of class, race, ethnicity, or gender. Fasting from quick, harsh, unfiltered confrontations can be as simple as saying a prayer before confronting a coworker and keeping your own shortcomings in mind. There is still time to make the most of this Lenten season.

Thank you for your prayers and gifts.

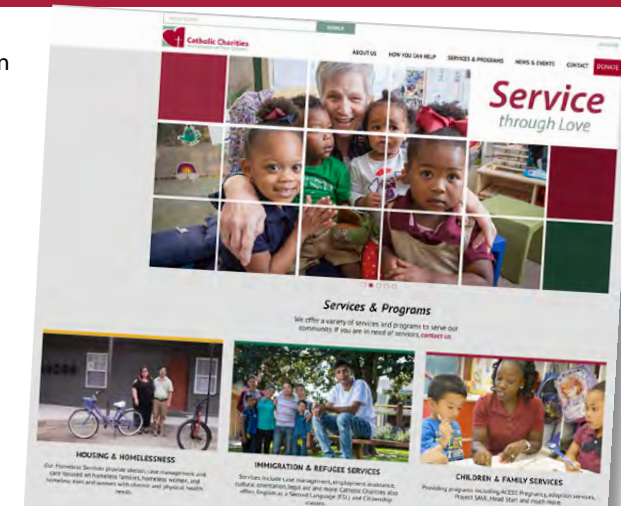
God bless you,
Sr. Marjorie Hebert, msc
Sr. Marjorie Hebert, M.S.C.
President/CEO

As we fast from judgement, let us feast on empathy

Introducing the New CCANO Homepage!

We're excited to share that we've redesigned our homepage to be more user friendly than ever before! The new page allows users to access our programs, services, upcoming events and latest news right from the homepage - no searching necessary. Users can also sign up to volunteer, add their names and email addresses to our database and donate in just a few clicks of their mouse.

Head over to www.ccano.org to browse our new homepage and check out these exciting updates. We hope you like what you see!



Fore!Kids - continued from page three

coping mechanisms to face their present situation and instill in them a strong foundation of confidence for the future. Through one-on-one activities and group meetings, mentors provide support and encouragement that promotes trust, confidence, enthusiasm, personal growth and positive thinking.



While it might not be evident every day, the children in these programs are slowly learning the skills needed to be successful in life and to avoid following in their parents' footsteps.

In the end, the program hopes to completely end the cycle of imprisonment and help strengthen a generation of children. Thanks to the generosity and support of the Fore!Kids Foundation in helping us work towards this goal!

SAVE THE DATE!

- March 27** Monthly Peace Prayer Walk, 6 PM at St. Katharine Drexel Preparatory School
- April 17** Volunteer Information Session, 4 PM
- April 24** Registration for Summer Citizenship Classes, 6 PM at the North Kenner Library
- May 1** GiveNOLA Day

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—IN THE SPOTLIGHT:— Refugee Services Program Manager Lilian Alvarez

The diversity visa lottery is a program that annually makes Permanent Resident Cards available to 50,000 immigrants, selected from countries with low immigration numbers in previous years, in an effort to diversify the United States' immigrant population. The program is currently being targeted for elimination.

Originally from Guatemala, Lilian Alvarez and her family traveled to the United States on a diversity visa when she was just six years old. Her mother, an accountant for Saab, and her father, a mechanical engineer for Tabacalera Nacional (a Marlboro competitor), left behind their successful careers in Guatemala for a better overall life for their family here in the United States.

Lilian remembers the day, 27 years ago in January, when her family arrived in Chicago with only ten suitcases and each other.

Upon arrival, the entire Alvarez family shared a bedroom in a relative's two-bedroom apartment. Then, they were fortunate enough to move into an apartment of their own. With the help of garage sales and donations and support from their church, their apartment soon became a home. A few years later, the Alvarez family had a house in the suburbs complete with a backyard and a swing set!

Growing up in the Chicago area, Lilian attended public schools that offered both English as a Second Language classes and continuing Spanish education. Her parents instilled in their children the importance of continuing to both speak Spanish and practice their Guatemalan traditions and values.

In addition to being bilingual in English and Spanish, Lilian also studied French in high school and college. She originally chose to major in International Business in college, but later decided to pursue a degree in Family and Child Studies with an emphasis in Social Services.

Throughout her career, Lilian has worked with the immigrant population in a number of capacities including at-risk youth, kinship care, young mothers and mentoring. Now, she serves as the Program Manager for Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans' Refugee Services program.

Although she hadn't directly worked with refugees before assuming her role at Catholic Charities, she knew their stories were similar to that of her own family and felt a calling to work in the field.

"While my family didn't face most of the obstacles a lot of our clients face, I knew that our

stories were similar. Our story is one of hope. One of struggle and humility," she says of her relationship with her clients. "Refugees and immigrants have either had everything taken away from them or have given up everything they know for a chance at their next chapter."



The Alvarez family then and now



Her clients are at the mercy of others, the consequences of whose choices leave them stateless and displaced. They place their lives on hold for months, sometimes years, before they're

given the opportunity to start a new life. They're resilient, she says, but they also have vulnerabilities that can create additional obstacles.

Reflecting on her family's journey to the United States, Lilian is filled with both pride and heartbreak. "I struggle to fathom that some people still believe that my family and I, along with thousands of other immigrants, don't belong in this country," she says of the current atmosphere.

"But, I remain hopeful with the demonstrations of support for all immigrants."

An immigrant's life, Lilian shares, is one of constantly explaining, defending and proving yourself, sometimes working twice or three times as hard as non-immigrants to achieve the same goals. Immigrants also live with a constant internal struggle to identify with both their native culture and the new culture they now embrace.

"It is a bittersweet experience being an immigrant in today's world, but it's my experience and one that I have dedicated my life to teaching others about," Lilian shares. "I am proud of the struggles my family and I have overcome and optimistic about the awareness our stories will bring to others."

Lilian and her family's story continues as she welcomes her first child this May!

Money Matters Offers Brighter Futures

Catholic Charities' Money Matters Financial Stability program provides financial education classes to help individuals in St. Charles Parish become more aware of their financial situation. The program helps participants develop budgeting skills, open checking and savings account and learn about credit scores.

Along with financial education, the program provides minimal financial assistance for training to those who may want to enhance their skills in order to gain better employment, leading to self-sufficiency.

Through partnerships with other local agencies, the Money Matters program, can help with needs like employment, housing, SNAP applications, Medicaid enrollment, clothing, budget counseling, referrals for mental



Sherry Rhodes (center) with her four clients at their graduation.

health services, services for battered women and more.

Four single women came to Sherry Rhodes, a Catholic Charities case manager in St. Charles Parish, and told her they wanted to improve their financial situations not only for themselves, but also for their families and their futures. They wanted to train for better jobs in order to make more money.

The Money Matters Financial Stability program was able to offer them financial assistance that allowed them to enroll in Life Care's CNA (certified nursing assistant) program. Thanks to the aid they received from the Money Matters program, all four women are now registered CNAs in the state of Louisiana!

CCANO Celebrates Service and Commitment

On March 7, 2018, Catholic Charities hosted our annual Employee Recognition Luncheon, which honors employees celebrating milestone anniversaries. This year's event was hosted at the Audubon Tea Room and honored numerous employees celebrating 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35 years of dedicated, selfless service to Catholic Charities.



Darlene Adams is honored for 30 years of service.



(L to R) Tim Robertson, 35 years; Tom Costanza, 25 years; Sr. Marjorie Hebert; Cindy Distefano, 25 years; Martin Gutierrez, 20 years

We honored teachers, case managers, CNAs, administrative professionals and so many more who have offered their skills and time to those in need in our community!

In her opening remarks, Sr. Marjorie Hebert, M.S.C., President and CEO of Catholic Charities, encouraged those gathered to think of one memory or one client they've cherished most during their years on the job. "How have they made you a better person, a better giver, a better representation of Jesus?" she asked.

Combined, the group has offered 885 years of service to various Catholic Charities programs. The number of clients they've touched or lives they've changed for the better is simply incalculable.

Thank you to these influential employees for being an example to not only other employees, but also to our clients, of hard work, dedication and commitment to service!

Strengthening Children with the Fore!Kids Foundation

On March 8, 2018, the Fore!Kids Foundation distributed a total of \$430,000 to local nonprofits, including Catholic Charities! The funds represent the profits from the 2017 Zurich Classic of New Orleans golf tournament.

Since 1958, the Fore!Kids Foundation has been working to improve the lives of children by educating their young minds and giving them the confidence to pursue their dreams and goals. Through their charitable endeavors, Fore!Kids offers healthcare, education and so much more for over 200,000 children every year.

This year, Catholic Charities received \$10,000 to support the efforts of our Cornerstone Kids mentoring program!

An initiative of Cornerstone Builders, Cornerstone Kids connects children of incarcerated parents with volunteer mentors who work to give them

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Share the Journey Interfaith Prayer Service

In September of 2017, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) launched the "Share the Journey" campaign, which seeks to bring together the global community to support the plight of immigrants, refugees and all those who are forced to flee their homes due to persecution, violence and war.

In light of this effort and the current political climate, faith leaders in New Orleans banded together to bring peace, unity and understanding to the community.

Organized by Father Buddy Noel, the Archdiocese of New Orleans' ecumenical officer, and countless other community leaders from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, a large crowd gathered at the Hispanic Apostolate on Sunday, February 25 for an Interfaith Prayer Service in solidarity with immigrants and refugees.

The service began with a traditional fan dance. Then, religious and ethnic leaders from around the community processed past attendees of all ages, races, backgrounds and faiths to the altar. There, Archbishop Aymond addressed the crowd, reminding them we are all children of God: one family, all beautiful and perfect in His eyes.

Archbishop Aymond called all those present to remember in their prayers the migrants and refugees affected by the current legal uncertainties. Prayers were read in different languages from different holy books. Each reflected the theme of all gathered being equal and important in God's eyes and the need for each to welcome others into our hearts and into our communities. Then, a young man made his way to the podium.

Jose, a Catholic Charities Immigration Services client, made the arduous journey from Honduras to the United States alone when he was only ten

years old. After years of working and living alone, he decided he needed a support system and turned to Catholic Charities. CCANO Immigration Services staff helped him obtain the one thing he'd been dreaming of most: his legal status.

Now, Jose wanted to share his story to show that there is a way to achieve your dreams and thank those who'd helped him achieve his.

Father David Caron, Director of the Archdiocese's Office of Evangelization, and Sr. Marjorie Hebert, MSC, President and CEO of Catholic Charities, read a poem about refugees. The service ended with a prayer and a call for unity.

A big thank you to everyone involved in planning and executing such a meaningful event, including CCANO Division Director Martin Gutierrez!