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Notes from the Heart

News from Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans

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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.

Sharing Our Gifts

Dear Friend of Catholic Charities,

This month, we are highlighting Catholic Charities staff members who have used God-given gifts to uncover the preexisting but hidden gifts of their clients. Witnessing this work every day reminds me of the bible verse, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." Romans 12:6

Recently, we convened an internal focus group to address homelessness and housing in the greater New Orleans area. CCANO staff members from Bethlehem Housing, Health Guardians, Workforce Development, Immigration and Refugee Services, Parish Community Ministry, Voyage House, and Prison Reentry services each brought a special set of abilities to the table in their respective fields. Together, though, we were able to discuss a much more comprehensive approach to addressing the complex causes of homelessness and the needs of our clients from a variety of angles and perspectives. This meeting reminded me of the richness and diversity of our staff's talents.

These staff members do not waste their skills but instead employ them to empower their clients to uncover



strengths that they already possessed or new gifts they never knew they had. It takes everyone's abilities combined to create meaningful change, and no one person possesses everything needed to enrich our community. This is the beauty of Catholic Charities' wrap around services.

As you read the following stories of hope, I encourage you to reflect on your gifts and how you can share them with the world.

God Bless You,

Sr. Marjorie Hebert, M.S.C.

Sr. Marjorie Hebert, M.S.C.
President/CEO

Early Responders, Forever Responders

This hurricane season, Catholic Charities will monitor and respond to any weather threats to ensure the safety of our community. With South Louisiana's geographic vulnerability to emergency weather conditions, we have taken a significant step by hiring our first year-round, full-time emergency management coordinator, Kevin Carlson.

Division Director Tom Costanza explains, "Within our organization, we have plans set up when a storm is 72 hours out and 48 hours out. Kevin will be the point person to bring everyone together. Once the storm hits, we'll assess the damage and do what we've been doing over the last several years. Archbishop Aymond likes to say we are the early responders and the forever responders."



emergency kit with a flashlight, radio, batteries, first aid supplies, cash, copies of important documents (birth certificates, medical records, insurance forms, etc.), medications, nonperishable food items, and clean drinking water to last each family member three days. Make sure you have signed up for emergency alerts, and join us in prayer for God to watch over us in the upcoming months:

"Our Father in Heaven through the intercession of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, spare us during this hurricane season from all harm. Protect us and our homes from all disasters of nature. Our Lady of Prompt Succor, hasten to help us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen."

For more information on preparing for hurricane season, visit www.ready.gov/hurricanes.

To prepare at home, we recommend making an

The Power of Community Connection

When St. Pius X church encountered a parishioner who needed more than a temporary fix to address underlying issues, they reached out to Doug Karicker from CCANO's Parish Community Ministries (PCM) to assist "Rhonda." As a mother of six children without a high school diploma, Rhonda could not secure a job and was living in a neighborhood that was suffering – there were vacant lots with overgrown yards, stolen cars abandoned nearby, buildings still damaged from Katrina, and gang activity.

Doug and Rhonda started by focusing on what strengths and resources Rhonda already possessed. One of the biggest challenges in maintaining



work is transportation. After Rhonda's grandmother passed, she inherited the family car. Additionally, Doug was instantly impressed with Rhonda's parenting skills. He says, "Her discipline struck me. She's a conscientious and respectful person. Her personality and mindset showed she could take on challenges with determination."

The first priority was finding Rhonda and her children a safer living arrangement. Her landlord found another property for her, and Rhonda moved her family six blocks to a more secure environment while maintaining community ties. The apartment did not have a refrigerator, but PCM was able to provide the family with a new one so they could keep fresh food in the house.

Next, Doug and Rhonda worked together to assess her employment situation. With the booming tourist industry, Rhonda was picking up jobs cleaning bed and breakfasts. Through her demeanor and work ethic, Rhonda was able to find more work by word of mouth. However, several of her regular properties did not keep a vacuum on site. To expand her capacity and efficiency, PCM funded the purchase of a vacuum for Rhonda's business.

Doug is now a part of Rhonda's extended family, visiting the children for holidays or sending a thoughtful card for Mother's Day. Doug is hopeful for Rhonda's future, and their continued relationship is a sign of the power of connection through community. Learn more about Parish Community Ministry at <http://www.ccano.org/parish-community>.

Finding a House, Making a Home

Since opening its doors in February, Bethlehem Housing has served thirty families, including Ms. Jalessa who was referred by a church parish in Alexandria to Archbishop Aymond. Jalessa has been trying to balance the responsibilities of parenting seven children, but her challenges have been adding up since her 5-year-old boy, Ace, is battling brain cancer for the second time.

The family moved from North Louisiana to New Orleans to be closer to Children's Hospital for Ace's ongoing chemo treatments, but after living in six hotels for seven months, they no longer were able to afford the bill. A traditional family shelter was not an option because of Ace's fragile health condition, and they had exhausted all other options.

When Bethlehem Housing staff met Jalessa, she did not have plans for housing, but she knew she could no longer sustain the \$400 per week hotel stay. Jalessa describes that time as hell. "My whole life was stress. I couldn't think. We were always hiding the kids from the hotel staff because they only allowed four kids in the room, not seven."

With the guidance of Bethlehem Housing, Jalessa explored several options and found a house that

was large enough for her family and close to the hospital. Earlier this month, Jalessa and her children moved into their own home. The children finally have their own toys again with room to play, and Jalessa has peace of mind about the stability of her family.

...Jalessa and her children moved into their own home.



room and could not believe the house was theirs. She reports there is a difference in the children's behavior, saying, "In the hotels, the kids were all over the place. Now they are more respectful. They are happy."

The flexible funding of the Day One Families Fund allowed CCANO to serve this family in the unique ways they needed and prevented the additional trauma of a shelter stay for a very sick little boy and his siblings. CCANO was able to finance car seats for the safety of the youngest children, assist with utilities so the family could have electricity and water, and transfer the family's belongings from storage.

Now, Jalessa's family has a place to call home and a stable base for dealing with the emotions and logistics involved in caring for a child with a serious illness. CCANO will continue to work with Jalessa to address the many obstacles ahead, and she now has a team to support her on this journey to family well-being.

Jalessa explains, "It's so peaceful to be in our own home after living in hotels for so long. I can relax now. I don't have to worry about where we are going to be next. It's the best thing that has ever happened in my life." She shared that when Ace first saw the house, he cried walking from room to

Ms. Jalessa affirms, "Now that I see Ace is happy, I can be happy. God made a way." Learn more about Bethlehem Housing at <http://www.ccano.org/blog/introducing-bethlehem-housing>.

Announcing CCANO's New COO: Martin Gutierrez

We are thrilled to announce the promotion of Martin Gutierrez to Chief Operating Officer at CCANO starting July 1, 2019. Martin has dedicated the past twenty-two years to supporting CCANO clients and the parishioners of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. After serving as the Director of the Hispanic Apostolate, Martin has advanced as the Director of Immigration and Refugee Services and as a Division Director.

Last summer, Martin was ordained a deacon after five years of intensive preparation and eighteen years of consideration. He says, "I spoke with my wife, Judi, about this and decided that since our three children have established their careers, I could focus on this call." Martin and Judith first met at the Hispanic Apostolate youth group, and their connection to the church has continued throughout their marriage.

Martin's oldest son, Martin Alejandro, is a Jefferson Parish Sheriff Deputy married with one daughter and a son on the way. Their daughter

Jazmin is studying for her Masters of Counseling at Holy Cross while working for the CYO, and their son, Andrew, was just ordained a priest with his father serving as a deacon for the Archbishop at the Mass.

"I didn't plan to work for a nonprofit or the church, so at first this was just a job. Then, I fell in love with the mission and realized this was my calling. This is not a career for me; it's a vocation. I serve at two tables: the altar at mass and the streets of our community. My faith is fed at the altar, which allows me to serve those who are most vulnerable. This faith and service in turn feed each other."

Martin looks forward to the opportunities and challenges he will face as COO. He explains, "This is a new position, so it will require a lot of flexibility. I plan to meet with all of the Program Directors to determine our priorities in alignment with the Strategic Plan." Please join us in congratulating Martin on this well-deserved promotion.



Foster Grandparents Support Families

The recent Head Start graduations were meaningful not just for the students advancing to kindergarten but also for CCANO's Foster Grandparents. Among the supportive families, a group of Foster Grandparents including Wilma McCaskill cheered with pride as the students walked the stage to accept their certifications.

After retiring in 2008, Wilma found herself sitting at home bored and looking to fill her free time with purpose and meaning. A friend from St. Jude told her about the Foster Grandparents program, and she thought it would be a



great fit, saying, "I've always loved kids, and I just had to get out of the house. Now, I look forward to coming to school, and the students are always on my mind."

Priscilla Mantilla, Foster Grandparents Program Director, explains, "Each Foster Grandparent assists with two students. They have work performance goals set at the beginning of the year to prepare their students for school. There are regular evaluations to determine if the students have good attendance and academic growth."

Wilma goes above and beyond to ensure her students feel included and have a joyous childhood. She is valued for knowing the students' personalities and preferences, making her a trusted member of the Head Start community by staff and students alike. If Lea is having a rough morning, Wilma knows what calms her down versus what would work best for Zoe. For instance, when the Breakfast with Dad event ended, Zoe started crying because her dad was leaving. After finding Ms. Wilma, Zoe stopped crying, reassured that Ms. Wilma was there for support.

Priscilla is proud to have Wilma on the team, sharing, "Wilma is always up to the task and willing to get things done. She's got a positive attitude and doesn't let anything stop her. She's very compassionate and sympathetic. She goes shopping for special clothes for the students whose families don't have room in the budget for presents and holiday treats."

Thank you, Wilma, for all that you do for our Head Start students! Learn more about Foster Grandparents at <http://www.ccano.org/foster-grandparents>.

Reflections of a Head Start Graduate

At last month's St. John the Baptist Head Start transition event, fifty eager young learners fidgeted with their caps and gowns as they listened to the wise words of their commencement speaker Elise Barnes, a Head Start graduate about to start her first year of high school. Looking out over the crowd of family members, teachers, and staff who were all rooting for the students, Elise shared:

"The time I spent at Louise Head Start helped to build a strong foundation of education that I have since built upon. The supportive, loving environment at Head Start allowed me to be creative, inquisitive, and independent. This environment gave me the confidence to be myself and explore the things I loved, such as dance and theatre. These interests have led me to New Orleans Creative Arts High School where I will be an incoming freshman next year.

I say to all of the graduates today to continue to build on the education and personal interests you have gained at Head Start. Continue to explore the world around you, continue to have fun with learning, and continue to work hard. This will be the first graduation of many to come. You will gain so much new knowledge with each new school year and each graduation. With the love of family, the support of teach-



"The supportive, loving environment at Head Start allowed me to be creative, inquisitive, and independent."

ers old and new, and a belief in yourself, there is no limit to the places you will go."

We are excited for our Head Start alumni and current students to excel in their futures and for this recent ceremony to be the first of many graduations in their lives. Learn more about Catholic Charities Head Start centers at <http://www.ccano.org/head-start-program>.