

## FRIEND,

When it was – and will again be – safe to invite friends or family to your home for dinner, what does the meal mean? Certainly it's more than a chance to put something in your stomach. For most of us, sharing a meal with others is an act of creation – an opening, an invitation to a deeper and more trusting relationship.

For 40 years, Our Daily Bread has been an invitation. Our neighbors experiencing

homelessness or food insecurity are welcome – every day – to receive a warm and hearty meal. Our hope is that they will also find with us other services and resources to help them on their journey to a better life. Still, if they choose to eat with us once, or many times, and never seek those resources, our door remains open, and we always hope they take us up on the invitation again.

Food is sustenance, but an invitation is nourishment for the spirit. It says, “you are welcome here, with me, as a neighbor in my community and a sister or brother in love.”

In this Blessings issue, I hope you find invitation to something that nourishes you.

*Bill*

William J. McCarthy, Jr.,  
Executive Director



SUMMER 2021

# BLESSINGS

CATHOLIC  
CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Inspired by the Gospel mandates to LOVE, SERVE and TEACH, Catholic Charities provides care and services to IMPROVE the LIVES of Marylanders in need.

## OUR DAILY BREAD EMPLOYMENT CENTER: 40 YEARS OF SERVICE



On a recent Tuesday, a few dozen people line up for a hot meal at Our Daily Bread Employment Center. Some are regulars; others have come for the first time. Each of them has a story about the journey that led them there.

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**KEVIN HOLMES** knows how to sing – and he is not afraid to belt out R&B favorites after finishing a hot lunch. The 55-year-old starts softly as he sits on a wall outside the center, but his voice grows stronger until he is happily serenading the entire line of guests.

“In 2019, I was on the brink of death,” he says, describing a bout with double pneumonia while wrestling with family-related challenges. “God saved my life and has a purpose for me. I’m striving to be an R&B singer!”

After learning about Our Daily Bread from “a homeboy,” Holmes now attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings on-site and has participated in other services, thankful for the ease of access.

“I come every day, like clockwork. The food is good and it keeps me nourished,” he explains – and breaks into song again.

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**TEMPESTA BRAVEHEART** never intended to stop in Baltimore. But the 29-year-old’s path from New York to Louisiana was derailed and, after landing in



### Lining up for a meal and so much more

the city with no income or connections, she “wandered around” and slept on local streets. “I don’t have anybody,” she explains.

About a week after arriving, she is at Our Daily Bread for her first meal there, which she describes as “not bad; really good.” She has been given lists of services she can access in Baltimore but is determined to head south. She doesn’t know anyone in Louisiana, either, but looks forward to what it might offer.

“It’s a new life, a new start, a chance to settle down,” she says, adding that she might come back to Our Daily Bread if it takes longer than she hopes to move on.

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**DEREK KNOX** is still surprised to find himself at Our Daily Bread Employment Center.

Growing up in Park Heights, he had a basketball court outside his back door and dreams of playing in the NBA.

“Nobody would have ever told me I was going to be here right now,” he said.

Over the years, he found himself caught up in drugs and then experiencing homelessness, a trajectory he describes as a predictable story that no one predicts for themselves.

Two years ago, someone suggested he could get a meal at Our Daily Bread. He lives up the street, and now walks down – rain or shine – for meals and Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

Dreams of the NBA faded long ago, but he picks up games on a court not far from the center. “I still play – I played on my 60th birthday,” he says, smiling.

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**FOR 40 YEARS**, Our Daily Bread has provided millions of meals to Baltimore’s most vulnerable populations, including more than 86,800 meals in the first 10 months of this fiscal year alone. And it doesn’t take much more than a conversation to hear how many of the guests that line up for a meal each day are hungry for so much more – food, support, guidance, companionship and love.



## A TROUBLED CHILD LEARNS TO

# BREATH.E

**JONAYA ADMITS THERE WAS A TIME** she allowed her temper to determine her actions. But she's learned so much now. "If I find myself getting mad or upset, I now know to walk away and go to my bedroom to sit alone and breathe through the moment," said the 14-year-old.

That small tactic has made a big difference for the teen, who received care at St. Vincent's Villa. The comprehensive residential treatment program serves children ages 5 to 14 whose mental and emotional health needs have not responded to community-based interventions and services.

Jonaya arrived at St. Vincent's Villa with a reputation of threatening violence and being physical. But for more than a year, she's sustained an ability to cope with her feelings and moderate her actions.

The center's staff focused on a strength-based, trauma-focused model of care, including intense family involvement, said Program Director Patrice Flagle. Creative interventions like cognitive behavioral therapy, art, music, bike riding, sensory-related strategies, psychiatric medication and behavioral supports helped Jonaya learn how to self-regulate her emotions.

### Working together in residential care

Jonaya lived at St. Vincent's Villa for over a year before returning home to the women she calls her "aunts," Jalene and Shirlene Chase.

Child Protective Services initially placed Jonaya and her two older sisters in the Chase family home for 30 days, as part of respite care – designed to give parents a break in intense times of caregiving. The Chases, who are trained in behavioral health and trauma-informed care, noticed Jonaya was exhibiting symptoms and knew they had to commit to being the safe, loving, family environment and home the girls needed to heal. They tried therapy. Then they started looking for residential care.

"It was the hardest decision we had to make, but we prayed on it and knew she would be better for it," said Jalene Chase.

"Despite her violent episodes, breaking items around the house, we saw Jonaya being more valuable than anything we owned in our home."

### Not alone

Jonaya and the Chases underwent a personalized treatment plan to address their specific therapeutic needs, including intensive solo and family therapy. During her residential stay, Jonaya was able to see her aunts and sisters often.

"There were times I was sad and missed my family, but I'm thankful for St. Vincent's Villa because I'm much more calm now," said Jonaya.

"I'm happy my aunts really, really care because without them I would probably still be upset a lot."

## Telehealth has been "a godsend" to clients during the pandemic

Kelli A., a client at Catholic Charities' Villa Maria Behavioral Health Clinic in Frederick, MD, calls telehealth "a godsend." When COVID-19 struck, she didn't want to leave her house, but worried about missing appointments with her therapist and doctor.

"I have anxiety about going out," Kelli said. "It's due to PTSD. It would take a lot for me to go out and get in a cab or get on the bus."

Since she began meeting her clinicians over Zoom, however, she hasn't missed a single appointment – a far better attendance record than she had before the pandemic.

"Telehealth is an amazing tool, and ... I would like to continue with it after COVID," she said.

That's a common refrain among many clients of Villa Maria clinics, said Emily Winicki, a therapist and supervisor at the Dundalk, MD clinic.

"Telehealth worked out really well for people who had a lot

of barriers – not just COVID, but transportation issues, health issues, mobility issues. With those barriers out of the way, if they have a smart phone, they [can participate]," Winicki explained. "The barriers I just talked about are still going to be here post-COVID. It's really important that the platform continues for those hard-to-reach folks."

This spring, Catholic Charities delivered around 3,500 telehealth visits per week to clients, including on its HIPAA-compliant Zoom platform, and successfully advocated for the Maryland

General Assembly to pass legislation expanding insurance coverage of telehealth options, increasing access to these vital services.

Zoom and phone meetings will never replace in-person therapy – "laying eyes on people is important," Winicki explained – and telehealth is not a good option for every Villa Maria client. But for many clients, virtual appointments have allowed treatment to continue at a time when it was badly needed.



# FIVE YEARS INTO CATHOLIC CHARITIES' SAFE STREETS PROGRAMS, AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT

**ON A RECENT FRIDAY MORNING**, Corey Winfield was on his way to pick up donated diapers. It's just another way the director of Catholic Charities' Safe Streets program in Brooklyn-Curtis Bay is trying to disrupt violence and save lives.

Why diapers when Safe Streets is aimed at stopping the shooting on Baltimore streets?

"You have to go out there and get those resources people need. If I'm helping a young man, it's not just me helping him – it's helping the whole family," he explained. "Grandma might need help with the water bill, and I've got to find some way to help them. It takes a village to raise one. You have to find those resources."

Catholic Charities opened its first Safe Streets site in Sandtown-Winchester five years ago, following the death of Freddie Gray in police custody, and the second in Brooklyn-Curtis Bay in 2019. These are two of Baltimore City's 10 sites for the Safe Streets program, an evidence-based public health initiative designed to reduce gun violence by deescalating and mediating disputes that might otherwise lead in that direction.



*Greg Marshburn and Corey Winfield have been with Catholic Charities' Safe Streets programs for five years.*

Over the past five years, the Catholic Charities sites have conducted nearly 2,000 mediations and witnessed a notable drop in shootings. In Sandtown-Winchester, for example, shootings fell from 10 in 2016 to just four last year. As importantly, the programs have earned the trust of local communities.

## **"It's OK, Safe Streets. We got this."**

Greg Marshburn, director of the Sandtown-Winchester program, has worked at the site since it opened and watched the effort mobilize the neighborhood. Not long ago, his team was called to respond to a growing crowd, but they returned to the office about 10 minutes later. When he asked them what happened, his staff said people in the crowd had waved them off, saying, "It's OK, Safe Streets. We got this."

"When we first got to this community, people would laugh at us and say it doesn't work," he said. "Now they want to be part of this."

Earning that trust requires being in the community day-in and day-out, knowing people well and serving as an unbiased resource when conflicts arise. At any moment, Safe Streets may be called to respond to a range of pressing needs – diapers, a job opportunity or a way out of a bad situation.

"I'm going to get to where nobody has to cry, and nobody has to die," Winfield said. "When you leave your house, what do you say? I'll see you later. I want to make sure you're able to keep that promise."



## *One pandemic, four generations and the power of visits*

**BERTHA PAUL IS FEELING PRETTY GOOD THESE DAYS.** She has her own beautiful bedspread, and her wedding picture is hanging on the wall. Little touches of home mean a lot, though she's not quite sure why.

Bertha has dementia, and she suffered a fall that left her hospitalized. There, she had a stroke. More recently, she moved in at St. Elizabeth Rehabilitation and Nursing Center.

"I like it," Bertha said. "It's very nice. I like the food."

For 19 years, she'd lived with her daughter, Christine Chehreh, and Christine's family. Making the decision on a 24-hour residential care center for her mother was painful enough, even though Bertha's mother had lived there many years ago and her aunt is a current resident. Moving her in during COVID-19 was gut-wrenching.

"I can't imagine what other families who have had someone there longer have gone through," Chehreh said. "I felt like, for those weeks that I couldn't see Mom, I couldn't breathe."

## **The impact of restricting visits**

State restrictions have been particularly rigid for long-term care and skilled nursing facilities. For many months, any positive test anywhere in the center meant no one could come inside to visit. That kind of isolation—seeing only the staff—has an impact on residents.

"They sleep more, they might eat less, they get agitated more easily," said Nurse Unit Manager Tracy Atwell. "People with dementia don't always understand why people stopped visiting. They feel abandoned."

When the COVID positivity rate went below 5 percent in Baltimore City, the restrictions on visits eased. For Bertha and her family, the eased restrictions were transformational.

"Being able to see her has given my whole family a sense of calm," said Chehreh, who visits three or four times a week, and often brings her 16-year-old daughter – and things from home, like the bedspread and wedding photo.

"I think sometimes on the phone, maybe she knew who I was and maybe not," Chehreh said. "But I know that she knows who I am when I walk through the door, because she says my name. It means everything."



## WWII veteran receives military medals after 75 years

**THE SURPRISE AND HONOR OF A LIFETIME.** That's how Melvin Jonczak Sr. describes the moment his family presented him with military medals he earned 75 years ago, while serving in the United States Army during World War II.

It all began as a casual conversation between Jonczak Sr. and Catherine Kundratic, property manager for Catholic Charities' Abingdon Gardens Senior Community in Harford County. Jonczak Sr. shared memories from his time in the Army including traveling to multiple countries, such as France and Germany, being a member the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers charged with building bridges and destroying German military bunkers, training as a paratrooper, and serving in the U.S. National Guard until his retirement in 1953.

"It was a heck of a time over there," said Jonczak Sr. "I sacrificed so much for this country and waited years to be recognized. I almost thought I would never get my medals, but I'm sure glad I was running my mouth with Cat because she made this happen for me. She did this for me."

"When Melvin told me he was unsuccessful in his two attempts of receiving his service medals, I thought I'd make an effort on his behalf," said Kundratic.

Shortly after that conversation Kundratic wrote a letter to the Army identifying herself and explaining the situation. A few months



WWII veteran  
Melvin Jonczak Sr.

later, she received a call. Jonczak Sr. would soon receive his five medals and pins. Initially, the Army planned to make the delivery in-person and perform a special ceremony, but COVID-19 changed those plans.

"I briefly considered waiting to present the medals until after the pandemic, but Mr. Jonczak was turning 97 years old on Christmas Eve so I thought it would be good for him to have this gift by his birthday," said Kundratic.

### An early birthday surprise

Jonczak Sr.'s family was informed when the medals arrived, and they planned a surprise ceremony for Dec. 22, 2020, just two days before his birthday. Jonczak Sr. thought he was heading for a family outing, but found himself being directed to a space deemed to be safe for social distancing based on COVID-19 restrictions.

As they left his apartment, Jonczak Sr. was immediately greeted by his two sons, Melvin Jonczak Jr, Frank Jonczak, and their wives. Frank, who also served in the Army like his father, led the ceremony where each family member pinned medals on the retired sergeant.

"My mouth fell open when I walked into the room and saw the United States flag and my family standing there," said Jonczak Sr. "I didn't know what was going on at first. I was a little choked up that it all happened."

## NOSTALGIC VIEW ON DRAGON BOATS RACE



As the days get warm, we reminisce about sunny (and, often as not, rainy) days on the beautiful Inner Harbor and the great successes of past Dragon Boat races.

This spring, however, the agency made the difficult decision to cancel races in the fall of 2021. At the time of cancellation, Baltimore was neither issuing permits for gatherings nor setting a timeline for resuming permitting while COVID-19 remained a threat to public health, and many employers were still working remotely.

One of the true blessings of Dragon Boats is the partnerships and friendships that are fostered between the teams and their partner programs. When on-site volunteering resumes, we hope you will find new ways to forge partnerships with our programs. Please visit the volunteers page on our website to get the most up-to-date information on volunteer opportunities. [cc-md.org/volunteer](http://cc-md.org/volunteer)

## HELP MARYLANDERS IN NEED WITH YOUR DONATION!

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- Call 667-600-2023 or email [vehicles@cc-md.org](mailto:vehicles@cc-md.org)

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