



FRIEND,

'TIS THE SEASON FOR COMFORT AND JOY!

As the Christmas season arrives, I can't help but feel a greater surge of joy than I normally do. I think that's because of the difficulty of the year. We need a little Christmas, right this very minute. My heart is wide open to it, and I hope yours is, too.

The way we welcome Christmas, of course, differs from person to person. For some of us, this is a season of powerful spiritual

reflection, remembrance, and rejoicing in the heart. For others, it is a time of memories made and memories recalled. And for some, it's a deeply sad time. This year's circumstances might keep you from those you love. I do not disregard that. If this is a painful season for you, know that we hold you close.

Throughout the year, you have given us a gift, and by extension, you have gifted our community. Now it's our turn to give to you. From whatever place you come, I invite you

to celebrate the season with deliberate joy.

Please savor the gifts of self-sufficiency shared in this issue of Blessings, and join us at comfortandjoy2020.org for a daily gift of little joys this whole month long.

Merry Christmas, friend. May you be blessed beyond measure in 2021.

William J. McCarthy, Jr.,
Executive Director



WINTER 2020

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.

Comfort & Joy

a special gift for you

HAVE YOU TRIMMED UP THE TREE? ARE YOU DECKING THE HALLS? ARE YOU FOCUSED ON FILLING YOUR SPIRIT WITH SOME FESTIVE CHEER?

In any case, Catholic Charities' Comfort & Joy will be a welcomed addition to the way you celebrate the season.

From Dec. 1 – 31, open a gift each day at comfortandjoy2020.org. Maybe you'll enjoy our Midweek Music mini-concerts from amazing groups like the Morgan State University Choir and Baltimore Choral Arts Society. Perhaps you want to fill your home with the sweet scents of the cookie recipes we share in our Cookie Jar Friday series. You might like to set a little time aside to sit with our Sunday reflections. Through a beautiful interactive experience, every day will give you a little something to fill your spirit's stocking. Plus, it's 100 percent virtual, so there's no need to leave your safe, warm and healthy home. You can even sign up to receive our special series gifts in your inbox.

"We're really excited to bring Comfort & Joy to Marylanders," said Executive Director Bill McCarthy. "It's been such a hard year for so many people in so many ways. We all need Christmas. We couldn't resist putting these 31 days of little gifts together in the hopes that we could help our neighbors feel that sense of spirit."

Comfort & Joy is made possible through generous sponsorships and partnerships with several organizations.

To see each day's gift and sign up to receive them in your email, go to comfortandjoy2020.org or follow Catholic Charities on Facebook.

Comfort & Joy Special Series

Gift Tag Tuesday

Share in the spirit of a gift given with love! See how it brightens faces of our youth at St. Vincent's Villa, our guests experiencing homelessness, and other neighbors when your generosity is gift-wrapped.

Midweek Music

Each week features a new and unique mini-concert, presented entirely online through video, from extraordinary performers like the Morgan State University Choir, the Baltimore Choral Arts Society, and more.

Cookie Jar Friday

Whether you're a novice or a pro, who doesn't love a good Christmas cookie? We'll share a new recipe each week.

Sunday Reflections

This is a good season for making our own spirit a little brighter. Spend a few minutes in reflection each week.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God — ISAIAH 40:1





“He got the job, he got the girl ... and he got his life back.”

When Tim McPherson looks back at his life, he can't believe where he is today.

“I'm an alcoholic, and I really never did anything except what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it,” he said. “I never could have even imagined this.”

McPherson, 58, now owns a three-bedroom house in Baltimore City and is engaged to be married on Christmas Eve. And he credits Christopher Place Employment Academy for helping to steer his successes over the past two years.

“My life is just totally different from what it was,” he said. “I'm Christopher Place for life.”

A WINDING PATH

McPherson said he left his first wife in 1987 and moved from Baltimore to Florida where he “drank and went from job to job,” ending up homeless. He returned to the area as his mother grew older, but couldn't keep a job. Later, when he got out of prison, he couldn't stay clean, and his probation officer recommended a local rehabilitation program.

That's where he heard about Christopher Place Employment Academy, Catholic Charities' intensive residential program that offers education, training and recovery support to formerly homeless men in the Baltimore area.

“It was a two-year program and I thought I might as well be under an umbrella for the longest time I can be,” he said. “When I got here, it was like nothing I had ever experienced. You could be dropped here naked, and they got you. I just embraced the program. I said to myself, ‘I don't really know how to live, so I'm going to learn how to live.’”

As new clients start the program, case managers determine the types of assistance they may need and help them work through barriers, said Program Manager Nicole Williams.



Verdell Lemon and Tim McPherson

“In Christopher Place, basically no person gets left behind,” she explained.

SHE SAID YES

Step by step, McPherson began addressing challenges that had blocked his way. He earned back his driver's license, which had been revoked. He developed a plan around paying child support. He was taken off probation early. He began working on his credit score. And he found a job at Our Daily Bread Employment Center, where Christopher Place is located.

That is also where McPherson met Verdell Lemon, and later proposed to her on Christmas Day 2019. Because Lemon was employed at the center, too, they had kept their relationship quiet – until that moment. He stepped into the dining room, where lunch was being served, and pulled out a ring. “Everyone clapped,” he said. “I walked in with my Ravens leather jacket, got down on one knee, and she said yes.”

MORE THAN EXPECTED

Four months before the end of McPherson's two-year stay at Christopher Place, with the support of staff and volunteers, he began exploring how to buy his own home.

“I ended up finding ... a three-bedroom house that's gorgeous, on the longest block in Baltimore City,” he said. “It took me all of those two years, minus a day. I was transformed. I am transformed. I'm just not the man who [first] walked into Christopher Place.”

Williams said McPherson's positive nature and gratitude for the program stand out.

“He's never forgotten where he's come from and what the program did for him,” Williams said. “He got it all here – he got the job, he got the girl, he got the house, and he got his life back.”



A taste of happiness



Volunteers prepare meals for donation

The COVID-19 pandemic is prompting more people to look to shelters – not only for housing, but to feed their families on a daily basis. That is why community support for shelters like My Sister's Place Women's Center is so critical. For the past 38 years, this program has been able to operate and support the community, thanks in part to donors and volunteers.

“This summer, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw an average of 50 women per meal, and five to 10 children,” said Julie Martin, volunteer manager at My Sister's Place.

Local restaurants play a huge role as well. Sammy's Trattoria pledged to donate chicken Parmesan dinners through the end of the year, while Nando's Peri-Peri agreed to donate 50

meals for dinner. Another organization known as Who is Hussain recently made a donation of 50 meals. That group empowers communities around the world to organize charitable events for the common good.

“I have received a lot of feedback from staff that ‘word on the street’ has spread about the food we are getting,” said Martin. “I think we strike a really great balance – a catered meal is always a nice treat. Many clients can't remember the last time they ate at a restaurant... But there's also a lot of great home cooked donations that we get from our really dedicated meal groups. And ... the clients have started figuring out the schedule for the regulars so they know when to come get their favorites.”

Through Catholic Charities' service in FY2020...



650,759 meals served to people who are hungry



Individuals found a warm, safe bed 173,381 times



384 individuals found permanent housing



Elevate supports students as they pursue college degrees

The American dream has evolved over the years. At one point, it wasn't uncommon to graduate high school, get married, and find a job that supported a family. Today, a high school education alone may not afford the same lifestyle as in years past – making college degrees ever more important for long-term success.

But, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, even those low-income students who make it to college are far less likely to graduate than their more financial stable peers. While 60 percent of the wealthiest students earn a college diploma, only about 16 percent of low-income college students graduate.

That's why Catholic Charities is partnering with the Community College of Baltimore County to launch Elevate (formerly known as Stay the Course), to help students overcome challenges that can disrupt their educational trajectories.

Elevate Program Manager Mark Saunders explained, "The goal of Elevate is to keep students enrolled in college until associate's degree attainment, by assisting them with non-academic barriers including food insecurity, rent and housing, transportation, utility cutoffs, childcare needs, and behavioral health barriers that often derail students' best intentions."

One participant was so pleased with the services that she wrote to senior CCBC leaders to share her successes.

"...I got enrolled in a program on campus called Stay the Course, now known as Elevate. It has helped me with so much, including getting accepted into the Medicaid program and I started seeing a therapist, psychiatrist, and a Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program specialist. I see a professional two to three times a week and am finally getting the consistent care I need. I can concentrate, I have little to no anxiety, and experience consistent levels of motivation and excitement towards my job, school, and personal life."

Elevate provides hands-on case management, which includes weekly check-ins with support specialists who ask about students' well-being and assist them with personal goal-setting and achievement. The program has adjusted to restrictions in place due to COVID-19. The new virtual environment allows the team to offer services by phone, email, text and video chat.

Elevate is designed to work in tandem with Catholic Charities mission of serving the underserved to end generational poverty.

"[Our team] is helping people escape poverty and fulfill their personal goals," said Saunders. "It is incredibly fulfilling to do so."



Agency honors compassionate service of staff and volunteers

As part of a weeklong celebration of service in November, Catholic Charities honored three exemplary servants who have worked tirelessly in support of our mission.

MARY ANNE O'DONNELL received the Msgr. Arthur F. Valenzano Joyful Servant Award, which honors the spirit of the late rector of the Baltimore Basilica, who also served on Catholic Charities' Board of Trustees. O'Donnell started her nearly 25-year career at Catholic Charities as director of Sarah's House, and served most recently as the agency's assistant director and chief administrative officer, before retiring this year.



CAROLYN GUTERMUTH, manager of community relations for Chesapeake Employers' Insurance Company, received the Distinguished Service Award for her 20-year volunteer commitment to My Sister's Place Women's Center. Through donation drives, personal gifts, financial support, committee service, and the engagement of her circle of personal and professional contacts, Gutermuth has exemplified the compassionate caregiving and service this award recognizes. Calling the honor a "group effort" that has the full support of the company's senior leadership, Gutermuth said she is really just "the cheerleader and the one who organizes volunteers, donations and event attendees on behalf of Chesapeake Employers Insurance."



VINAY KHOSLA, a Dulaney High School senior, received The Anne Lindsey Otenasek Youth Service Award for his outstanding selflessness and care for his community. The award was named for an energetic teenaged Catholic Charities volunteer who died in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. Khosla embodied Otenasek's spirit of service by organizing members of the Dulaney Key Club to volunteer to serve meals at Our Daily Bread Employment Center, and by volunteering at St. Vincent's Villa's annual Season of Wonder. "Volunteering... has opened my eyes to the plights of people who live only 15 or 20 minutes away from me," Khosla said. "I only hope I have impacted someone's life through Catholic Charities because that is really what this is all about."



Uninsured immigrants visited a health clinic **3,707** times



1,982 seniors received safe, affordable housing



Gallagher Services supported **18** adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities



7,845 people received behavioral and mental health services



THE POWERFUL FIRST STEP TO FIND HOUSING

An average of 2,193 people experience homelessness in Baltimore City on any given day, according to federal data. Every person included in that statistic has a name.

One of them is Diamond.

A Baltimore native, Diamond suffered severe injuries in a car crash in 2019, leaving her unable to work and, eventually, homeless with three children.

“I had nowhere to go,” said the 23-year-old. “I heard about Catholic Charities and the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, so I called them and my life changed. My case manager, ShaTia White, had so much confidence in me, she never gave up on me the entire year I was there. She honestly gave me the motivation to start the process of getting my mental and physical health together, so I can have the strength to get my kids back.”

Catholic Charities operates the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, Baltimore City’s largest overnight shelter. Before the pandemic, it housed 175 men, 75 women and 25 medically-

referred individuals in a convalescent-care dorm. The center now operates out of hotels to protect residents during the pandemic, but continues to provide each resident with a case manager, workshops, resource referrals, and two daily meals.

White, part of a caring staff committed to honoring the dignity of each individual, supported Diamond throughout her journey.

“There were several scenarios that could’ve prevented Diamond from moving onto the next step, but she was determined to see the end result,” said White.

In early 2020, Diamond left Weinberg Housing and Resource Center and moved into a three-bedroom apartment. She is actively looking for a job and to enroll in parenting and anger management classes, as part of her ongoing desire for greater custody of her children.

“I appreciate Ms. White for seeing the value in me,” said Diamond. “Her assistance made a huge difference in my life. If I could give her a raise I would.”



Extending one family’s legacy at the Esperanza Center

Lydia Dibos remembers going to the Esperanza Center – then known as the Hispanic Apostolate – on occasional Saturday mornings as a teenager. Her mother, a pediatrician, had organized weekly clinics to serve children with no other access to health care.

Over the following decades, her parents, Esther Edery and Pablo E. Dibos, also a physician, continued their unwavering volunteer service at the clinic, supporting its growth as they treated immigrant patients who did not qualify for insurance and could not pay out of pocket.

Following her parents’ passing – Esther Edery Dibos in 2014 and Pablo E. Dibos in December 2019 – Lydia Dibos and her brother Paul H. Dibos extended the family legacy at Esperanza with a donation that allowed the clinic to implement its first electronic health record, or EHR. On Sept. 10, Esperanza began using Epic, a system adopted by many area health systems.

“[We] really felt strongly after my dad died that we wanted to be able to continue supporting the clinic with a gift in memory of both my mom and dad. And here was an opportunity in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic to get this going,” Lydia Dibos said, explaining the gift was one way of following the example her parents set. “My parents were people who never brought any attention to themselves. There are no buildings named after my parents. But they helped lots of people in their own way.”

The shift to an EHR has long been a top priority for Katie Phillips, Esperanza’s clinic manager.

“This has been a labor of love for three years for me. I really believed that Epic was the best thing for our patients,” she said. “It was thanks to [the Dibos] family that we were able to pull it off.”

Two recent events underscored the importance of an online system. Following the 2018 fire that destroyed the center’s Fells Point facility, the program undertook a massive effort to salvage and restore paper medical records that had been severely damaged. More recently, when COVID-19 necessitated a shift to virtual visits and telemedicine, clinicians struggled to reconstruct patients’ medical histories because paper charts could not be taken off site.

“That really drove home the importance of getting this sensitive data onto the cloud and out of paper records,” Phillips said.

But Phillips said Esperanza could not cover the set-up costs for the EHR – until the Dibos family’s contribution.

“I always look at my mom and dad as Good Samaritans,” said Lydia Dibos. “If we encounter people who are suffering, we need to stop and help instead of looking away. I think that my mom and dad didn’t look away.”



Pablo E. and Esther Edery Dibos

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Catholic Charities is the largest multi-service charitable organization in Maryland. Serving all, we provide innovative programming to accompany people on life’s journey including assistance to those living in poverty, individuals with developmental disabilities, immigrants, older adults, families and children in crisis.

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