



CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

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Catholic Charities celebrates a woman paving the way for generational humanitarianism

{November 1, 2021/Baltimore} A Baltimore County grandmother dedicates 27-years of her life to serving children with significant emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges. She is one of three exemplary area servants Catholic Charities will recognize the week of November 8-12.

Geri Olsen will receive the **Distinguished Service Award** for her decades of volunteer services to the residents and staff of St. Vincent's Villa. The program in Timonium provides comprehensive residential treatment for children throughout the state of Maryland, ages 5-14, whose behavioral and emotional needs have not responded to community-based interventions and services.

"It has truly been the fulfillment of my life's purpose," said Olsen. "During my senior year of high school they asked, 'if you had all the money in the world, who would you give it to?'. My instant response was, 'I would use the money to make every child's Christmas wish come true'."

"Geri has been an outstanding supporter for children at St. Vincent's Villa," said Mikael Kristiansen, director of community outreach and volunteer services. "She is the core supporter, organizer, and motivator for St. Vincent's signature Christmas Campaign, Season of Wonder, which is now part of Catholic Charities' Comfort and Joy December community gift campaign. She works tirelessly throughout the year to bring potential donors together to provide for children, staff, and families. Geri truly is a force that is determined and deep-rooted in action - not merely words."

"Nothing warms my heart more than seeing the generations of my family join me in spreading love and kindness to the staff and children at St. Vincent's Villa. This holiday season, let's all work together to make Christmas wishes for every child at St. Vincent's Villa come true. It's nice to be nice."

Olsen is the recipient of several prestigious awards including The Unsung Hero Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and the 2001 Distinguished Service Award from Catholic Charities. This award is given to an individual or group who exemplifies and significantly supports compassionate caregiving and service through personal commitment to Catholic Charities' work.

Along with Olsen, Catholic Charities will recognize two other pillars of the community.

Johns Hopkins University graduate **Karen Sun** is being honored with the **Anne Lindsey Otenasek Youth Service Award** for her commitment to women and children experiencing homelessness and poverty in Baltimore. The 2020 public health studies graduate has volunteered at My Sister's Place Women's Center for nearly four years. Before the pandemic, Sun was very active in supporting onsite workshops. From the start of the pandemic, Sun devoted her time to coordinating partnerships with other local agencies to provide clients with as many resources as possible, including legal support from several organizations. In addition to caring for clients, Sun carried out projects to lift the spirits of frontline workers, by coordinating the delivery of care cards handcrafted by her fellow John Hopkins University students. This award is in memory of Anne Lindsey Otenasek, an energetic teenaged Catholic Charities volunteer who died in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. The youth service award in her name honors and perpetuates her spirit and personal commitment to helping others. It is given to a high school or college individual or group that shows outstanding volunteer commitment to Catholic Charities.

St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church Pastor Rev. Ray Chase will receive the Msgr. Arthur F. Valenzano Joyful Servant Award. Commissioned to recognize a joyful life and spirit in service, the award honors the spirit of the late rector of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who served on the Catholic Charities Board of Trustees until his passing in 2015. Fr. Chase began his ministry with Catholic Charities of Baltimore 43 years ago. He started as a deacon at Gallagher Services, formerly known as the Gallagher Center, in 1978. Fr. Chase has served in many roles with Catholic Charities throughout the years, and currently serves as chaplain at the organization's Jenkins Senior Living Community near Halethorpe, a campus hosting The Neighborhoods at St. Elizabeth Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, Caritas House Assisted Living, St. Ann Adult Day program, and two independent living senior communities. Fr. Chase's parish, at the foot of I-83, is motivated by significant social and racial justice efforts.

The celebration is a virtual week-long event, November 8-12, recognizing those who serve and those who are served as individuals of value and dignity, with special thanks to those who support the organization's work. In addition to our three awardees, Catholic Charities will also honor six employees with its Mission in Action Award for extraordinary examples of commitment: **Steve Branson**, director of case management services; **Patti Bulger**, resident associate for senior congregate housing; **Michael Jolley**, facilities project management for Senior Services, **Jill Kratz**, manager of services for senior communities; **Bonnie March**, office manager at Villa Maria Community Resources Behavioral Health Clinic in Lansdowne; and **Erin Moyer**, clinic director at Villa Maria Community Resources Behavioral Health Clinic on the Fallsway.

The week will also feature stories about neighbors' personal journeys toward their better lives, podcast conversations with experts discussing senior care, homelessness & poverty prevention, workforce development, immigration, behavioral health, and intellectual & developmental disabilities, and more. Find all content at catholiccharities-md.org and on the Catholic Charities Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn feeds.

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About Catholic Charities of Baltimore

Catholic Charities of Baltimore is Maryland's largest private provider of human services, with more than 80 programs in 200 locations to serve children and families experiencing homelessness and poverty, individuals with intellectual disabilities, immigrants and seniors without regard to religion, race or other circumstances.

www.catholiccharities-md.org.