When parents can’t parent:
Grandparents raising grandchildren

Helping families live well:
Child development centers of the Archdiocese of Miami

Helping families with young children
Charities USA starts its digital-only format with the current issue. As reported in the previous edition, we decided to forgo print copies in order to join the efforts of so many around the globe in conserving Earth’s resources.

The magazine’s format remains the same. Each issue focuses on a particular theme of interest to the Catholic Charities ministry and includes related articles highlighting the work of Catholic Charities agencies and/or the national office. This issue offers a number of examples of agencies helping families with young children. See the introduction for more details.

We also have kept our standard departments: the president’s column, updates on activities of the national office and the network, and a final article that spotlights a particular agency. Be sure to read CCUSA Updates to learn about the finalists of the 2020 CCUSA Volunteer of the Year Award. Since this issue comes out during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have included a photo display of how Catholic Charities is responding. A more detailed account will be offered in the summer issue.

The digital format does come with a PDF version, which allows a user to print only the pages he or she may need for whatever reason.

One bonus of the new format is the ability to offer videos. Hopefully this will enrich the reader’s experience. Inside this issue we have a few clips of our volunteer finalists and one video featuring a child development center from Catholic Charities Miami.

As always, the main goal is to present the varied programs and experiences of the Catholic Charities ministry in the United States so we can appreciate and learn from each other’s gifts and talents.

David Werning, Managing Editor
To comment on this issue, please write to David Werning at dwerning@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org.
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LAST ISSUE: WINTER 2020
"In times like these, our families become all the more precious to us."

– Sister Donna Markham
In my last column I shared with you that we are transitioning our magazine to digital format. Concern for Earth’s resources, as expressed so beautifully in Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’, made this an easy decision for us. By coincidence, this edition arrives in your email amid the COVID-19 pandemic while most of us are sheltering in place. Hopefully, it will provide a bit of solace as you peruse the stories included here.

Many of our Catholic Charities frontline workers across the country are not staying in their homes. They are continuing to risk reaching out to vulnerable, sometimes desperate, people to provide food and other necessities to them as safely as possible. We remain committed to accompaniment, even in the worst of times. The challenges have called for significant re-thinking of the delivery of services but have not resulted in the discontinuation of our presence to those who need us most. You will read about some of these efforts in the pages that follow.

In times like these, our families become all the more precious to us. In this edition, you will read about “life as it was” before the pandemic arrived. You will also see how our agencies have responded in “life as it is” these days. Please continue to be joined with us in prayer and compassion as we walk forward in this difficult time.

Sister Donna Markham OP, PhD
President & CEO
From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, the Catholic Charities ministry has acted to serve and support the people in our communities across the nation, with special concern for the most vulnerable.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) wrote to congressional leadership urging immediate and effective policies and appropriations to limit the spread of the virus and to aid those with little or no income. CCUSA has continued to call for changes to relief programs to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

CCUSA also has worked with other organizations to get help to people in need, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that provided $4 million for humanitarian aid, the Mennonite Disaster Service that provided thousands of masks and the Dairy Pricing Cooperative in Wisconsin that donated over 2,000 gallons of milk.
Catholic Charities agencies rose to the occasion as well and continue to provide critically needed services throughout the pandemic. In many cases staff have discovered innovative ways to serve their local communities, including a drive-through food site at Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, a video concert for children affected by domestic violence offered by Catholic Charities Diocese of Trenton, and a service from Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington to help poor residents in DC receive government stimulus checks.

The numbers of ways Catholic Charities has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic are too numerous to list here. We have some photos to give the reader a sense of ministry in the midst of the pandemic. The summer issue will offer a more detailed account.

CCUSA has sent 140,000 masks to Catholic Charities agencies around the United States.
How to talk to children about difficult situations, like COVID-19

By Michael Horne, Clinical Psychologist and Director of Clinical Services for Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington

With the spread of COVID-19 and all the news coverage, not to mention other crises, many parents wonder how best to talk to their children. Here are a few tips to help your child understand and cope with situations like the coronavirus.
1. Stay calm.

Children take their cues from their parents. When their parents are worried and highly stressed, they become more anxious. Manage your own anxiety. Before talking with your children, think about what you want to say, talk with your spouse, and bounce ideas off each other. Stay calm when discussing the outbreak.

Let your younger kids play with their toys while you’re talking to them. Having something else to focus on helps them stay calm while they listen. On the other hand, don’t try having a conversation with your children if they’re watching TV, playing a videogame, or otherwise engaged in screen-based activities. These are highly distracting and can create major obstacles in communication.

2. Don’t make promises you can’t keep.

We want to let our children know we will do everything possible to keep them safe, but we need to be honest. Some things are outside our control. We can’t promise them they won’t get sick or that everyone they know will be fine. If we do, children may lose trust and confidence in us if people do begin to get sick.

Tell the truth. Lead with this: There is a very low risk that children and younger adults will get COVID-19. According to Dr. Thomas Murray at the Yale School of Medicine, COVID-19 does not appear to cause severe distress in children. Most people who contract COVID-19 will have a fever and flu-like symptoms that will clear after a few days or weeks. The virus can be serious for people who are older or chronically ill; but remind children that older adults in our lives (grandparents, teachers, friends at church) are taking steps to ensure they stay healthy too. During this time of year, especially in larger families, it’s not unusual for someone in the house to be sick, often with a common cold or allergies. Reassure your kids that you’ll take care of them. Most children will tend to assume things are much worse than they really are if they aren’t given the facts. Being honest with children, even about the risks, will reduce their anxiety.
3. Don’t give too much information.

While we need to be honest, we don’t want to flood our children with too much information. Start by asking kids what they’ve heard and then respond to their concerns. Be factual, general and brief. Then let children ask questions. Kids will ask questions when they’re ready for more information.

Make sure the information you give is age-appropriate. Preschoolers don’t need to know about pandemics or community spread. Older children may ask questions to which you don’t have the answers. In those cases, either look for the answers together or tell your kids you’ll find out and get back to them. Don’t feel like you have to have all the answers immediately but do follow up with them. Uncertainty and the unknown fuel anxiety – answers help put things in perspective.

It’s also important to know what they’re hearing and seeing on TV, online or in conversations around the house. They could become overwhelmed and anxious if there is too much conversation about COVID-19 around them.

4. Make yourself available.

Keeping on top of daily life can be challenging for all of us. Even as we’re trying to juggle changes in school, work schedules, or widespread cancellations of activities, we need to be continually present and available to our children. Several days after your initial conversation about COVID-19, they still might need to talk through their concerns or ask questions. Make sure you’re touching base with your children at least once a day to see how they’re doing.
5. Teach kids how to prevent the spread of germs.

Knowing specific steps they can take to stay healthy is an important way for children to keep them from feeling out of control. Teach them the proper way to wash their hands (sing “Happy Birthday” twice). Also teach them to wash hands after coming in from outside, after using the bathroom, and before and after meals. Show them how to sneeze or cough into their elbows rather than their hands or the air. Encourage them to keep their immune system strong by eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep and exercising.


During this uncertain time, praying together as a family can comfort and encourage children. Praying for anyone impacted by COVID-19 is a good way to help children feel they can help others. Children under stress are more likely to start acting out if they aren’t given appropriate outlets for that stress. Being outdoors and exercising reduces anxiety, so if possible and safe, let them play outside. Drawing, constructing or other creative projects are a great way for children to process stress. Most importantly, make sure children have the opportunity to laugh. Healthy play and laughter are the best ways for children to process anxiety and build resiliency.

Reprinted with permission of the Arlington Catholic Herald found at catholicherald.com.
The U.S. bishops announced a year of service to pregnant women. The initiative, called “Walking with Moms in Need,” started on March 25 and ends on the same date in 2021. Giving birth to a baby and caring for the child are not vocations to do alone, and the bishops through their initiative remind us to lend the support that we can.

The Catholic Charities ministry in the United States, since its beginnings in 1910, has been making the same appeal for care and concern not only for mothers and their children but also for all people in need. Throughout the years, Catholic Charities staff and volunteers have supported millions of men and women and children.

Inspired by the bishops’ initiative, we wanted to share some of the ways the Catholic Charities ministry helps families with young children today.

The articles here represent efforts old and new. Two look at adoption and education for children, traditional services that Catholic Charities agencies have offered for years. One group of articles considers the subject of grandparents raising their grandchildren. It’s not surprising to find grandparents involved with grandchildren, but the opioid epidemic and mass incarceration changed the situation dramatically. An increasing number of grandparents are becoming the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. One other article – set in the present COVID-19 pandemic – offers advice on how to talk to children about such crises.

The service to families with young children is one part of a continuum of care that Catholic Charities offers to the communities in which they work.
Mother Teresa once said, “The problem with our world is that we draw the circle of family too small.” Catholic Charities works to widen that circle every day.
When parents can’t parent:

Grandparents raising grandchildren

By David Werning, Managing Editor

In its March 2020 issue, The Atlantic noted how traditional, nuclear families have, in large measure, been replaced in society with a variety of other models: single parent, unmarried parents, and even groups of unrelated people choosing to live and raise their children together. Another model on the list, one the Catholic Charities ministry is increasingly aware of, is grandfamilies, which refers to a household headed by grandparents.

The website Grandfamilies.org maintains 52 fact (or data) sheets about grandfamilies in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the nation as a whole.

According to the Grandfamilies.org national fact sheet, last updated in 2017, a little more than 5.6 million children under 18 live with grandparents.

Among these households, more than 2.65 million grandparents are the responsible adults,

- 33.2% have no parents living in the home,
- 37% of the grandparents are over the age of 60, and 21% live in poverty.
The reasons why grandparents become the primary caretakers of their grandchildren cover a wide spectrum. It could be a temporary situation, as when the parents are recovering from an illness or serving in the military. Permanent situations result from events like the death of the parents or their absence due to divorce, imprisonment or mental illness. Another major factor in the U.S. is the opioid epidemic, which has contributed to the death of many parents.

Whatever the reason, the Catholic Charities ministry serves grandfamilies just as it does all clients: by caring for their needs and honoring their God-given dignity. According to the 2017 Catholic Charities USA Annual Survey, at least 36 programs from 24 Catholic Charities agencies across the U.S. provided services to households in which grandparents lived, including grandfamilies. The services ranged from support groups and counseling to financial stability programs and housing.

The following vignettes offer a few examples of how the Catholic Charities ministry helps grandparents and grandchildren in the same household grow and prosper as families.

Catholic Charities (Santa Fe)

Catholic Charities (Santa Fe) had a grand opening ceremony on Feb. 27, 2020, for Generations @ West Mesa, an affordable living community in Albuquerque serving grandparents caring for grandchildren.

Catholic Charities worked with the real estate developer Gorman & Co. to develop and build Generations @ West Mesa. “This was a population that really needed housing,” said Jim Gannon, CEO of Catholic Charities. “We were so happy to get this community going so the grandparents and grandchildren could worry less about where they would live and more about just living.”
Residents of Generations @ West Mesa began moving in as early as January 2020. Many of them expressed excitement and relief to be able to rely on stable housing for themselves and their grandchildren, and they noted with appreciation the special features such as a walking track, exercise room and playground that serve the needs of both older adults as well as children.

Catholic Charities will continue to recruit new residents for Generations @ West Mesa and will staff the complex with a resource coordinator who will help residents access other public services and community resources.

Catholic Charities of Central Texas (CCCTX) recently received a St. David's Foundation grant that allows CCCTX to conduct research, planning and outreach in order to identify and offer services for Central Texas families headed by grandparents, also known as grandfamilies.

CCCTX already serves grandfamilies, mostly through its financial stability and counseling programs, but there’s more to do, especially among the rural areas in the 25-county region that the agency covers.

“We know that there is growth in this population,” said Suzanne Leggett, CCCTX’s chief advancement officer, “because we have grandfamilies walking in the door looking for services. We also know that each area has different needs and issues. It’s not one size fits all.”

The St. David’s grant gives CCCTX the opportunity to gather input from stakeholders in the numerous communities – families, churches, other social service agencies – and to discern the best course of action for each based on the data.

“It’s our goal to provide services that strengthen these unique families financially and emotionally,” said Sara Ramirez, executive director of CCCTX, “and help them overcome feelings of isolation as we connect them to resources and to others in their situation.”

In addition to the research being done, CCCTX has another valuable resource that is helping to better understand and serve grandfamilies: their director of counseling, Renee Brown.
Brown cared for her grandson Corli from 2012 to 2018, while her daughter Tierney went in and out of rehab and jail and battled a drug addiction. The experience was difficult at times, but also full of love and hope, especially the end result. Brown said that since 2018 Tierney is “in a good place” and over the drug addiction.

Brown’s experience instilled a desire to help other grandparents. She was thrilled when asked to help study the state of grandfamilies in Central Texas and to identify relevant programs for them. “I was like this is so amazing,” Brown said. “I have many friends who are doing what I did, and I think about all those grandparents out there who may be struggling.”

Two main struggles confront grandparents who become the primary caretakers of their grandchildren, according to Brown: adjusting to the abrupt change of lifestyle and providing good care for the grandchildren, and these two situations happen at the same time.

Whatever the reason a grandparent starts raising a grandchild – divorce, death, ill health or imprisonment of a parent – it is usually sudden. When Tierney went to prison, Brown immediately switched gears to care for Corli: “I was out buying diapers, wipes, food, clothes, everything for this little baby boy.” Brown added that Corli’s other grandmother Teresa took an equal part in providing for Corli. “Everything you can think of in parenting, that’s what we were doing.”
But making sure a child gets the necessities of life can overshadow inner feelings that result from a grandparent’s new role. It can take time for these feelings to surface. After visiting her daughter in prison, Brown realized that she was angry and she had to work through it. “I had to get over being mad at her, because it was bigger than me; it was about Corli. And he and his mom needed to stay connected,” she said.

At the same time, Brown worried about being able to provide good care for Corli. Like many grandparents, Brown had no custody rights. “I was really worried that he would get sick and we would have to go to the hospital,” Brown said. “And we had nothing on file.” Brown learned that in Texas grandparents had no rights, and she could not find an attorney to help her.

As it turned out, Corli had no serious illness, and Brown with the help of both families was able to raise him until Tierney could take over again.

Now Brown wants to help grandparents in the same situation and sees the St. David’s grant as a Godsend. “While we already serve grandfamilies through our financial stability department,” Brown said, “we want to expand our focus in counseling services to be relevant to grandfamilies.” She thinks two programs would be important additions: support groups for the grandparents and play therapy for the grandchildren.

Sometimes the material needs get more attention, and they certainly are important for a family’s wellbeing. But having someone to talk with who has been through the same experience or someone who will listen without judgment can give a person the strength to continue.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

COVID-19 Fact Sheet for Grandfamilies and Multigenerational Families


When Kenneth and Clothilda Mitchell first came to Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, they were homeless caregivers for their young grandchildren Chloe and Carter.

Kenneth, a former U.S. Marine Reservist, had difficulty walking or working after four strokes in two years, and the family had been recently evicted.

“When my husband had a stroke, he asked, ‘What are we going to do? How will we get by?’” Clothilda recalled. “I told him, ‘God is going to take care of us.’ Then we found Catholic Charities, and I knew it was God’s plan.”

The team at Catholic Charities’ Mamie George Community Center helped the Mitchells find an apartment and connected them to the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program, among other services. Fifty-eight grandparents and 132 grandchildren participate in the program, which meets the third Saturday of each month for lunch, guest speakers, and special events for the children.

While the grandparents learn and network with others in similar situations, the grandchildren enjoy crafts and games. Major events include a Back-to-School Bash, where grandchildren receive school supplies; an Easter Celebration, with gift baskets for the children; a Christmas Children’s Party, with each child receiving a gift and stocking; and the Kids Healthy Camp, where children learn about and prepare a kid-friendly, healthy meal and snack.

Topics featured at the monthly events include living on a budget, preparing for children’s education, self-care for grandparents, mental-health first aid, bullying, suicide prevention, CPR, healthy eating and nutrition, and dealing with grief.
“I don’t know what we’d do without Catholic Charities and these programs,” Clothilda said. “Our grandchildren love them, and we have peace of mind that we’re going to be OK. Everyone is caring and looks beyond our circumstances to really see us as a family.”

The Mitchells have stabilized their living situation, recently receiving assistance from Catholic Charities to move their family into a home. Each weekday, the couple enjoy a hot meal at Patty’s Café in the Mamie George Community Center, and they regularly shop in Trini’s Market, Catholic Charities’ grocery-style food pantry that features meats and fresh produce.

Kenneth said he gets his strength from his beautiful grandkids. “It’s a blessing to have them in my life,” he said. “They are 100 percent in my heart, and I want to make sure they’re bringing God into their lives. I want to raise them right, like I was raised, and in the right environment.”

Catholic Charities’ Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support group helps meet the emotional and educational needs of grandfamilies, leading to stability, self-sufficiency and better behavioral and academic outcomes for grandchildren. Grandparents support one another, and the children make connections with other children being raised by their grandparents – which helps normalize their home environment.

“Many situations lead to grandparents raising their children’s children,” said Debra Zagala, lead case manager with Catholic Charities’ Family Assistance Program. “Sometimes a son or daughter is sick or deceased, has an addiction or is incarcerated. The grandparents think they are done raising children... then life happens.”
Suddenly, they must raise their grandchildren or allow them to go into the foster-care system.”

Zagala has loved getting to know the Mitchells and the many other grandparents who regularly attend events. This year at Easter, she helped deliver 85 colorful Easter baskets to the homes of more than 20 families participating in the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program because the pandemic prevented Catholic Charities from hosting a party.

Keeping social distancing in mind, Zagala and her husband Tony dropped baskets near the gate at one home where the three girls were dressed in princess dresses. “Their faces lit up with excitement,” Zagala said.

They delivered six baskets to another home where a grandmother was raising three grandchildren and three children who belonged to a sister who had recently died. They also brought the family food for Easter Sunday. When they got just a block from the home, the grandmother called and several young voices called out, “Thank you for the baskets!”

Zagala said faith guides the team as they serve families in need. “We’re here for these grandparents, no matter their circumstances. We help in other ways, but most importantly, we give them hope.”
Even given the best of circumstances, parents encounter many challenges as they try to raise their children. If one happens to be a single mother or an immigrant who cannot speak the country’s language, or if one has a low income and works all day trying to make ends meet, then the difficulties multiply quickly.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami, Inc. (CCADM) recognized that many families in and around the city needed support, so it responded with its Child Development Centers. There are six centers in Miami, and they exist to help families educate their children and learn how to navigate the various challenges of daily living in the U.S.

The support from each of the Child Development Centers includes programs for children and parents. The centers include a family enrichment component, and they follow a two-generation approach that focuses on the needs of both children and adults. The children must be between the ages of 3 and 5. They receive instruction, nutritious meals, exercise and other services that prepare them to develop successfully in their education and overall growth. Parents can enroll in trainings that help them manage time and finances and work schedules and family life. The staff, who include speakers in English, Spanish and Creole, provide case management with the goal of building strong and healthy families.
Centro Hispano Catolico, one of CCADM’s development centers in the Wynwood section of Miami, offers the full set of comprehensive social services for the children and parents enrolled there. Centro Hispano Catolico is well known in the neighborhood, and its reputation for caring and professional service attracts many families who want to use its services.

Ana Garcia and Lina Saldarriaga have children enrolled in Centro Hispano Catolico, and they both have participated in trainings for parents.

Garcia moved to the United States when she was 23. She came, she said, to escape the poverty and crime and violence of Honduras. Although it has been difficult living in Miami, Garcia said that getting married and having children here has made life better.

Garcia includes Centro Hispano Catolico as part of her family: “Conozco a todo el personal y ellos nos conocen a cada uno de nosotros, cada padre y sus hijos. Ellos están allí para ayudarnos y son bien atentos. Si necesitamos un papel para un dentista o algo más, ellos nos recuerdan. El venir acá nos da mucha seguridad a mí y mis niños. Al venir a este centro yo me siento tranquila y puedo respirar y decir que mis hijos están en buenas manos.” [“I know all the staff and they know each of us, each parent and their children. They are there to help us and very attentive. If we need a paper for a dentist or something else, they remind us. Coming here gives me and my children a lot of security. When I come to this center I feel calm and I can breathe and say that my children are in good hands.”]

The attention and concern of the staff at Centro Hispano Catolico extends beyond their walls too. Garcia’s oldest child is autistic, and while the center did not have the facilities to help the child, the staff did work with Garcia to get him the assistance he needs. “Es muy importante para mí,” Garcia said, “porque no solo están pendiente de nuestros hijos a ver como están creciendo y las necesidades de los niños, pero las necesidades de sus familias también.” [“It’s very important to me,” Garcia said, “because the staff is not only making sure our chil-
children are growing and covering their basic needs, but supporting the needs of the families as well.”

Lina Saldarriaga, like Garcia, found Centro Hispano Catolico to be a major factor with her ease at remaining in Miami. Saldarriaga first came to the United States as a tourist and stayed here after giving birth to her twin daughters. As a single mother, she was looking for an organization that would help her with her children. She heard all the positive news about Centro Hispano Catolico and quickly enrolled the girls when they turned three. She never regretted it: “...lo que más me ha gustado con respecto al centro es que ha habido como un acompañamiento muy cercano de las maestras. A pesar de tener 20 niños en el aula yo siento que la enseñanza de ellas es muy individual para cada niño. Las maestras no sé cómo lo hacen, pero ellas identifican a cada uno de los niños y se acercan mucho a nosotros como mamás.” [“...what I liked most about this place is that there has been a closeness with the teachers. Despite having 20 children in the classroom I feel that their teaching is very individualized for each child. I am not sure how the teachers do it, but they identify with each of the children and become very close to us as their mothers.”]

Impressed by the care afforded to their children, both Garcia and Saldarriaga have made use of training programs for parents too. They have participated in parenting classes that cover topics such as how to discipline one’s children or managing a family budget. One class in particular mentioned favorably by Garcia and
Saldarriaga is “Your Money, Your Goals,” which is a financial training program developed by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection (BCFP). CCADM staff learned directly from CFPB trainers how to facilitate the program.

According to the BCFP, “Your Money, Your Goals,” is designed for organizations like Catholic Charities that serve people living with low incomes. The program gives participants “the tools and information [needed to] set and achieve goals; build skills in managing money, credit, and debt; and choose financial products that are right for them.”

Garcia said that “Your Money, Your Goals” has been phenomenal for her: “Para mí fue muy importante y serio recibir las clases ya que me están ayudando mucho a cómo manejar el dinero y mis tarjetas…porque tengo una familia muy grande y a veces no puedo pagar todo.” [“For me it was very important and serious to receive the classes since they’re helping me a lot on how to handle the money and my credit cards…because I have a very large family and sometimes I can’t afford everything.”] Saldarriaga noted that, for her, being new to the U.S., she needed to understand things like establishing credit and maintaining a good credit card history. Both women think that “Your Money, Your Goals” has made their transition to life in the U.S. easier.

Their feelings for CCADM are the same. The agency, and particularly the Centro Hispano Catolico Child Development Center, welcomed Garcia and Saldarriaga and their families when they needed help. “Yo tengo el corazón roto porque las niñas le tienen un cariño especial a este lugar, siento que ellas son más felices acá que en la casa,” Saldarriaga said. [“I have a broken heart because the girls have a special affection for this place, I feel that they are happier here than at home.”] She has only gratitude and praise for Centro Hispano Catolico. So does Garcia, who said that she hopes CCADM will be able to offer the service for other families: “Rezo por las Caridades Católicas y por qué continúen su buen trabajo por muchísimos años más.” [“I pray for Catholic Charities and that they may continue their good work for many years.”]

*Translations provided by Sophia Hernandez and Fani Cruz.*
As a young social worker many years ago, how startling it was to learn that my husband and I were infertile as a couple. We plunged into the teaching of the Church and the culture of the time to learn how we could build a family. While there were medical options such as in vitro fertilization, sperm donation and surrogacy, we learned that many of these were contrary to Church teaching as well as intuitively unappealing to us.

We turned to Catholic Charities for assistance with adoption, something that we knew little about and had very limited experience with in our extended families. At the time, open adoption was a new concept and the culture of adoption remained closed and secretive, as it had been historically. To keep these secrets, many clergy and religious had been involved in building families through adoption over the decades. We are all familiar with stories of frightened and shamed birth families leading to placements made by the well-intentioned but not necessarily the best-educated workers.

The supply of children exceeded the capacity of families available, leading to the notion that the adoptive families held the high ground of virtue in accepting children into their homes. But adoptive families received little to no training in what to expect with an adopted child and
were unprepared for the inevitable mixture of emotions and signals which the children would face as they grew. The taking and placing of the children seemed transactional in nature and not formed in the teaching of the Church but focused on someone else's judgment on how to best solve a problem.

We know from the social doctrine of the Church that the family is the first natural society and the primary place of humanization for the person and society at large. Indeed, the family is the cradle of life and love. With this as a foundational focus, the best interests of the child begin to emerge as an overriding imperative. The Church’s social doctrine constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. Social workers are taught a similar concept in their secular curriculum, but in the absence of a faith-based perspective the best interests of the child tend to be connected to financial or material advantages.

The adoption practices of Catholic Charities agencies were among the first to change in recognizing the importance and value of each member of the adoption “triad,” including birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees. Each member of the triad deserves the attention and understanding of the adoption workers in seeking the humanization of the child in a cradle of life and love.

Under this new awareness of Catholic Charities, birth mothers and fathers were respected, coached, mentored and supported, regardless of their decision to place or parent. Adoptive couples were educated to understand the complexities of parenthood, and most particularly parentage through adoption. Children grew without a secret history and were given the dignity to know more about themselves. They were able to recognize that while their families were formed differently, they were richer in many ways because they had extra people in their lives to love them!
Currently, as the supply of children available for adoption is limited, the old transactional adoption practices have returned and flourished, particularly outside the Catholic Charities agency world. Families are told that their ability to adopt and the speed of success depend on their budget. While private adoption practitioners, whether attorneys or non-faith-based agencies, may say that they consider the needs and protect the “rights” of birth parents, the bottom line remains payment for services rendered. When the legalization takes place, services to birth parents, adoptive parents and children cease.

The social doctrine of the Church regards the family as a divine institution that stands as the foundation of life for each member. When adoptive families are trained and formed in this belief and birth parents are counseled towards this realization, the adoption is more likely to meet this aspiration.

We were chosen as a couple for two boys all those years ago. Our boys have differing relationships with their birth families but neither boy suffered from the idea that his past was shameful or should be kept a secret. They know that their birth mother chose us, and money was not the motivation.

As a longtime agency director and as an adoptive parent, I firmly believe that now is not the time, nor will there ever be a time, to abandon the building of families through adoption by the Catholic Charities network.

The marketplace has made it difficult for birth parents to find their way to faith-based agencies, and the power of money will always drive human practices, even, regrettably, social work practices.

Catholic Charities must stay engaged as an adoption model, and we must reflect the social doctrine of the Church as we help form families. We can embrace the teaching that a family is a divine institution, and not only the completed family but all the individuals involved in the process who act out of love for the children and the children themselves.

Who can do this better than we?
2020 Volunteer of the Year Finalists

CCUSA is pleased to honor the following volunteers who are finalists for the 2020 Volunteer of the Year Award. They represent the nearly 300,000 volunteers who dedicate their time and talents to the Catholic Charities ministry each year. By applying their skills to serve and help others, each of the finalists exemplifies the mission and spirit of Catholic Charities. The 2020 Volunteer of the Year, Steve Hanlon, will be featured in the summer issue.
Steve Hanlon
Agency: Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma
Program: Car Care Clinic for Transitional Living Program
Service: For the past 12 years, Steve Hanlon has coordinated a car care ministry for Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma’s (CCEOK) Transitional Living Program residents, who are working mothers with children and women with newborn children. The women know that they can rely on Hanlon to keep their cars running. “Having reliable transportation is such a huge part of being able to regain my stability and move forward with my life,” one resident said about the importance of Hanlon’s ministry. While the ministry officially happens just once a month, Hanlon spends countless hours finding supplies, recruiting volunteers, maintaining records and ensuring funding. He can often be found working on a resident’s car in the parking lot of CCEOK whenever issues pop up between monthly car clinic dates. Hanlon works directly with residents to coordinate repairs and to get them back on the road to jobs, classes, group sessions and other important off-campus activities. Here is video about the Car Care Clinic.

June Gagnon
Agency: Catholic Charities Maine
Program: Refugee and Immigration Services Program
Service: June Gagnon has “welcomed the stranger” for 12 years as a volunteer with Catholic Charities Maine’s Refugee & Immigration Services. Putting in the hours of a full-time employee, Gagnon is a critical member of the team, serving Maine’s newest neighbors at their most vulnerable time. She gets donations to our refugees, and has even helped install car seats. Gagnon quickly becomes a trusted friend and...
go-to resource for clients. She is also a tireless advocate for the refugee community by helping to facilitate monthly cultural orientation workshops that educate the community-at-large about the refugee experience and foster a community of caring. Gagnon’s infectious smile uplifts the Catholic Charities staff daily. She happily tackles whatever task she’s given and is a beacon of hope to everyone she meets. Gagnon truly embodies the spirit of Catholic Charities and we are blessed to have her among our ranks.

Dr. George Rosenberg
Agency: Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands
Program: Health Care for the Homeless
Service: Dr. Rosenberg was born and raised in New York City. He completed a four-year residency in Diagnostic Radiology through Columbia University at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Medical Center, also in New York City. In 1985 he and his wife Jessica moved to St. Thomas, USVI. Rosenberg worked at the St. Thomas Hospital, and in 1987 opened St. Thomas Radiology Associates with Dr. K.K. Kim. Through St. Thomas Radiology Associates, Rosenberg introduced the first permanent CT scanner, MRI scanner and digital mammography, as well as numerous other medical imaging modalities and interventional procedures, to the U.S. Virgin Islands. In 2013, Rosenberg, in collaboration with Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands, started Health Care for the Homeless, a free medical clinic for the homeless and underserved population.

Renee Hooks
Agency: Catholic Charities, Diocese of Cleveland
Program: Bishop William M. Cosgrove Center
Service: Ask Renee Hooks why she has volunteered every day for the last three years at the Bishop William M. Cosgrove Center and her answer is simple: It’s the people. “My heart goes out to the families, the women, the men,” Hooks said. “Because I’ve been there.” Because she, too, was homeless. Through Catholic Charities, Diocese of Cleveland, the Bishop Cosgrove Center offers daily hot meals and other services for the city’s homeless and disenfranchised, including pantry and clothing distri-
Hooks’ lived experience helps her connect with guests on a deeper level. After her husband passed away unexpectedly in 2015, Hooks struggled with substance use and found herself in a women’s shelter just a few blocks from the center. “It was like God had brought me down here to give me hope again, to give me motivation,” she said. Even as a guest at Bishop Cosgrove, Hooks always offered to volunteer wherever help was needed. She does the same now, whether it’s helping to prepare meals, cleaning up the cafeteria or distributing clothes. But what’s most important to her is talking with the guests and showing that she cares. “Just somebody to say, ‘Good morning. How are you doing?’ that really makes a person’s day,” she said. “If it’s just one word, or that smile. They need that. I just thank God that I’m happy to do that for them.” Renee Hooks’ life was changed by the help she received at the Bishop Cosgrove Center. Now she works to change lives every day as a volunteer.

**Elsa Poole**
*Agency:* Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
*Program:* Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
*Service:* Elsa Poole has volunteered at the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston for 8 years in a variety of roles, and most recently with the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren is a monthly meeting that equips grandparents with knowledge and resources for successful parenting while providing fun activities for the grandchildren. Each month, Poole coordinates food, activities, prizes and games for over 75 adults and children that are involved in the program. Alongside program staff, she listens compassionately to the needs of the grandparents, addresses those needs with whatever internal resources are available, then connects with external resources to help families get what they need. Throughout her time as a volunteer, Poole has been a model...
for others to follow as an example of Christ-like love and compassion. The way she takes time to make each client feel important is indicative of her passion for serving these people. Poole never makes it feel like a person is receiving social services, which can sometimes feel impersonal or stigmatized; instead, Poole serves without judgment and makes each person feel welcomed and heard so that they trust her to help them on their path to self-sufficiency. Poole is giving clients a hand up without it feeling like a handout.

**Ines Campusano**  
**Agency:** Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington  
**Program:** Spanish Catholic Center Food Distribution Program  
**Service:** Ines Campusano volunteers at Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington within the Spanish Catholic Center’s Food Distribution Program. She has been volunteering with Catholic Charities in different capacities for more than 15 years. Every Wednesday, Campusano arrives at the center along with other volunteers to receive our food order from the Capital Area Food Bank, mostly fresh produce and a few non-perishable items. Campusano unloads boxes and organizes the food. If there is any chopping or sorting that needs to get done, she takes the initiative to get the other volunteers organized. Campusano is incredibly kind and gentle when motivating the other volunteers who may be volunteering for the first time. She has an incredible amount of patience, especially when coordinating some of our younger high school volunteers. It is an intergenerational community of volunteers that make the Food Distribution Program run. After the food is sorted and organized, Campusano and the other volunteers create 100 bags of food that are given to families in need. Campusano has built a rapport with many of the clients and treats them with the utmost respect. She continually teaches us the importance of prioritizing kindness and joy in our everyday work.
The Diocese of Corpus Christi, Catholic Charities of Corpus Christi and Mother Teresa Shelter announced Warren E. Phipps, Jr. as the new executive director of the two organizations.

As executive director, Phipps will manage the day-to-day operations at Catholic Charities of Corpus Christi and Mother Teresa Shelter and will work in concert with the Diocese of Corpus Christi and local leadership to elevate the care of the needy, homeless and displaced in our community and the 12 counties of the Diocese.

“I am honored and humbled to be a part of an organization that is well known and respected,” Phipps said. “I look forward to achieving the vision of the diocese and of the board of directors.”

Phipps brings over 20 years of experience in executive leadership in various U.S. military positions and nonprofit public charity, strategic planning and business development, functional organization management, team building and communications expertise to his new role.

Most recently, Phipps was executive director for Coastal Bend Disaster Recovery Group, Sinton, Texas, where he was responsible for administration, financial stewardship and implementation of the strategic plan in accordance with the organizational mission and values.

Bishop Michael Mulvey says that Phipps is an experienced leader who has a heart for service. “He is a servant leader and will be a great asset to our Diocese and especially Catholic Charities and the Mother Teresa Shelter,” the Bishop said.

Phipps’ first day at Catholic Charities was March 2, 2020.
Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) offers its employees, as a free part of its benefits package, a coach-led, financial management program called Beyond Belief. Just as we coach and walk with clients on their journeys out of poverty, we also help employees who need assistance achieve financial stability, with checkpoints and incentives along the way. About 8% of our staff participate.

We have employees right out of college facing massive student debt. We have employees with sudden, unexpected emergencies with vehicles, family members, health, and more that drained the savings they had worked so hard to build. And now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have some employees who need help and guidance to withstand the crisis.

The Beyond Belief program assists employees in achieving four goals or metrics: A living wage, no inappropriate debt, appropriate savings and savings behavior, and no government assistance.
A living wage

Regarding a steady, livable income, we have our employees covered. Although the composition of every family is different, we use the MIT living wage calculator (https://livingwage.mit.edu/) to ensure that we pay each employee an appropriate living wage.

It’s the last three goals that are difficult to achieve, but well worth the effort. We want our employees (as we do our clients) to stay out of financial trouble, so we share proven tools and resources that help in the long run.

No inappropriate debt

We define “inappropriate” debt as interest-bearing debt that does not result in a long-term asset, which includes credit cards, payday loans, title loans, interest-bearing medical debt and all other interest-bearing debt. “Appropriate” debt includes items like a mortgage, student loan, vehicle loan or small business loan. In other words, appropriate debt leads to asset building.

Savings

While the other metrics indicate whether someone is out of poverty, the savings component is the only metric that indicates if one can remain out of poverty.

For Beyond Belief, meeting the savings metric means an employee has saved $1,000 and demonstrated monthly savings behavior in a six-month period.

No government assistance

Having no government assistance is a different end game for many other service providers. CCFW sees government assistance as a tool to stabilize a family on the road to self-sufficiency, but it is never part of a permanent solution.
How it works

Currently we have two full time success coaches with caseload capacity of up to 40 people each.

Upon enrollment, employees start meeting with their assigned coaches once a week for one month, then two times a month going forward, for a minimum of three months. During these meetings, the coach works with the employees to create an individualized plan for personal and financial goals.

We recognized that employees will be discussing sensitive information with their coaches, so we went to great lengths to ensure that the program is confidential and private. The names of participants and their data are accessible only to their coaches.

During their time in the program, participants have access to a capped amount of emergency financial assistance, as long as it is strategically applied to move the participant toward financial stability.

All participants are able to sign up through a CCFW Beyond Belief SharePoint site, where we also list frequently asked questions, eligibility requirements, coach biographies and employee success stories.

Beyond Belief milestones

- **82 participants since starting in 2018**
- **2 Success Coaches**
- **Upon program entry, employee participants averaged $8,000 in debt**
- **Upon program exit, employee participants averaged over $1,000 in savings**
- **50 employees who meet CCFW’s out of poverty definition**

“In January of 2018, I had $6,000 on my credit card. In January of 2019, I’m completely paid off. I was enrolled in Beyond Belief for six or seven months, and during this time I still got to do all of the things I loved, liked traveling, without adding to my credit card debt.”

- Bethany Dunn, Client Navigator, Economic Advancement for Refugees and Immigrants
All in-person meetings and large gatherings previously scheduled in the near term have been cancelled in response to Covid-19.