Catholic Charities responds to COVID-19
CONTENTS

Catholic Charities responds to pandemic

From Catholic Charities USA, the national office

- The work of CCUSA’s Social Policy team
- Disaster Operations COVID-19 Report
- AmeriCorps response: National Service at Catholic Charities
- Parishes and the pandemic

From Catholic Charities, member agencies

- “For I was hungry, and you gave me food” - Matthew, 25:35
- Catholic Charities COPE line offers hope through pandemic
- Protecting the dignity of human life - at all costs
- Catholic Charities of Tennessee managing dual disasters

DEPARTMENTS

Editor’s Column
CCUSA Update
Network Notes
Agency Spotlight
Calendar

LAST ISSUE: SPRING 2020
EDITOR’S COLUMN

While the main theme of our summer issue is the response of the Catholic Charities ministry to the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s difficult not to mention the terrible tragedy of the killing of George Floyd.

Mr. Floyd’s death at the hands of a police officer points to a deeper and more persistent disease among us: the sin of racism. Catholic Charities USA denounced immediately the killing and urged Congress “to pursue a holistic and integrated approach to racial justice” (Read the full letter here).

On June 19, 2020, Sister Donna invited CCUSA board members and staff to a virtual Juneteenth prayer service to commemorate the freedom of African American slaves in the United States.

Together we asked God to give us a deep conversion of heart; the wisdom, insight, and courage to reject hatred and racism; and the strength to change our nation through loving, personal care of each other. Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Perhaps the pandemic, which has heightened the importance of individual responsibility for the common good, can point us in the right direction toward fighting racism. If I want to help stop the spread in the community, then I need to make the appropriate changes in my own behavior and way of thinking first.

David Werning, Managing Editor
To comment on this issue, please write to David Werning at dwerning@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org.
On the first day of January 2020, coronavirus for many people in the United States was a mysterious disease happening somewhere else. Just three months later, most people not only recognized the term and its specific designation, COVID-19, but also acted to slow its spread. By March 2020, COVID-19 had swept across the U.S. and began infecting people at an alarming rate. In response, many workplaces shut their doors and households sheltered in place.

The staff of Catholic Charities USA and many local Catholic Charities agencies around the country responded similarly, closing offices and starting telework. But the response of the Catholic Charities ministry had another aspect as well: continuing to serve its clients during the challenging time of the ongoing pandemic.

As early as March 11, 2020, CCUSA asked Congress and the administration to enact immediate and effective policies to limit the impact of COVID-19. CCUSA has continued throughout the pandemic to advocate for the most vulnerable by urging the availability of stimulus funds and increased funding for programs like the Emergency Food and Shelter Program. CCUSA also distributed $6.1 million to agencies for COVID-19-related disaster grants and helped to deliver almost 2 million face masks, 650 gallons of hand sanitizer, and gloves, masks, shields, and gowns.
Member agencies across the U.S. have responded with the same speed and generosity in a variety of ways too many to recount. Local Catholic Charities staff, careful to follow social distancing guidelines, still managed to get food to needy families either by delivering items to doorsteps or creating drive-thru pantries. Staff and volunteers at agencies also made phone calls to senior citizens who were quarantined in nursing homes, counseled people over video chats, and constructed shelters for people without housing.

The response of the Catholic Charities ministry during COVID-19 has been amazing in its generosity and innovation, from both the national office and the local agencies. Representing just part of this response are the articles found in two sections of this issue: “Catholic Charities USA, the national office” and “Catholic Charities, member agencies.” Each section contains four articles describing some of the ways Catholic Charities has responded to COVID-19.
During catastrophes access to the White House, federal agencies and Congressional offices becomes a key component to the Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) Social Policy team’s efforts at informing the national discussion regarding resources provided through legislation for frontline services and support for individuals and families.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic/shutdown, CCUSA’s Social Policy team reached out to Capitol Hill via tele-meetings, contacting key Congressional offices early on to advocate for income supports, personal protective equipment for frontline staff and volunteers, work supports, and other issues of concern. In collaboration with national nonprofits, the team advocated for additional funds for charities through changes in charitable giving policy, direct financial support, loans and other means to assist the nonprofit sector’s response to the pandemic.

Another key component to the work of the Social Policy team is the strength of the Catholic Charities network and the role it plays each and every day to assist individuals and families during challenging times. The policy team had no trouble gaining access to the federal agencies because the ministry of Catholic Charities to those who are poor and vulnerable is well known. Staff in federal agencies respect the work of the Catholic Charities network and were eager to work with CCUSA on how to get support to the front lines. These agencies wanted to ensure that CCUSA had access to resources and information for service providers. Most of this information is posted on the CCUSA COVID-19 webpage and shared directly with the respective program area.

The Social Policy team connected officials in the departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, and
Homeland Security (FEMA) with Catholic Charities directors and staff across the country so that local concerns could be heard and answered.

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) even contacted CCUSA about hosting a webinar for the CCUSA network. The webinar provided information to Catholic Charities agencies on the federal homelessness response to COVID-19, including presentations from the Centers for Disease Control, USICH, HUD. Each of the federal departments addressed questions and concerns regarding guidance, supplies, food shortage and safety. They also provided their contact information.

During the pandemic the CCUSA Social Policy team participated in the process of a bill becoming a law, which involves rulemaking and guidance on how the program is to be administered. Typically, this process is lengthy. However, given the pandemic, rules were made and guidance issued in a very short period of time, which created confusion. Programs such as the Unemployment Insurance program, Paid Family Leave, and the Small Business Administration (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) were not accessed as intended. The policy team studied the numerous rules and guidance and shared its conclusions with the Catholic Charities network. The team also held webinars on the SBA loans and SNAP, and provided one-on-one consultations.

The team spent a lot of time advocating for more flexibility in the SBA Loan program’s rules, which stated originally that only nonprofit agencies with fewer than 500 employees could qualify. This provision was problematic for at least 15 Catholic Charities agencies that had more than 500 employees. Further advocacy efforts by the Social Policy team led to some of these agencies being granted access to the program.

The CCUSA Social Policy team has worked non-stop since the onset of the pandemic and continues its efforts as another COVID-19 bill is pending, states are reopening, and temporary provisions begin to expire. The Social Policy team continues to advocate for just social structures—it is our mission.
If responding to natural disasters wasn’t complicated enough, COVID-19 places new challenges in the disaster response work Catholic Charities accomplishes. As agencies try to navigate an already complicated disaster process, it becomes even more challenging when the process includes new terms like “social distancing,” new equipment such as masks, shields, and gloves, and new strategies of meeting clients through electronic means.

At the onset of COVID-19, CCUSA disaster operations staff and public health and disaster experts conducted a readiness training for Catholic Charities agencies that garnered 600 participants. That was the start, and it didn’t take long for the action to increase with countless information sources, guidance, directions, and updates.

Since COVID-19 is a disaster that affects EVERY Catholic Charities agency, the diocesan director listserv soon became overwhelmed with all types of information, data, questions, etc. As a result, Disaster Operations quickly established the COVID-19 Resource page to help organize information that would be helpful to agencies in a one-stop location. Information flow on this page is continually monitored and updated with new articles and guidance being added every week. We encourage agencies to continue using the COVID-19 resource page to assist them in their work.

Disaster Operations’ work with Catholic Charities Nashville opened the door to the reality that approaching a response to disasters must be different under COVID-19. Our team immediately began working on what the new reality would look like and promptly developed a planning tool: “What Happens during a Disaster Chart” helps agencies plan for disasters through a COVID-19 lens. Each agency should create its own plan with the provided work-
sheet - the key is to PLAN BEFORE THE CHAOS of a
disaster happens. Kudos to Catholic Charities in the
Gulf States who used this resource to plan their re-
sponse and prepare for the landfall of Tropical Storm
Cristobal. Agencies were ready to meet challenges
but, thankfully, the storm did not cause the damage
anticipated.

At the national office, CCUSA distributed $6.1 million
to agencies for COVID-19 programming by way of
short-term disaster grants and foundation funding.
Additionally, working alongside CCUSA’s Develop-
ment team, and in response to the dire need agen-
cies expressed for Personal Protective Equipment
(PPE), CCUSA partnered with both FEMA, Health and
Human Services (HHS), Mennonite Disaster Services,
and others to help address the PPE shortfall, procur-
ing and delivering almost 2 million face masks, 650
gallons of hand sanitizer, as well as gloves, masks,
shields and gowns.

CCUSA also deployed its mobile laundry trailer to
Catholic Charities Tampa/St. Petersburg. The agency
partnered with the City of Tampa to open an emer-
gency shelter for the homeless that would help those
on the margins of society stay safe from the corona-
virus and receive much-needed services. Soon after
arriving, six washers and six dryers were running
nonstop while the laundry was open. With over 100
clients and the summer’s heat already intense in Flor-
ida, a schedule was created to ensure everyone had
equal access. CCDOSP Executive Director Maggie
Rogers said, “It contributed greatly to the success
of the shelter and the comfort of our clients.” The
multi-agency collaboration was so successful that the
City of Tampa is seeking a new, 250-person shelter
site to be operated by CCDOSP.

Finally, Disaster Operations continues to make avail-
able information from FEMA on operational proce-
dures during COVID-19, which can be access from
the COVID-19 Resource Page link above.
During this unprecedented time in our country, our federal partner AmeriCorps made the decision to allow national service members to break from their traditional service duties and support COVID-19 response efforts in their communities. Through CCUSA's five AmeriCorps programs, 28 AmeriCorps members provided almost 5,000 hours of COVID-19 response efforts, serving over 25,000 individuals since March. Their services corresponded to the needs of their local agencies and communities, with AmeriCorps members performing 992 wellness and safety checks, serving 4,639 meals, and collecting and distributing 149,372 pounds of food. Members also sorted 110 tons of donations, which included food and sanitary items as well as critically needed personal protective equipment, and they recruited 673 volunteers to assist in providing key services.

Outside of these direct service activities, AmeriCorps members also served from a distance, creating and dispersing information on COVID-19 and emergency assistance resources to clients in multiple languages through social media, flyers, and community postings. In addition, AmeriCorps members assisted with the creation of re-opening procedures and helped to screen individuals for benefit eligibility. Through these various interventions, AmeriCorps members helped meet the immediate needs in their community while also planning for the future.
Parishes and the pandemic

By Scott Hurd, Vice President, Leadership Formation, CCUSA

Following a disaster, impacted communities typically gather together to pray: for help and hope, survivors and victims, resiliency and recovery. But that wasn’t possible after the coronavirus hit, as church doors were shuttered to help prevent spread of the disease. At the same time, parish programs were cancelled and volunteers found themselves isolating at home, leaving Catholic Charities agencies and the parishes with which they collaborate bewildered and wondering what to do next.

But not for long. Following the initial shock, parish social ministers pivoted to new ways of serving their communities and engaging with volunteers. Older volunteers, no longer able to safely staff food pantries, instead made “wellness check” phone calls to the homebound elderly and other vulnerable persons. Younger volunteers, especially college students finding themselves back from school, stepped in to take up the slack, even delivering groceries to those for whom it was risky to leave their homes. “Grab and go” replaced “client choice” at food pantries, and some parish parking lots became major Catholic Charities food and diaper distribution sites.

Parish social ministry leaders seized the moment to foster participation in the U.S. Census, encourage parishioners to write their lawmakers to advocate for important social policy issues, and promote Catholic social teaching. Prayer services and liturgies were streamed online, providing essential religious and social connection. Thousands were challenged and inspired by reflections emailed each morning by Catholic Charities USA, connecting the day’s Mass readings with the Church’s ministry to those in need. Thanks to the expansion of teletherapy services by multiple Catholic Charities agencies, many parishioners were able to easily access mental health care at home at a
time when demand for such services increased. And, in the face of massive unemployment and financial strain, ministry leaders helped those impacted apply for SNAP benefits, especially those who never had to receive them before.

During the pandemic’s initial weeks, Catholic Charities USA conducted video conferences for parish social ministry leaders across the country, allowing them to connect for mutual support and the sharing of best practices and new initiatives. Later, online conferences featuring Catholic Charities content experts stressed the need to understand the pandemic as a disaster, explored strategies for how parishes can safely reopen while helping parishioners feel safe, and considered how Catholic Charities agencies can effectively engage with parishes struggling with financial stress, or even downsizing.

After most disasters, it takes 18-24 months for a parish community to return to its pre-disaster strength. But the COVID-19 pandemic is not a typical disaster. Parishes are just now beginning to tentatively reopen, and generally at limited capacity. Even those parishioners who may wish to return may not feel safe to do so, especially vulnerable older persons and those with underlying health conditions. Yet as these communities continue to recover and journey toward a “new normal,” social ministers – both those with Catholic Charities and parish staff – will continue to collaborate with perseverance and creativity, providing help and creating hope.
“For I was hungry, and you gave me food” - Matthew, 25:35

By Deanna Wolf, Community & Volunteer Engagement Manager, Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego

In the rapidly changing reality of COVID-19, the Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy, bishop of the Diocese of San Diego, called upon the Board of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego at their meeting March 12, 2020, to address the increasing needs of vulnerable populations.

The bishop reminded the group that almost 100 years ago, Catholic Charities along the West Coast were born as a result of the devastation created by the Spanish Flu, and now Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego was called upon, during its centennial year, to address the devastation created by COVID-19 within our communities.

Anticipating the changing needs of the community, CEO Vino Pajanor and the leadership team at Catholic Charities created the Emergency Food Distribution Network. The team knew that the traditional model for food distribution would not be viable during the pandemic. Unemployment numbers were climbing daily. Seniors could not safely leave their homes. People were hungry. Jesus fed the disciples before he would teach them. Couldn’t we, as Church and Catholic Charities, do the same?

When Pajanor suggested during the board meeting the idea of Catholic Charities leading a diocesan-wide effort to feed the hungry, Bishop McElroy quickly pledged his support and promised to enlist three
deans from the diocese to help Catholic Charities recruit an even greater number of parishes to participate.

Providentially, our organization’s leadership team had worked hard during late 2019 to develop relationships with a handful of parishes throughout the diocese, inviting them to partner with Catholic Charities as food distribution sites. The fruits of our labor paid off.

Catholic Charities was set to open monthly mass food distribution sites at two large parishes in the diocese during the Spring of 2020. As the number of COVID-19 cases grew across the country, gatherings of close to 300 people at these sites left us with fear for the health and safety of our communities. Hunger does not stop for a pandemic; it is exacerbated by it. We needed to change our model.

A new model had to be quickly implemented in order to provide resources to a growing number of people experiencing food insecurity during COVID-19. We had two main considerations: We needed to modify operations for social distancing and to gather fewer people together.

Several brainstorming sessions, spreadsheets and charts later, our food distribution model became decentralized through the Emergency Food Distribution Network. None of this could have happened without the support of our partners. A call was put out to an initial list of seven parishes in the diocese, asking them to host a drive-thru food pantry and conduct home-delivered meals in the surrounding community. All seven parishes answered the call and became our beta-test partners the week of March 25.

On April 6, Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego officially launched the Emergency Food Distribution Network with 21 participating parish partners and 519 engaged volunteers. Thanks to the generosity and unfailing support of the diocesan high school, Cathedral Catholic, it became the central pickup location for our parish partners. Catholic Charities filled the school’s parking lot, gym, and theater with pallets and boxes of nearly 2,500 food packages that were distributed to our parish partners that first wet and rainy day in April.

Our Community Services Program now works closely with parish coordinators from each emergency food distribution site to support weekly operations of the drive-thru food pantry and home deliveries of food to the surrounding community. These parish coordinators, many of whom are parish staff, give tirelessly to the effort. In turn, Catholic Charities has partnered
with the Diocese of San Diego to reimburse parishes for the hours their staff contribute towards the Emergency Food Distribution Network.

An average of 250 volunteers work at various parishes each week as distribution assistants, packing assistants and home-delivery drivers. The Knights of Columbus San Diego Chapter demonstrated incredible leadership as volunteer drivers, showing up even for last minute, unscheduled needs. In a time when so many people feel helpless about how to respond, Catholic Charities gives them the opportunity to be the Good Samaritan that Christ has called us to be by feeding his people.

As parishes begin to reopen, we are looking ahead to the next phase of the Emergency Food Distribution Network. We hope to let our partners lead the way. Sustainable solutions and programming come from the community. Our parishes are uniquely situated as safe, trusted places not only for parishioners but also for many members of the community. Parish staff know the needs of their neighbors intimately. Catholic Charities will join parishes, heeding their experience, in growing the Emergency Food Distribution Network through deep, authentic partnerships that adapt to the ever-changing environment.

The Emergency Food Distribution Network of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego involves two parish coordinators per parish doing a combined 20-40 hours of work per week to coordinate the volunteers and food distribution. Catholic Charities prepared a budget that factored in the costs and then raised funds for the network. When funders/donors asked why support for parish coordinators was necessary, Catholic Charities validated the expense for the benefit of advanced planning and the sustainability of the program.
Catholic Charities COPE Line offers hope through pandemic

Diocese of Springfield in Illinois creates program to offer mental health solutions in midst of coronavirus

By Laura Wolfe, Development Director, Catholic Charities Diocese of Springfield

For the past seven years Eleanor has suffered from dementia and her daughter Jenny has faithfully visited her in the nursing home where she lives.

When the nursing home closed its doors to the public because of safety concerns surrounding the coronavirus, Jenny feared her mom’s already failing health would worsen. Jenny quickly realized the stress she felt was causing her own health to deteriorate. Jenny needed someone to hear her cry for understanding and support.

Twenty-five miles away, pre-coronavirus, William’s social life consisted of leaving his home to go to the store and restaurants.

William had been a hard worker, but had become estranged from his family many years ago. He learned to adjust to a new kind of loneliness with the arrival of the coronavirus. The 76-year-old retired U.S. Navy veteran felt like any connection he had with the outside world dwindled to nothing and he needed someone to listen.

As the weeks passed, William and Jenny longed for normalcy. They both felt hopeless and depressed. Then, each happened to see an advertisement for a free public service, the Catholic Charities COPE Line, which offers compassionate, optimistic, professional, and empathetic mental health guidance by telephone.
The COPE Line was created a few weeks into the pandemic to help people deal with the stress and anxiety related to loneliness, confinement, finances, unemployment or other problems related to the coronavirus outbreak. Unlike traditional therapy, there are no fees, no enrollment forms, and no applications.

Both Jenny and William decided to call the COPE Line, and they were met with compassion and empathy by licensed professional counselor, Annetta Finley.

Annetta has been a licensed therapist for 15 years. She listened to their problems and offered them hope in the middle of their anxiety and feelings of helplessness and uncertainty.

“The COPE Line provides an outlet for people to vent and someone who will listen without judgment or preconceived ideas,” said Annetta. “Some of the conversations have actually become spiritual and, in addition to listening and imparting coping skills, I’ve been able to pray with the person.”

Catholic Charities wants to be a light in every community it serves, big, small, rural and urban. The main goal with the COPE Line is to help people understand they are not alone. Catholic Charities reaches out to people as part of its mission to seek out those who are suffering.

“When the Governor’s Office put the Stay at Home Order restrictions in place, we knew that there would be many people who would become more socially isolated and depressed,” said Steven Roach, executive director for Catholic Charities, in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. “We knew we had to be creative and think of ways to reach them, and that’s how the idea for the Catholic Charities COPE Line was born.”

To learn more about Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois or its programs, visit cc.dio.org.
Protecting the dignity of human life - At all costs

By Tom Blonski, President and CEO of Catholic Charities New Hampshire

Spending a Tuesday night painstakingly negotiating with vendors to secure several thousand pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) for our skilled nursing facilities after the last order was waylaid somewhere in the Far East… Witnessing the tsunami of emotions facing our residents, staff and family members, while doing our best to remain calm, collected and reassuring… This is the “new norm” at Catholic Charities New Hampshire as we navigate this unprecedented time – and our mission of protecting the poor and vulnerable is being tested like never before.

In addition to our various social services programs that disrupt the cycle of poverty and strengthen families – each having their own dynamic response to the pandemic – we’re one of a handful of Catholic Charities agencies that operate skilled nursing facilities. We have seven in total, serving nearly 1,000 seniors each year, with more than 850 staff.

Our residents are spouses, parents and grandparents. Each is a cherished member of our family. We learn from them, smile because of them and are privileged to be able to care for them. And now, we’re doing all we can to protect them from this invisible enemy in COVID-19.

The steps we’ve taken may seem extreme but are necessary. In consonance with CDC protocol(s), we implemented rigid infection control guidelines. We prohibited all visitations until opening up (outdoor) family visits recently. Community gatherings (meals, special events, etc.) were suspended. Staff and residents are regularly tested and screened for the virus. Universal masking (and donning of full PPE when needed) was implemented. In the event that residents test positive, we constructed temporary isolation units. The list goes on.
While these actions have proven to be effective, we’re surrounded by the constant reminder that you don’t have full control over the situation, especially after employees leave work. You could be doing everything right, and the virus still enters your facility (as it has with one of ours). The risk is with us every day.

Our employees are true heroes, literally risking their health/lives to care for our residents. Some could have decided it was too much, opting for more pay through unemployment, but they didn’t. Their commitment to our residents and fellow staff is remarkable.

We’re fortunate to have secured sufficient amounts of PPE, and unlike other nursing homes, our staff don’t have to reuse PPE for multiple days. Initially, we had three people working almost fulltime to eliminate having to reuse PPE. In a market filled with confiscations, price gouging and counterfeiting, you have to be extra vigilant to ensure that you have adequate access to the right quantity and quality of PPE – at a fair price. Thankfully, it paid off for us.

Our residents are understandably anxious and feeling more isolated by the day. We’re doing our best to focus on the positives. We purchased tablets so residents could have “virtual visits” with loved ones, family members are doing “window” and outside visits, and we even had special car parades to commemorate occasions like Mother’s Day, Easter and Father’s Day.

We also contend with daily negative press and “nursing home bashing,” including the belief that loss of life in facilities like ours is less important than getting the economy back on track. It’s not an either/or predicament! To cast human beings aside as if they were “expired goods” is disheartening and sickening. Before judging, others should seek first to understand.

Operationally, we’re anticipating at least a $1 million loss this year due to continued underfunding from Medicaid, unexpected costs related to PPE, lower census, and paying more for outside agency personnel to fill staffing vacancies. But this is all secondary to what matters most.

In Ron Rolheiser’s book, The Restless Heart, he states, “Evolution works through this principle: The survival of the fittest...However, one of the essential elements of Christian discipleship demands that we work for a different principle: The survival of the weakest and the gentlest.” This is what drives us.

In times of crisis, the dignity and sanctity of human life are not to be sacrificed. In fact, they are to be bolstered and uplifted. We remain driven by the belief that every person we encounter is sacred and has worth, especially our seniors. They are our most vulnerable citizens and the foundation of who we are as human beings. They deserve nothing less.

And although the unknowns of tomorrow persist, we are confident that our faith, diligence and God’s hand will carry us as we continue to protect and care for the most vulnerable.
Catholic Charities of Tennessee managing dual disasters

By Judy Orr, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of Tennessee

Fresh from new director training at Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) headquarters in mid-February, I was reenergized to tackle my goals of elevating the Catholic Charities of Tennessee’s profile and increasing fundraising. Three weeks in March 2020 accelerated all that.

On March 3, at 12:38 a.m., a tornado with wind speeds up to 165 mph ripped across the region with only minutes’ warning, decimating a portion of North Nashville where we have a significant presence. By 7 a.m., I had already heard from Brian Corbin and Kim Burgo at CCUSA, offering prayers, support, and a reminder that we could apply for an instant disaster relief grant for $10,000.

Before lunch, my disaster team was meeting to understand the scope of the disaster and how we would interface with Nashville’s overall disaster response. Fortunately, our own locations were not too badly damaged, considering the damage to nearby neighborhoods included roads being impassable.

By 1 p.m., we had a tornado relief page live on our website that helped us raise additional funds. Donations poured in quickly and totaled nearly $10,000 within days.

Our agency has several people experienced in responding to crises, including work during the epic 100-year flood that hit Nashville in 2010 and devastated thousands of homes across the region. That
said, we are not “first responders.” We opened our North Nashville neighborhood center to other organizations providing immediate relief and began participating in the long-term recovery planning effort led by the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA).

I was buoyed knowing that Kim Burgo would arrive the week of March 23 to take charge, and would drive the CCUSA mobile response unit, bringing with her four disaster relief workers borrowed from other agencies. But on March 17, all tornado relief efforts ground to a halt because of the coronavirus pandemic. TEMA redeployed to assist with COVID-19, and our CCUSA team was in lockdown.

By then we were receiving calls for financial assistance when restaurants were ordered to serve at reduced capacity and retail establishments started closing.

Knowing Nashville had established a COVID-19 Response Fund, I assembled our emergency assistance case managers to get their input on a relief plan. They suggested calling the mayor’s office to tell them we are experts at helping displaced people, and that we have the capacity to help, because some of our programs were being closed due to coronavirus.

On Thursday, March 19, United Way of Greater Nashville called to say they wanted us to be among the first partners to distribute the Response Fund. We expected to be up and running within a week. The next day, as I drove home, I heard the radio announcement that Catholic Charities would be distributing money from the fund.

My heart skipped a beat, because they didn’t tell us we’d start the very next day. But by Sunday afternoon, we had an online application form ready and two staff poised to take applications. Our intake team grew to 12 within a week and peaked at 20 during the process, with several staff dedicated fulltime to the program.

Our improvised “call center” served both COVID-19 and the tornado team, who could no longer meet people face to face. After several weeks, we began contact-less delivery of household supplies, with help from Society of St. Vincent DePaul volunteers.

To date, we have distributed $313,000 in financial assistance for job losses related to COVID-19, and we expect to distribute even more in tornado relief as the city reopens.
I have learned so much about myself as an executive director and the talents of my staff as we handled these dual crises. Here are just a few of my thoughts:

- **Never be afraid to ask for help.** People are very eager to help when you are a new leader.

- **Seek out the best counsel available.** The resources and expertise of CCUSA were invaluable to me, as was the real-life experience of my team.

- **Offer to help.** My call to the Mayor’s office resulted in us being recognized as experts in emergency financial assistance.

- **Be creative and flexible where you can.** None of us had experience working a pandemic, but we figured it out together.

- **Focus on what your organization does well.** Recognize whatever bench strength you’ve got and run the ball when the community needs it.

- **View crises as opportunities to grow.** We’ve learned new ways of working together as a team and have developed stronger community partnerships.

- **Always keep your faith…and a rosary in your pocket.**
CCUSA enters the podcast world

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) launched its new podcast channel “Charities at Work.” It can be accessed on the CCUSA website as well as the following podcast platforms: Apple, Google Podcasts, Spotify and SimpleCast.

“Charities at Work” will focus on the work and mission of the Catholic Charities ministry in the United States, both the national office (CCUSA) and local agencies. Topics regarding the Catholic faith in general will also be featured.

The first seven episodes of Charities at Work will explore the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching as outlined by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: 1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person; 2. Solidarity; 3. Care for Creation; 4. Call to Family, Community, and Participation; 5. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; 6. Rights and Responsibilities; and 7. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.

Each of the seven themes will be discussed by a moderator and two guest speakers, who will consider the particular theme in terms of its theological foundations and practical implications. Each podcast will be around 30 minutes in length.

Episode 1 considers the Life and Dignity of the Human Person through the insights of Father Ragan Schriver, special assistant to the president at CCUSA, and Brian Corbin, executive vice president of member services at CCUSA. Schriver discusses the theological and pastoral foundations of the principle of human dignity, and Corbin looks at the practical implications of the teaching.

Two AmeriCorps VISTA members share their experiences over the last year

On June 24, 2020, CCUSA held a lunch and learn tele-meeting during which two AmeriCorps VISTA members – Abby Qualliotine, VISTA Leader, and Brigid McKeon, VISTA member at CCUSA - shared their work experience over the previous year.

Qualliotine and McKeon spent their VISTA year with CCUSA, serving the national office in Alexandria and local Catholic Charities agencies across the country. The year was marked with an amazing variety of activities for both of them, including assisting the Catholic Charities ministry’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
As VISTA Leader, Qualliotine helped over 50 VISTAs thrive in their assignments by checking in with them via video chats and providing webinars on topics like self-care and maintaining a work-life balance during the pandemic. Qualliotine also created a Life After AmeriCorps program to counsel and prepare members for their next professional opportunity after their end of service as well as a recruitment checklist to improve the process of onboarding new members for local Catholic Charities.

McKeon spent the year as a VISTA for CCUSA and assisted the ministry by furthering a border deployment program to send volunteers to help with migrants coming into the United States, supporting the 2Gen programming at Catholic Charities agencies through webinars and site visits, and lending a hand in organizing shipments of donated food items during the coronavirus crisis.

Both Qualliotine and McKeon remarked how fruitful their year with CCUSA had been, and they look forward to using what they learned as they move on to careers focused on helping people, especially the most vulnerable and forgotten.

Zach Cahalan, strategic director for Disaster Operations at CCUSA, appointed to NVOAD Board

Zach Cahalan, strategic director for Disaster Operations at CCUSA, recently became a member of the NVOAD Board of Directors by membership vote at the 2020 NVOAD Annual Member’s Meeting (National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster National VOAD). Cahalan has been doing disaster work since 2006, supporting local and national disaster needs.

“It’s an honor and privilege to have the support of my peers in providing my experience and insights to this amazing organization,” Cahalan said. “I’ve benefited countless times from ongoing collaboration with NVOAD members and this affords me an opportunity to pay it forward.”

NVOAD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization that builds resiliency in communities nationwide. It serves as the forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle—preparation, response, recovery and mitigation—to help disaster survivors. CCUSA, then the National Catholic Disaster Relief Committee, was one of seven national founding members in 1970 and remains committed and invested in advancing the NVOAD mission: to be a forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle—preparation, response and recovery—to help disaster survivors and their communities.
In light of the tragic killings of African Americans, including most recently George Floyd, Sister Donna Markham OP, PhD brought CCUSA board members and staff together in prayer on June 19, 2020, to commemorate “Juneteenth,” which celebrates the ending of slavery for African Americans in the United States.

Opening with “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the Negro National Anthem, the service highlighted African American culture as well as some of the day-to-day struggles inflicted upon the African American community. Prayers, historical facts, scripture readings, poems, music, and tears filled the service with a sense of pride and hope for change.

As the service concluded, everyone was asked to sit in silence in remembrance of George Floyd for eight minutes and 46 seconds, the same amount of time that elapsed when his life was taken so unjustly from him on Monday, May 25, 2020. This moment of silence after prayer accentuated how life can be taken so quickly.
Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma (CCEOK) is distributing free food boxes through the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program. The boxes include fresh produce and dairy products and are available to anyone in need. During the first six weeks of this special initiative, volunteers teamed up at 13 locations across Eastern Oklahoma and distributed more than 2 million pounds of food. Eight locations will continue this program through August.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented need in our community. Included in those affected by this crisis are local farmers, who were throwing away tremendous amounts of product because they had no buyers. The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program was created to pay farmers for their product without waste, as the food is being given out to those in need.

“I’ve never met a more caring group of people,” said Tammy Perry, a CCEOK volunteer in Muskogee, Oklahoma. “This program not only helps those in poverty, but also helps the farmers. I think I am as blessed as those who are getting the food.”

Catholic Charities, powered by hundreds of volunteers, is taking on the challenge of distributing these boxes of produce and dairy to those who need them. To ensure safety during the pandemic, each of the sites features a drive-through distribution with volunteers wearing masks.

“We strive to serve every person with dignity and are pleased to be partnering with so many amazing volunteers and organizations on this important project,” said Deacon Kevin Sartorius, CEO of Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma.

For a list of locations, times and volunteer opportunities, visit cceok.org/f2f.

Volunteers chill out by the refrigerated truck with CEO, Deacon Kevin Sartorius.
Staff member from Catholic Charities of Buffalo reflects on serving during the pandemic

By James Campbell, Outreach Specialist, Catholic Charities' Department of Parish Outreach & Advocacy

Down in the southeastern reaches of the area served by Catholic Charities of Buffalo rests a small food pantry staffed currently by myself and nine tremendous volunteers fulfilling God’s work of feeding the hungry, which is the first of the Corporal Works of Mercy.

Our ministry is both supported by and supportive of all who come to us. Every day that the food pantry is open there are shared feelings of concern, of laughter, of joy, and especially of comfort in knowing that we made a difference in the lives of all we served.

I was thinking of a line of lyrics in a favorite song from years past. The Grateful Dead’s “Scarlet Begonias” reads, “Once in a while you get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right.” I see the light in my volunteers. I see the light in those most grateful for what we do each day.

One elderly couple visited our site early last week. The husband said to me as I was setting bags full of food items on the table outside for them, “I see the face of Jesus in you.” I smiled and gave a wave while turning to go back inside to help prepare bags of food for the next family. It didn’t really sink in until later what he had said to me. I thought about it and realized how lucky I am to be in a position to do God’s work on a little street corner in Wellsville, N.Y., for Catholic Charities.

My Catholic faith has always been important in my life. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife and two beautiful daughters, and I do my best to be a good spiritual leader for our household. I’ve been blessed to have a great supervisor and coworkers throughout the Parish Outreach and Advocacy Department. All of them have been most supportive in my tenure with Catholic Charities during the last seven-and-a-half years. I can only hope and pray that all of the people doing God’s work across Catholic Charities receive the same blessings I have and continue to receive them each and every day.”

For other testimonies from Catholic Charities of Buffalo staff, please see the storybank on the CCUSA website.
All in-person meetings and large gatherings previously scheduled in the near term have been cancelled in response to COVID-19.