

# Charities USA

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SPECIAL EDITION

DOUBLE  
WHAMMY

SUPER STORMS DRAW  
TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY  
EVEN CLOSER

FIRST STEPS  
AFTER  
HURRICANE  
IRMA:

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
DEACON RICHARD  
TURCOTTE

## IN THE EYE OF THE STORM:

THE CATHOLIC CHARITIES MINISTRY RESPONDS TO DISASTERS



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## EDITOR'S

## COLUMN

The present issue provides for the reader a close look at the work and ministry of disaster recovery by the Catholic Charities network, including the national office (CCUSA), in the wake of the terrible destruction caused by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Through the popular media, we have all been well-informed about many of the details: death tolls, numbers of homes and businesses lost, and the costs of damages and repairs. There have also been many stories shared about the responses of organizations and countless volunteers who provided aid and support to the impacted areas.

What may not be so widely known is the specific work of Catholic Charities, both at the national and the local level. As you read through the articles, you will discover a wonderful mosaic of experiences and responses in light of the aforementioned hurricanes that devastated Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We hope that the stories herein will inform and inspire you. They reveal well the fruit of the Catholic Charities mission to serve people in need. One could also say that in the case of the recent – and ongoing – recovery efforts, Catholic Charities brings to life the famous prayer of St. Teresa of Avila:

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people.”

Amen.

**David Werning, Managing Editor**

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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In this special “hurricane recovery” edition of *Charities USA*, we devote space to the experiences and work of those Catholic Charities agencies that weathered the hurricanes of last fall and that have labored since then at helping their communities rise again.

I have had the privilege to visit the areas impacted by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. In Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, I was honored to deliver to the Catholic Charities agencies the immensely generous donations of the people who support our mission. At the time I am writing this column, the total amount given for hurricane relief so far is \$24,000,000. And the people are still giving.

Equally impressive has been the response of our Catholic Charities ministry: the CCUSA Disaster Response Team, the staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities agencies who travelled to the affected areas and, of course, the staff and volunteers of the Catholic Charities agencies that were directly hit by the hurricanes.

As you read through the articles submitted by these agencies on the “front lines,” you will get a glimpse of how each of them, while unique in terms of demographics and personalities, used the resources at hand and those supplied to get individuals, women and men, and families back on their feet.

The work of recovery that began even before the storms made landfall continues, and the work will continue for some time. Catholic Charities will be with the communities every step of the way, just as we share the journey of everyone we serve. ■



**Sister Donna Markham OP, PhD**

President & CEO



# IN THE EYE OF THE STORM:

THE CATHOLIC CHARITIES MINISTRY RESPONDS TO DISASTERS

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## INTRODUCTION

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By David Werning, Managing Editor

Even as Hurricane Harvey was forming hundreds of miles off the coast of Texas, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) was planning a multi-pronged response.

It didn't hurt that providence seemed to have a hand in the response as well. Just three days before Harvey made landfall, the Ford Motor Company was at the offices of CCUSA in Alexandria, Va. handing over a brand new Mobile Response Center (MRC). The MRC is a Ford truck outfitted specifically for disaster response work, and it would be on its way to Texas a week after Hurricane Harvey had run its course. When Harvey did reach the shore on Aug. 25, CCUSA launched via social media a text-to-give campaign across the United States, asking people to give in support of hurricane relief efforts.

Millions of dollars poured in from donors all over the country, and the giving continued as Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). In fact, people are still giving to support the recovery efforts in the areas impacted by the various hurricanes. As the donations came in, CCUSA disbursed 100 percent of the funds at the first opportunity. Sister Donna Markham OP, PhD, president and CEO of CCUSA, personally hand-delivered checks to Catholic Charities agencies in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The CCUSA Disaster Operations team was on the scene in each of the areas affected as well. Kim Burgo, senior director for CCUSA Disaster Operations, went to Texas and Puerto Rico. In both places she provided assistance to local Catholic Charities agencies and helped to assess the particular needs. CCUSA has also deployed disaster teams consisting of staff from Catholic Charities agencies around the United States. The teams helped not only with immediate needs but also with long-term recovery and restoration.

In November (2017), as the communities in Texas, Florida, USVI, and Puerto Rico were busy with recovery, CCUSA hosted the Applied Institute for Disaster Excellence in Lake Junaluska, N.C. Thirty-nine Catholic Charities agencies from 35 dioceses and 22 states were represented at the Institute. The purpose was to help participants build capacity to respond to disasters and to train staff to be ready to deploy to other agencies in time of need.

Matt Zieger, who is CCUSA's senior director for Impact Investing and Social Enterprises, is an example of a staff member leaving his regular duties behind and volunteering for disaster relief work. He was scheduled to participate in the CCUSA Annual Gathering, but instead worked with Catholic Charities Beaumont, Texas to provide immediate supplies to victims of Hurricane Harvey. About his experience, he said:

"It reminded me of how important it is to be in community and that Catholic Charities USA and our network being able to deploy people from around the country to come in and wrap around people in a place and a time of need is a really important structure. It's a model of the Church; it's a model of a lot of things in community that are important for us to remember, just to have each other's back and to support each other."

The response by CCUSA and the entire Catholic Charities ministry to the disaster caused by the hurricanes of 2017 has been generous and inspiring. This includes the amazing efforts of all the staff and the thousands of volunteers and donors who did everything from disbursing water bottles to sending in cash donations. However, just as inspiring has been the hard work and determination of the agencies that suffered the disasters directly. *Charities USA* asked these agencies to relate their experiences in order to give readers an intimate look at the work of disaster recovery from their immediate perspective. The following articles are their stories. ■

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON

By Cynthia Colbert, President and CEO

“...be strong and steadfast! Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD, your God, is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

**H**urricane Harvey slammed into Texas as a Category 4 hurricane. The diameter of the storm was 280 miles, with winds of up to 130 mph. The amount of rain from Harvey made a U.S. record – 51 inches in some parts of Texas. The amount of water totaled more than 27 trillion gallons. More than 40 counties were federally declared as disaster areas. Early estimates put total losses at as much as \$75 billion.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston is located in the fourth largest city in the country. The agency serves the 10 counties that comprise the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. Although it has been steadily providing long-term disaster response for people impacted by flooding in 2015 and 2016, the agency has increased financial assistance, basic needs help and case management services to respond to the thousands of Texans impacted by Hurricane Harvey.

Catholic Charities President and CEO Cynthia N. Colbert, MSW, said, “When we learned of the widespread devastation of the hurricane and then the additional devastation that resulted from flooding when water was released from area dams, we knew we had to respond in a bigger way than we initially planned.”

Catholic Charities staff and volunteers opened disaster centers in three counties: At the main office in Houston, its three sites in Galveston County, and one





site – the Mamie George Community Center – in Fort Bend County. Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Charities of Ft. Worth also helped with staffing and gift cards, and Catholic Charities in San Antonio sent 65 truckloads of donations. Other Catholic Charities agencies and organizations from around the country sent their support in the form of financial and in-kind donations. “The outpouring of support for Texas is nothing less than amazing,” said Natalie Wood, senior vice president of Programs.

Thousands of people visited the relief centers for assistance and were provided gift cards, food and other basic needs items. In addition, attorneys from the St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigration Legal Assistance helped people with FEMA applications, and the Counseling Program served those with mental health needs. “We were blessed to receive so many in-kind donations of food, cleaning supplies, clothes and other items that people needed,” said Colbert. “Although we saw some of the worst of Mother Nature, we saw the best in human nature. Everyone came forward to help.”

The emergency relief centers were closed after the first three weeks of response and now the long journey of recovery has begun. Catholic Charities is providing long-term disaster recovery case management along with financial assistance. Many people have lost everything: their clothes, their furniture, and all the mementos that made up their lives. They are in a complete rebuilding process, and most did not have flood insurance or enough flood insurance to cover the costs of rebuilding. In other cases, people are still waiting for a FEMA inspector to examine their damaged home or apartment. Still others have been denied FEMA assistance and need help with the appeals process.

Even if people have received FEMA assistance, the amount provided is insufficient to cover the costs of repairs and items lost due to the storm. Many remain in unsafe living conditions because they are afraid to leave or have nowhere to go. Undocumented residents are not eligible for any public assistance, and even if someone in their household is eligible to apply, they are fearful of applying to a government agency for any help.

Certainly, the damage to homes, apartments, businesses and other structures is enormous. But the human toll is where Catholic Charities can offer the most help: providing case management, financial assistance, counseling and other assistance that will help individuals and families get back on their feet.

“For many, nothing will be the same after Harvey, but our job is to help people create a new, healthy ‘normal’ and to journey with them in the recovery process,” Colbert said.

Consider housing as a case in point. One of the major challenges for people in the recovery process is obtaining short term housing while their home is being repaired. So Catholic Charities, with the help of a large donation, has established a short-term housing program called “Safe Harbor.” With the financial assistance and in-kind donations of furniture from ROOMS TO GO and household items from Cort Furniture, Catholic Charities has 50 apartments that people can stay in at no charge while their homes are being repaired. People like Elaine and Silvestre.



“Although we saw some of the worst of Mother Nature, we saw the best in human nature. Everyone came forward to help.” – Cynthia Colbert

Elaine first came to Catholic Charities in 2016 when a tree fell on her mobile home during a severe storm. Catholic Charities placed her in an apartment while her home was being repaired. Then a year later, Hurricane Harvey flooded the apartment. One of our disaster case managers called to check on Elaine, and after hearing about the flooding, the case manager immediately got her into a hotel for a few nights. Now, thanks to Safe Harbor, Elaine is in a clean, safe apartment where she doesn't have to worry about rent or utilities for the next three months. “Catholic Charities is just a genuine blessing to the utmost degree. And I will be forever grateful to Catholic Charities. Forever,” Elaine said.

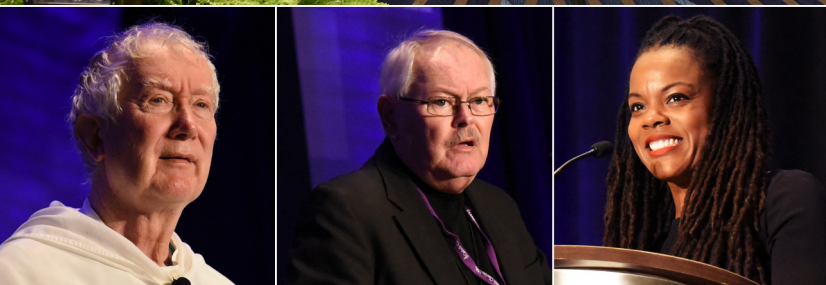
Silvestre is originally from Angola and came to the U.S. with his sister and two children. After spending six months in Michigan, he moved to Houston to find work as an engineer. Two days later Hurricane Harvey hit and flooded his apartment. He and his family spent the night at the Greyhound bus station. When he discovered online that Catholic Charities was providing relief services, he walked to our downtown office and got help. Catholic Charities put the whole family in a hotel for a few weeks before finding them an apartment – furnished and paid for – while Silvestre got the kids enrolled in school and looked for work. Silvestre couldn't have been happier: “I just want to thank Catholic Charities for helping me in full, for helping me all month with everything. So I really appreciate it, and I'm really thankful for all of the efforts that Catholic Charities is doing for people like me.”

Here in Houston, we are #HoustonStrong and we are #CatholicCharitiesStrong, as we stand with our Texas region and all of our brothers and sisters in the long process of recovery. We remain strong and steadfast because we believe that God is with us wherever we go. Thank you CCUSA and all Catholic Charities who have helped us with this important work. God bless you all. ■

# STANDING TOGETHER IN UNITY

THE 2017 ANNUAL GATHERING SHIFTS GEARS TO SUPPORT THE PEOPLE OF TEXAS!

Catholic Charities USA welcomed nearly 500 people in Houston for its Annual Gathering, which took place Sept. 28-30, 2017. In light of the devastation caused weeks before by Hurricane Harvey in and around Houston, a decision to cancel or to continue the event had to be made. The decision was to continue, but with a small change in focus. The agenda for the gathering was revised to offer attendees volunteer opportunities throughout the conference. Hundreds of Catholic Charities staff responded through various activities: going door to door in local communities assessing people's needs, assembling supply kits, and helping to pack and deliver goods from one of the warehouses being used as distribution centers. ■



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF BEAUMONT

By David Werning, Managing Editor

Immediately following a natural disaster, the people who have lived through it can have a range of reactions. Feeling overwhelmed or having a sense of shock in the face of all the destruction is common. If one has a relative or close friend who died during the disaster, then obviously great sorrow also follows.

Reactions, however, are not limited to grief and anxiety, as understandable as they certainly are. As the hours and days keep moving beyond the immediate danger, many people also begin to plan their recovery. They evaluate the situation, make a plan, and begin to rebuild their lives.

When Hurricane Harvey stomped through Texas from Aug. 25 through Aug. 30, 2017 – first as a category 4 storm with winds of 130 mph and then as a tropical storm with rains accumulating to 51 inches – no one in or out of Texas was fully prepared for the extraordinary damage that ensued. Nevertheless, the people – again, in and out of Texas – met the challenges with strength and generosity. The sorrow and grief of losing friends and family members, and the burden of losing hearth and home, were answered with determination to show that the human spirit would prevail.

A vivid example of this determination is the response of the local Catholic Charities agency in Beaumont, Texas, which is led by Executive Director Carol Fernandez. Given the catastrophic destruction caused by Hurricane Harvey across Texas, and in and around Beaumont in particular, one would not be surprised to hear that the people were greatly dispirited. Yet both residents of Beaumont and people from around the country demonstrated an active charity that belied the power of Harvey. Carol Fernandez recognized it quickly: “Part



of what has been so inspiring for me is the amazing generosity from every part of the country, including our own city, and the genuine care for what we are facing.”

For Catholic Charities of Beaumont, the recovery process started even before the rains from Harvey had finished. Carol Fernandez and her team were already assessing the needs and setting the foundation for a plan that would get people both immediate supplies (like food, water, clothing, and emergency shelter) and long-term assistance to help with things such as furniture, appliances, and home repairs.

The first step was to secure a large enough space that could serve as the distribution center for all the supplies that would be provided and then given to needy people. They did not have to wait long. A 28,000 square foot warehouse – along with fork lifts, pallet jacks, and fork lift drivers – was donated. Within a few weeks all 28,000 square feet had been filled with material donations, which included the following: water, food, cleaning supplies, baby formula, diapers (baby and adult), personal hygiene products, pet food, and paper products. These supplies had been sent to Beaumont from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, New York, Illinois, Maryland, Georgia, and other parts of Texas.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans sent three 18-wheeler trucks fully loaded with supplies and 50 volunteers to unload the donations at the warehouse. Once the supplies had been stored and arranged for ease of distribution, the work of delivering them began, quite a task by itself. Many more volunteers, however, stepped up to get the donations to the neighborhoods and households who needed them. All told, Catholic Charities of Beaumont distributed supplies to 11,213 people.

The disaster response teams of Catholic Charities Beaumont will be scheduling appointments well into 2018 in order to meet with families. The ongoing support will help with financial assistance and will address long-term needs.

The statistics that quantify the material assistance provided by Catholic Charities are quite impressive by themselves. However, the stories that have come from the experience of responding to Harvey reveal the essence of the generosity that inspired Carol Fernandez. There are many stories to tell, but the following three are offered as brief glimpses of the dazzling brilliance of charity in action as Beaumont continues to recover from Harvey.

Matt Zieger, who is the senior director of Impact Investing & Social Enterprise for Catholic Charities USA, was in Texas to attend the 2017 CCUSA Annual Gathering Sept. 28-30. Once he arrived, however, he volunteered to help with the efforts in Beaumont. He was very impressed with what Catholic Charities Beaumont had already done, and even more so with the people: “Men and women, and even youth, from all walks of life and socioeconomic backgrounds came together to help each other and the community.” One person that Matt encountered while in Beaumont stands out, as he related: “I was going to get propane for the forklift that we were using at the warehouse, so we drove up the street to a local

hardware store. While I was in line to get the propane tank filled, this gentleman in front of me – a big Texan guy – in a big white pickup truck hops out and walks back to me and sees the magnet on the side of our car that had Catholic Charities printed on it. So he goes to the cashier and the person filling the propane tanks and says, ‘Whatever he’s getting, add it to my bill.’ He came back to me, shook my hand, and said, ‘I’m so thankful that you’re here, we really need your support, and we’re really glad you’re here.’”

For Carol Fernandez, two memories stand out. The first one features the youth from the Diocese of Biloxi, Miss. who traveled to Beaumont on Sept. 30 with a priest and their adult chaperones in order to spend the day helping Catholic Charities distribute emergency relief supplies. They brought two busloads, holding more than 100 people. Some of the youth worked at the warehouse and some went off site to help clean out homes. Fernandez said that the spirit of community and generosity that the youth had brought with them continued throughout their visit: “At the end of the day the priest celebrated Mass at the warehouse for everyone and then the Biloxi volunteers even hosted a barbecue feast too!”

The second memory that stood out for Fernandez was not specific to any particular group or individual. Rather it was the manner in which many of the donations were prepared and delivered to Beaumont. Whether the packages contained cell phones, blankets, or baby wipes, most of them also had encouraging notes that the donors had inserted with the supplies. Fernandez was touched that people took the time to write special messages to the people who would be receiving the greatly needed gifts.

However one considers the recovery process in Beaumont, whether it’s in terms of statistics about supplies or stories about people, the reality is that the people are being cared for with a spirit of generosity that befits their dignity and that clears a path toward a full life post disaster. ■



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF CENTRAL TEXAS

By Sara Ramirez, Executive Director

Catholic Charities of Central Texas has historically responded to a local disaster every three years. Since 2013, we have responded to an average of two to three disasters per year ranging from floods to wildfires to tornadoes. What had been an occasional response effort has become part of our day-to-day operations.

Each disaster requires a unique response to meet the needs of the specific community and event. Yet while every disaster event is different, there are five phases of disaster that are constant time after time: readiness, rescue, relief, recovery and review. Over the past four years we have come to recognize more fully how our strengths and efforts can be best utilized in each phase.

## Readiness

One of our agency's strategic priorities is to launch disaster preparedness education sessions in our local parishes and community. Our pilot presentation was scheduled for fall 2017, but our priorities quickly shifted in order to respond to the needs of families impacted by Hurricane Harvey. Rather than working to develop long-term plans, we worked swiftly to ready our local communities for impending disaster.

Communication is perhaps the most important aspect of our response efforts throughout the life cycle of disaster response. In order to ready our community for potential danger and devastation, we need to stay informed. Our Disaster Response Coordinator receives regular updates and alerts from the National Weather Service in our region, as well as personal communication from local officials and disaster partners. By staying informed about the projections and risks, we are able to proactively reach out to those parts of our service region



likely to be impacted, as well as to other stakeholders who look to us as the first source of information. As Harvey neared, we reached out to our parishes in the path of the storm to send prayers and to provide them with direct contact information for our Disaster Response Coordinator should they need assistance. We reached out to all stakeholders in our agency donor and volunteer database to proactively ask for prayer, money and manpower. Though we did not know what impact the storm would have in our community, we knew that those three things would be critical. We also directed our stakeholders to our social media pages for updates throughout the process. Establishing these communication channels from the beginning helped to better align our response efforts moving forward.

### Rescue

Though Catholic Charities is considered a first responder for disaster relief, we are not involved in search and rescue efforts. While emergency responders help to get individuals and families to immediate safety, we prepare for disaster relief deployment.

### Relief

The primary goal of the relief phase is to ensure that everyone impacted by disaster is safe and has his or her basic needs met – food, clothing, hygiene and shelter. During this phase we assess the impact of the disaster and the immediate needs of the affected communities. As a starting point, we reach out to every parish within the impacted areas to assess the needs for money, manpower and material items. We recognize that our parishes are often the first points of contact for individuals needing assistance in their local community.

With an initial assessment, we determine where our efforts can be best utilized and we begin mobilization. It is critical to communicate back to our stakeholders with more specifics on how they can help. If material items are needed, we provide specific lists of items. For Harvey it was cleaning kits, hygiene kits, school supplies and gift cards. When other items arrive, we point them to partner agencies that can accommodate clothing, food, etc. We keep our potential volunteers abreast of any opportunities to deploy to impacted areas, to help coordinate the response efforts locally from our office, and other needs that arise. And we continue to ask for generous financial contributions, because while supplies may be needed today, monetary donations allow us to respond to any need at any time. We know that disasters are not part of anyone's budgets, so we ask our community to "give like the widow" (see Mk 12:41-44), not just contributing their abundance but digging deep to make a difference.





For us, the relief efforts are the busiest time during the response process. We work to process incoming donations, volunteers, and financial contributions, all the while responding first and foremost to the needs of families. In addition to processing intakes and helping with immediate material and financial needs, we deploy our licensed counselors who can provide crisis counseling to help families through the difficult time. At Catholic Charities of Central Texas, our disaster “team” consists of a single Disaster Response Coordinator. Critical to the process is also our volunteer coordinator and the numerous volunteers who give of themselves in a time of crisis so that our day-to-day programs continue uninterrupted.

Since Hurricane Harvey, we have had more than 450 responses to our call for volunteers. Our Catholic parishes and schools rose to the challenge to gather much-needed items and gift cards. One of our schools even offered their bus and their students’ time to pick-up donations from the local parishes. Because of the generosity of our volunteers and donors, we not only responded to the needs of our local diocese but also served families within the Diocese of Victoria, which does not have a Catholic Charities agency. Victoria’s volunteers included some victims of the disaster, and our relief efforts helped them to be able to take care of themselves and their families.

### Recovery

Throughout the relief efforts, we remind our staff, volunteers and community partners that we are in a “marathon, not a sprint.” We know that it will take years for all of the families impacted by Hurricane Harvey to return to normalcy, and we will be with them every step of the way. When the disaster is out of the news and eyes are turned toward the next event, we are still walking with families to rebuild and recover. After their resources have been exhausted through FEMA and insurance, we help to address unmet needs that have slipped through the cracks. To date, we have assisted more than 3,000 individuals impacted by Harvey across 23 counties in Texas, and have 121 people enrolled in long-term case management.

### Review

When it’s all said and done, we evaluate our response in order to ensure accountability. We debrief our volunteers and staff about their experiences. We report back to the community about what we have been able to accomplish through their support. And we begin preparing for the next time. Because we know that there will be a next time and we will be ready to answer the call. We continue to pray for all families who have ever been impacted from disaster. “He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.” Job 9:10 ■



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIOCESE OF CORPUS CHRISTI

## IN RECOVERY MODE

By Alfredo E. Cardenas, *South Texas Catholic*

In the New Testament book of Hebrews we learn, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have; God is pleased by sacrifices of that kind” (Heb 13:16). That same theme of helping others is also found in the words of the apostle Peter: “Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pt 4: 9-10).

After the ravages to the Texas Coastal Bend by Hurricane Harvey, it became clear to those who suffered from the storm that Catholics do indeed know their Bible and its commandments. The same, of course, can be said of non-Catholic Christians. Help came from every corner of the nation, from Christians and non-Christians alike, and it came quickly.

It came in the form of the Knights of Columbus, from Portland, Oregon to Connecticut and places in between. It came from students in Rhode Island, classrooms in Alaska, Catholic schools in Texas, parishioners in Georgia and Mississippi, donors in Louisiana and Indiana.

And of course, the faithful in the Diocese of Corpus Christi were not idle. Youth groups, Knights from every council in the diocese, prayer groups, schools, parish communities and hundreds of individuals were out picking up tree limbs, covering roofs, preparing meals, unloading supplies, etc.

Secular and governmental charity was also on display in abundance. Firemen, first responders, police, state troopers, Army reserves, and many more were lending a hand in every affected town in the Coastal Bend.



The risk in listing anyone is that someone will be left out. For those who feel left out, remember the words in the Book of Matthew, “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Mt 6:3-4).

Bishop Michael Mulvey of the Diocese of Corpus Christi set the tone early on for his flock. As the hurricane approached the Coastal Bend he went live on Facebook and assured everyone that he was praying for them, including first responders, public officials and the media. Immediately after the storm cleared the area, the bishop sent a representative with Catholic Mutual of America to assess the damage done to churches and Catholic schools.

Bishop Mulvey also made personal visits to many of the affected communities as soon as it was possible to go into the impacted areas. He comforted individuals who had suffered loss and met with public officials, especially in the smaller communities, to assure them that the Church would be a presence in their communities not only for the moment but also for the long run.

“As I travel around the diocese and meet people, one thought continues to echo in my mind. We need to help one another. We need to gather together to support one another. Pray together. Have faith together. Remembering, however, that in the end only God is eternal,” said Bishop Mulvey.

The bishop then called a meeting of all pastors and parochial administrators in the diocese and assured them of his prayers and the support of the diocese, as well as that of the Catholic community throughout the nation. In addition to the diocese’s insurance, ample financial aid would be coming their way, he told them.

“We will rebound, we will help one another, we will rebuild, we will comfort the anxieties and fears of one another,” Bishop Mulvey said.

“As I travel around the diocese and meet people, one thought continues to echo in my mind. We need to help one another. We need to gather together to support one another. Pray together. Have faith together. Remembering, however, that in the end only God is eternal.” – Bishop Michael Mulvey

In order to deal most effectively with the recovery, the bishop named Deacon Mark Arnold to head the diocese's disaster relief efforts. He also named a committee to help in the effort. The members included Deacon Richard Longoria to coordinate volunteers, Linda McKamie with Catholic Charities, Stephanie Bonilla to help with the needs of families, Deacon Michael Mantz to coordinate efforts of deacons, Superintendent Rosemary Henry to help with displaced students and Orlando Zepeda with the diocese to assist with buildings and grounds.

Two weeks after the hurricane struck, Bishop Mulvey led a Holy Hour of Prayer at the Corpus Christi Cathedral and began celebrating Masses at parishes most severely affected, including at Port Aransas and Rockport. The bishop continues to visit parishes and schools during the ongoing recovery process.

Plans for rebuilding the most severely affected structures are already underway. Repairs are being done to every building affected. In addition to Catholic Charities, individual parishes are helping with day-to-day emergencies and needs.

"Let us work together to rebuild our lives and the lives of our neighbors and friends. Let us work to rebuild our communities and neighborhoods and our parishes, and let us be courageous to rebuild what is inside, what is eternal. May our love for God abound," Bishop Mulvey said.

(To get a more complete look at the work being done in the Diocese of Corpus Christi to recover from Hurricane Harvey, visit [southtexascatholic.com](http://southtexascatholic.com).) ■



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES FORTH WORTH

## REMAINING CALM IN THE STORM

Katelin Cortney, Communications & Creative Director

Long before the storms rolled in to Houston, Texas, Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) had been laying the groundwork to be response-ready. How can you be prepared? We want to share all the ins and outs with our network to strengthen our unity in helping our neighbors.

We have a long history of being there for our neighbors: maintaining a program for five years after Hurricane Katrina to help families resettle, assisting with the fertilizer plant explosion in West, Texas in 2013, aiding in the Granbury, Texas tornadoes of 2013, housing the kids removed from a Texas FLDS compound in 2008, taking in unaccompanied alien children during the border crisis of 2014, and helping with the flooding and aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

### One contact, all in the know

For starters, we have had Francine Speer, the Disaster Response Manager at CCFW, working full time in this role for more than five years. We found that having a point person at the ready was imperative given the urgency of timing in any crisis. Francine serves as the president of our county's local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), represents CCFW at the state level VOAD, and keeps a close line of communication with Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), the national VOAD representative. CCUSA has also launched a governing board to develop products, like disaster case management training, that will be really beneficial to have. Additionally, we recommend attending the Applied Institute for Disaster Excellence (AIDE) to gather useful information about working with parishes, donations, fundraising, volunteering, and case management. Already being in the pipeline of the most relevant agencies and information puts us at a huge advantage to pivot quickly.



### Before the Storm

We know that any disaster response program has to have a clear plan of how they will engage with disaster on a local, state, and national level. Each agency is much better prepared if they decide, along with their leadership teams and diocese, what their response should be prior to a disaster even if the decision is not to deploy staff nationally. It's good to know so that you know what services you will not be able to provide. For CCFW, our rule of thumb is that "we respond 100 percent of the time in our 28 county area, when we are called upon at the State and National level." We keep staff and volunteers trained quarterly to respond in these situations. We also are mindful of all the areas of emergency management, including preparedness (personally and corporately), response, recovery, and mitigation.

CCFW preparation is demonstrated in a few ways:

For our employees: we train staff and volunteers to be case workers and case managers for potential disasters, as well as preparing internally to keep staff safe if a disaster occurs on our premises.

For our responsiveness: we are ready to issue immediate financial assistance and handle disaster-affected intake and assessment for anyone who may come to us.

For our long-term ability to help: we train for the longevity of case management and recovery construction management.

For our preventative steps: We partner with Disaster Resiliency AmeriCorps VISTA, working to identify and increase disaster resilient behavior in Tarrant County with populations that have limited English proficiency.

We believe organizations need to be thinking *how does disaster response affect our day-to-day operations?* For example, what can preparedness do to benefit clients in other areas of life and what skills in staff and volunteers are transferable? Does a good financial assistance caseworker make a good disaster response caseworker? We have found that they do.



### How to Organize Aid

We have a ready-made plan set to be tailored for any disaster that strikes. We have plans for how to rally volunteers and donations, and to communicate with multiple audiences.

We use the most effective and quickly accessible tools we have, namely our website and social media channels, to begin telling the story of what we are doing, what we know today, and how a reader of our media can help. We make sure there are a variety of ways to contribute: financially, deployments, local volunteering, care kits, etc. It's important to have the information needed to update one's website at a moment's notice and direct donations to a specific cause.

### How to Leverage our Partners

From the get go, we have had a strong relationship with our diocese, and put an intense focus on clear communications between us, so when something happens, we can coordinate with our bishop in real time. It helps us know which parishes may be affected, which ones may be able to mobilize and help us gain resources, etc. For example, our diocese includes 28 counties, and the gift card donations we pulled in from local parishes exceeded \$10,000 for Hurricane Harvey, as well as a second collection, which—combined with a contribution from the diocese directly—yielded us over \$400,000.

It's also crucial to have close working relationships with Catholic Charities within our own states/regions, so we can divide and conquer the work. What we excel at is case management; we know that is our focus, our talent. So when our partner agencies are out there tarping houses or mucking and gutting, it means that we can start working on intakes as soon as possible for case management.

We have found that a disaster is an avenue to show your values, which for CCFW means first and foremost hospitality and compassion. We do this through case management because we believe in the power of relationship and dignity of each person. We believe that helping a client recover requires person-to-person connection and the gift of hope that only comes from the gift of service. Presently, we are working intensively with 43 families who have relocated to the Fort Worth area following Hurricane Harvey. We plan to be by their side for the long haul. Indeed, we were ready for them! ■



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN ANTONIO

By Lisa L. Ayres, Director of Mission Advancement

**A**ugust 25, 2017, Mother Nature let loose with amazing fury as Hurricane Harvey made landfall along the Middle Texas Coast. The most devastating tropical storm since 1950, Hurricane Harvey obliterated homes, schools, business, and cities in its path. Rapidly exploding from a tropical depression to a major hurricane in less than 36 hours, hundreds of thousands of people and animals sheltered in place or fled for their lives. Texans sought safety in neighborhood shelters and churches, boarded buses to evacuate, leaving their homes and possessions behind, or simply boarded up the windows and hoped for the best. Nineteen trillion gallons of rain dumped over southeast Texas while Category 4 level, 130 mile per hour winds battered all in its path.

As the rain poured down, winds howled, and power and drinking water were lost, so were the homes, businesses, and possessions of many Texas residents destroyed. Left with nothing but the clothes on their backs, these citizens face the cleanup of what remains of their properties. Mold, water damage, mounds of mud, insects, snakes, debris, bacteria, sweltering temperatures, and filth in the still standing water make this clean up a daunting challenge. Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued a state disaster declaration before the storm hit based on weather forecasts and reports in an effort to mobilize disaster response units and emergency funding aide proactively. As of September 6, 2017, the President of the United States has visited Texas twice to survey storm damage and assure residents that help is on the way.





Catholic Charities of San Antonio (CCAOSA) has become a hub for the collection and distribution of supplies, aid, and assistance for those in need throughout the state who have been affected by Hurricane Harvey. Donations of food, clothing, cleaning supplies, bed linens, medical supplies, car seats, and safe sleep Baby Boxes have been sent to evacuees and storm victims in Bexar, Atascosa, Brazoria, Guadalupe, Ft. Bend, Leon, Live Oak, San Patricio, Refugio, Aransas, Victoria, Calhoun, Nueces, Harris and the remaining 43 counties included in the state's disaster declaration.

The first wave of relief efforts sent five box trucks to the Diocese of Corpus Christi, and two box trucks to Victoria, Texas. With the assistance of Catholic Charities staff and 369 community and student volunteers, donations were collected, sorted, inventoried, loaded, and delivered to our southern neighbors. Motivated to continue to work on behalf of so many who have lost so much, CCAOSA continued to collect much needed cleaning supplies, diapers/baby wipes, and gift cards along with food and bottled water, with the goal to fill and deploy 25 large box trucks for the benefit of storm victims in Houston and the surrounding area.

But as we all know, God is good! The community stepped up with an outpouring of generosity. All of the aforementioned supplies (and then some) were donated by our generous community, so much so that we were able to fill 65 trucks and cars. The convoy headed to Houston and received a warm welcome from friends at the offices of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston where the caravan contents were offloaded, inventoried, and readied for distribution. It took 531 volunteers, and dozens of Catholic Charities' employees hundreds of hours to deliver this labor of love but all were honored with the privilege to serve.

The following week, as staff from CCAOSA attended the Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering in Houston, they received the opportunity to help distribute the supplies that had been sent. The process had come full circle, from collection to distribution. Darryl Greer, director of Senior Volunteer Services, reflected, "Imagine my surprise and amusement when I realized that the boxes we were unpacking and distributing were the very same we had shipped up the week before. I recognized my own handwriting on some of the boxes and knew exactly what had been placed inside. I truly felt blessed to witness the joy, relief, and appreciation from the recipients."



To date, more than \$5 million worth of goods have been collected and distributed to those in need. Monetary donations have poured in from across the United States. We also received support in goods and services from all over the country, including semi-trucks full of donations from Illinois, New York and New Jersey. Boy Scouts from Austin drove to San Antonio to volunteer for the day. Local parishes, youth groups, and Catholic schools have opened their hearts and extended their hands to bless their neighbors. Supplies provided by the Corporation for National Community Service Senior Corps Network of RSVP projects, including 600 blankets and 250 backpacks for muckers, were sent to the Jewish Community Center in Houston.

Antonio Fernandez, president and CEO of CCAOSA, made the following pledge, "There is still much work to do. There are many evacuee families still in San Antonio with no means to get back home and truly nothing to go home to. We are creating a disaster relief system to efficiently help with housing and other basic needs. We will continue to do all we can to help them and everyone affected recover from this tragedy for as long as it takes."

CCAOSA will continue to provide for the needs of others, through selfless service, under the sign of love. It is more than just our mission statement. It is our responsibility. It is our honor. ■

**"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace, in its various forms."**

- 1 Peter 4:10



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES, DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

By Janet Shelton, Executive Assistant

**A**mber Horton breathed a sigh of relief when a Catholic Charities van arrived in her neighborhood and caseworkers started handing out food, water, clothing and other emergency support. She was pleased especially with the clothing - partly because she lost almost every piece when the family's mobile home was flooded and partly because what she still had was far too large.

Horton dropped four sizes in 10 days due to stress and suffering brought on by Hurricane Irma.

"I had one pair of pants left," she said. "I'm wearing size zero now."

Hurricane Irma's September arrival to Florida's central-west coast surprised many locals. Despite numerous threats and its coastal vulnerability, the Tampa Bay area had not experienced a direct hit for 60 years. Residents' mildly interested attitude shifted to panic, however, as Irma's strength grew to a Category 5. Many tried to flee the storm's incomprehensible power.

Catholic Charities Executive Director Mark Dufva was nervous. He was there when Ivan and Dennis slammed into the Diocese of Pensacola. He spent a month helping New Orleans and Mississippi residents recover after Hurricane Katrina. He and the other six Florida Catholic Charities directors knew what they were facing. They were in constant contact.

"All seven dioceses work together to respond to disasters," Dufva said. "Everybody was thrown into a near panic - watching (storm projections) every minute of every hour, wondering who is going to get hit the worst."



### Protecting the Most Vulnerable

As the storm approached, preparation centered on the agency's most vulnerable clients and facilities: the nearly 200 homeless residents of the Pinellas Hope "tent city", and the more than 1,000 seniors living in 13 HUD housing apartment buildings.

"We got the word (from Pinellas County) on Thursday that we would have to evacuate on Friday," said Homeless and Veteran Services Director Rhonda Abbott, who oversees Pinellas Hope. "I was like, 'Oh, my gosh!'"

Tent residents packed everything they owned into plastic bags that were placed on a pavilion used for meals. Some left with family, but 150 others, many suffering from chronic illness, physical limitations or behavioral issues, collected their bedding, boarded buses and vans, and joined a caravan to a nearby shelter, where they were assisted by Pinellas Hope staff.

The next day, amid increasing gusts and gathering clouds, staff returned to the property to collapse and secure every tent. What had been a bustling area with hundreds of people was now flattened squares of blue and white nylon.

"I remember standing on the deck ... and it was just so eerie," Abbott said. "We stood there looking out onto a sea of tents that weren't there anymore. And the weather was dark."

At the HUD apartments managed by Catholic Charities, managers spoke to seniors about leaving, but few took that option. King's Manor in Tampa was outside all evacuation zones, so the management opened its doors to others. "They could invite family who lived in vulnerable areas/mobile homes," said Betsy Rowen, housing manager. "The Service Coordinator, Petra Rivera, and I stayed at the building overnight during the hurricane."

### The Community Steps In

Hurricane Irma hit the Tampa Bay area in the early hours of Sept. 11. Most residents of the five coastal Florida counties making up the Diocese of St. Petersburg felt blessed as they made their way home. More than two million homes were without power, but the impact was not as significant or widespread as feared.

Four hundred sixty-three of the HUD senior apartments were without power. Oxygen tanks could not be replenished, food was lost, and there was no air conditioning in apartments as temperatures climbed to 95 degrees. It would be six days before power would be restored in some buildings.

Local organizations brought in cooked meals for the seniors. Residents took respite from the heat in common areas with generator power. There they also charged their phones, replenished oxygen and cooked crock-pot meals.



At Pinellas Hope, the power was out for days, but people showed up to rebuild tents and clear debris. A large truck brought water, canned goods, and personal care items – a gift from Texas. The shelter received so many food donations, it ran out of room in the kitchen. Abbott will always remember the kindness of strangers. She also will remember the moment the power company truck lumbered down the road and stopped in front of the complex and power was restored.

“We were laughing. We were jumping up and down, giving high fives, whooping and hollering,” she said. “It really was a scene out of the movies.”

The staff was exhausted, but satisfied, Abbott said. “It was a feeling of, ‘Wow. We did this. We pulled this off.’”

### Stepping Up to Help

In the ensuing days, as Catholic Charities worked toward normalizing operations, people started calling for help.

Assistance sites were placed in four areas of the diocese, and Catholic Charities partnered with national and local governments and organizations. Most of the early calls were for food, furniture, clothing, and utility and rent/mortgage assistance for those who lost work or lost their homes. Many situations could not be resolved with one type of assistance.

The biggest problem facing the agency was money. A huge boost came one week after Irma’s visit, when Sister Donna Markham OP, PhD, Catholic Charities USA president and CEO, arrived with \$250,000 for immediate emergency assistance in the St. Petersburg Diocese alone. In the weeks that followed, CCUSA sent another \$460,000 and parishes raised \$420,000. Catholic Charities donors gave \$40,000. The Tampa Bay Lightning Foundation also gave \$250,000 to be distributed across Florida. Catholic Charities quickly earned a reputation for stepping in when others couldn’t.

Senior residents of the 463 HUD apartments that lost electricity were given \$100 grocery store gift cards to replace spoiled food or to purchase medicine. The agency replaced a mattress ruined when a home’s windows leaked. Catholic Charities paid an electrician to help an elderly couple left in the dark for more than a week when the electrical unit was destroyed.

But even with funds, disaster relief proved complicated. Catholic Charities caseworkers found ways to respond to suffering, bewildered people who had no idea where to turn. By early November 2017, Catholic Charities had received 544 requests for assistance. Just under 2,000 people received aid. Caseworkers were still sorting through and addressing a backlog of emergency cases.

“Disaster response is on-the-job training,” Dufva said. “People don’t have a lot of understanding on how to respond or receive help. Catholic Charities has to be the lead long-term recovery responder. The Church is expected to respond to victims of disaster. That’s our calling.” ■

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIOCESE OF PALM BEACH, INC.

By Janelle Hoffman, Development Director

**A**s Hurricane Irma approached the Florida coast, we knew that it would affect the Diocese of Palm Beach. It was projected to hit as a Category 5 somewhere in Southeast Florida. After landing in Key West on Sept. 10 as a Category 4, it then went out to the Gulf of Mexico and landed for the second time in the Diocese of Venice as a Category 3. Hurricane Irma continued to barrel its way up the center of the state to the Jacksonville area, affecting six of the seven dioceses in Florida with flood and wind damage.

Because our agency had not experienced a hurricane in almost 10 years, our disaster program had been disbanded and replaced with an internal voluntary disaster team composed of disaster-trained staff and administration. We also had a fluid COOP (Continuity of Operations Plan) and a detailed Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Procedures Manual in place. Gabe Tischler, the Catholic Charities of Florida Disaster Emergency Management Specialist, had assisted us in writing our COOP, training our staff, and educating our parishes in disaster response. In following our pre-disaster procedures, our disaster team met and delegated tasks for pre-disaster and immediate post-disaster response. The team met daily before Hurricane Irma struck and continued the daily meetings by telephone after the event. All employees were accounted for and buildings inspected for damage during the first weeks following Hurricane Irma. Our goal was to resume Catholic Charities operations as soon as possible and then to assist with the disaster's unmet needs.



Our administration also met daily by telephone with all the executive directors of Catholic Charities throughout Florida. We could discuss and plan responses for immediate needs in the various dioceses with Gabe Tischler coordinating our supplies and transportation and networking at the state level. This support was and continues to be vital to the success of disaster relief and recovery efforts in our diocese.

Due to the severity of Hurricane Irma, we organized our agency response to meet the immediate needs of the community. Two of our employees worked the Unmet Needs desk at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) located in West Palm Beach from the time the storm landed until the EOC shut down operations. We collaborated with local emergency officials and other nonprofits in providing short-term assistance such as food and water distribution, needs assessments, Spanish and Creole interpreting services, FEMA applications and referrals. The agency also participated as a member of the Caring Community Coalition for Disaster Relief, which helped address the unmet relief needs of individuals and families at seven locations.

We knew during this time that we needed to launch our disaster program and hire a disaster coordinator and case managers. Many of the agency's employees were pulling double duty by covering their normal jobs plus helping with food/water distribution and assisting at disaster sites.

Catholic Charities USA reached out to us with the offer of disaster case managers, and we continue to be grateful for this assistance. Catholic Charities USA disaster volunteers came from Catholic Charities South Carolina and hit the ground running. We thank Deacon Dan Powers, executive director of Catholic Charities of South Carolina, for deploying his experienced staff members to assist us during this critical time. Kelly Kaminski and Brantili Senn assisted with programmatic expertise, including recommendations on organizing the Disaster Recovery Program; outreach to community and governmental organizations involved in disaster; and organizing a response system based on need level. Sherry

Christina Storrs-Casanova and Brittany Soward worked seamlessly and tirelessly with our staff, meeting with the community and performing needs assessments. After their two-week deployment ended, Catholic Charities USA deployed another much-needed disaster case manager, Katherine Roberts from Catholic Charities of Chicago. Katherine worked professionally and amiably with our staff in prioritizing our growing case load, which was now up to more than 650 clients.

The additional staffing help from all the Catholic Charities USA case managers was instrumental in allowing our agency to respond efficiently to the needs of those in the community who were impacted by Hurricane Irma.

However, we were in the middle of our fiscal year and funding was imperative to implement a long-term disaster recovery program. Catholic Charities USA again reached out to us through Sister Donna Markham, their president and CEO, offering us much needed funding vital to establishing and operating our disaster program. Through this funding our disaster program could do the following at four Catholic Charities disaster recovery centers: review all our client needs assessments; prioritize cases according to established criteria; and assist with immediate needs such as personal property replacement, rent, mortgage and utility bills, gift cards and referrals. The program then moved on to address the long-term needs of the clients such as house repairs, mold removal, personal property replacement, etc. We currently have more than 650 long-term disaster recovery clients.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Palm Beach Disaster Recovery Program will continue to assist those who suffered hurricane-related losses for the next one to two years, as needed. "We are blessed by the critical support provided by Sister Donna, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Charities of Florida, and the continued support of our bishop, Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito," said Sheila Gomez, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Palm Beach. ■

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

FIRST STEPS AFTER HURRICANE IRMA: AN INTERVIEW  
WITH DEACON RICHARD TURCOTTE

By Tom Tracy, Florida Catholic

**H**urricane Irma's destructive winds blew wreckage and disruption throughout Florida on September 10, 2017. A week later Deacon Richard Turcotte, the executive director of the Archdiocese of Miami's Catholic Charities, was particularly anxious about the devastation in Monroe County.

The area reportedly sustained severe damage from Irma, including the places of Marathon, Cudjoe Key, Big Pine Key and Key West.

"It looks like (news reports show) there is absolutely nothing left in Marathon," Deacon Turcotte said, noting that poor cell phone communication and transportation logistics have been slowing the flow of information several days after the hurricane.

"I am trying to establish some communications. I plan to talk with some of the pastors there and do some distributions of water and food from parishes, and once we get the highway opened up we can talk about those distributions to the Keys."

In terms of Hurricane Irma's impact on Miami-Dade and Broward County, it appears that "there wasn't the devastation that we saw in the Keys, so the greatest challenge will be getting services up and running there," Deacon Turcotte said.





State officials confirmed (as of September 14, 2017) a 23rd death attributable to Hurricane Irma in Florida, with eight of those fatalities in Monroe County and another eight at a nursing home in Hollywood. Irma will be remembered as one of the Atlantic's strongest hurricanes on record, with peak winds of 185 mph and Category 4 strength when it landed in the Florida Keys. Some sources are predicting that insured losses from the storm could total \$18 billion in the U.S.

In addition to five Catholic parishes and one school throughout the Florida Keys, the region is home to a Catholic Charities-affiliated residential program, New Life Workforce Housing in Key West, and other homelessness prevention programming for Monroe County.

Workforce Housing had a 32-bed capacity and Catholic Charities was in the process of trying to build 37 new units in Key West, but Hurricane Irma's impact will likely set the plans behind schedule, Deacon Turcotte noted.

He said his Charities team has been working in three broad teams following the hurricane, with a goal of pulling together damage assessments to facilities, deciding on Charities programming status and prioritizing future response efforts, which are expected to be long term in focus.

"I have been taking all that information and then determining where the greatest damage is, and we can say it is Marathon so far," Deacon Turcotte said.

"We are having daily conference calls with other state Charities agencies and Catholic Charities USA about available resources and stages of recovery," he said, adding that the seven Catholic Charities agencies of Florida spoke by phone September 13 with

the president of Catholic Charities USA, Dominican Sister Donna Markham. Sister Donna traveled to Clearwater, Fla. on September 19 in order to personally deliver a check in the amount of \$2 million for the impacted agencies to provide immediate, emergency assistance to people affected by the hurricane.

Before Hurricane Irma arrived, Catholic Charities programs across the archdiocese had evacuated residential clients in anticipation of the storm, including relocating some 52 unaccompanied minors living in Miami to temporary housing in Houston.

Residential clients at St. Luke's Center for alcohol abuse and substance addiction and New Life Family Center in Miami were also temporarily relocated. Many of those residents are returning as power is restored in the region.

Many Charities staff have been working from home throughout the hurricane crisis until South Florida gets back to normal.

"In the future, we may need to do outreach for long term recovery, but right now it is too early to evaluate how to respond in Miami and Fort Lauderdale areas," Deacon Turcotte said. He noted that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will eventually publish data that will give some indications of who needs help and particularly who was unable to get federal assistance.

With each hurricane come lessons for emergency services providers, including Catholic Charities. Nonprofits here have organized themselves into regions and geographic sectors to share emergency resources. Hurricane Irma proved unique, Deacon Turcotte said, for having directly impacted almost every diocese in the state, including the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, which had the distinction of receiving many of the evacuees from other regions. ■

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

By Lilla Ross

The Diocese of St. Augustine stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, encompassing 17 North Florida counties that all felt the impact of Hurricane Irma. Some more than others.

The lessons learned from Hurricane Matthew a year earlier were put to good use by Catholic Charities, which operates from a central office in Jacksonville and three regional offices. During Matthew, the Jacksonville office was called on to help with case management in the four counties it serves.

“We’re experienced at case management, but disaster case management is a little different. We really didn’t know everything we needed to know,” said Lili High, director of emergency assistance.

So, after Matthew, High and another case manager got additional training in disaster case management, and they in turn shared what they learned with the other case managers in Jacksonville. When Irma arrived, they were ready, well-versed in FEMA procedures and other assistance.

Though Irma had weakened considerably by the time it reached North Florida, the rivers in the region overflowed, damaging homes and closing many businesses. Power was out for more than a week in some areas.

“One guy shot a video of himself canoeing in his living room,” High said.



A lot of people missed work because their business shut down or their home was damaged. They needed help with temporary housing, rent and utilities. Michele O'Malley, her husband and four children needed housing. During Matthew, the family rode out the storm with friends in Georgia and returned to find that they hadn't even lost power. So, when Irma threatened, they decided to stay in Jacksonville. The damage from the storm surge was so bad that the house had to be torn down.

"We were staying with family, but we have four kids, ages 2 to 11. Baths and breakfast and getting them to school can turn into madness," she said. "We didn't want to overstay our welcome," O'Malley said. "I have a friend who works at Catholic Charities and she said we might be a candidate for assistance."

Finding a hotel for a family of six was difficult, most of them were across town. O'Malley heard that a hotel near their house had become a FEMA hotel. "FEMA didn't cover the entire rate but Catholic Charities was able to make up the difference. We stayed there for a couple of weeks until we could get into a condo. We're sleeping on mattresses on the floor and all the furniture is donated," she said. "But a two-bedroom condo is better than a one-room hotel room. It's been a frustrating time but Catholic Charities has been pivotal getting us the information to get everything rolling and to help us find a place to stay two blocks from our house. We had a great experience. We can't wait to pay it forward."

Lake City, an hour west of Jacksonville, is about as far away from the Florida Keys as you can get and still be in Florida. It's the place where South Floridians seek refuge from hurricanes and where 1,300 emergency crews from out of state hunker down until it's safe to go into action. With a population of 12,000, Lake City is the largest city in north central Florida, and Catholic Charities is an important part of the area's emergency response.

"We were at the table in the emergency operations center two days before the storm and 11 days after," said Suzanne Edwards, executive director of the Lake City office. "Local authorities know we know our business and we will represent them well." The office provided food and water for emergency shelters in four counties, for other service agencies, and for emergency responders, Edwards said. Between Sept. 8 and Sept. 30, the office distributed 897,403 pounds of food and 3,570 cases of water.

About 18,000 households in the region qualify for FEMA assistance and hundreds more need assistance with housing and utility assistance for months to come.

Even Catholic Charities was not immune from the effects the disasters. The Lake City office lost power for nine days, losing the perishables in their drive-in freezer and cooler, Edwards said.

The St. Augustine Regional Office is juggling emergency relief for Irma victims with disaster recovery assistance for Matthew victims in the five-county area it serves. Sometimes they are one in the same.

St. Augustine is known as the Oldest City and much of it is low-lying, making it especially vulnerable to hurricanes. Director Mary Kelley Kryzwick said the St. Augustine Office was ready for Irma. “We knew that as soon as we opened, the phone would start ringing,” she said.

The pantry was stocked so that it could open five days a week, instead of the usual two days. Kryzwick distributed emergency funds to the three satellite offices, including one that serves Putnam, the poorest county in the state.

After the storm, Disaster Manager Tara Provini loaded her car with food and cleaning supplies and drove around, checking on the people she had helped after Matthew. Some homes still undergoing repairs from Matthew were flooded again. “When they saw Tara they would come out and just hug and cry,” Kryzwick said.

The costs and long-term needs are still being assessed, Kryzwick said, but Putnam, the poorest county, has 2,600 households eligible for FEMA assistance.

Kryzwick said her office is in it for the long haul. “When you work with people in disaster recovery, it’s not just one meeting. It’s several meetings, lots of calls, coordinating repairs, getting volunteers,” she said. “There’s a bond.”

High said the needs from Irma victims are far greater than from Matthew. “Our relief effort is anticipated to go through the end of December,” she said. “Then we shift into recovery mode. I think the community really came together for Irma. This time we had our resources in line. We had a better understanding of where the gaps in services might be. Everybody stepped up to do what needed to be done.” ■



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIOCESE OF VENICE, INC.

By Judy Bokorney, Communications Manager

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Venice, Inc. encompasses 10 counties in Southwest Florida and is no stranger to being on the receiving end of hurricanes. During his tenure, CEO Peter Routsis-Arroyo has experienced the ravages of Hurricanes Charlie and Wilma, and other tropical storms as direct hits and has fine-tuned Catholic Charities disaster preparedness, response, and long-term recovery efforts.

“This is the most prepared we have been for a hurricane and we needed to be because Hurricane Irma was such a large storm that affected most of our diocese,” said Routsis-Arroyo. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, Catholic Charities served more than 82,000 people in three weeks.

At 96 hours prior to the storm, Catholic Charities implemented the Disaster Preparedness Plan and visits were made to emergency operations centers. Conference calls were scheduled with the statewide disaster coordinator and the Florida Catholic Conference, and other Florida Catholic Charities directors.

Catholic Charities office locations were prepared and secured at 48 hours before the hurricane, and staff were given time off to make personal preparations. Generators and food pantries were placed at strategic locations. The day before the storm made landfall, text and voice messages were sent to all Catholic Charities staff with instructions.

“The first two days after Hurricane Irma came ashore on September 10 in the southern part of the diocese, staff made assessments and began to return to work despite many of them having lost personal belongings or had their house damaged or were without electricity,” said Routsis-Arroyo.



Two days after the storm, on September 13, Catholic Charities opened Disaster Response Centers at their office locations in Naples, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Immokalee, and Arcadia. Through the support of Bishop Frank Dewane and the Diocese of Venice, additional Disaster Response Centers were opened at Catholic parishes the following day totaling 12 locations. Catholic Charities organized fork lifts, pallet jacks, security services, and portable storage units at each Disaster Response Center.

“Hundreds of volunteers assisted with setting up the centers to serve the victims of Hurricane Irma,” said Routsis-Arroyo. Regional drop-off locations were opened in the northern part of the diocese in Sarasota, Bradenton, and Punta Gorda to collect donations of water, food, and other necessities. The Knights of Columbus collected and delivered the items to the Disaster Response Centers.

“The Knights of Columbus cooked and served daily hot meals at several of our Disaster Response Centers for two weeks and provided transportation of items between centers,” said Routsis-Arroyo. “Catholic Charities staff and volunteers worked non-stop including weekends to provide aid to victims. It was all hands on deck.” Isolated areas that were hit hard by the storm also were identified and staff and volunteers delivered food and water to those locations.

Organizations, churches, civic groups, and individual donors from all over the United States responded to the need for items and delivered non-perishable food, water, and other necessities. The call for monetary contributions also was charitably met by donors.

“People are incredibly generous, thoughtful, and creative after a disaster,” said Mary Shaughnessy, Catholic Charities’ district director in Collier County (Naples and Immokalee). “We received thousands of dollars in donations from across the United States. We also received semi-trailer trucks full of water and food and one with ‘buckets of blessings’ that included personal hygiene products and cleaning supplies. In addition, our new best friends in Worcester, Mass. at St. Peter-Marian Junior Senior High sent \$3,600 in gift cards from Walmart, Target, Home Depot, and Lowe’s.”

Shaughnessy said students from Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School in Washington, D.C. mailed handmade cards to show their love and support for those who experienced the storm. She also received hygiene kits from a shut-in living in the Midwest who bought bars of soap and wash cloths through Amazon, and wrapped the cloths around the soap and secured them with rubber bands. “Charlie and Tommy who are nine-years-old and live in Ohio set up a lemonade stand and sold lemonade to raise money for our Immokalee residents,” she said.

Ten days after Hurricane Irma roared through Florida, Catholic Charities USA assigned a logistics coordinator to assist with the efforts. A centralized warehouse in Arcadia also was opened to store food, water, cleaning supplies, baby items, air conditioners, dehumidifiers, household items, and building materials.



It was determined by Oct. 1, approximately three weeks after the storm, that the total number of people served through the 12 Catholic Charities Disaster Response Centers was approximately 82,687 individuals. The largest areas of assistance were the Fort Myers locations (over 27,000 served) and the Naples locations (over 25,000 served).

On Oct. 2, Disaster Services of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul-USA opened five Parish Recovery Assistance Centers. The centers were open until Oct. 14 and served 1,000 people with information on FEMA, Small Business Administration and other state and local disaster programs, as well as providing aid, hygiene kits, cleanup buckets, and registering households with Crisis Cleanup for muck outs and debris removal.

Organized by Mark Smith of the Da Vinci Group in Washington, D.C. with corporate partner Global Tell Link, victims of Hurricane Irma were treated to a BBQ meal and a care package by the Give To Live volunteer group. They served more than 500 people in Clewiston on Oct. 6 and over 500 people in Naples on Oct. 7 hoping to offer them a much-needed break from their troubles.

A month after the storm made landfall, Catholic Charities hired a program director and caseworker for long-term disaster recovery. Efforts began by identifying families who lost homes, needed help moving out of shelters, and required financial assistance with security deposits for rent and utilities. Volunteers were ready to help with the deep cleaning of homes, tree removal, and roof repairs.

“We are a member of the Long-Term Recovery Organization which is a group of faith-based, non-profit organizations that pool resources to help vulnerable populations recover from disaster,” said Routsis-Arroyo. “Since FEMA is not available to undocumented individuals, we had to find other options to serve this group of victims.”

Other areas of concern for long-term recovery include insufficient affordable housing in the region and significant damage to crops, which has resulted in migrant workers having no employment until new crops are ready to harvest and process. “Without work, they cannot afford food, housing, and other necessities,” said Routsis-Arroyo. “Many victims of Hurricane Irma also do not have insurance and must pay for necessary repairs to their homes and vehicles, so there will be an ongoing need for financial assistance as well.”

It took thousands of people to aid the tens of thousands of people who suffered from the wrath of Hurricane Irma. The work is not over, especially for those without resources. “Our long-term recovery efforts will continue for two to three years,” Routsis-Arroyo said. “We are so grateful for the overwhelming response we received to help people recover from this disaster. We could not do it alone.” ■

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

## HURRICANES IRMA AND MARIA: HOW CCCF PREPARED AND RESPONDED

By Glenda Meekins

**H**urricane season is ushered in by frantic trips to the store for supplies and the boarding of windows. Catholic Charities of Central Florida recently followed its own hurricane protocol prepared long in advance for such situations. But this year, the unexpected occurred—back-to-back hurricanes that required the collaborative efforts of state agencies, ministers and local parishes.

Executive Director Gary Tester had a plan in place prior to Hurricanes Irma and Maria that admittedly “continues to evolve.” He shared how his organization worked to quickly meet the needs of so many people.

“We had a lot of notice on Irma so, a week before, we began to convene leadership to talk about the projected storm path; how we would address things internally at Catholic Charities; and then began to have conversations of what things might look like—based on Hurricane Matthew—what we knew we needed to do if this hurricane hits. Those conversations intensified through the week, leading up to agreement that, once we made sure everyone was safe, we would convene post-storm to determine next recovery steps.”

Hurricane Irma hit Sunday, Sept. 10. For the next several days, much of the staff had no power. “The leadership team met Wednesday morning and began calling parishes around the diocese based on what we had heard on the news, of where the eye had hit,” he said. “We also used information from our phone tree contacts regarding staff status reports, giving us a geographical idea of hardest hit areas.”





Tester explained that Bishop John Noonan's cabinet, at the Diocese of Orlando, also had the responsibility to contact priests to assure them of support before and after the storm. "All that information determined much of our area was in need of emergency food and water, and we began to lay the groundwork to respond," he said.

Next Tester reached out to Catholic Charities of Florida's emergency management specialist, Gabe Tischler, who submitted supply requests to appropriate state and federal agencies. What followed were daily phone calls among the Catholic Charities directors around the state. By Friday, a special food drop was scheduled with the help of Second Harvest Food Bank. Trailers to hold and transport the food were staged around the diocese with the aid of American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Feeding Florida, a network of food banks.

### **Distribution Coordination**

"At Catholic Charities of Central Florida, we have a memorandum of understanding with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for the Diocese of Orlando," explained Tester. "When we determined we needed emergency food and water distribution, we immediately began to contact parishes where we knew we had strong St. Vincent de Paul conferences. We knew we needed volunteers on the ground to do a great job, so we reached out to parishes where we thought the need existed and where we thought we could do good work with the conferences. We ended up distributing in 13 parishes and one agency in the diocese, plus three parishes in the Diocese of Venice," he noted.

A week of food drops evolved into what Tester would call "long term recovery support" using different parish offices to meet individuals impacted financially by Hurricane Irma. Through funds from Catholic Charities USA, local donors, and a particularly generous grant from the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation in Winter Park, financial assistance was provided to assist with lost wages and rent. Tester added, "We hope to assist folks with construction repairs, but that remains to be determined. Those are the steps we are taking as we move into the next phase of support."

### **Hurricane Maria hits Puerto Rico**

On Oct. 20, Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico. "We were doing all we could to marshal and support resources in the state," said Tester. "Then, when Governor Rick Scott declared the state of emergency, anticipating an influx from Puerto Rico, we began turning our attention to how we could assist. The first step was to try and identify the need for emergency supplies. We coordinated with them concerning a collection of supplies at the Mass for Solidarity that Bishop Noonan had celebrated on behalf of the victims of Puerto Rico. The need for coordination was greater as we learned other parishes were doing collections," explained Tester. "We began to coordinate with deaneries to establish collection points to pick up supplies and ship them out."

Tester stated that, as of Nov. 2017, more than 13 tons of supplies had been shipped to Cáritas of Puerto Rico.

### **Airport Ministry**

Preparing for the influx of families due to the large Puerto Rican population in Central Florida, the governor's office coordinated with the Orlando Aviation Authority and the Florida Division of Emergency Management to provide a welcome center at Orlando International Airport.

CCCF emergency management services manager, Julio Rivera, worked with the Emergency Operations Center following Irma, so it was a natural call to send him to the airport. "We began Oct. 3 along with 20 agencies including FEMA, Red Cross, and the United Way," said Rivera.

As individuals arrived, volunteers directed them to the welcome center which is operational until December 29, 2017. It will then be relocated through March 31, 2018. Seventy-nine people visited the first day, and the numbers kept growing. The center was open nine hours per day, seven days a week. It recorded as many as 912 people in one day.

Rivera estimated that more than 3,500 people were helped through Catholic Charities, some arriving with only the clothes on their backs. Assistance ranged from pastoral care and counseling to housing and employment assistance.

### **Pastoral Element**

In the first week at the airport welcome center, Rivera noticed people were emotionally distraught. He requested pastoral presence, and the diocese quickly sent in priests and deacons. Prayer cards were printed with a list of nearby Spanish Masses. Clergy came regularly to console those who wanted to pray. Rivera observed, "Many people needed to release the pressure and shock of leaving their home and family. We understand that some will need prolonged services," he added. "Now the work is to help them establish themselves here."

Tester concluded, "There is no manual that tells you how to respond to a disaster. Without the Vincentians, without the Knights of Columbus, without the Council of Catholic Women, without our parishes, we simply could not respond to folks in need."

### **Tips to Others**

Tester's advice for other agencies facing similar situations: "Be willing to step out and address whatever needs are identified. Understand that it will feel uncomfortable because it is essentially like assembling a bike, even as you ride it down the hill. And that's okay." ■

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

## DOUBLE WHAMMY SUPER STORMS DRAW TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY EVEN CLOSER

By Bernetia Akin

It's easy to overlook the U.S. Virgin Islands. With a total land mass of just under 134 square miles and a population of little more than 100,000, this lush U.S. territory appears as three tiny dots just east of Puerto Rico, at the top of the island chain that separates the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean.

Small as they are, they loom large as hurricane targets.

Virgin Islanders are well used to tropical cyclones. But in recorded history, they've never experienced the like of the 2017 storm season. In less than two weeks last September, they were pummeled by not one but two Category Five hurricanes. First Irma devastated St. Thomas and its next-door neighbor, St. John, and slightly "dusted up" St. Croix, 40 miles to the south. Then Maria showed up to finish the job, ripping up St. Croix and dumping massive quantities of water on all three islands and surrounding islets. Both of the territory's hospitals, both of its airports, most of its electric grid, and thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed.

No one was spared, including Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands, which suffered minor to serious damage to most of its structures and the complete loss of one facility.

Undeterred, the small staff of 20, plus a handful of volunteers, has continued throughout the disaster and its aftermath to deliver on the agency's mission: combatting homelessness and uplifting the needy and the marginalized.

Andrea Shillingford, executive director, has nothing but praise for all of her workers, many of whom are serving despite major personal losses.



Following are the stories of some of these heroes.

### Brenda Charles

A member of the CCVI staff for 24 years, Brenda Charles works primarily in the St. Croix soup kitchen which is a lifeline for individuals who are chronically homeless.

By the evening of Sept. 18, most residents had hunkered down, awaiting Maria's arrival, which was fast approaching with winds in excess of 165 miles per hour. Bethlehem House Shelter, a home for people down on their luck who need a place to live temporarily, was deemed too vulnerable. Staff moved the 29 men, women and children housed there to a government disaster shelter.

But what about the chronically homeless men and women who live in the streets and alleyways of St. Croix? They are also CCVI's clients. So Charles got into the agency van and starting searching.

"I was just trying to beat the time before the wind picked up. I went to all the different areas where the homeless are" to give them a lift to one of the government disaster shelters. She also got calls from concerned members of the public, who had sighted people who needed help. "They'd say, 'there's someone by Banco Popular or there's someone laying down by Subway,'" Charles said.

Not everyone she found understood the gravity of the situation. "Some of them want to give me a hard time," she recalled. They told

her they would be fine in their usual doorway or other cubbyhole. But she was not taking no for an answer. "I said 'You can't be out here. You have to go to the shelter.'"

Managers at some of the public shelters refused to take in the homeless. So Charles drove from shelter to shelter, and finally enlisted the aid of VITEMA (the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency) which ordered public shelter managers to accept the people.

Charles says she made six-and-a-half trips that night. The half trip was the one time she was driving away from a shelter and spotted four people in a bus shanty, so circled back for them. In all, she picked up 44 people and took them to safety, then she headed home.

"It was rough out there," she recalled. "I could hardly see on the road. The rain had picked up and I was kind of scared, but I said, let me keep the faith." She arrived home safely minutes after midnight and shortly before the worst of the storm began.

### Giselle Petersen and Francis King

On St. Thomas, when the winds from Irma subsided, Shillingford began checking on her staff and on the facilities. She made her way downtown to the building that holds CCVI's administrative offices and its soup kitchen, to find that Giselle Petersen was already on the job.



There was no electricity and no running water, but there was a propane stove and bottled water and a six-inch battery powered lamp for light, and with that, Petersen started cooking.

Conditions eased about a week later when CCVI received several small generators from Catholic Charities in San Juan, but it would be months before regular electrical service was restored.

It was a similar story when Maria hit the soup kitchen on St. Croix – mud and water in, electricity out. Petersen’s counterpart, Francis “Frankie” King, stepped up to the plate.

“He said if he doesn’t cook, what is going to happen to his people,” Shillingford said.

#### **A’daesha Davis and Yohanna Richards**

“Immediately after the storm, they were here,” Shillingford said, recalling how two high school students – both daughters of soup kitchen staff – pitched in to help and continued to volunteer until school reopened several weeks after the hurricane. “You didn’t have to ask them to do anything,” she said. They just did whatever was needed.

Extra help was especially appreciated in the first weeks, when the numbers of people relying on CCVI for a hot meal spiked from the usual 75 to 100 a day to as high as 400 on St. Thomas. Similar increases were seen on the other islands.



#### **Dr. George Rosenberg’s Medical Team**

On the second Saturday of the month, doctors, nurses and other members of the St. Thomas medical community spent hours at Bethlehem House giving free screenings and health care services to the homeless. Like other territory residents, many of them suffered severe damage to their homes from Irma and/or Maria. But that did not keep them from their regular volunteer service.

#### **Michael “Mic” Akin, Elton and Beverly Chongasing**

After 38 years in the Virgin Islands, 12 of them as executive director of CCVI, retired Mic Akin could not resist offering to help out in his former home after Irma struck. He contacted Catholic Charities USA and started the ball rolling on what turned into significant ongoing support from the national agency to its small affiliate. CCUSA wanted him to deliver the first of the aid and help in distribution, but there was a hitch: nearly all of the island’s hotels were closed and those few with any undamaged rooms were already full of residents who had lost their homes.

One text to St. Thomas friends Beverly and Elton Chongasing solved that problem. Active members of their church and community – Elton is a longtime member of the CCVI board – they are well accustomed to sharing their home with extended family, friends, and the occasional stranger in need. For two weeks they fed and sheltered Akin, including during the surprise visit by Maria, which formed while he was on his way to the territory and arrived two days after he did.



### Fr. Enrique Camacho

You could not ask for a better neighbor than Fr. Enrique Camacho, executive director of Catholic Charities in San Juan. Within days of Irma's passing, he managed to airlift several small generators and other supplies to CCVI on St. Thomas.

He also facilitated CCUSA's early relief efforts, acting as host when volunteer Akin stopped in Puerto Rico on his way to St. Thomas. He arranged a free overnight hotel stay for him in San Juan, and the next day, when the commuter airlines bumped Akin from one flight to the V.I., Camacho used his connections to get him on the next one.

### Nishawn Georges, Arden Shillingford

Maria left quite a mess for Nishawn Georges, CCVI's supervisor for St. Croix. A tree had fallen through the roof of one building at Bethlehem House; the wind had ripped up the other. The agency van was damaged. The soup kitchen was usable, but damaged. And for days and days and days there was no way to communicate with anyone off-island.

"She did what I did on St. Thomas," Shillingford said. She traveled the debris-filled and damaged roads, checking on staff and clients and getting basic services up and running. Georges had an advantage: she is a member of the V.I. National Guard and so had some leeway during the confining weeks-long curfew.

On St. Thomas, Shillingford had her own advantage - a man named Arden Shillingford, her husband. They lost their home due to Hurricane Irma, and it was a long time before Arden's own office reopened. So he became a super volunteer, accompanying his wife on her mission.

"He did not have a choice," Shillingford joked, adding more seriously, "I was really happy to have his support. He was there from Day One until he had to go back to work."

The U.S. Virgin Islands may be small, and vulnerable to the hurricanes that form over the Atlantic, but the people there have big hearts and strong hands to help each other through the storms. ■



# CÁRITAS DE PUERTO RICO

## RECOVERY ONGOING IN PUERTO RICO

By Padre Enrique Camacho, Executive Director, Cáritas de Puerto Rico

Since the passage of Hurricane Irma, Cáritas de Puerto Rico has been very active supporting the affected communities in the eastern part of Puerto Rico. They have even helped their neighbor, St. Thomas of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thanks to the initiative of Archbishop Monsignor Roberto González Nieves, who contacted the National Guard of Puerto Rico, two helicopters were sent to St. Thomas with more than 6,000 pounds of food, water, basic necessities and five generators.

After Irma came Hurricane Maria, but Cáritas had already activated its Command and Information Center at the radio stations of the Archdiocese of San Juan – Radio Paz and Oro 92.5 – from where information was transmitted in order to support communities during the hurricane.

The day after Maria passed, Cáritas visited communities that had been impacted by the storm and opened its offices in order to provide food, water, clothing and essential items to thousands of families. A process including interviews, listening sessions and accompaniment was followed to determine needs.

Two weeks after the disaster, Cáritas had already helped more than 25,000 families. Indeed, in many remote communities Cáritas was the first agency to deliver supplies. After two months, the number of families served had grown to more than 150,000 throughout Puerto Rico. Cáritas continues to work at delivering supplies and meeting people's needs in collaboration with the six dioceses of Puerto Rico, which has made it possible to reach the 78 municipalities of Puerto Rico. This outreach was helped immeasurably by the Catholic Church's 500 parishes and their volunteers.

Since the middle of November 2017, Cáritas distributed more than \$1 million in food vouchers throughout the island and more than \$3 million in direct aid.



We have a warehouse of 10,000 square feet in the town of Cataño and in each diocese around the island there are one or several warehouses as well. Also, food and basic necessities, which filled 15 vans, have been distributed throughout the island, more than 1 million pounds worth:

**32** power generators

**1k** portable stoves

**21** pallets of portable lanterns

**13** pallets of batteries

**20** water pallets (more than 550,000 bottles of drinking water)

**60** pallets of non-perishable food

**100k+** baby diapers

**10** pallets of rice

**17** pallets of beans

**65** pallets of cleaning and hygiene products

**15** pallets of sheets

**16** pallets of baby products

**30** pallets of clothes

**352** tarps for the roofs



We offer much thanks to Catholic Charities USA, whose support and accompaniment have been decisive in providing this help to our people. We are extremely grateful. We have also received great support from Food for the Poor, many parishes, colleges and universities, the Puerto Rican diaspora and other national and international organizations, such as the Houston Astros, UNICEF and MANO A MANO (Spain).

The support of our Social Parish Ministry "Cáritas Parroquiales" and their volunteers, who have taken to the streets to carry out their "Love Visits" has also been fundamental. They have aided in identifying the needs and deficiencies in their parish territories, in order to provide answers of mercy and charity.

Puerto Rico is still facing a lot challenges, like lack of electricity and water in most communities. Many families lost everything and are still without a home. Therefore, Cáritas Puerto Rico has identified four objectives as initial steps towards long-term recovery: continue the distribution of aid to communities; provide case management to victims in order to help them be in a better condition than they were before the disaster; establish health clinics in the most affected and vulnerable communities; and give families the tools for their human development, such as trainings and other programs to teach them skills and to empower them. ■



DISASTER SERVICES

# MIRACLES OF CHARITY

“.... Human closeness at these times (of disaster) gives us strength – there is solidarity” (Pope Francis – aboard the papal flight from Seoul, South Korea, to Rome, Aug. 18, 2014).



By Kim Burgo, Senior Director, Disaster Operations, Catholic Charities USA

**H**uman closeness gives us strength that leads us to solidarity... I've had a lot of time to reflect on this quote from Pope Francis since the Weather Channel monitors began to light up with the approach and landfall of Hurricane Harvey in late August, then the arrival of Hurricane Irma, trailed by the passing of Hurricane Jose, followed by the power and destructive force of Hurricane Maria. Wow! At one point I thought: "This is a disaster nightmare! How do we process it all? Where do we even begin to sort out what to tackle first?"

More than 20 million people were affected by one month of hurricanes. Thousands of families lost loved ones, hundreds of thousands lost their homes and all their belongings, countless individuals lost their income, their jobs, and their livelihoods. Those who previously lived in poverty were now critically vulnerable, while many who never sought social services before had begun a poverty journey difficult to overcome. Even now, hundreds of thousands remain without electricity. I had to ask myself: "How does one actually go about providing 20 million people with human closeness, which gives strength and leads to solidarity, and still make a difference in someone's life?" Just saying to someone, "it's going to be OK," isn't going to work.

In the days and weeks following the hurricanes, I began to see the answers in the miracles I witnessed while supporting agencies in their disaster response, like the clients in Houston who offered and helped to unload the CCUSA Mobile Response Center, filled with much-needed resources, when no other volunteers were available. These clients set up the distribution site and cared enough to serve each other until everyone received the resources he or she needed. Another miracle was the group of homeless men standing on an overpass who waved, cheered and took pictures of the CCUSA Mobile Response Center as we drove by under them, shouting out their "thank you's" because Catholic Charities is always there to help them.

Indeed, in every place that was impacted by the hurricanes, the miracles of charity and generosity were evident.

The diocese of Corpus Christi was “ground zero” for Hurricane Harvey, but the people there didn’t think twice about sharing their resources with the Diocese of Victoria, which had none. They packed up the CCUSA Mobile Response Center vehicle and sent it off to relieve the suffering of those in Victoria. And, when the truckload of resources arrived in Victoria, the people were waiting. A mop, Clorox, food, water, diapers: It was all that was needed to bring tears to the eyes of those who were left vulnerable. When the supplies dwindled in less than two hours, neighbors arrived bringing more and more goods. Like the miracle of the loaves and fishes in the Bible, enough supplies arrived to serve hundreds of people during the following four hours. In total, almost 11,000 people received disaster services provided from the CCUSA Mobile Response Center before it made its journey back to Alexandria, Va.

Catholic Charities San Antonio organized a convoy of 72 trucks that hauled \$4.1 million in relief supplies, which were loaded onto the vehicles by 600 volunteers and driven four hours away to be received by Catholic Charities of Galveston/Houston. Upon arrival, the contents of the trucks were off-loaded by 300 volunteers, all of whom were dedicated and determined to give of their strength to assist those who were made fragile by the aftermath of the hurricane. Staff from Catholic Charities agencies in Albany, Camden, and Gary assisted with every aspect of the disaster services being provided. And in the week that followed, more than 500 CCUSA Annual Gathering attendees (Sept. 28-30, 2017) from across the country would continue to support the disaster work in Houston and Beaumont by operating call centers, canvassing neighborhoods, participating in distribution sites, assisting in food fairs and mucking/gutting homes in the hopes of moving each family one step closer in their recovery process.

Catholic Charities Austin and Dallas supported evacuees at shelters, and Catholic Charities Fort Worth sent teams of staff to supplement and support agency staff who were in such desperate need of a break. Houston took from their resources and sent supplies to Beaumont. Lake Charles – also providing assistance to evacuees – made sure Beaumont maintained its presence by supplementing

distribution sites whenever possible. Catholic Charities Beaumont became a catalyst for disaster service provision by being a physical presence in each county it serves, ensuring resources would be available to all.

While activities continued in Texas, Florida began to respond to its own catastrophe following Hurricane Irma. Each of the Florida agencies began to support one another, providing mutual aid assistance and sending disaster supplies to those areas hardest hit. Catholic Charities staff from Charleston South Carolina packed their bags to provide assistance to Catholic Charities Venice. Hurricane Irma also caused havoc in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (St. Thomas and St. Croix). Without a second thought, Catholic Charities/Cáritas Puerto Rico reached across the sea to provide immediate help to its island neighbor, Catholic Charities of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Two weeks after Irma cut services in Puerto Rico and ravaged the Virgin Islands, Hurricane Maria provided a devastation not seen on the islands since the 1920s. Yet, despite the challenges that occurred in the previous weeks, both Texas and Florida agencies took immediate actions in support of their suffering Catholic Charities family members in Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands. Once again, the call to give strength was embraced by staff from the New Jersey Catholic Conference, Catholic Charities Camden, and Catholic Charities Cleveland. All of them were bringing their knowledge, their compassion, and their desire to be of service to those made most vulnerable.

Catholic Charities local agency staff in each of the disaster-affected agencies were impacted by the hurricanes they experienced. In Catholic Charities/Cáritas Puerto Rico, more than 50 percent of local staff lost their homes and everything they owned. Yet, in Puerto Rico, as in the Virgin Islands, Texas and Florida, these front line heroes come to the office each and every day to provide hope, kindness, and compassion to all who seek help from Catholic Charities.

This is only the beginning. Disaster recovery services will be required for years to come. Through these stories, and all those too numerous to share, Catholic Charities gives breath and a beating



heart to the call of Pope Francis to provide the human closeness that gives strength and leads to solidarity. Every embrace of comfort, every tear shed with each other, every story of survival shared, every compassionate touch, and every action that provides hope, is part of that miracle where we, as Catholic Charities, have a profound impact as we support one another and provide meaningful and life-changing assistance to the 20 million disaster survivors who are on their road to recovery. ■

# PLAN.PREPARE. PROTECT.

## NEW PROGRAM UNVEILED AT THE APPLIED INSTITUTE FOR DISASTER EXCELLENCE

Plan.Prepere.Protect. is a pilot program developed as a four-tier progressive disaster readiness training for parishes. It was developed as a joint project of Catholic Charities agencies across Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma with information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Catholic Charities USA, the American Red Cross, and other sources. Funding for this ambitious project was generously made available through CCUSA grant funding from the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.

The program was developed based on several years of interaction with parishes representing various demographics, size, composition, resources and geographical locations. A full seven years' worth of disaster data analysis based on actual events and client assistance data compiled by local Catholic Charities agencies was used to ground and inform this training. In sum, Catholic Charities has learned, based on more than 100 years of disaster recovery service, *that the key to successful recovery after a disaster depends on effective preparation before it strikes.*

Plan. Prepare. Protect. was unveiled at this year's Applied Institute for Disaster Excellence at Lake Junaluska, N.C. Participants gathered from 39 agencies, 35 dioceses, and 22 states from all coasts (including Alaska) and got a sneak peek of this innovate training from creators Mark Chan (Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Oklahoma City) and Aren Koenig (Catholic Charities of Missouri).

The training progresses from preparing the people within the church to looking outward to the community at large. It helps the church determine how they will respond when their neighbors and others around them may be hurting. Each deliberately designed level of the training helps comprise how to best prepare local parishes for disasters and what that preparation means. The end result are parishes that are stronger, more resilient assets in their communities. Look for more announcements regarding this innovative training program in the future!



## #GIVINGTUESDAY

Catholic Charities USA participated in the ringing of the opening bell at Nasdaq in New York City in recognition of #GivingTuesday (Nov. 28). Along with other organizations that stood up for victims of multiple disasters during 2017, CCUSA was invited by the host of the event, Blackbaud, Inc., to participate in acknowledging the generosity of donors who gave money in support of relief efforts.

Blackbaud, which is the world's leading cloud software company powering social good, anticipated that 2017 would be a record-breaking year for charitable giving.

At the event Anthony Sciacca, chief development officer for CCUSA, made the following comment: "On this #GivingTuesday, Catholic Charities USA is highlighting the plight of the vulnerable and persons in need in America. Millions of our sisters and brothers are without shelter, including far too many of our veterans. Donations from today will help Catholic Charities serve vulnerable populations by providing housing and a wide range of other services."

Pictured above: Representing CCUSA at the event were Charles Cornelio, chair of the CCUSA Board of Trustees; Anthony Sciacca, chief development officer for CCUSA; and Patricia Cole, vice president of communications for CCUSA.

## Catholic University of America Hosts Christmas Concert to Benefit CCUSA Hurricane Relief



Pictured from the left: Msgr. Walter Rossi rector of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington, Steve Bogus, vice president of corporate and foundation giving for CCUSA and John Garvey, president of Catholic University of America.



# FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HONORED

BILL SINCLAIR, CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF TENNESSEE

Bill Sinclair, who retired in January 2017 after serving more than 30 years as executive director of Catholic Charities of Tennessee and 40 years on staff, was honored with the Spirit of Service Award on Wednesday, October 18, 2017, during the Celebration of Mission to Service, a benefit event for Catholic Charities and Saint Mary Villa Child Development Center (CDC). The event was presented by Saint Thomas Health.

*"The Spirit of Service Award is presented to individuals or groups that have been significant contributors to the well-being of the clients served by Catholic Charities and Saint Mary Villa and reflect the agencies' values of love, goodwill, kindness, learning and laughter,"* explained Pam Russo, Catholic Charities of Tennessee executive director.

*"In the past, we have generally had two honorees each year. This year, it was clear that Bill Sinclair should be our sole honoree. His four decades-long commitment to serving those most in need in our community – throughout the state of Tennessee, for that matter – speaks for itself."*

Bill Sinclair retired in January 2017 as the longest serving executive director – and staff member – in Catholic Charities of Tennessee history. He started in 1975 when he took a temporary job helping to relocate refugees from what was then South Vietnam. The temporary job became permanent and, in 1977, he was named the agency's assistant director. He served in that role until 1986, when he was named the agency's third executive director, succeeding Sister Andrea Vaughn, D.C.

During the late 1970s, Sinclair oversaw the conversion of Saint Mary Orphanage, a residential home for children, into Saint Mary Villa Child Development Center, an early childhood development program, according to Clarie Givens, the current CDC executive director.

In a Tennessee Register interview prior to his retirement, Sinclair said that the most significant change he saw in the human services profession during his tenure was the shift from concentrating on immediate needs to a long term sustainability focus.

He is married to Eileen Beehan, former director of Social Services for Catholic Charities of Tennessee.



## Catholic Charities Maine is Putting Refugees on the Road to Self-sufficiency



Refugees newly arrived in Maine face a lot of challenges, and one of the biggest can be transportation. Catholic Charities Maine says, with the current job market, it has been highly successful in finding refugees jobs, but the problem then is making sure they can keep them.

“We have an awesome job market right now, so it’s going really well for our clients, being placed with employers, but Maine is a rural state, so a lot of folks get placed outside the city,” explains Hannah DeAngelis, program director for Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS). “Refugees come here with nothing. They do not have access to transportation, and even when they get a minimum wage job, it’s pretty hard to allocate money for a bus pass or a bus ticket, so we’re always struggling with the problem of transportation for our clients for job retention.”

An AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, Dana Dotson, who is working with Catholic Charities, set the wheels in motion for a possible solution, a bike drive project. Catholic Charities put out the word that it was seeking donations of gently used bicycles that could be provided to clients.

It was quickly a hit with local parishes notes DeAngelis. “It was awesome. Our contact at All Saints parish in Brunswick called and said, ‘We have 34 bikes on our lawn.’”

Some of the bikes needed repair, and Catholic Charities is working with Portland Gear Hub, a local non-profit, to get them road ready, but so far, eight clients have already benefited.

“There are a lot of needs people have when they come here, and self-sufficiency is the most immediate, but in the long term, integra-

tion absolutely is the goal, helping people feel like they really have the tools to restart their lives,” says DeAngelis. “I think a bike is a really smart part of that. It is a piece of people helping people to be able to move around the city on their own terms.”

In addition to the bicycles, Catholic Charities provides helmets, locks, and lights, and Dotson has put together a bicycle safety program. While many of the refugees used to bike in their home countries, they need to learn state bicycle laws and how to ride alongside cars. Dotson has even biked with some clients to work to make sure they arrive safely.

In addition to local parishes, the Bike Project has been promoted through flyers and posters distributed throughout the community and on Catholic Charities Maine’s Facebook page.

## Catholic Charities to Open New Ambulatory Detox Clinic in Trenton

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, is opening a new ambulatory detox clinic to round out a full complement of addiction and mental health recovery treatment services offered at their Trenton campus located at North Clinton Avenue and Southard Street. This new program opens soon after the New Year. “The addition of this new clinic, offering safe and cost-effective treatment for individuals seeking recovery from opioid and other substance dependence is much needed,” said Marlene Laó-Collins, executive director of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton.

The ambulatory detox clinic is the final component of the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), a federally sponsored initiative that integrates behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment, and primary care at Catholic Charities’ Trenton campus. This initiative launched on July 1, 2017 and has already produced measurable improvements in treatment outcomes. “In just four months, consumers receiving care through the CCBHC have seen an overall reduction in the need for hospitalization and improved access to integrated services,” observed Susan Loughery, director of operations at Catholic Charities. ■

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## A STORY ABOUT CÁRITAS PUERTO RICO

With the spate of hurricanes that hit the U.S. mainland and its territories in the fall of 2017, the need for disaster relief was urgent and widespread. Many people focused their efforts in their local communities, and rightly so. Residents, charitable organizations like Catholic Charities, and government offices – already embedded in neighborhoods – were taking care of their brothers and sisters.

National organizations helped too, of course. The level of destruction in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands was such that local efforts alone could not (and still cannot) respond to all the needs. Even as Hurricane Harvey approached the coast of Texas, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) – the national office for the Catholic Charities ministry – was already initiating a national donation campaign and mobilizing its disaster operations team, including the deployment of the CCUSA Mobile Response Center vehicle to Texas.

In the face of such difficult times, one hears many inspiring stories. Thousands of good people come to the aid of their neighbors, whether it is by rescuing an elderly woman from her flooded home or by sending a \$100 donation to help people get back on their feet. One story that captures this benevolent charity well involves a helicopter ride from San Juan, Puerto Rico to St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Two days after Labor Day, Hurricane Irma tore through the U.S. Virgin Islands and damaged much of St. Thomas and St. John. The hospital, the airport, two police stations, one fire station, and many private homes, including subsidized housing units, were unusable. Communication systems were also down. Without exaggeration, the need was immense. Even as Andrea Shillingford, executive director of Catholic Charities USVI, was assessing the damage, she knew it would be a long time back to normalcy.



In a few days, when Ms. Shillingford was able to get the word out about the situation in the USVI, the bishop of San Juan, Archbishop Roberto Nieves, and the executive director of Cáritas Puerto Rico, Father Enrique Camacho, were already planning to help their island neighbor. Puerto Rico, depending on the point one measures from, is around 100 miles west from the USVI, which is only about a 30 minute ride by air.

On Sept. 11, a day notable in U.S. history for neighbor helping neighbor, and despite Puerto Rico being in the path of Hurricane Maria, Archbishop Nieves and Father Camacho, with the help of Puerto Rico's National Guard, loaded a helicopter full of more than 3,000 pounds of food, water, and other items like solar lamps, batteries, and generators. They flew the supplies to St. Thomas, where Ms. Shillingford met them and received the donations. She told Father Camacho that despite the difficulties of the moment, she was happy to be part of the big family of Catholic Charities. "We are not alone," she said.

Both Archbishop Nieves and Father Camacho were also very glad to be able to help the people in the USVI. Although they probably would say that it was simply part of their duty, their generosity in time of need is an example of sacrificial love after the manner of Christ, even as they were facing Hurricane Maria, which decimated Puerto Rico.

Sometimes people who are overwhelmed by a disaster ask where God is in all of the pain. Certainly part of the answer will always remain a mystery, but another part is the help he provides through people. The aid received from Puerto Rico certainly made Ms. Shillingford and the people of USVI feel not only supported but also hopeful. "If God took us to this, He will take us out of it," she said. And Puerto Rico too. ■

## 2018 UPCOMING TRAINING & EVENTS

**April 10-12**

**Diocesan Directors' Spring Gathering**

*Las Vegas, Nev.*

Kristan Schlichte

[kschlichte@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org](mailto:kschlichte@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org)

**April 30 – May 4**

**O' Grady Leadership Institute  
& O' Grady Advanced Leadership Institute**

*Lutz, Florida*

Scott Hurd

[shurd@catholiccharitiesusa.org](mailto:shurd@catholiccharitiesusa.org)

**September 12-14**

**Annual Gathering**

*Buffalo, NY*

Bea Lewis

[events@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org](mailto:events@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org)



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