

FRIEND,

The two most beautiful words in the English language, according to the great novelist Henry James, are “summer afternoon.” It’s hard to argue with him, given that summer afternoons provide us with plentiful sunshine and abundant opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and one another.

And I can think of no better way to spend a sliver of an upcoming summer afternoon than by reading the remarkable stories included in this edition of Blessings – stories that you effectively co-authored

as a generous and dedicated supporter of Catholic Charities and those we serve.

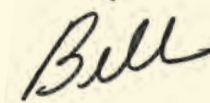
I am profoundly grateful for all that you do to help thousands throughout our state fulfill their God-given potential. I am also eternally thankful for all that you have shared with me during my 15 years as leader of this extraordinary organization.

And so it is with gratitude that I recently announced that I will retire as Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Baltimore in July 2025. It has been one of the greatest privileges of my life to collaborate with you in service of our neighbors across Maryland

and in the spirit of our Gospel-inspired calling to Cherish the Divine Within All.

Between this summer and next, the Catholic Charities Board of Trustees will conduct a national search for my successor, and I will continue to work with the same passion, energy, and dedication that I have since starting way back in 2008.

I wish you and your loved ones a healthy and happy summer season.



William J. McCarthy, Jr.,
Executive Director



SUMMER 2024

BLESSINGS

CATHOLIC
CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Inspired by the Gospel mandates to LOVE, SERVE and TEACH, Catholic Charities provides care and services to IMPROVE the LIVES of Marylanders in need.



Family support following the Key Bridge collapse

AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, NEWS CREWS AND OTHERS DESCENDED ON BALTIMORE after the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in March, staff at Catholic Charities’ Esperanza Center maintained a singular focus: caring for the families of the six construction workers lost in the tragedy.

The six men were immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, and their families needed bilingual support to navigate a complicated web of questions and decisions. Baltimore City and Baltimore County officials tapped the Esperanza Center to serve as a center-point for the grieving relatives, responding to their needs and streamlining the deluge of calls and requests.

Mayra Loera, Client Services Program Manager, was out of town when she learned of the center’s role.

“On my drive back, I was on the phone, trying to work out the next steps, reaching out to families to introduce ourselves and to say, ‘We’re here to support you,’” she said. “Honestly, there was so much happening for the families. They were receiving multiple calls from multiple entities. It was very hard for them to channel.”

And the intensity of those early days didn’t let up for weeks.

NAVIGATING COMPLICATED CHANNELS

The Esperanza Center provides a wide range of services – education, health care, legal counsel and general supports – to thousands of immigrants each year. Loera and her team often serve as an initial point of contact, helping clients navigate through various systems.

Soon after the bridge collapse, the team visited the families’ homes to understand their needs. They filled out applications for financial support to cover expenses – mortgages, rent, electric bills, car payments, insurance, clothes and more. They helped connect U.S.-

born children with benefits. They delivered death notifications as victims were found and connected families to funeral homes. The client services team worked through the process of repatriating remains back to home countries or arranging visas, flights, hotel reservations and more for overseas family members wishing to come to the U.S.

It was an experience that pulled the entire Esperanza Center team deeply into the lives of many affected families. At the same time, the whole Agency began to delve deeper into a focus on the call to action of “Love Your Neighbor.”

“They opened up their hearts to us,” Loera said. “For those who wanted to share, we listened. They would share the funny things their loved one used to do, and we were laughing and crying with them at the same time.”



SOLVING A PUZZLE FOR NECESSARY SOLUTIONS

Esperanza Center staff also created or deepened connections with a range of organizations, such as the FBI, Coast Guard and foreign consulates, involved with the response.

“It’s a large group, all working together, everyone adding their expertise and trying to solve the puzzle of meeting every family’s needs,” she said. “It’s been a team effort.”

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:
I am the LORD. — LEVITICUS 19:18

VOLUNTEER

So many ways to



FOR ONE CATHOLIC CHARITIES VOLUNTEER, “Love Your Neighbor” means offering handyman services at Sarah’s House, year after year. For another, it means playing Dungeons and Dragons with kids at St. Vincent’s Villa. And for another, it means helping middle school classmates make pizzas for Our Daily Bread Employment Center.

Every one of these contributions is foundational to the Agency’s work, said Colette Saucier, Director of Volunteer and Outreach Services at Catholic Charities.

“When you ‘Love Your Neighbor,’ it’s giving the best that we can to each other. There’s a lot of things that go into it,” she explained. “When you love somebody, you have a genuine care for their well-being. You wish them well. You want them to trust you. That’s the kind of love that ‘Love Your Neighbor’ is speaking to.”

Catholic Charities launched the Love Your Neighbor initiative on Valentine’s Day this year to promote loving service and advocacy, while issuing a bold invitation

to others. The goal is to elevate and champion the principle of Love Your Neighbor, encouraging the community to act, including volunteering, participating in events and supporting those in need. During Volunteer Appreciation Month in April, many programs held special events or featured volunteers on social media to honor their contributions.

DIRECT IMPACT

“We don’t do this work here alone. Through our partnerships, we’re able to fully realize our mission,” said Bruce Clopein, Sarah’s House Volunteer Resource Manager, which offers emergency shelter and project-based supportive housing in Anne Arundel County. “One group may engage and wonder, ‘what’s the effect?’ but when you couple that with 25 other groups, it shows the difference that can be made.”

The direct impact of volunteer contributions is felt in the annual budget of

Sarah’s House, which includes just \$11,000 to feed up to 66 people daily, across the year.

“That’s a lot of mouths to feed, and we’re able to – for lack of a better term – ‘get away with’ having such a small food budget because of our volunteers,” Clopein said.

COULDN’T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

People often talk with Saucier about the benefits of volunteering – the connections with others who share similar values, the joy of serving another, the opportunity to share the blessings in their lives. But these are far more than feel-good contributions to Catholic Charities.

“We need a lot of volunteers to pull off all of our services, and to make them fuller,” she said. “Our volunteers work shoulder-to-shoulder with our employees. We could not fulfill our mission to improve lives, on such a large scale, without them.”

To learn more about sharing your time and talents with Catholic Charities, visit our Volunteer Portal – cc-md.org/volunteer.

INTERGENERATIONAL CENTER GROUNDBREAKING CELEBRATION



From left to right: Kevin Creamer, Director of Catholic Charities Intergenerational Center; Robert Hunt of the Alliance of Rosemont Community Organizations; Archbishop William E. Lori; Amy Kleine, Senior Program Director at The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation; Congressman Kweisi Mfume; Bill McCarthy, Catholic Charities Executive Director; Baltimore City Councilman John T. Bullock; State Senator Antonio L. Hayes; Mayor Brandon Scott; Jack Bisciotti, a representative of the Stephen and Renee Bisciotti Foundation; Daniel Rizzo, Catholic Charities Board of Trustees President; Jason Bisciotti, a representative of the Stephen and Renee Bisciotti Foundation; Tim Regan, President and CEO, The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company.

With the objective of serving area residents through every stage of their lives — from infancy through retirement — Catholic Charities of Baltimore formally broke ground in April on the \$32 million Intergenerational Center in West Baltimore. The Center is expected to open next summer.

CASSEROLES NEEDED

We are so thankful for your donated casseroles to feed our hungry neighbors across Maryland. Recipes and convenient drop-off options are available by contacting: volunteer@cc-md.org.

Thanks to you, we are able to continue our work in the community.

Use your phone’s camera to scan the QR code to donate today!



A coach for the littlest clients

MORGAN ROBERTSON REMEMBERS turning to her son's pediatrician and saying, "Help me." Dennis was just five years old, but she was getting daily calls from his school about disruptive classroom behavior, and he had destroyed seven TVs and a laptop during outbursts at home.

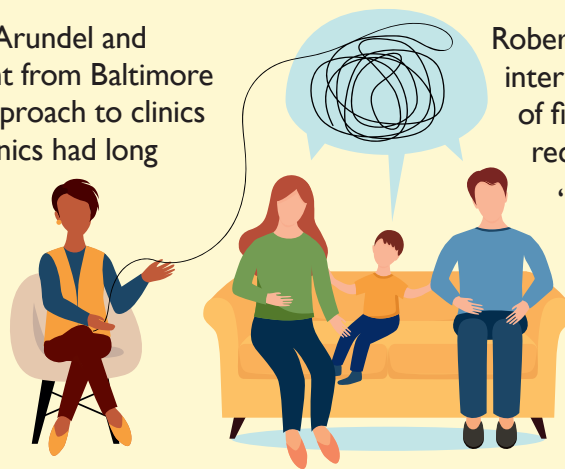
"I took him into the doctor, and I was like: I need you to help me. I don't know what to do anymore. I feel like I have no control over my kid. It's like he controls me," she said. "That's what I felt at that point in time."

Robertson started researching parent-child interaction therapy (PCIT), a structured, evidence-based treatment designed for young children with behavioral problems. At a friend's recommendation, she made an appointment at Catholic Charities' Villa Maria Behavioral Health (VMBH) clinic in the Dundalk community of Baltimore County.

STARTING EARLY

Catholic Charities has offered PCIT in Anne Arundel and Allegany counties for several years, but a grant from Baltimore County allowed the Agency to expand the approach to clinics in Dundalk and Lansdowne in 2023. Those clinics had long offered trauma-informed care to youth but wanted more effective ways to serve very young children.

"PCIT is for children three to six, the itty bitties. There are very few real resources for families struggling with kids that little," said Elizabeth KonKolics, VMBH therapist



and supervisor of the PCIT program in Baltimore County. "We knew this was a segment we weren't hitting enough. We're seeing the siblings at eight, at 10, at 15. We want to get in and start earlier for that early intervention."

PCIT is geared to supporting families and keeping them together. The treatment takes place across 12 to 16 weekly sessions, with the first half focused on building positive parenting skills and the second half on developing a healthy, effective discipline system.

In each session, a caregiver plays with a child in one room, while a trained therapist watching from another room coaches the adult through an earpiece. The therapist offers specific advice in the moment – "praise her for playing nicely with that toy," for example, or "you can wait out this moment; he's not even crying." Caregivers may feel awkward at first, but KonKolics say they tend to settle in quickly, and children are more interested in playing.

"LEARN YOUR CHILD"

Robertson said she and Dennis quickly started interacting differently, and within a week of finishing the treatment, she had already recommended it to a friend.

"To actually take that time to sit and understand and learn your child – that's a great experience, and not just for children that have behavioral issues," she said.

"Having somebody else there to mediate the behavior and give you ideas or directions on what you can do – it's very, very helpful."

Filling a fridge and forging trust

WHEN MEMBERS OF THE SAFE STREETS TEAM in Baltimore's Sandtown neighborhood saw a teenager they didn't recognize dragging a box spring from a dumpster recently, they leaned in. Who was he? And why was he gathering trash?

Those questions may not seem core to the work of a team focused on reducing shootings and homicides in a high-violence area, but they're at the heart of what Safe Streets does, said Greg Marshburn, Safe Streets Program Director.

The boy had just moved to the neighborhood from a shelter, and his family had no food, no furniture and no sense of where to turn. Safe Streets responded by buying three beds and filling their refrigerator.

"It shows that we care. It shows that we're a safe haven, a safe hub, somebody they can come to," Marshburn explained. "We try to get to a point where, instead of something happening first and then they tell us about it, they let us know beforehand. We get them to allow us to be proactive in their lives instead of reactive."

CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER

Safe Streets, a public health initiative aimed at preventing and interrupting violence, has helped reduce homicides and nonfatal shootings in Baltimore City neighborhoods since its introduction in 2007, according to a 2023 report from Johns Hopkins. Today,



the city hosts 10 Safe Streets sites, four run by Catholic Charities. These sites are in Cherry Hill, Brooklyn, Penn North and Sandtown.

Safe Streets staff must be credible messengers, known in the communities where they work. Stepping into conflicts to diffuse or deescalate violent situations necessarily starts with trust.

"The connections are important because once you have the relationship, if you build it and foster it with individuals, then you can go to them and deescalate a situation. They know you care. They know who you are," Marshburn explained.

Safe Streets builds those relationships in a variety of ways. Neighborhood trips to Camden Yards. Giveaways of backpacks at the start of school and winter coats when the weather turns cold. Block parties that include tables of diapers, cleaning supplies and clothing for all ages.

AN UNEXPECTED BLESSING

Marshburn saved a video capturing the response from the mother of the teen found dragging a box spring as a reminder of the importance of his team's community-focused support.

"I've got a full refrigerator for me and my children, and I didn't know how that was going to come about," she said, almost tearing up in her kitchen. "Oh my God, it's a blessing."



Blase Cooke: A MAN FOR OTHERS

Jacqueline Branch



TO SAY THAT BLASE COOKE left the world better than he found it is a profound understatement. It's like saying that Cal Ripken Jr. – known as the Iron Man – was durable. Accurate, yes. Adequate, no.

In a life cut too short by cancer in 2007, Blase didn't merely contribute to the world he inhabited. He helped to create new worlds and new lives of opportunity, dignity, and love for those in need – just like Jacqueline Branch's.

In the fall of 2023, after losing her job and then her home, Jacqueline Branch walked into a West Baltimore center offering free daily lunches. She was desperate to eat and depressed from all that she had endured, including domestic violence. The staff at the J.P. Blase Cooke Center, known more widely as My Brother's Keeper, made her feel at home and valuable. They showered her with love and support, provided her with case management, and facilitated her admission into temporary housing and, eventually, into permanent housing.

She recently reflected on the assistance she received, saying, "I had all this gold right here when I became homeless, and everyone associated with My Brother's Keeper will forever be embedded in my heart."

Her words are a fitting tribute to the memory of Blase Cook.

HE LEFT THE WORLD BETTER THAN HE FOUND IT

Born in 1947, Blase grew up in the West Baltimore community of Irvington, right around the corner from where he



WINNING DRIVE

OVER \$9.3 MILLION RAISED:

by the Blase Cooke Classic Golf Tournament since 1988

45,000 MEALS SERVED:

at My Brother's Keeper since 2018

37 EVICTIONS PREVENTED:

by My Brother's Keeper staff last year alone

eventually had My Brother's Keeper built. He went to work to help support his family at the age of 12, following his father's death from a heart attack. During his high school years, he dropped out of Mount Saint Joseph to attend a free public school to eliminate the tuition expense. Working various jobs, he saved enough money to attend community college and secure a deferment from the military draft. But when his mother received an unexpected

bill, he gave her the cash earmarked for tuition, postponed his college education, and began his military obligation.

Following his military service, he joined a construction company, Harkins Builders, as a laborer. During the years, he earned both a college degree and multiple promotions – vice president in 1980, president in 1984, chairman and chief executive in 1993.

At every stage of his 60-year journey in life, he made time to support others, particularly through his work with the Catholic church and Catholic Charities. For example, he is responsible for Catholic Charities' annual golf tournament, which has raised millions of dollars since its inception 37 years ago. This year's tournament was held on June 17. Blase was also a driving force behind our popular Dragon Boat event, which has generated a considerable sum over the years to support our various efforts.

"There was nothing Blase wouldn't do to support others," said Theo Rodgers, a close friend of Blase.

What's more, Blase provided us all with an inspirational role model, said Dick Lombardo, a longtime friend. "If you knew about Blase, if you knew who he was as a person, what he had been through, you'd want to emulate him," Lombardo said. "With passion, drive, and energy, he was a man for others."

To learn more about the remarkable life of Blase Cooke, read "My Brother, My Keeper," a biography written by his brother, Phil Cooke. The book is available on Amazon.

SAVE THE DATE OCTOBER 9, 2024

JOURNEY TO SOCIAL JUSTICE



Join us for A Conversation with Matthew Desmond on **Poverty, By America.**

CC-MD.ORG/
JUSTICE

THIS EVENT IS
FREE AND ALL
ARE WELCOME.



**Presentation
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Dessert reception to follow**

Church of the Nativity
20 E. Ridgely Road
Timonium MD, 21093

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

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

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