

FRIEND,

I hope this issue of Blessings finds you enjoying the summer sun and bright, cheery days. At Catholic Charities, we are in the middle of our cheerful celebration of 100 years of improving the lives of Marylanders in need.

Along with the agency's centennial, several programs are celebrating their own anniversaries. As you'll read about in this issue, Weinberg Housing and Resource Center (WHRC) commemorates its 10th year in July. And, fifty years before Catholic Charities' start with WHRC, Esperanza Center

began welcoming immigrants by offering hope, compassionate services, and the power to improve their lives. This year is also the 35th anniversary of Sarah's House, a supportive housing program with an array of other services for families experiencing homelessness in Anne Arundel County.

These anniversaries call out three Catholic Charities programs with an overlapping goal—providing support and opportunity to those in need. Whether in search of housing, employment or other essential needs, clients have found hope through these programs and

through our committed colleagues for decades.

We thank you for your continued support of these and the many other programs that improve the lives of Marylanders in need each day. May the warmth of the summer sun give us all strength and good cheer.



William J. McCarthy, Jr.,
Executive Director

Bill McCarthy

BLESSINGS

100
YEARS
CATHOLIC CHARITIES
CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL



RETURN OF THE DRAGONS

• DRAGON BOAT RACES •

2023



READY TO ROW!

Five years after the last Dragon Boat race, the tradition comes roaring back on Sept. 9, bigger and bolder than ever!

The COVID-19 pandemic halted the biennial event in 2020, and Catholic Charities chose to postpone its next race to 2023 so it would coincide with the agency's centennial celebrations. The postponement also allowed organizers to plan new festival activities that will draw rowers and non-rowers alike.

Races will kick off at 8 a.m. on Baltimore's Inner Harbor, with each of the nearly two dozen teams – broken into three skill levels – competing at least three times. Following finals for the fastest boats, an awards ceremony will

celebrate the winning teams at around 2:30 p.m.

From noon to 5 p.m. at West Shore Park, the festival will feature food and drink vendors, live music, a children's section and a "community row" of booths with representatives from Catholic Charities programs explaining their work. The music station of sponsor WBAL, 98 Rock, will also broadcast from the event.

The previous 11 races helped Catholic Charities raise more than \$5 million to support its mission.

More information about the event and how to get involved is available at www.dragonboatsbaltimore.org.

SEPTEMBER 9

8 AM – 2 PM RACES | NOON – 5 PM FESTIVAL

INNER HARBOR

RASH FIELD PARK AREA



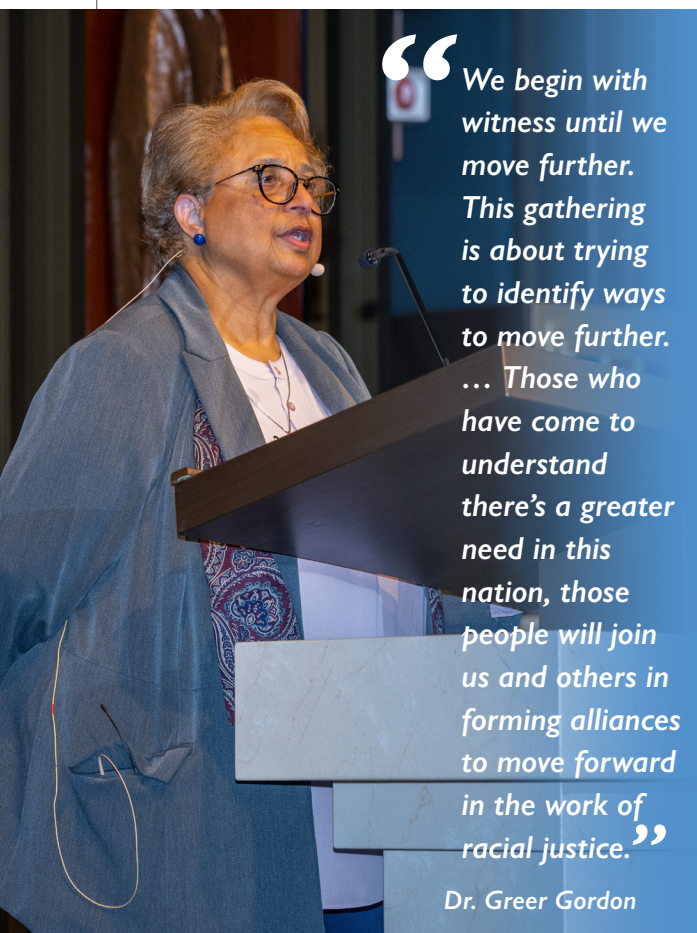
As part of the year-long commemoration of our centennial, we're sharing photos from our archives. Here is a look at some of our Gallagher Services clients, then and now.

Inaugural symposium inspires call to action

ONE OF THE FREQUENT RESPONSES CATHOLIC CHARITIES HEARD after hosting its inaugural symposium on social justice was: what's next?

That question emerged over and over in feedback from the more than 200 attendees of theologian Dr. Greer Gordon's keynote remarks – "Good Trouble: Alliances for Racial Justice" – and those who engaged with the reflection guide prepared for the event.

Catholic Charities hosted the symposium in April as a centerpiece of the celebrations of its centennial year, with plans to make it an annual event.



Dr. Greer Gordon

Mary Anne O'Donnell, project manager for Catholic Charities' centennial celebrations, pointed to themes within Gordon's talk that sparked particular interest: the importance of empathy, the need to draw groups together in alliances with common purpose, and the value of interrupting damaging narratives.

"People appreciated hearing this, and want to know more," she said, "We also wanted an action to be part of the

symposium. There's two phases to that: what people take away and decide to do on their own, and what we can follow up on and help facilitate."

Facilitated activities could include developing focused partnerships with other local groups or convening smaller conversations that shore up alliances.

"We won't do it alone. We're calling people together, presenting resource information but not necessarily doing it ourselves," O'Donnell said. "The work may look different in parishes and communities in West Baltimore and those in Western Maryland."

To foster continued conversation, the agency posted to its website a social justice toolkit framed around the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching to highlight principles that have informed Catholic Charities' mission over the past century. Organizers will post additional materials and activities to engage interested partners and maintain an action-oriented focus on justice.

A recording of the talk and copy of the guide are available at <https://cc-md.org/our-impact/justice/>.



Expanding Safe Streets to stop the spread of violence



AFTER ELGIN MAITH STARTED WORKING WITH SAFE STREETS A DECADE AGO, he began to understand violence as a disease – one that could be stopped or slowed with the right care.

"We can prevent it. We can cure it. And we can stop it before it's transmitted. And if it occurs, if an outbreak happens, we can go there and stop it, calm down where it broke out," said the Safe Streets site director in Baltimore's Cherry Hill neighborhood.

Maith's approach resonates with that of Catholic Charities, which doubled the number of Safe Streets sites it oversees earlier this year, adding Cherry Hill and Penn North. Adjacent to the agency's first two violence-interruption programs in Brooklyn-Curtis Bay and Sandtown-Winchester, the new sites allow for a seamless expansion and deeper connections across communities.

ALIGNING THE EFFORT

Baltimore City is home to 10 Safe Street sites, focused in neighborhoods with high levels of gun violence. The program deploys violence interrupters, who are known by and respected in the community, to defuse tense situations and link neighbors with resources that can range from diapers to substance-abuse treatment.

That Catholic Charities provides many of these services directly is a benefit to working with the organization, said Dennis Wise, director of the Penn North site, which was previously run by a smaller community-based organization.

"There's a lot of desperation based not on a lack of resources, but on a lack of knowledge of resources. Community members have problems, but they don't know where to find the resources," Wise said, adding Catholic Charities' broad reach helps streamline efforts to provide the support needed.

Greg Marshburn, the former director of Catholic Charities' Safe Streets program in Sandtown-Winchester, now oversees all four sites, supporting coordination and a unified approach. He said the additions made sense.

"It makes it easier to mediate cross-site conflicts," he said. "The closer the site is, the easier it is for all the violence interrupters to know the individual."

Supporting Sarah's House: A Volunteer Story



Rita Zienkiewicz

WHEN RITA ZIENKIEWICZ FIRST MOVED BACK

TO MARYLAND, she was overwhelmed by how many outreach programs her parish – Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville, Md. – offered.

“I was looking for something to do with my extra time,” she said. She talked with her pastor, who asked her what she wanted to do. “A

really basic thing is to feed people. I said I'd like to be involved in a program that feeds people.”

That was the start of Zienkiewicz's nearly two-decade commitment to Sarah's House, the Catholic Charities program that provides emergency shelter and project-based supportive housing in Anne Arundel County.

She connected with a new effort in her parish to provide regular meals to Sarah's House and began coordinating interested volunteers.

“The people of our parish are very generous and willing to give of their time, their talent and their resources,” she said. “That was 2004, and I'm still doing it.”

At the beginning, Zienkiewicz coordinated new and existing volunteers, selecting and parcelling menus that could be assembled on site. Before COVID, the parish's commitment expanded to two meals each month, and they served Sarah's House clients on site. She said the kitchen was clean, organized, well run and ready for shifts that accommodated each building of residents.

“When my daughter was younger, she would often go with me to Sarah's House and – at that point – serve,” Zienkiewicz explained. “I remember at one point she said, ‘I expected people to look different or act different, but they're like you and me.’ I said, ‘Exactly.’ We have to be Christ and reach out.”

During COVID restrictions, a few people from Zienkiewicz's parish – especially those who were elderly or experiencing health conditions – dropped from the volunteer rosters. But Zienkiewicz said her biggest challenge is coming up with nutritious, affordable menu options that residents will want to eat.

“The biggest challenge I have is coming up with a menu that will please everyone... God helps me do that,” she said, adding that parish volunteers tend to step up every time she asks. “All I have to do is send out an email to our group, and usually I get someone who says, ‘Yes, I can help you out.’”

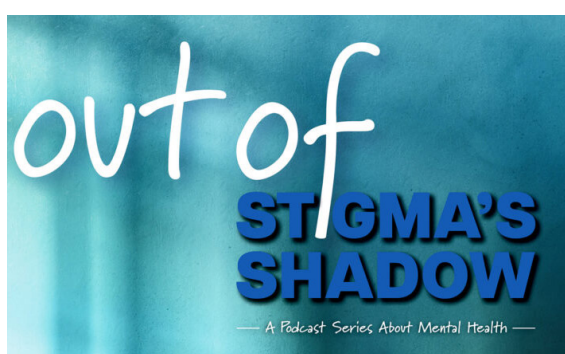
To volunteer at any of Catholic Charities' programs, visit <https://cc-md.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

New podcast helps young people understand mental health challenges

AS A KID, Peter spent a lot of time in the principal's office. He was bullied and teased. He didn't have the attention span to make it through long days of school. By high school, he was drinking. By college, he was using drugs. His grades dropped, and he started failing out of classes.

When he finally sought mental health support, he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and learned he suffered from anxiety. At that time, he was 6-foot-4-inches tall, and a devastatingly skinny 120 pounds. His father pulled him out of school, and he entered an intensive outpatient therapy program that helped him get sober and face his medical challenges. At 26, he's a college graduate with an internship lined up as he works toward a full-time job.

That's the story Peter shared on “Out of Stigma's Shadow,” a podcast co-sponsored by Catholic Charities, with Jewish Community Services, Medstar Health, NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore and Behavioral Health System Baltimore. By sharing the voices of young people talking openly about their mental health struggles,



Peter's story is reflected in that of Jada, now a 26-year-old college student, poet and mental health advocate. On the podcast, she read from her own poem:

**“Did you know that therapy
isn't a dirty word?”**

**Did you know that therapy
could possibly be the remedy
for you and me?**

**And if you get educated
and learn the signs,**

**You'll be able to read
between the lines,**

**When you ask someone
if they're OK,**

And they tell you they're fine.”

the weekly podcast aims to combat barriers that stop people from seeking the behavioral health care they need.

“THEY CAN FEEL BETTER”

Even before COVID-19, the rates of young people feeling persistently sad or hopeless or experiencing suicidal thoughts was increasing dramatically, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which found a 40% increase before 2021. And those challenges grew worse during the pandemic.

“We want young people to hear that there's hope and that they can feel better,” said Taylor Scott, Catholic Charities' medical director of behavioral health clinics in Anne Arundel County. “And we want to encourage families to find support in whatever setting works best for them.”

The agency provides a wide range of mental and behavioral health services for youth and families through programs such as Villa Maria Behavioral Health's school-based clinics, which supports licensed therapists in more than 100 schools throughout Maryland.



Marking a decade of service, night after night

When the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center (WHRC) first opened as a low-barrier emergency shelter in 2011, it represented a key piece of Baltimore's strategy to provide a wide spectrum of supportive services along the Fallsway.

A few years earlier, Catholic Charities had relocated Our Daily Bread Employment Center to a new building across the street, and Healthcare for the Homeless had opened a large facility a couple of blocks south. Forged from a former transportation building, the 275-bed shelter filled a vital need in an increasingly convenient location.

Catholic Charities stepped in to manage the shelter two years later. This summer, the agency marks a decade of service at the site, a period that included not only consistent support for people needing a bed and the resources and skills needed to find permanent housing, but also the drastic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A STEADY CORE DURING CRISES

One key to the center's long-term success has been its staff, many of whom have worked there for a decade or more.

"We've always had that steady core who have been able to endure," said Program Director Steven Rice. "We identify our staff as first responders. They're so great at dealing with crises and emergencies. They band together like nothing I've seen at any other job."



That connection to the work – and support from other Catholic Charities programs – helped when WHRC needed to move clients from its dorms to local hotels to keep them safe during the pandemic. After shifting back to the shelter last year, the center limited capacity, but it is now opening more beds to meet local needs.

GOING HOME

Among the successes of the last decade, Rice said, is the growing emphasis on developing effective housing plans.

"We concentrate on housing as many individuals as we possibly can... and celebrate the goal to get out there on your own," he said. "Come in from the storm, get out of the rain, press the reset button, and get back out there."

As he thinks about the next decade, Rice said he's anxious to see more funding for vouchers that allow people to move into permanent housing.

"One of the challenges we face is too few vouchers," he said. "Sometimes a client can qualify for housing and be stuck waiting for a match for months. We'll continue to promote that to move people along at a more rapid pace, we need to unclog the system."

To learn more about WHRC, visit [cc-md/whrc](https://cc-md.org/whrc).



Brought together by the Dragons

For Bruce Clopein, the connection between Sarah's House and its 2023 Dragon Boat sponsor, Allegis Group, is about far more than a one-day event.

"To me, it is a good reminder of how the programs – including Sarah's House – rely on community partnerships, beyond Dragon Boats," said Clopein, volunteer manager for the program that provides emergency shelter and project-based supportive housing in Anne Arundel County.

That's a sentiment echoed by Tara Stern, co-captain of the Allegis Dragon Boat team, which has partnered with Sarah's House since first joining the races in 2010.

"Allegis Group is all about building relationships. That's part of the company culture," said Stern, a release train engineer. "We just kept asking to continue being partnered with Sarah's House because we had built those relationships. ... We get very hyped up during the racing years, and we want to continue with them."

PARTNERED UP

As part of the Dragon Boat festivities, Catholic Charities pairs sponsors with one of its dozens of programs supporting Marylanders in need. The connection is a chance for rowers to learn more about



the agency's work and to get a deeper understanding of a particular program. Clopein takes that partnership seriously. In the weeks before race day, he drives from Anne Arundel County to attend team practices along Baltimore's waterfront, joins rowers for post-workout meals and brings clients to the docks to cheer on the team. For many Allegis rowers, the race offers a first-time introduction to the array of services Sarah's House offers, so Clopein invites the team to visit and learn. He said that often leads to the same question: "How can we help?"

"It's important for us to have that commitment as well. It builds the connection," he said. "We rely so much on relationships in the community."

TOGETHER FOR A CAUSE

Stern was part of the Allegis Group's first boat 13 years ago. The team didn't know what to expect from Dragon Boats, and she remembers meeting Clopein and Kelly Anderson, program director of Sarah's House, whom she now keeps up with on Facebook.

"That first year racing, we won the B division! It was just a whole bunch of people who happened to volunteer. We were probably the oldest, heaviest boat out there, but it was one of the greatest experiences," Stern said, adding she still has a plaque from the victory in her office. "It's all about timing and having fun and raising money for a good cause," she said.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL
Catholic Charities is the largest 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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