

FRIEND,

Although a full six months have now passed since the Key Bridge collapsed into the Patapsco River, the sight of what remains of the structure – and the void between the remnants – still shocks the senses.

Likewise, our communal heartache persists for the six men who lost their lives in the tragedy, as well as for their loved ones whose lives are forever changed.

But thanks to you and so many others throughout the region, we are responding as we always do to great challenges and adversity. We

are developing new and better ways to care for and serve those in need.

As you know, we've been working in a wide variety of ways to support those touched by this tragedy since March when the bridge fell. Expanding on these efforts, we opened a new bilingual support center in September to provide a range of much-needed services to communities affected by the disaster. You can read more about this important initiative below.

Also inside this edition of Blessings, you will find powerful client stories of perseverance and triumph – stories that you helped to make possible through your generous support. You'll

also discover an inspirational article about the women who make the Gathering Point Giving Circle a force of good and a Q&A with Dr. Mohan Suntha, the president and chief executive of the University of Maryland Medical System and the chairman this year of one of our most significant fundraising drives.

As always, I wish you and your loved ones all of the very best as we enjoy the colorful transition to fall and begin to look forward to the holidays.



William J. McCarthy, Jr.,
Executive Director



FALL 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.



Growing in Response to Tragedy

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, Catholic Charities has opened a new bilingual support center near the bridge site in Dundalk, Md., focused on health and wellness, immigration services, and workforce development.

The center draws on staff and expertise from three Catholic Charities programs — the Esperanza Center, Our Daily Bread Employment Center, and the Villa Maria Behavioral Health Clinic – to support community members, regardless of primary language, immigration status or workforce experience.

“With other programs, we’re working as one,” said Mayra Loera, program manager of client services. “I really like the idea that we’re collaborating, being Catholic Charities no matter what the name of the program is. Everyone who works here was placed here for a reason by a higher power, whether they know it or not.”

EXPANDED FOCUS

The center took shape in the Dundalk Villa Maria Behavioral Health Clinic, with an expanded staff now focused on health and wellness, immigration services, and workforce development. The inter-programmatic design helps Catholic Charities meet clients where they are, without restrictions on eligibility or access.

The center expansion is supported by generous grants from the Baltimore Community Foundation and The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

“We are profoundly grateful to have the opportunity and resources to serve those touched by this heart-rending tragedy,” said Bill McCarthy, executive director of Catholic Charities, referring to



Staff at our new multi-service center in Dundalk include Daniela Hernandez (left) and Guadalupe Espino Molina.

the bridge collapse. “With the compassionate and generous support of our donors, we will do everything we can to lift up our neighbors and neighborhoods with service and love.”

Through its “Maryland Tough Baltimore Strong Key Bridge Fund,” the Baltimore Community Foundation committed more than \$1 million to the initiative over a two-year period. The Weinberg Foundation invested \$300,000 in the project and the people it serves.

WHAT ELSE CAN BILINGUAL RESOURCE NAVIGATORS PROVIDE?

- **Workforce Development:** Staff will provide clients with direct access and referrals to existing programming at the Our Daily Bread Employment Center. This includes career coaching, job-preparation courses, job placement, and the pursuit of certification at partner organizations.
 - **Immigration Services:** Clients will receive access and referrals to Esperanza Center programming. This includes legal services, free primary care for the uninsured, English language training, and professional case management support services.
 - **Health & Wellness:** Staff will facilitate client access and referrals to behavioral health and primary care providers, including onsite access to individual and family therapy in English or Spanish.
- “By supporting the creation of this multi-service center, we hope to provide essential resources and a sense of stability to those who need it most,” said Elvis Guzman, program officer for The Weinberg Foundation.

Feeling “chosen” after overcoming barriers



WHEN HE WAS LIVING ON THE STREETS, Keith used to tell himself he was not homeless, just “camping.”

He saw how people looked at him. Employees at the Safeway where he had shopped for 15 years, for example, started treating him differently when he lost his home. But he was hesitant to go to a shelter because he didn’t know what to expect.

When he found Sarah’s House, which provides emergency shelter, project-based supportive housing and an array of other services in Anne Arundel County, he saw the possibilities for a brighter future.

These days, he would advise other people experiencing homelessness to reach out for help more quickly.

“I would tell them it will be OK,” he said. “There are people out there who care; you just haven’t met them yet. And if [Sarah’s House] comes across your path, it’s just God pointing you in the right direction.”

THE LOSS OF HEALTH, JOBS AND HOME

Several years ago, Keith started having health problems. Blurry vision. Seizures. Days spent lying on the floor, unable to move. A doctor finally diagnosed his Type 1 diabetes in 2016. He spent a month in the hospital and the next several years figuring out how to manage the disease.



Keith

“I was just trying to adjust, watching what I ate and getting sick a lot,” he said.

In 2021, Keith was living with his parents and unable to hold down a job for long when they decided to move to Georgia. He had two daughters in Annapolis and decided he’d rather sleep outside than be far away from them.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPPORT

Keith wasn’t sure what to expect when he arrived at Sarah’s House in March, and he was surprised by the warmth of staff members, who treated him like family.

Regaining self-sufficiency requires far more than shelter. The program helped him get new identification, access benefits such as food stamps and temporary disability assistance, plan medical visits and find a job.

Six months after his arrival at Sarah’s House, Keith was making plans to move into one of the program’s supportive housing units. But he was also thinking about his future, including finding a place where his daughter could live with him.

“Two years from now, I want to have my own place. I’ll still be working, seeing my kids and just living,” he said, noting that he’s also working on building an entertainment company.

Keith intends to call his business the Chozen Network (spelled with a “z”) because, he explained, “everybody is chosen for something.”



DEANMICHAEL HARROD DRESSES WELL.

So, he showed up to his first interview with Christopher Place Employment Academy in January 2023 in a suit and tie, topped with a London Fog jacket. But he didn’t feel as good as he looked.

“We call it a dressed-up garbage can,” he said. “I was dressed up, but I still felt terrible. My outsides looked good, but my insides were just messed up.”

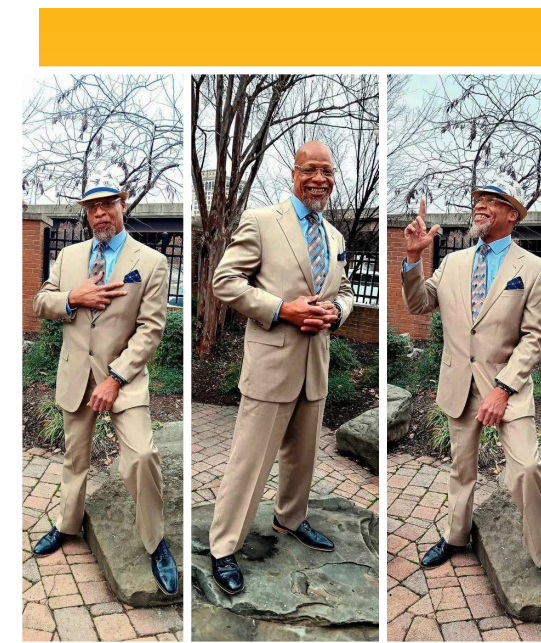
The staff at Christopher Place weren’t fooled.

“They actually saw me and heard me. They felt that I was serious about the help. I was serious about turning my life around,” he said. “I can’t even explain how much this place has changed my life.”

WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Christopher Place is a residential employment program that offers education, training and recovery services to formerly homeless men. Through a rigorous process that addresses a wide range of personal and professional needs, the program helps participants achieve long-term independence.

For years, DeanMichael had tried substance-use treatment programs. But not long after successfully completing each one, he fell back into old patterns. At Christopher Place, he found something more – a class on self-esteem, training in professional skills, a relentless focus on



DeanMichael Harrod

‘This Place Has Changed My Life’

building personal savings and a staff deeply dedicated to his success.

“I felt the love of staff – every person, every counselor, every case manager, even the director and operations manager. Everybody had a part to play in my life, every last one of them,” he said. “They definitely had your best interest at heart. It wasn’t just, ‘come in and get a bed.’”

PLANNING FOR A NEW LIFE

DeanMichael interviewed for his current job without knowing it. Catholic Charities’ human resources professionals offer mock interviews at Christopher Place to help residents prepare for their job hunt. At the end of their conversation, the interviewer asked if he’d be interested in working across the street at the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, the low-barrier emergency shelter run by Catholic Charities.

Through that job, he met the woman he married this summer, saved enough money to move out on his own and plan for their future, and began serving as an example for men at the shelter.

“You don’t have to be strong. I was just as weak as the next person. But I came in and I gave it a shot. I felt like I needed someone to really help me because I’d been alone all of my life,” he said. “And this is where Christopher Place Employment Academy came in.”

DeanMichael added: “I pray that every man could experience what I’ve experienced because it’s life changing.”

Q&A with Dr. Mohan Suntha



Dr. Mohan Suntha, President and Chief Executive of the University of Maryland Medical System; and Chairman of Catholic Charities’ Leadership Breakfast Committee

As the president and chief executive of the University of Maryland Medical System, Dr. Mohan Suntha leads one of the best academic health systems in the nation, one that employs 28,000 employees across the state of Maryland at more than 150 locations.

Despite the demands on his time, Dr. Suntha also is serving this year as chairman of Catholic Charities’ Leadership Breakfast Campaign, which is our largest annual initiative to raise unrestricted donations that make our many services possible for those in need.

We recently caught up with Dr. Suntha to learn more about his commitment both to the work of Catholic Charities and to the delivery of world-class health care to people throughout our state.

1 Why is it important to you to support Catholic Charities?

When I think about the work of Catholic Charities and the impact in our communities, I am truly in awe. Not only are the mission and values of Catholic Charities aligned with my own personal value system, but also with our foundational approach here at the University of Maryland Medical System, where we care about the health and well-being of each of the communities that we are blessed to serve.

2 What is the Leadership Breakfast Campaign and how does it help Maryland?

The Leadership Breakfast is critical for Catholic Charities to support Maryland’s most vulnerable residents. Forty-four years ago, the first Leadership Breakfast was a humble event, where Catholic Charities’ staff prepared and served a simple breakfast, raising \$50,000. Today, the Leadership Breakfast Campaign stands as the cornerstone fundraiser, providing crucial unrestricted funds to meet the most pressing needs in our communities.

3 Why did you decide to be the Leadership Breakfast Committee chair this year?

This year’s Leadership Breakfast is, of course, especially noteworthy because it will be Bill McCarthy’s last as Executive Director of Catholic Charities. I am honored to serve as Chair this year to raise funds for the incredible mission that the Catholic Charities serves, but also to pay tribute to Bill, whose leadership in our community has been unparalleled.

4 What impact does Catholic Charities have in the region?

Catholic Charities of Baltimore is the largest private provider of human services in the state, reaching thousands of our neighbors in need regardless of their faith, perspective, background and ethnicity. Its mission extends to communities beyond the greater Baltimore region and throughout Maryland, enabling men, women, children and families to endure times of crisis and to regain security and dignity in their lives.

5 You are in the middle of a very distinguished, demanding, and public career as the top executive of one of the nation’s leading medical systems. Why did you choose to pursue this path? And what do you like most about doing what you do?

In my own Catholic faith, the call to service has always been incredibly important, and is why I chose a career path in medicine. As a physician, I have been blessed to see firsthand the dramatic impact of restoring one to their best health. In the role that I am honored to serve in today, as President and CEO of the University of Maryland Medical System, I view it as my responsibility to ensure the health and well-being not only to every patient, but also to the collective communities in which we are privileged to serve.

Bringing joy is part of their mission

THEY CALL THEMSELVES the “fun aunts” of St. Vincent’s Villa – the ones who make sure residents get a visit from Santa at Christmas, exactly what they want for their birthdays and a snowball truck in their driveway to celebrate the end of school.

They’re the Gathering Point Giving Circle (GPGC), a group of women who came together in 2019 to combine separate, long-standing volunteer efforts to support women and children in Baltimore and surrounding counties. St. Vincent’s Villa has benefitted from their compassion since the group’s founding.

“We’re all mothers. We all have children. And we all feel called to provide those who have suffered great trauma and live in a residential facility with some of the same experiences that our children had,” said GPGC member Amy Neubauer. “That’s really what it’s all about.”

FOCUSED ON WHAT THE PROGRAM NEEDS

Many GPGC members have known each other for decades, as sisters, neighbors, college roommates or friends. In each other, they recognized a shared spirit for volunteering and decided to start a nonprofit to support that work. Every year, they back a few organizations aligned with their mission, concentrating their efforts to make a meaningful difference.

Amy’s family has long supported St. Vincent’s Villa, Catholic Charities’ comprehensive residential treatment program for children ages 12 and younger who have not responded to community-based interventions and services. The program seemed a natural fit for GPGC – and staff have been particularly grateful for the group’s thoughtful approach.

“They’re a wonderful group to work with because they want to give us what we need,” said Dominique Solomon, community outreach coordinator at St. Vincent’s Villa. “The things the Gathering Point Giving Circle does are not just little moments of joy – they’re trying to give our residents as much of a ‘normal’ childhood as possible. ... It makes such an impact when you talk to the kids.”

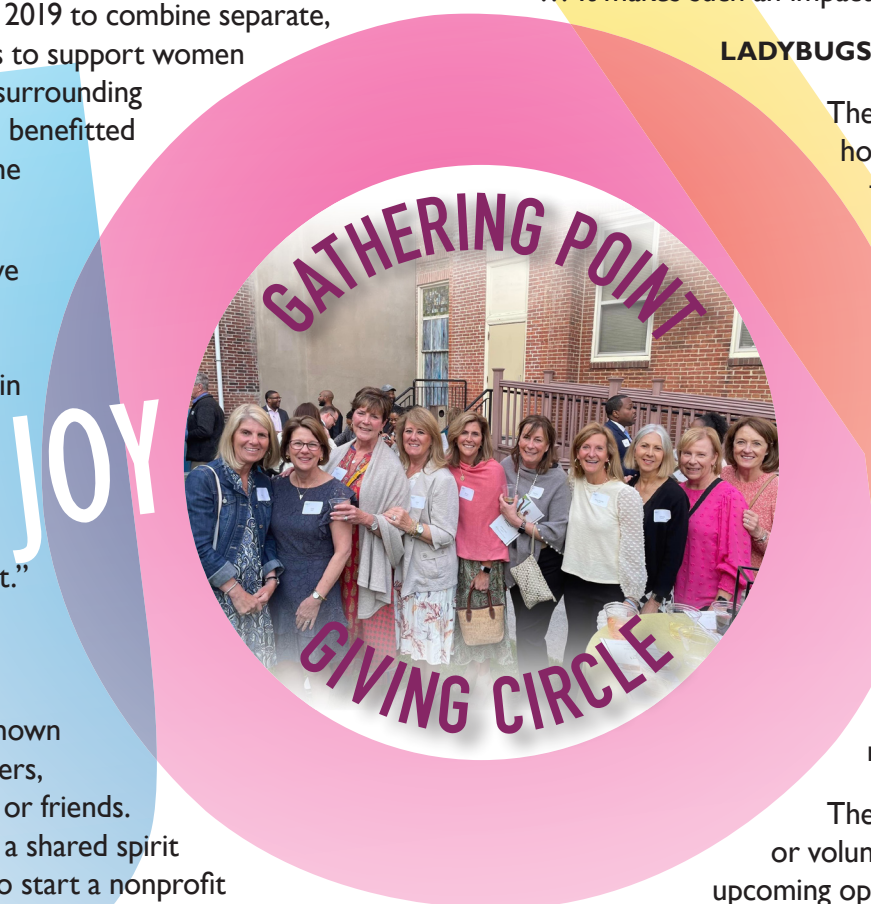
LADYBUGS AND LAUGHTER

The GPGC shows up for far more than holidays and birthdays. With support from local companies and donors, they helped erect an outdoor pavilion that covers six picnic tables, and they help care for an on-site garden, working directly with children who want to plant, care for and harvest vegetables.

This summer “we released ladybugs out into the garden because they help keep away all the ‘bad’ bugs,” said Danielle Evensen, another GPGC member. “They’re so teeny, tiny and it was really fun to have the kids out there releasing all these ladybugs.”

The group tries to make it easy to donate or volunteer, sending regular emails about upcoming opportunities to anyone interested in their work. And, like all “fun aunts,” they find joy in their time with St. Vincent’s Villa residents.

“We enjoy spending time with the children,” Amy said. “It’s like when we do the Easter egg hunt – we help them hunt, and it’s hilarious.”



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!



CATHOLIC CHARITIES
Christmas Festival
AT THE BASILICA
December 4, 2024
7:30 – 9 p.m.



Featuring the Baltimore Choral Arts Society, headlining with special guest performance by the Morgan State University Choir

*Dessert and Wine Reception following the concert.
Concert parking included in ticket price.*

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
409 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21201

For more information, visit cc-md.org/christmas

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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