

FRIEND,

Back to school is a big deal—especially at Catholic Charities! While it may seem like a distant memory in October, there's a lot of preparation—by teachers, by families, by students—that goes into starting the school year right. Our Head Start programs in Baltimore City, Carroll County and Harford County jumped right into the year with Catholic Charities employees helping to welcome families, sharing big smiles and all the supplies they need. You'll find related photos and stories in this special back-to-school issue.

School days can be filled with all sorts of excitement, adventures and challenges. That's even more so at Villa Maria School, which provides educational and clinical services for children with

emotional, behavioral and learning challenges. Get a better sense of one Villa Maria School family's obstacles, and success, in the story below.

Within Catholic Charities, though, education is for all ages. At Christopher Place Employment Academy and other workforce development programs, adults learn about finance, nursing, and auto repair, as they gain licenses and seek careers. And, at all 24 of our Senior Communities, residents have access to a wide variety of educational opportunities, providing useful information on technology, health and more.

One highlight for Catholic Charities' school year will be the opening of our Carolyn E. Fugett Intergenerational Center in West Baltimore in spring 2026. The Center will become our largest

Head Start site in Baltimore City, also offering Early Head Start. And, after dropping their kids off, community parents will be able to head upstairs for classes, workforce development, and use of dedicated workspaces. With so many other spaces, programs and offerings, the Intergenerational Center will inspire learning, interaction and excitement for everyone who enters.

So, enjoy this special issue of Blessings, and make sure to study hard, do your homework, and raise your hand. But also, be sure to have fun and support each other. No doubt, we'll all pass with flying colors!



Dave Kinkopf,
Executive Director



FALL 2025

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.

For One Mom, It Felt Like There Was No Place Left to Turn



BACK TO SCHOOL is a time that can be filled with excitement and drama for all families. Kindergarten, however, is when the “drama” started for Khdijii Dever’s son.

At that young age, he was suspended frequently – sometimes twice a week – for his behavior. Before he finished elementary school, he was diagnosed with ADHD, depression, anxiety and bipolar disorders and had spent time in hospital psychiatric wards. And in some of his worst moments, Khdijii had been forced to call the police for assistance.

Then, when he was in seventh grade, she found Villa Maria School.

“This was my last resort,” she explained, remembering that Principal Dan Plakosh turned to her and said, “Just give us a chance.”

“IT WAS THE LOVE.”

Villa Maria School, located in Baltimore County, provides educational and clinical services for children between kindergarten and eighth grade with emotional, behavioral and learning challenges. It’s a vibrant community where highly trained staff work as a team – and in full partnership with parents – to help meet every student’s unique needs.

Quickly, Khdijii’s son formed warm connections with various staff members – a teacher, a social worker, a therapist – who came to know and understand him.

“And then, of course, you have Carmen,” Khdijii said of the facility’s therapy dog. “Carmen was his safe haven.”

But what really made Villa Maria School work for him was love.

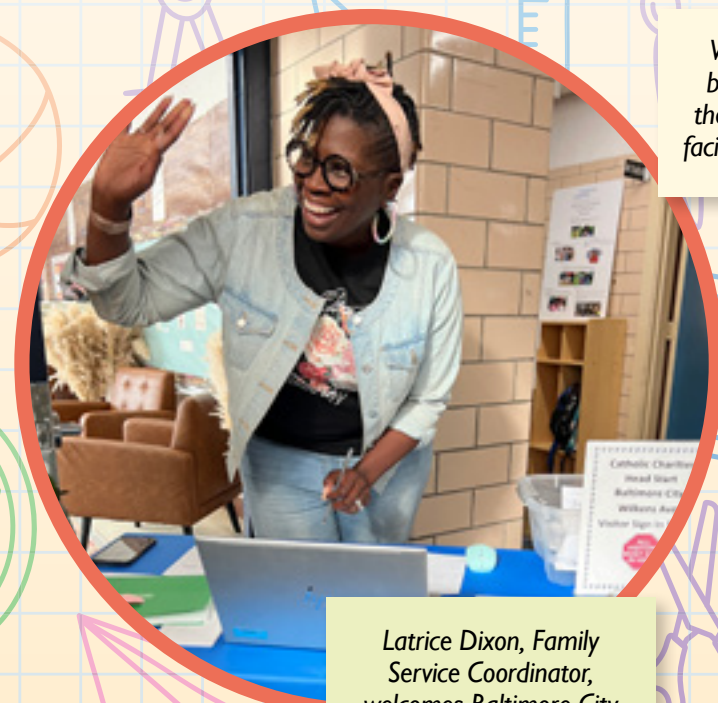
“It was the love. It was totally different from [other] schools. They don’t have the time. They don’t have the patience. They don’t have the love that these children need. And that’s what a lot of them really need,” she explained.

NOW FUTURE FOCUSED

Through Villa Maria School, Khdijii’s son better understands how to manage his emotions and de-escalate tense situations. Now in high school, he has experienced no suspensions or write-ups, earns all As and Bs, and is aiming to go to college with hopes of a career as an auto mechanic or in information technology. It’s what his mom calls a “complete turnaround.”

“Villa Maria did what they had to do,” she says today, with wonder.

BACK TO SCHOOL



Villa Maria School got back in the swing with the support of Currahee, facility dog and best friend.



Anna's House families enjoyed a treat at their back-to-school event.

Latrice Dixon, Family Service Coordinator, welcomes Baltimore City Head Start families.

True Barber Co. provided back-to-school haircuts at St. Vincent's Villa.



Dundalk Clubhouse received school supplies from The Regina Mae Dudley Organization.



Katina Allbrook Logan, Villa Maria School Office Manager, and school supply donor, Dawn Lloyd

SAVE THE DATE

CATHOLIC CHARITIES
Christmas Festival
AT THE BASILICA
December 3, 2025 | 7 – 8:30 p.m.
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



Back to the Classroom When It Matters Most



Joshua Jackson and family

BY THE TIME JOSHUA JACKSON WAS EXPELLED FROM HIGH SCHOOL in Arizona, he was in a rough place. He and five sisters had been abandoned and abused. He had started using drugs and alcohol, and they had fallen in with gangs. He ended up graduating from high school, but education was never a priority.

THAT'S NO LONGER THE CASE.

Now at Christopher Place Employment Academy, a residential employment program that provides training and recovery support to formerly homeless men, Joshua is glad to find himself back in the classroom. From financial literacy to conflict management, he's learning new approaches to tackling day-to-day challenges.

"I'm going back to school," he said. "And it actually encouraged me to think, 'you know what? I can do this.'"

WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

At different points, Joshua seemed to have his life under control. He worked to rebuild shattered relationships with his parents. He helped raise his niece and nephews when his sisters were in prison, ensuring the kids had security and the kind of childhood he never experienced. He met his wife – a Baltimore transplant – in church; they had two children, a boy and a girl, and he loved being their father.

But across these years, he was also battling addiction. Sometimes, he would get sober. Other times, he held down steady work, even while drinking or using drugs. And then there were times when he was clearly in trouble: his wife saved him from an overdose; he sold off possessions to pay for his habit, even while working two jobs; he learned his family moved to Maryland through a FaceTime call.

Joshua came to Baltimore to be near his children. He checked into a rehabilitation facility when his wife would not let him live with her family, then tried another. Finally, he arrived at Christopher Place because other men told him it worked.

"A lot of people were saying, 'that's the spot—you're going to leave there with some tools,' " he said. "I see it for myself. My wife sees it. My whole family can see the difference."

A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

Today, Joshua lives minutes from his children. He takes them to the park, drops them off or pick them up from daycare, and celebrates their birthdays. They recently started in the pre-K and kindergarten of a local charter school, as he focused on the academic pre-requisites for a nursing degree – the next step in his academic journey.

"I just want to stay sharp because I know I'm about to go to school," he said. "I need to stay in the game."

A Love of Learning at Every Age

THAT BACK-TO-SCHOOL FEELING ISN'T RESERVED FOR KIDS. At Catholic Charities' Senior Communities, residents have access to a variety of educational opportunities focused on health, technology, financial literacy and more.

"That sense of learning never stops," said Jill Kratz, manager of services for Senior Communities. "We see residents wanting knowledge just because it makes their life better."

Senior Communities provides supportive, affordable apartments to more than 1,800 older adults in 24 locations across Baltimore City and Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Garrett and Harford counties.

At each location, service coordinators work with residents to answer questions and ensure they have access to available resources. Those staff members organize educational programs when they recognize an interest or need, or receive a direct request.

"Sometimes a resident will come to us and say, 'I've been talking to my neighbors, and there's a bunch of us who are interested in learning more about – whatever it might be,'" Jill explained.

The types of opportunities vary widely, from a formal GED course, offered in coordination with the Enoch Pratt Free Library, to a floral design class to provide some holiday greenery at Christmas time. Other examples include a health and wellness fair, tech literacy trainings that cover computers, cell phones and the internet, a presentation on positive self-talk and mental health and active shooter training with the sheriff's department.

In addition to new skills, these programs often also offer continued autonomy. By learning how to use a computer to fill out a Medicaid eligibility form, for example, a resident may not have to depend on others to maintain their benefits.

"They want to be in control and as independent as possible, even as they get older," Jill said. "They just want to keep growing and learning."



Learning together at Trinity House Senior Community

Named for an Icon

WHEN HE WAS GROWING UP IN WEST BALTIMORE in the 1950s and '60s, Jean Fugett knew his neighbors – and knew they were looking out for him.

“It was a time when it really did take a village,” he said. “I would get in trouble at the top of the street, and by the time I got home, my mother would know about it. That’s how the neighborhood was.”

That was especially true because his mother was Carolyn E. Fugett, whose leadership and influence stretched across every corner of the community.

When Catholic Charities opens the Intergenerational Center in 2026, it will bear Carolyn’s name. Designed as a hub of activities for everyone from newborns to seniors, the center will foster the type of village she helped shepherd from the time Jean was a child.

“SLEEP FAST”

Once, Jean asked his mother how she found the time to do so many things. “You’ve got to sleep fast,” she told him, with a wink.

After all, she managed to work full-time while raising six children, tracking their academic progress and volunteering with their activities, while also advancing institutions and causes aligned with her core values of faith, hope and charity.

A devout, lifelong Catholic, she was as comfortable working in a church food pantry as she was leading her parish council or advising the archdiocesan leaders who sought her counsel.

Though she had dropped out of school to support her mother, she was a fierce advocate for education. She steered the academic success of her children (who went on to earn five advanced degrees), while also supporting community Head Start programs and neighborhood schools.

She deeply respected the dignity of work. At home, Fugett kids were expected to make their beds, dust the stairs, sweep the house, and wax the kitchen floor. By 14, Jean was mopping hallways in the Veteran’s Affairs hospital, because “that was the ethic,” he said.

And she was a political force, whether joining longtime City Councilwoman Agnes Welch to advance community interests or building productive partnerships with former Governor William Donald Schaefer or former Mayor Clarence ‘Du’ Burns. Her son, Reginald F. Lewis—a philanthropist, lawyer, and groundbreaking businessman—is also remembered through the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture.

HONORED TO BEAR HER NAME

Carolyn passed away in 2023, at age 97. By naming the Intergenerational Center after her, Catholic Charities honors both her life of tireless service to the multi-dimensional needs of the people she loved and the community she worked so hard to nourish and empower.

“Like I said, it was a village,” Jean said of the West Baltimore of his childhood. “And she was the queen.”



Carolyn E. Fugett



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JOURNEY TO SOCIAL JUSTICE



SCAN HERE TO REGISTER



A conversation with **Father Greg Boyle**, of Homeboy Industries, on his book *Cherished Belonging*

OCTOBER 22, 2025

Presentation 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Dessert reception to follow

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

THIS EVENT IS FREE AND ALL ARE WELCOME.

THANKS TO YOU, WE ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE OUR WORK IN THE COMMUNITY.

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CATHOLIC CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Catholic Charities is Maryland’s largest and most effective provider of human services. 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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