

*Faithfully Serving in 100 Locations Across 21 Virginia Counties and 7 Cities!*



Jeffrey Braggs Jr. and his son

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## Rental Assistance Helps Keep Many Affected by Pandemic in Their Homes

**WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT,** Oklahoma native and single father Jeffrey Braggs Jr., 32, lost the hearing aid business he'd owned for more than a decade. He decided to move to Northern Virginia with his 9-year-old-son to pursue his dream of being a full-time dancer, teaching ballroom dance, and performing competitive swing dance. Within a few months, he'd landed a good job as a dance instructor and was working with his competitive dance partner.

"I had a little savings that was going to get me through until I could accumulate more students," Braggs said. "And I was expecting a \$5,000 tax return."

But instead of getting the tax return, he ended up owing taxes from his business. That, coupled with the expense of the move East and the time involved in building up a student base, exhausted all his savings. Braggs fell behind on bills and he wasn't sure how he could pay his rent. "I had a 9-year-old and I had to worry about getting evicted."

He discovered Catholic Charities during an online search for assistance and was able to get the rental help he needed.

"It was a gigantic relief. I really didn't know what I was going to do if I didn't [get] help," Braggs said. Now that his income is steady and he's caught up on bills, "I'll be fine next month."

Braggs is just one of the thousands of men and women Catholic Charities has assisted during the pandemic.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington provided \$1.4 million in emergency rental and utility assistance to 3,800 individuals. That figure marks a 130 percent increase in clients served over the previous 12 months.

"A year into the pandemic, Catholic Charities continues to provide rental and utility assistance to vulnerable households. The financial effects of the pandemic continue to linger and the accumulation of debt for many people is

→ *continued on page 5*

## President's Message

Dear Friends of Catholic Charities,

The pandemic exposed great disparity and inequality; it caused tremendous suffering and grievous loss. Yet it also resulted in the expression of overwhelming generosity and compassion by so many people and parishes throughout our diocese. Thanks be to God!

And thanks to you, Catholic Charities will continue to help families and individuals recover from the devastation of the pandemic, challenging our ministries to find new and innovative ways to serve even more of our neighbors in need in the years ahead.

In this edition of *The Mission*, you will learn about how you can join the St. Lucy Food Project in its mission to ensure no child in our diocese goes hungry this year. You will see the transformative impact that your unprecedented amount of support has had in the lives of thousands of people in our community during the pandemic. You will meet Kevin and Paul, volunteers who go above and beyond for the women and children at St. Margaret of Cortona Transitional Family Housing. And we will share heart-warming news about how Catholic Charities collaborates with, and benefits from, the generosity of our Catholic Schools, like St. Louis, and programs of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, like the Young Adult Ministry.

Our work would not be possible without your financial support, your prayers, and our dedicated employees and volunteers. We are grateful to God for all these blessings. This past year we have seen tremendous generosity, which has allowed Catholic Charities to reach, help, heal, and serve more people than ever before. We put out the call for support, and you answered. "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.'" Luke 3:10-11

On behalf of all the people we serve, thank you. Together we can make a difference for all those we are blessed to encounter every day.

Gratefully yours in Christ,



**STEPHEN CARATTINI**  
*President and CEO*  
Catholic Charities of the  
Diocese of Arlington



## Hope in "Extraordinary" Time

We have returned to Ordinary Time in the Church year, when we wear green vestments as a symbol of hope. Of course, with the incarnation of Jesus, all time is extraordinary because Christ is always with us.

During the pandemic many have given of themselves and served those most in need with great courage and love, especially through Catholic Charities. We have seen an extraordinary outpouring of generosity and action that has sustained the hope of many struggling with worry, illness, loss and isolation. We prayed and asked God to give us strength to help others. That's Christian hope.

I read recently that linguists think the word "hope" shares roots with the word "hop." To hope for something is to leap in expectation, to hop towards possibility. Hope is more than wishing. It's more than wishful thinking. Christian hope is taking action and making an expectant leap forward. It means rolling up our sleeves and getting to work, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, helping with rent and utilities, welcoming the newcomer, counseling the lost.

Christian hope does not shy away from, but rather rushes toward the suffering and pain in our world. Christian hope empowers people to deal with this world's struggles with strength and resolve. Yes, there is pain and suffering and injustice in the world, but Christian hope enables its recipients to stand tall knowing that God is still working, even in the most difficult circumstances. It holds steady in the midst of chaos buoyed by something greater that has happened, the birth of our Savior and the Easter victory.

So welcome to Ordinary Time when we wear green as a sign of hope. Thank you for your goodness in supporting the work of Catholic Charities in these "extraordinary" times. That is exactly what Christian hope looks like.

Summer blessings,



**FATHER ROBERT CILINSKI**  
*Episcopal Vicar for*  
Charitable Works



# Truth, Beauty, and Goodness: Diocesan Ministry Teams Up with Catholic Charities to Draw Young People Back

**CAN CATHOLIC CHARITIES WORK**  
serving the poor and vulnerable throughout the Diocese of Arlington draw young Catholics back to the Church?

The diocese's Young Adult Ministries (YAM) believes that sharing how the Church, through Catholic Charities, works for justice, and inviting young adults to take part in that work may provide the path of return for disaffected young adults.

YAM is highlighting Catholic Charities ministries and others that serve the vulnerable as part of its *Truth, Beauty and Goodness* initiative, called T.B.G.

Justice is the first of five pillars to attract the religiously unaffiliated – called the “Nones” – proposed by Bishop Robert Barron, head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis and auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Beauty, truth, new media and parish transformation for outreach are the other pillars.

Geared towards captivating the minds and hearts of these young Nones, and held at local restaurants and other

venues, each T.B.G. event features live music and works of art on display to showcase beauty, and a lively discussion on truth seen through exploring the virtues, and considering goodness through community and works of justice, with opportunities for short-term and long-term engagement.

“When they see the works of justice done, it captivates them and draws them in,” says YAM coordinator Niru De Silva.

Catholic Charities Office of Volunteers is also working with the Young Adult Ministry to highlight ways young people can work for justice through service.

For its May T.B.G. discussion on goodness, YAM invited Chantal Skubic, Volunteer Manager for Newcomer Services, to join the event at Caboose Commons in Merrifield to share with young adults how and why the Church welcomes refugees and immigrants. De Silva challenged those gathered to help raise \$500 for an educational scholarship fund for young refugee students – a goal that was quickly surpassed.

For its June T.B.G. event, at Highline RxR in Crystal City, with a focus on the virtue of fortitude, YAM invited Christ House program director John Croft to

“Our faith is practiced with our hands and our feet. We deepen our own practice of the faith by serving others and having that encounter.”

– DEBRA BEARD, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF VOLUNTEERS

“Our faith is practiced with our hands and our feet,” says Debra Beard, Director of the Office of Volunteers. “We deepen our own practice of the faith by serving others and having that encounter.”

speaking about Catholic Charities' ministry to the homeless and poor, particularly the male residents and impoverished families who are served at Christ House in Old Town Alexandria. †



## Volunteer Opportunities!

Young adults can search volunteer opportunities by ministry at [volunteer.ccca.net](http://volunteer.ccca.net).

## Catholic Charities Future Needs

It's easy to name Catholic Charities as a beneficiary of a retirement plan, brokerage account or life insurance policy. For instructions, view our website [ccca.net](http://ccca.net) or contact Gretchen Koch at (703) 841-3819 or [gretchen.koch@arlingtondiocese.org](mailto:gretchen.koch@arlingtondiocese.org).



# Catholic Charities Mobilizes the Power of Parishes to Welcome Refugees

BY LESLIE MILLER, CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF WRITER

A Longer Version of This Story Appeared in *The Arlington Catholic Herald*. Reprinted With Permission.



Fr. Frederick Edlefsen with Emily Wood, Site Supervisor, Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services.

**A**GROWING NUMBER OF PARISHES Across the diocese are helping resettle refugees in Northern Virginia through a new initiative of Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services (MRS).

Ahead of an anticipated influx of refugees later this year, MRS has held two online trainings through a program called Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR), created by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to help mobilize volunteers on the parish level.

“Refugees have been welcomed in the Arlington diocese for decades, and this is a new way of engaging the power of our parishes. (Parishioners) are there and they want to help,” said Lourdes Iglesias, MRS community engagement specialist.

Catholic Charities has resettled and assisted more than 20,000 refugees and asylees since 1975. All have been vetted by the U.S. Department of State and most have Special Immigrant Visas, granted to refugees who have assisted U.S. military efforts overseas, most recently in Afghanistan.

In recent years, Catholic Charities has welcomed 300 to 400 refugees annually. But MRS expects to welcome about 600 beginning in October when the federal government’s new fiscal year starts. The change was announced after the current administration lifted the annual cap on the number of refugees who can be admitted into the United States.

Parish projects to support refugees have been ongoing.

Donna Hansberry of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Arlington was one of a core group of volunteers organizing food drives during the pandemic when the parish learned several Afghan refugee families were due to arrive in the diocese. The parish decided to “adopt” a family of eight to assist with resettlement needs, including securing housing and outfitting the household with furniture, household supplies and other necessities.

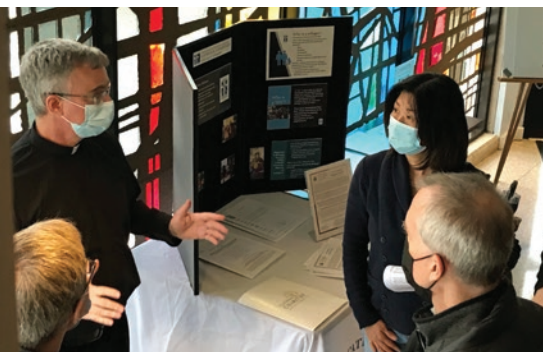
The team organized a household goods drive to supplement federal resettlement funding. A Catholic Charities staffer was invited to speak about refugees and answer questions after Mass. A parish webpage included links to wish lists on Amazon and Walmart so people can purchase housewares and linens and ship them directly to Catholic Charities’ Manassas warehouse.

“It really floored us, on our little volunteer team, how much people wanted to help,”



**Call for  
Volunteers!**

To learn more about our volunteer opportunities with our Newcomer Services ministry and ways you can get involved, please visit [volunteer.ccca.net](http://volunteer.ccca.net) or email Lourdes Iglesias at [lourdes.iglesias@ccda.net](mailto:lourdes.iglesias@ccda.net).



Fr. Frederick H. Edlefsen (left), pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Arlington, speaks with parishioners about a parish project to aid Afghan refugees.

said Hansberry. The parish collected \$10,000 in donations, “with a relatively quick effort,” she added. Donations also benefited other refugee families.

Helping refugees is “a worthy cause in and of itself, and it’s part of our Christian mission to welcome new neighbors, especially people who have suffered a lot,” said Our Lady of Lourdes pastor Father Frederick H. Edlefsen, who worked with MRS previously as pastor of St. Agnes Church in Arlington and as chaplain at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, where students played soccer with refugee children. “Helping in this manner really brings people together,” he said.

Volunteers from other parishes also have been supporting Migration and Refugee Services. Parishioners from St. James Church in Falls Church organized

donations in the Manassas warehouse. St. John Neumann, Reston, volunteers donated a truckload of furniture and other items. At Church of the Nativity in Burke, several collections organized by the Women of Nativity service group benefited refugees. The group packed about 100 “new arrival bags” containing toothbrushes, shampoo, and other personal items for refugee families.

“There is a chain of volunteer help and involvement that is really precious to us and exceedingly important,” Iglesias said, adding that once refugees settle in, volunteers also teach English, mentor youths, and run citizenship programs. “It really does take a village to do all this.” †

Continued from page 1 **Rental Assistance Helps Keep Many Affected by Pandemic in Their Homes**

overwhelming, even if they have returned to work,” said Catherine Hassinger, Director of Community Services. “The loss of a job or the loss of hours, even temporarily, creates a snowball effect that is hard to dig out from.”

Manassas resident Lisa Lynn Davis had always been able to manage her bills.

“I had saved up \$3,000 that kept me going for just a couple months. It was not enough...”

– LISA LYNN DAVIS

Single and 55, Davis drove a Fairfax County school bus during the academic year and always had summer employment too. But when schools closed last year because of COVID-19, she lost her

job and, after the end of the school year, her paychecks stopped. She couldn’t find a new job, and because she was an education employee, she wasn’t eligible to receive unemployment. Between July and November, Davis had no income at all.

Even though she was eventually called back to work, Davis had to work hard to catch up on bills, including her car payment. Her rental agency agreed to work with her, but she was still two months behind on her rent.

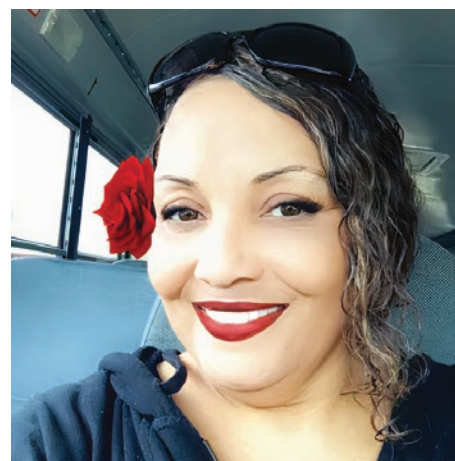
“I had saved up \$3,000 that kept me going for just a couple months. It was not enough,” Davis said. “It was the most stressful thing I’ve ever gone through in my entire life. I’ve never had to deal with anything like this.”

Davis was referred to Catholic Charities by Prince William County and she met caseworker Ruth Guillen, who treated her with care and compassion, and helped ease her anxiety. Most

importantly, she got the rental assistance she needed.

“I got the approval letter when I was at work,” Davis said. “I just started to cry.”

“In such an extraordinary year, we are grateful to be able to assist so many of our neighbors,” said Hassinger. “We also recognize the financial burden for many more still has not lifted. The upcoming end to the eviction moratorium and the ability of utility companies to resume cut-offs is something we are watching closely. We know these two issues will deeply impact families across our diocese for many months to come.” †



Lisa Lynn Davis



**For more information**

about Catholic Charities Emergency Assistance Program, visit [ccda.net/need-help/rent,-utility-assistance,-and-basic-household-needs/](https://ccda.net/need-help/rent,-utility-assistance,-and-basic-household-needs/)





Beckett Sheehan, left, and Matthew Reeder, who is holding an augmentative speech device which he uses to communicate with classmates and St. Louis staff.

## St. Louis Hawks Treehouse Makes a Difference for Those Affected by COVID

she said, have paid off. “It’s a first-rate product here. The boys were very much in it from the beginning.”

Through the store, Matt and Beckett were also practicing the spiritual virtues that St. Louis in Alexandria works to impart in all its students, especially charity.

“We said that any money we made was going to help charity,” Matt said through his augmentative speech device. “We picked Catholic Charities COVID relief because we wanted to help families during the pandemic. We feel bad for everyone and hope that the money will help them.”

In May, 6th grader Beckett and 8th grader Matt presented the profits from their labors to Catholic Charities President and CEO Stephen Carattini: a check for \$200 to help neighbors suffering from the impact of COVID.

“We’re so grateful for what you’ve done and the creativity and generosity you’ve shown. And I’m grateful to the administration and faculty of St. Louis School for creating the environment that allowed Matt and Beckett to undertake this wonderful initiative. These young people are certainly rooted in faith, growing in Christ,” Carattini said, a reference to the school motto. “I’d like to invite you to come to Catholic Charities to meet the people your gift has helped.”

St. Louis’s school administration, staff and students have supported the Hawk Treehouse from concept through implementation. The school’s art teacher designed the logo, the resource teacher created a jingle which was recorded by the

music teacher, and administration promoted the store through announcements and commercials. St. Louis’s students, turned actors, even starred in the commercial demonstrating the store’s products. It truly has been a success because of a collaborative effort by the entire school.

The Hawks Treehouse’s inventory: pencils, erasers, and face masks, also beach balls, stress balls, jump ropes and frisbees, many emblazoned with the school’s name and mascot.

Beckett compiles the students’ orders and maintains the spreadsheet. Matt fills the orders and counts the funds after the products are delivered to the students. He also drafts product descriptions for the webpage using vernacular his fellow students appreciate.

The effort reflects the successful collaboration of the St. Louis school community: clergy, administrators, staff, students, and their families. And their gift to Catholic Charities reflects their love for our neighbors who are in need as they do as Christ calls us all to do. †



Catholic Charities President/CEO Stephen Carattini thanks Matt Reeder, left, and Beckett Sheehan while St. Louis pastor Fr. Keith O’Hare looks on.

**L**AST FALL, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE pandemic, St. Louis Catholic School students Matthew Reeder and Beckett Sheehan, with the support of the school resource team, participated in a cross curricular and life skills project, opening a school supply store named Hawks Treehouse.

The online and in-person undertaking offered the students the opportunity to hone academic skills in a “real world” setting. Both students, who have special needs, use a modified curriculum as part of the school’s options program. Through the store, they worked on marketing, customer service, keeping inventory, ordering products, filling orders, and technology, including how to build and manage content for the store webpage. The resource team’s goal is to provide students experiences that prepare them for their high school years, and beyond.

“You have to have a big idea and do a lot of work,” resource aide Teresa Miller said about launching the project. The results,

# Meet Paul Zerkow & Kevin Tamai

## 1. Tell me about your background.

**Kevin:** I was born and raised in a Catholic family of 8 in Maryland, just outside of DC. I went to St. Ambrose Catholic School and then DeMatha Catholic High School.

I am also an Eagle Scout and have been involved in scouting for over 45 years. I am a member of the Catholic Committee on Scouting. I spent my career in the events industry and in the communications industry. Giving to and helping Catholic Charities has been a part of my life for a very long time. Having a loving family that supports me in all that I do is a big part of my inspiration.

**Paul:** I retired after 45 years of working and now had time to volunteer. I spent 20 years in the Army and 25 years in Health Care IT field with the VA and DoD. During my entire tenure in both careers, I volunteered with the Catholic Church teaching Religious Education, serving as an Usher, and as a member of the Knights of Columbus (KofC) working with Food Drives, Life Chains, Food for the Needy and Feeding the Homeless.

## 2. When did you get involved with our St. Margaret of Cortona Maternity and Transitional Home for Families and why?

**Kevin:** I got involved with Catholic Charities after talking with Paul about the needs of St. Margaret's. Paul was bringing donations from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church and Sacred Heart to St. Margaret's and needed help with the furniture.

**Paul:** My first encounter with St. Margaret's was in 2009 when a request went out for donations of furniture to furnish the recently renovated apartments. Having a truck, I brought multiple loads of furniture from the parishioners at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Lake Ridge. Then again in 2013, I would make weekly trips picking up donations of essentials from several local churches. It was this time that I became familiar with the staff at St. Margare-

ret's and all the wonderful work that they were doing. These collections and deliveries went on for six years.

In early 2020, right at the beginning of the pandemic, a request came from St. Margaret's about a number of repairs that needed to be done to the facility. I met up with Kevin, who is also a Knight from our Council 8183, and we developed a tag-team with other Knights to tackle the laundry list of repairs.

## 3. Can you touch on your relationship, and Catholic Charities' partnership, with your parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Fr. Bashista, and the KofC?

**Paul:** Father Bashista and the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton community have been wonderful supporters of St. Margaret's with providing donations from the Essentials Pantry, and usable furniture from the Church. When the call came in from St. Margaret's and their need of repairs, Father looked to the Knights to fill the void.

**Kevin:** The four are very intertwined and supportive of each other. Our Catholic faith teaches us to "Love thy neighbor as thyself." We show love for our neighbors by conducting food drives, blood drives, donating the food to local food pantries, volunteering at Special Olympics, and by supporting, both spiritually and materially, mothers who choose life for their babies. As Knights and Catholic gentlemen, we are charged with faith, fraternity, charity and patriotism. Charity is the very heart of our mission and our faith. There is no better way to experience love and compassion than by helping those in need, a call we answer every day.

## 4. What do you do in your role(s) as a volunteer for Catholic Charities?

**Paul:** All the volunteers from the Knights have completed landscaping, plumbing and electrical repairs, painting both interiors and exteriors, movement of furniture into and out of apartments, building



Kevin Tamai (left) and Paul Zerkow (right).

shelves and repairing just about anything that breaks in the apartments. The staff at St. Margaret's have estimated that by doing the volunteer work, we have saved them more than \$13,000 in material and labor costs.

**Kevin:** I fix anything that breaks as well as all of the little "honey-do" items in the homes. I do the grass cutting and general landscaping and find kind individuals who are willing to donate furniture if we need something. I also involve and encourage many others to help us. People will always help if you just ask.

## 6. What has been your favorite memory of your time volunteering?

**Paul:** Seeing that mothers can spend very little on themselves or their children, we presented the mothers small baskets of personal essential items at Christmas time this year, since the church collects toys for the children. Then a few months ago at Easter, we prepared 23 Easter baskets filled with candy and gifts for the children and 8 baskets for the mothers with needed personal supplies.

**Kevin:** A memory that sticks out for me was when I helped to fix a toilet in an apartment that a mother and her daughter had just moved in to. The little girl told me it was her birthday and she was sad because they could not celebrate it. I went to the grocery store to get them a small cake, ice cream and a balloon. I also got a card and gave her \$10. As we sang happy birthday to her, she was so happy and excited. The mother was so very grateful. †



# St. Lucy Puts Out Call For Specific Food Items

The last year was the busiest year in memory for Catholic Charities' St. Lucy Food Project, which supplies three Catholic Charities pantries and about 60 other community pantries throughout the diocese.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, St. Lucy collected and distributed more than 2 million pounds of food worth \$3.4 million to 27,456 individuals. An 115% increase in clients served.

St. Lucy is reaching out to parishes, who are eager to help provide the food. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, in Lake Ridge, for instance, has come up with a fun way to collect food to stock the pantry shelves by holding a drive at its July 19-23 Vacation Bible School.

Each day kids are asked to bring a specific item – such as “Stack the Mac (& Cheese)” or “Tomato Talk: A Dicey and Crushing Conversation!” The VBS includes care for the hungry into their weeklong theme, Marvelous Mystery: The Mass Comes Alive.

This summer, St. Lucy is targeting two areas:

- ✓ Fill the pantry with specific food items, most of them convenient and easy to put together for a meal (see sidebar);
- ✓ Collect funds to provide for operating expenses to meet the growing demand for food.

When donating food to the St. Lucy Food Program this summer, focus on items that are nutrient-rich and healthy, such as:

- canned tomatoes
- jam/jelly
- canned pasta
- nutrition bars
- canned beans
- fruit cups
- macaroni & cheese
- cereal

**Drop off location:**  
24/7 bins located outside our Manassas location (8426-28 Kao Circle, Manassas, VA 20110)

**i** For more information, please contact Lori Sikra at 703-479-2975 ext. 103, or [Lori.Sikra@ccda.net](mailto:Lori.Sikra@ccda.net).

## A Snapshot in Time: How Catholic Charities Responded From April 2020 – March 2021



## ABOUT CATHOLIC CHARITIES, DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON

*Together, We're Transforming Lives!*

21 programs across 21 Virginia counties and 7 cities

Serves all regardless of background, faith, or circumstance

85 cents of every dollar spent goes to programs and services