Dear Friends,

Did you make a New Year’s resolution? If so, how will your life be different this time next year, if you see it through to completion?

Maybe you will have more money in savings, or you will feel and look healthier. Or you will have made lasting memories with your loved ones. Most of us have a vision for a more fulfilling life, and resolutions are a great place to start.

Here at Catholic Charities of Central Texas, our New Year’s resolution is to respond to the needs of our community thoughtfully, prayerfully and with the same zeal as if our own lives were on perilous journeys to freedom, justice and dignity.

If you’re already involved with Catholic Charities, you know of our bold goal to end poverty. Making this a reality requires equal parts of big picture dreaming and practical doing. We must work hard to ensure that everything we do points families and individuals that we serve on a clear pathway out of poverty.

This is why we are focused on three main strategies in 2018, which you’ll read about in this and other newsletters. First, we are dedicated to engaging the community in combatting poverty to ensure that families in need are connected to the right resources. Secondly, we are committed to educating the community with the tools, skills and knowledge required to lift families out of poverty. And finally, we are proud to be an agency that empowers families by transforming problems into opportunities for growth.

I’m excited that our new strategic plan will bring us to a place where we can offer even more life-changing, hope-filled services to our community, and ultimately see an end to poverty. Whether you are a parish partner, donor, volunteer, foundation, corporate funder, or if you are working with us in one of many other ways, you play an important part in reaching our goal. I am grateful that you have chosen to take this journey with us. The destination will be amazing!

With gratitude,

Sara Ramirez,
Executive Director
Upcoming Spring Events

**kNOw POVERTY HOUR**
How does poverty impact families in Central Texas, and how can we live out our call to serve the poor among us? Join us for a kNOw Poverty Hour in Austin or Bryan, an interactive opportunity to see the Catholic Charities’ mission in action and learn how you can help to eliminate poverty in Central Texas.


**Austin office:** Tuesdays at 8:30 a.m., 10:00 a.m. or 1 p.m.
February 6 and 20
March 6 and 20
April 3 and 17
May 1 and 15

**Bryan office:** Tuesdays at 2 p.m.
March 13 and 27
April 10
May 8 and 22

**7TH ANNUAL CREATING HOPE IN THE BRAZOS VALLEY LUNCHEON**
Creating Hope brings our community together to provide support for Catholic Charities’ mission to end poverty in Central Texas. RSVP by calling Rachael Wells at 979-822-9340, ext. 114.

*Thursday, February 22, 2018* at 12 p.m.
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church
2541 Earl Rudder Freeway South,
College Station, TX 77845

**GABRIEL PROJECT 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**
Saturday, May 8, 2018
Mass location TBD. Please check ccctx.org under Events for details to come.

**FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER**
This fall, Catholic Charities was invited to present the Red Carpet World Premiere of Paramount Pictures and Pure Flix Entertainment’s SAME KIND OF DIFFERENT AS ME prior to its international theatrical release. The Austin area private premiere was held on October 18, 2017.

The movie tells the inspiring true story of challenges, friendships and love that ultimately transforms everyone involved. It is based on The New York Times bestseller written by Texas’ own Ron Hall and Denver Moore. The movie stars Academy Award® nominee Greg Kinnear, Academy Award® winner Renée Zellweger, Academy Award® nominee Djimon Hounsou and Academy Award® winner Jon Voight.

This incredible movie brings the heart of Catholic Charities’ mission to life on the silver screen. The film illuminates the truth in the words of St. Francis, “For it is in giving that we receive.” Sponsorships of the event directly support Catholic Charities’ mission to help people of all ages, faiths, ethnic backgrounds and economic circumstances.
THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS WHO SUPPORTED THE “SAME KIND OF DIFFERENT AS ME” AUSTIN MOVIE PREMIERE

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Patricia and Stephen Macy • Peggy O’Shaughnessy

Cy and DeeDee Richards • Terri and Chris Von Dohlen
My name is Jennifer Zamacona, and I volunteer 15 hours a week with Catholic Charities’ Immigration Legal Services and Family Counseling Programs. I learned about Catholic Charities through a good friend who volunteered with a Catholic Charities affiliate in the Chicago Diocese. As an immigrant myself and now a U.S. citizen, I want other immigrants to realize the blessing of becoming a citizen of the United States. I love to see the joy in our clients’ faces when they receive direction and information to help them on a path to citizenship.

I was born in Mexico City and immigrated to Chicago with my parents in the 1970s. I spent 16 years in the United States Air Force primarily stationed at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport security. I spent another 20 years with the National Guard and the Chicago Police Department as a night shift patrol officer on Chicago’s South Side. After a Parkinson’s diagnosis, I retired in 2015 and moved to Austin to be closer to my family.

I don’t let symptoms deter me from my work in the community, which I began last April. I deeply believe in and support Catholic Charities’ mission and love the clients, community and the friendships I’ve developed. If I had one wish, I’d wish for a larger facility so we could hire more employees to serve even more people. If you are thinking of volunteering, run — don’t walk — to sign up! You will discover untold blessings for so many and yourself.
The Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez, bishop of Austin, The Most Reverend Daniel E. Garcia, auxiliary bishop of Austin, and Sara Ramirez, executive director of Catholic Charities of Central Texas invited a select group of generous donors to the once-a-year event, “Catholic Charities’ Brunch with the Bishop.” The special event was held at The Chancery in Austin on January 20, 2018. After a mid-morning prayer service in a beautiful, private chapel, the guests enjoyed a wonderful buffet, conversation and an update on the latest developments of Catholic Charities. Thank you for helping us engage, educate and empower our clients out of poverty!
Catholic Charities of Central Texas launched St. Michael’s Veteran Services on September 9, 2017, to respond to the need and demand for assistance for military veterans and active military families in Central Texas. Named for St. Michael the Archangel, guardian of the church and patron saint of warriors, our services assist those who have sacrificed so much for our country and help them get back on their feet. The objective of our program is to connect veterans and their dependents to the resources and the coordinated care they need to help them overcome life’s challenges.

Our nation’s veterans are at higher risk of experiencing mental health and relationship challenges, and almost a quarter of Texas veterans report a service-related disability. We determined that of the almost quarter million veterans who live in the 25 counties we serve, many could benefit from comprehensive services to help them become healthy, financially stable and self-sufficient.

Thanks to funding provided by the Texas Veterans Commission’s Fund for Veterans’ Assistance, our program is on track to serve 490 veterans, active duty personnel and their families this year through case management and counseling, regardless of discharge status or religious affiliation. We serve Texas veterans of any era, including those with National Guard, Reservist or Active Duty statuses.
At two open house events this fall in Bryan and Austin, we welcomed the community and local veterans to learn about our new services which are delivered in-person and virtually from our Bryan, Killeen and Austin offices. We offer short-term financial assistance, mentoring, counseling, employment/education support, transportation vouchers, housing stabilization, referrals, peer support groups and case management. Case management includes short term financial assistance, budget counseling, education/employment support and referrals. Case managers create individualized service plans with each client in order to identify and work toward short- and long-term goals. Since our launch, the case management program has served 126 veterans and family members.

We also offer a variety of counseling options to veterans and their dependents including individual, couples and family counseling as well as group and play therapy. In addition, we now offer virtual therapy for those who do not live near one of our offices or are unable to travel or leave their homes. Virtual therapy, which is securely delivered by a HIPAA-compliant portal similar to Skype or Facetime using an internet connection, is an easy and effective way for veterans and their families to receive counseling on a consistent basis to help them work through relationship or emotional issues.

While St. Michael’s Veteran Services has only been up and running for a short period of time, its impact is already visible. For example, we are providing financial assistance to a veteran and his wife to ensure that they are able to pay their mortgage. We also assisted the family in applying for a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan to offset the cost of their prescriptions. Their Catholic Charities case manager also contacted local community organizations to coordinate food delivery and referred the family to the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program in order to help them obtain fresh fruits and vegetables. When asked about the impact of this program, our veteran responded, “This program is a Godsend and will help other veterans in so many ways.”

Learn more about St. Michael’s Veteran Services online at https://www.ccctx.org/st-michaels-veteran-services or call us at 979-822-9340.
Growing Our Presence in Waco and the Surrounding Area

Would it surprise you to learn that Waco has one of the highest rates of poverty in our service area? McLennan County and adjacent Limestone and Falls counties make up 3 of the 5 counties in the Diocese of Austin with the highest poverty rates, based on 2014 U.S. Census data. Eighty-five percent of students in Waco ISD receive free or reduced-price lunch. More than 60 percent of the foreign-born population is low-income, yet Waco has only one full-time, reduced-cost immigration attorney. We know that the need for our services is great, and our team is ready to rise to the challenge.

A NEW OFFICE IN THE WORKS

With offices in Austin, Bryan and Killeen, Catholic Charities is ready for the next stop: Waco. While its brick and mortar office location is forthcoming, Catholic Charities is making its programs available in the greater Waco community. Services available to families living in Waco right now include:

• **Counseling Services** is excited to offer virtual therapy through HIPAA-compliant live video connection over the internet, similar to Skype or FaceTime. This means that services can be provided from any private location with internet and a connected device, such as a smartphone or computer! Virtual therapy allows clients residing in the Waco area to meet with one of our licensed counselors, eliminating the barrier of distance.

• In fall 2017, we launched our **St. Michael’s Veteran Services** program to provide support to our nation’s heroes and their families to overcome life’s challenges during or after military service. Services can include financial assistance, education and employment support or other help needed to stabilize their situations. Catholic Charities case managers meet with clients at convenient locations in the Waco area for regular appointments.
Senior theology students from Reicher Catholic High School in Waco participate in a poverty simulation exercise.

EXPANDING AWARENESS & KNOWLEDGE
In addition to providing help for families, Catholic Charities supports our parishes and schools in living out our faith and our calling to serve the most vulnerable members of our society. We partner with them to provide education on poverty, disaster preparedness, financial literacy and more.

For example, Catholic Charities recently partnered with Reicher Catholic High School to offer a 3-part speaker series for senior theology students. Topics included Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration, Understanding Poverty and Living Justly. The presentations help students to better understand how our Catholic social teachings apply to everyday life, especially as they prepare for graduation. Presentations on a variety of topics are available to any group in the Waco area from Catholic Charities experts.

JOIN US
As the social services provider on behalf of the Catholic Church in Central Texas, Catholic Charities aims to engage, educate and empower our clients to live up to their God-given potential and dignity, and to invite all people of goodwill to join in our mission. To learn more about Catholic Charities of Central Texas services in the Waco area, visit www.ccctx.org/waco-mclennan.
Volunteering at Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities of Central Texas has volunteer opportunities in our offices in Austin and Bryan, and we are in particular need of volunteers who are bilingual in Spanish and English. Please review our list below, and visit our website to begin the volunteer application process. You may RSVP to attend a kNOw Poverty Hour in Austin or Bryan. Volunteers also complete Ethics and Integrity in Ministry training through the Diocese of Austin. If you have questions about a specific volunteer opportunity described below, please contact Claire Bordelon at 512-651-6159.

**AUSTIN OFFICE**
- Hope Donation Center Assistant or Attendant
- Bilingual/Spanish Counseling Intake
- Bilingual/Arabic Counseling Interpreter
- Financial Stability Intake
- Immigration Legal Services E-Conversion
- Bilingual/Spanish Immigration Legal Services Office Assistance
- Advancement Administrative Support
- Bilingual/Spanish Receptionist Assistant

**BRYAN OFFICE**
- Hope Donation Center Assistant
- Bilingual/Spanish Gabriel Project Life Center Classroom Assistant
- Bilingual/Spanish Counseling Intake
- Bilingual/Spanish Financial Stability Intake
- Bilingual/Spanish Reception/Administrative Support

**CHECKLIST: BECOMING A CATHOLIC CHARITIES VOLUNTEER**
- Learn about current volunteer opportunities.
- Attend a “kNOw Poverty Hour” in Austin or Bryan.
- Attain EIM Certification through Diocese of Austin.
- Complete and return our application.

WWW.CCCTX.ORG/VOLUNTEER
1. Services are provided with _____ and respect for each person.
2. All _________ are open to anyone in need – regardless of race, religion or income.
3. We promote social justice for all and work towards systemic changes through ____________.
4. We operate with __________ and the highest professional standards.
5. We practice good __________________ by being good stewards of resources.
MISSION STATEMENT
People of faith serving anyone in need by strengthening families and promoting respect for human dignity and life.