Dear friends of Catholic Charities,

During this month of May, the month of Mother’s Day and the month of Mary, I’ve reflected on what a mother’s love means. Following the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, Pope Francis offered that mothers are indispensable to society and the church; they show the world what it means to generously give of oneself, respect life, and show tenderness and moral strength in times of trouble. Pope Francis went on to add that a world without mothers would be “inhumane.”

A few weeks ago, New Orleans had the privilege of hosting a conference of Catholic Charities Diocesan Directors from around the country; 83 different Catholic Charities Directors were in attendance. These events are always so energizing. Sharing best practices, unique struggles and successes, and taking stock of the vast network of resources that we share can only bring positive growth to our individual organizations and Catholic Charities as a whole. What I was not expecting and what really struck a chord with me was in speaking with the conference staff, which put on a wonderful event, I found many hotel employees expressing gratitude for the work of Catholic Charities in the community. Some of the men and women I spoke with shared with me that they or someone they loved had been directly affected by Catholic Charities’ work.

I share this with you first to demonstrate how your support makes a tangible difference in the community. The more than 70,000 people assisted by Catholic Charities each year come to us from all walks of life, at a time when they need the help and hope that the organization provides. I also share this with you to bring full circle the idea of a mother’s love. We are all brothers and sisters in the eyes of the Lord and it is an undeniable fact that each person is some mother’s child. In Catholic Charities’ mission of respecting each person and serving those in need, as we are impelled to by the love and teachings of Jesus Christ, we emulate Mary in her faith and motherly love. Thank you for joining with us in this mission.

Throughout this month we pray to our God’s Blessed Mother, Mary, for all the mothers, living and deceased, in our Catholic Charities community.

Sr. Marjorie Hebert, M.S.C.
President/CEO

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans
provides life-giving programs that deliver health and human services to the most vulnerable and needy throughout 8 civil parishes in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. We serve people regardless of race, religion, age, ethnicity or economic status.

Most Rev. Gregory M. Aymond
Archbishop of New Orleans

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Notes from the Heart

A Mother’s Love

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Aymond congratulated major donors to the campaign were on hand at Palace Café to celebrate the success of the 50th Anniversary Archbishop Hannan Community Appeal. The campaign raises unrestricted funds to support the important work of Catholic Charities through a network of more than 30 ministries, programs and community partnerships which serve the homeless, feed the hungry, and care for the elderly, at risk youth, pregnant women, individuals with developmental delays, and many others. Archbishop Aymond congratulated guests on a successful 50th Anniversary Campaign and recognized chair couples Clifton & Elizabeth LeBlanc and Price and Christine LeBlanc for their dedication and leadership to the Archbishop Hannan Community Appeal. The 50th Anniversary Archbishop Hannan Community Appeal campaign surpassed its $1.7 million goal, raising $2,002,406.

HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

The 2016 hurricane season is quickly approaching, and being prepared is the most crucial element to staying safe! Now is the time to make an emergency plan for you and your family. Identify where your family will go in case of an evacuation, which may include finding pet friendly locations. Establish a meeting place and communication methods in case your family becomes separated.

Once your family’s plan is in place, make sure your home is also ready. You can do so by securing and cleaning gutters, trimming or removing large tree limbs and securing all doors and windows. Be sure to have enough supplies, including clothing, nonperishable food, and clean drinking water, to last several days. Additionally, you should prepare a disaster supply kit, including the following items:

- Flashlight
- Radio
- Extra batteries
- First aid supplies
- Cash
- Copies of important documents (birth certificates, medical records, wills, etc.)

Follow Catholic Charities on Twitter (@cathcharitiesNO) and Facebook (Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans) as we share tips and resources during Hurricane Preparedness Week, May 15-21, and throughout hurricane season.

For more information on preparing your family and your home for hurricane season, visit www.ready.gov/hurricanes. Remember, hurricane season begins on June 1!

Volunteer Spotlight:

Kallin Zehren

Kallin Zehren is currently a Junior at Tulane University, where she works as the Service Chair at Tulane’s Catholic Center. When she took on the role, she wanted to expand the Catholic Center’s service initiatives, and turned to Catholic Charities to ask about their areas of greatest need. She put together a volunteering initiative for the children at Baronne St. Housing, a transitional shelter for homeless families.

On Saturdays, she brings out a team of 12 students and local volunteers for three hours to spend time reading, doing arts and crafts, and dancing with the children living there. The younger children are easier to work with and more ready to accept volunteers with open arms, she says, while the older children can sometimes be less trusting because of the tough life experiences that they have gone through. Zehren’s team of volunteers is versatile, however, and volunteers are able to take on one-on-one time with older children to get to know them. According to Zehren, one of the most rewarding parts of the job comes when an older or shy child finally opens up to a volunteer and starts to have fun.

Zehren and her team are doing more than just having fun! Recently, she has emphasized talking to young female children about more than their looks, and complementing them on their crafts, abilities, and skills. As she and her team have made that a priority, she says the young girls are even happier and more excited to have the volunteers around.

According to Zehren, one of the most difficult parts of the job is leaving at the end of the day. “Sometimes I have to physically remove children who are hugging on to me and asking me not to go,” she says. Furthermore, because the shelter is transitional, she often does not get to see the same children from week to week, and it is hard for her not to get attached. Zehren realizes that not seeing a child again can be a positive thing, perhaps meaning that their family has been lifted out of the cycle of homelessness and poverty. “I think about their parents and what they went through,” she says. “Sometimes I have to physically remove children who are hugging on to me and asking me not to go,” she says. Furthermore, because the shelter is transitional, she often does not get to see the same children from week to week, and it is hard for her not to get attached. Zehren realizes that not seeing a child again can be a positive thing, perhaps meaning that their family has been lifted out of the cycle of homelessness and poverty.

For Ashley, the mobile unit was convenient, and she appreciated the one-on-one attention and support that the staff gave her throughout her pregnancy. The confidentiality experienced at ACCESS also made Ashley feel more at ease seeking help. She commented, “ACCESS is a great resource, and I hope they continue to be there for other women with situations like mine.”

Ashley continues to visit ACCESS once a month to pick up diapers for her daughter, Macey Lynn, who is now two months old. ACCESS operates a Diaper Bank, which allows families to pick up 12 packs of diapers and wipes once a month to help defray the cost of raising a newborn. Catholic Charities’ Director of Pro-Life Services, Michelle Black, shared, “It is a privilege to work with clients like Ashley throughout the journey of pregnancy and be able to continue offering support through the diaper bank program as she adjusts to life with her beautiful new baby.”

In addition to the mobile unit, ACCESS also has a stationary location in Metairie where clients can receive resources and services. To learn more about the services offered by ACCESS and view the mobile unit’s current schedule, please visit www.ccano.org/accesspregnancy.
A New Model for Mental Illness

Under the leadership of Sister Anthony Barczykowski and Monetta Clark, the Ciara House program expanded. Sister Anthony, the executive director of Catholic Charities at the time, began to move clients capable of independent living from Ciara House into empty Archdiocesan-owned buildings to create a safe housing community for the mentally ill. A new model for housing the mentally ill was born.

The ultimate goal for the Ciara Independent Living residents is to reach the highest level of independence, which starts with the way other people interact with them.

Hurricane Katrina

When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, the group home clients and three staff members evacuated to Brandon, Mississippi. Due to a lack of time and resources, the apartment residents were forced to make evacuation plans on their own. When it was apparent the destruction of the Hurricane would make it impossible to immediately return to the city, the residents moved into an empty house owned by a parish church in Brandon.

“The parish was so wonderful,” said Monetta Clark, who had travelled with the clients to Brandon. “They really took care of these people. The state of Mississippi provided all of the necessary medical treatment and the parish provided meals and stability in an uncertain time.”

When the group returned to New Orleans nine weeks after the storm, they found the damage to both the group home and the apartment buildings was manageable. The program was the only state-funded mental health group home that survived Katrina.

With a grant from the Red Cross after Katrina, Ciara House was able to buy a house on Dante Street where the program is currently located. The house next door was owned by a bank who generously donated it to the program for an office location.

Ciara Independent Living

Due to state budget cuts in 2010, the Dante Street location transitioned into an independent living apartment complex for single adults with mental illness. Using their federal disability income, residents pay rent, provide their own meals, and live a relatively independent life. Bob Wardlaw, who has been with the program since 2007, has been running the Dante Street apartments since 2010. Now called Ciara Independent Living, the program has expanded to include a location in Mandeville and serves 34 residents. Residents are referred to the apartments by a multitude of sources including case managers, hospitals, and the National Association for Mental Illness (NAMI).

The residents of Ciara Independent Living are already working with case managers when they enter the apartments to ensure they are stable and getting the treatment that they need. The average resident is middle-aged and usually suffers from a disorder like schizophrenia. Wardlaw, along with a former resident who now provides maintenance services, serve as both property managers and problem solvers for the residents.

“It really helps the residents just to know that I am there and I care about their situation,” says Wardlaw. “Ninety percent of my job is listening to people.” The residents also look out for each other, helping one another with food when funds run short, and providing a stigma-free safe community.

The ultimate goal for the Ciara Independent Living residents is to reach the highest level of independence, which starts with the way other people interact with them. When Wardlaw started working with the program, he had no experience with mental illness.