

Deacons choose Catholic Charities as their ministry

Ministries of Presence Comfort Homeless Teens

▼ As Deacon Kevin O'Connor volunteered at Hope Street for Runaway and Homeless Youth on a recent Monday night, a young woman who was visibly angry came into the shelter. O'Connor asked why she was upset.

A staff person told him it was her birthday the next day and then explained: "She ages out of the shelter tomorrow."



Young people who live on the street often lack the options or resources to make it on their own.

Instead of being a joyous occasion, her birthday meant she didn't know where she'd eat or sleep.

O'Connor spent time listening to the woman, while staff found her another shelter where she could work out a long-term plan.

"As she told me later, there was no person, place or thing that was stable in her life," O'Connor says.

O'Connor and Deacon Russ Kocemba volunteer weekly at Hope Street as part of their ministry. Their regular presence offers some stability to young men and women who often have no one in whom to confide.

They began their outreach ministries at Hope Street after being ordained four years ago. O'Connor's pastoral ministry is

at St. Joseph the Worker in Maple Grove, and Kocemba serves at Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church in Mound.

They offer a ministry of presence and support for the teens who find shelter at Hope Street after they've become one of the 1,800 youth living on the streets in Minnesota each night.

Most Hope Street residents know Kocemba as "the resume guy" who comes every week to help them write resumes and fill out job applications.

"I really care about each of these

children," Kocemba says. "These are bright, vibrant young men and women. They're smart. And some of their experiences – sad, brutal, joyous, whatever it is that brought them there – make them very strong."

Kocemba and O'Connor chose to spend their weekly ministry with the teens and young adults at Hope Street after visiting several Catholic Charities programs.

"I guess God gave me a heart for the homeless," O'Connor says. "And we need more of those hearts." ♦

Parishes Make a Difference

Schoolchildren Collect Food for Food Shelves

Students at Guardian Angels Catholic School in Chaska collected enough food donations for Catholic Charities' food shelves to fill a car. The K-8 school held the food drive during Catholic Schools Week 2009. Teacher Jenna Robling, who helped organize the food drive, encouraged participation by requesting that students bring a different food item every day for a week, such as rice on Monday and vegetables on Tuesday.

St. Thomas the Apostle Serves Meals at Branch III

A dedicated group from St. Thomas the Apostle of Minneapolis has served meals at Branch III for more than a dozen years. The group purchases, prepares and serves lunch on the fourth Friday of each month to about 200 homeless or near-homeless community members who come to Branch III for meals, health care and employment services.

St. Bartholomew Gathers Toys for St. Joe's

St. Bartholomew Catholic Faith Community collected clothes, toys, games and stuffed animals for children at St. Joseph's Home for Children. Christen Weigel, St. Bart's coordinator of youth ministries, says the collection drive was a big success.

"The people here really want to give back and help out, and they do that whenever they can," Weigel says.

Learn how your parish can make a difference. Visit cctwincities.org/parish.

The Programs of Catholic Charities

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Hope Street for Runaway & Homeless Youth
Northside Child Development Center
St. Joseph's Home for Children

HOUSING & EMERGENCY SERVICES

Branch III
Dorothy Day Center
Evergreen Residence
Exodus Residence
Family Service Center
Food Shelves
Glenwood Residence
Housing First
Mary Hall
Secure Waiting Space
St. Anthony Residence
St. Christopher Place
St. Paul Residence
Visitation Place

FAMILY SERVICES

Adoption Services
Caregiver Support
Counseling Services
Hispanic Outreach
Migration & Refugee Services
Office for Separated & Divorced
Parenting Services
Prenatal Services
Senior Care Management

ADVOCACY

Office for Social Justice

Parish Volunteer Opportunities

For more information or other opportunities, call the Volunteer Line at 612-664-8600 or visit cctwincities.org.

Operate washing machines and dryers

to wash sheets and blankets at the Dorothy Day Center. Two to three volunteers needed for four-hour weekend shifts.

Prepare and serve breakfast at Branch III in Minneapolis. Groups of five to seven adults needed to prepare and serve breakfast to 150-175 guests. Cost is about \$200.

Provide companionship to an isolated elderly person or relief to family caregivers in their care of an elderly loved one in Ramsey County.

From Father John's Desk

Almost daily, parishioners ask about the economy's impact on Catholic Charities. Between October and January, demand at our food shelves increased 21 percent while donations decreased by 43 percent. Since September, more than 200 people sleep each night on the floor at Dorothy Day. The mats lie so closely together you cannot walk between them.

At Catholic Charities, we talk of the two equal feet of our mission, of providing charity and working for justice.

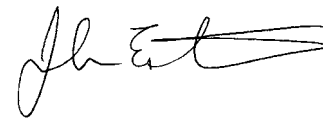
We rely more than ever on your generosity to provide food, shelter and health care to women, men and children. More than any other time we ask the faithful to speak on behalf of those who go unheard.

The state's multi-billion dollar shortfall threatens the deteriorating safety net that

ensures food, shelter and health care to our neighbors.

The onus of living the gospel, of providing charity and working for justice rests on each of us who sits in the pews and sanctuaries.

During the final days of Lent and throughout the beautiful season of Easter, may we remember Christ's repeated message that the poor are, in fact, the very face of God.



▶ ▶ ▶ Fr. John Estrem, CEO



During the 2009 legislative session, Fr. John Estrem and staff from the Office for Social Justice have been blogging about how budget cuts could affect people most in need in our community. We invite you to join the conversation at cctwincities.blogspot.com.

St. Peter Claver Collects Emergency Items

▼ Students and staff from St. Peter Claver Catholic School in St. Paul's Midway area celebrated Catholic Schools Week in January by collecting food and hygiene items for the homeless at Dorothy Day Center.

Students gathered hygiene items, such as soap, shampoo and toothbrushes, and food for the emergency food shelf at Dorothy Day.

The students "really got into the drive," says Christina Shamp, a teacher at St. Peter Claver who organized the drive.

The donations came at a time when demand at the Dorothy Day Center was at an all-time high: In January, nearly 6,000 people slept on a mat on the floor at the St. Paul shelter. That's 300 more than in December.

Though increased demand and the rise in poverty aren't new, the need grew far faster than anyone anticipated, says Fr. John Estrem, CEO of Catholic Charities. "No one anticipated the need would grow this far, this deep, this quickly," Estrem says.

The system, Estrem says, was full before the downturn in the economy. The economic crisis pushes an already-fragile system past its capacity, he says. And the increase in need will continue through the summer and long past any economic recovery.

"Donations from the students at St. Peter and those of other schools truly allow us to meet the basic needs of our neighbors," Estrem says.

As part of the project, St. Peter Claver students, staff and parents toured the Dorothy Day Center when they dropped off their donations Jan. 29. Seventh-grade teacher Jodi Fiege, who was part of the tour, says it was a good experience for the students, who learned about the many services Dorothy Day offers.

"I think it was a positive, eye-opening experience," Fiege says. "I think it would be worthwhile for other groups to experience as well." ♦