ANNUAL REPORT 2020
In the midst of COVID-19
The overwhelming tragedies brought on by COVID-19 have made the past year like no other in the history of Catholic Charities since our founding around the time of the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918. Throughout this time Catholic Charities staff, boards, volunteers and donors, have been “on the job” in the hardest hit neighborhoods and communities of New York. Yes, without a doubt, we pivoted and changed the way we provided many services.

Although many of us went remote and held numerous “zoominars,” hundreds of our Catholic Charities staff and volunteers could not and were on the frontlines in residences and neighborhood-based programs. We have sustained services to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, even though, in a few areas, we were forced to reduce and transition some services.

But, without a doubt, the major story of the past year — as we invite you to see in this annual report — is Catholic Charities’ significant expansion to meet basic needs for food, cash, and good information. So many of you have done or supported this critically-needed work. It is ongoing. Thank you, and we still need you.

EUGENE MCQUADE
Board Chair

MONSIGNOR KEVIN SULLIVAN
Executive Director
serving 400,000 individuals through 90+ agencies on the ground locally at 300+ sites in urban, suburban, and rural neighborhoods and communities throughout New York City and the Lower Hudson Valley.
Catholic Charities 100+ year-old Federation provides help and creates hope for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers — Non-Catholics and Catholics alike. Our network of affiliated independent Catholic human services agencies, touches almost every human need, giving special priority to the poor and vulnerable. Each agency, with its distinctive programs, is rooted in the shared Catholic belief that each person is made in the image of God, worthy of dignity and respect, and drawing inspiration from our Catholic Christian tradition and values. Catholic Charities seeks to build the individual capacity of each agency and strengthen our collective impact to build a society that is more just and compassionate.

Abraham House • Association of New York Catholic Homes • Astor Services for Children & Families • Bigs & Littles NYC Mentoring • Cardinal Hayes Home for Children • Cardinal McCloskey Community Services • Casa Cecilia • Casita Maria, Inc. • Catholic Charities Community Services • Catholic Charities Community Services of Dutchess • Catholic Charities Community Services of Orange, Sullivan & Ulster • Catholic Charities Community Services of Rockland • Catholic Charities of Staten Island • Catholic Guardian Services • Catholic Kolping Society • Centro Maria Residence • Covenant House New York • Create, Inc. • Dowling Gardens • Dwelling Place of New York, Inc. • El Carmelo Residence • Encore Community Services • Good Counsel, Inc. • Good Shepherd Services • Grace Institute • Grace Outreach • Holy Name Centre for Homeless Men • Incarnation Children’s Center • Jeanne d’Arc Residence • Kennedy Children’s Center • Ladies of Charity • Lamp Ministries • Lavelle School for the Blind • Leo House • Leviticus 25-23 Alternative Fund, Inc. • Life Experience and Faith Sharing Association • Lincoln Hall • Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Services • Lott Residence • Maria Droste Counseling Services • Mercy Center, Inc. • Missionaries of Charity/Queen of Peace Residence • Nazareth Housing, Inc. • New Hope Manor New York Foundling • Newburgh Ministry • One to One Learning, Inc. • Part of the Solution (POTS) • Pax Christi Metro New York • Queen’s Daughters Day Care Center • Robert B. Fox Memorial House • RSHM Life Center • Sacred Heart Associates, LP • Sacred Heart Residence • San Jose Day Nursery • Seton House • St. Agnes Residence • St. Anthony Shelter for Renewal • St. Dominic’s Family Services • St. Francis Counseling Center • St. Francis Residence • St. Ignatius Loyola Day Nursery • St. Ignatius School • St. Joseph’s Immigrant Home • St. Joseph’s School for the Deaf • St. Mary’s Residence • Thorpe Village for Senior Citizens • Toltentine-Zeiser Community Life Center • Xavier Mission Center • Xavier Society for the Blind • Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice.
IN ANY GIVEN YEAR...

PROTECTING AND NURTURING CHILDREN AND YOUTH
(87,000 served, $379 million in services)
Services include day care, foster care, adoption, camping, sports and after-school activities, community centers and preventative services.

WELCOMING AND INTEGRATING IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
(46,000 served, $20 million in services)
Services include reuniting families, teaching English and civics, obtaining work authorization and finding jobs, preventing exploitation, and supporting unaccompanied youth.

FEEDING THE HUNGRY AND SHELTERING THE HOMELESS
(142,000 served, $84 million in services)
Services include community kitchens, regular and pop-up pantries, home-delivered meals, emergency shelters, temporary and transitional residences, permanent affordable housing, and eviction prevention.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND RESOLVING CRISIS
(178,000 served, $116 million in services)
Services include information and referral, coordinating services, counseling, financial assistance, maternity services and job readiness and placement.

SUPPORTING THE PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGED
(49,000 served, $271 million in services)
Services include supportive housing for the mentally ill, counseling, residences for those with special needs and disabilities, early intervention, special education, and prevention and treatment services.

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In March 2020, as COVID-19 was closing New York down, Catholic Charities opened COVID pop-up pantries to respond to the striking and dismaying increase in food insecurity in hard-hit neighborhoods. As restaurants and office buildings shut down, jobs and wages disappeared overnight. Former wage-earners lost the ability to buy food for their families. Catholic Charities addressed this need more than 200 times through pop-up pantries and special delivery meals that distributed more than 750,000 meals throughout Manhattan, the Bronx, Staten Island, and the Lower Hudson Valley. When added to the increased demand at Catholic Charities’ continuing network of 40 ongoing food programs, pantries, and community kitchens, approximately 8.4 million meals have been provided during the past year to hungry New Yorkers.

8+ MILLION MEALS Provided
8+ MILLION nutritious meals provided for our neighbors through our network of pantries, community kitchens, and “pop-up” pantries

CASH ASSISTANCE
$5 MILLION distributed to 9,000 workers when they suddenly found themselves jobless but still had families to support

SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT
30,000 chemical dependency telecare sessions to serve 1,326 neighbors experiencing substance abuse

PREVENTING EVICTION
3,863 evictions prevented and households stabilized

400,000+ INDIVIDUALS SERVED in a given year
400,000 individuals served in any given year

3,000 youth engaged in summer camps or enrichment activities

TELE-HEALTH AND WELLNESS CALLS

140,000 calls to children, youth, and their families facing the stress of closed schools and other pandemic related social isolation

IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE

55,000 calls answered on three immigration hotlines and 3,500 legal consultations

TELE-HEALTH AND WELLNESS CALLS

140,000 calls to children, youth, and their families facing the stress of closed schools and other pandemic related social isolation

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

24,000 helpline calls answered and 3,400 new households assisted by caseworkers

NURTURING YOUTH

3,000 youth engaged in summer camps or enrichment activities

NDIVIDUALS

any given year
CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF NEW YORK  
Condensed Financial Statement  
Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 2020  
(Figures in thousands of dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVENUES</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardinal’s Appeal</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bequests</td>
<td>4,614</td>
<td>5,516</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appeals, Contributions and Events, Net</td>
<td>12,208</td>
<td>12,537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centennial Campaign contributions</td>
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<td>496</td>
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<td>Cardinal’s Committee for Charity, Net</td>
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<td>Foundations and Corporations</td>
<td>19,060</td>
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<td>Government Sources</td>
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<td>44,066</td>
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<td>Program Revenues and Income</td>
<td>3,886</td>
<td>4,193</td>
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<td>Other Supporting Services</td>
<td>2,611</td>
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<td>Investment Dividends and Income</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>747</td>
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<td>Realized Gain on sale of property</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realized/Unrealized Investment Gain (Loss)</td>
<td>6,485</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Revenues</strong></td>
<td>94,298</td>
<td>82,326</td>
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<tr>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community Outreach Services</td>
<td>19,287</td>
<td>20,788</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral Health (Beacon of Hope)</td>
<td>12,632</td>
<td>11,569</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration and Refugee Services</td>
<td>13,648</td>
<td>12,486</td>
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<td>Alianza Youth Services</td>
<td>6,940</td>
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<td>Catholic Youth Services</td>
<td>1,341</td>
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<td>COVID and Disaster Response Assistance</td>
<td>7,546</td>
<td>116</td>
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<td>Services for the Disabled</td>
<td>2,072</td>
<td>2,059</td>
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<td>Social and Community Development</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,286</td>
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<td>Agency Relations</td>
<td>11,208</td>
<td>10,024</td>
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<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>4,408</td>
<td>4,234</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>8,690</td>
<td>9,831</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>88,979</td>
<td>81,993</td>
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<tr>
<th>OPERATING RESULTS</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Operating Results</strong></td>
<td>5,319</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>EXTRAORDINARY ITEM (pension termination liability)</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Extraordinary Item</strong></td>
<td>(5,223)</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<th>INCREASE IN NET ASSETS</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Increase in Net Assets</strong></td>
<td>96</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
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Numbers reflect the combined audited financial statements of The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, Catholic Charities Community Service of the Archdiocese of New York, Housing Fund of the Archdiocese of New York, Inc. and Housing Development Institute, and the coordination of support to the Federation of Agencies as described elsewhere in this document.
THANK YOU
Frontline workers
Our staff and volunteers were crucial to helping us remain open and service our neighbors in need across New York. They didn’t tire in helping us unload boxes of food, serve families through weekly wellness calls, and much more. Thank you to Catholic Charities of NY’s essential workers.
The impact of remote learning on children has been well documented. For families in need of childcare and a safe space for virtual learning, we operated four Learning Labs. We also kept in touch with children and families through thousands of wellness calls. We organized summer day trips for New York City youth.
When COVID-19 forced the closedown of the Hudson Valley CYO sleep-away camp, Catholic Charities quickly converted it into a camp with day trips for New York City youth. Hundreds of youth took advantage of this wonderful setting.
Pivoting to TELECARE

Faced with restrictions against in-person services, our staff embarked upon a range of tele-health and wellness calls to provide a listening ear and needed support during a time of unprecedented loss and uncertainty.

Tele-Behavioral Health Sessions

Weekly Wellness Calls to Youth and Families

Virtual Presentations on English Classes

Immigration and Paralegal Services

Learning Labs for Students

Remote Counseling and Resource Assistance

Astor Services for Children & Families carried out 90,000 tele-health sessions to ensure the emotional wellbeing of thousands of children and their families. Our staff at the Alianza Dominicana Youth Services program made over 50,000 wellness calls during the first three months of the pandemic. These weekly wellness calls made contact with families 22,000 times.

Our caseworkers assisted families in crisis throughout the pandemic. We adjusted our telephone helpline to operate from home offices on weekdays from 8 am to 8 pm.

During the 2020 school year, Alianza provided in-person and remote programming for 2,350 youth as well as critical support for students. For families in need of childcare and a safe space for virtual learning, we also operated four Learning Labs.

To distribute critical information regarding healthcare, unemployment, stimulus checks, and changing immigration regulations, we conducted 150 virtual presentations reaching more than 13,500 people.
Thank you, Volunteers

Catholic Charities volunteers stepped up and helped us remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic when many others were staying home. Almost 3,000 volunteers donated their time at food pantries, immigration workshops, family and youth events, Census information tables, and more, which amounted to over 35,000 hours of service.

In 2020, we had to cancel our traditional St. Nicholas Shopping Day, but Catholic Charities staff, volunteers, and donors served even more families through a strong digital shopping effort.
Accustomed To Helping Others, They Now Find Themselves In Need

In pandemic’s grip, concerns about food insecurity are compounded for older Americans

Until March, Gabriel and Constancia Merrill had both worked to provide food to seniors, she preparing the meals and he delivering them.

But now, the couple has found themselves on the receiving end of food assistance after losing those jobs.

“We’ve never gone to a food bank before,” Mr. Merrill, 71, said. “Now, we’re to the point where we can’t do anything. We never thought we would be in this situation at all.”

Since their employer had to let them go in March because of curbed operations, the couple has survived off Social Security checks, and has yet to receive unemployment.

To make ends meet, the Merrills have been visiting Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington, a pantry working with Capital Area Food Bank, a member of the Feeding America network.

The Merrills are not alone. Before the coronavirus pandemic, more than 37 million Americans were considered food insecure by the government. A recent study from Feeding America projects that the number will rise significantly this year, as the coronavirus wreaks havoc on the most vulnerable populations’ livelihoods.

“Our demand has skyrocketed,” said Radha Muthiah, the president and chief executive of the Capital Area Food Bank, one of 200 in the network of Feeding America, a beneficiary agency of The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. “We’re now looking to serve just over 600,000 people, as opposed to the 400,000 that we were projecting before Covid.”

Some seniors, Ms. Muthiah said, found themselves facing struggles before the pandemic began, such as being on a fixed income, rising rents or being full-time caretakers to their grandchildren. Now, with many staying home as much as possible because of an increased risk of hospitalization from the virus, those around 60 and older are facing new hardships. Just venturing to the grocery store or a food bank could now be hazardous for them.

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In fact, Ms. Merrill, 62, recently tested positive for the coronavirus. She said she had been leaving the house only to get groceries and had experienced a mild case.

In order to mitigate this risk, food banks, like the Capital Area Food Bank, and groups like Catholic Charities Community Services have had to adjust their operations, some shifting to at-home delivery to ensure older people who either don’t want to or are unable to leave their homes continue to have enough food on their tables.

“For a lot of these seniors, this program is kind of their lifeline,” said Beatriz Diaz Taveras, executive director of Catholic Charities Community Services, which is part of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New York, another beneficiary agency of The Fund. “We are doing as much as we can, but the need is greater than our resources.”

Catholic Charities Community Services used $6,000 from The Fund for July’s monthly food pantry bag expenses. The group has long offered at-home delivery through its Homebound Program, and demand surged after the pandemic began.

Having served about 60 people on a monthly basis before the pandemic, the Homebound initiative now delivers food to around 300 people each month.

Among them is Manuel Rosario, who is 85 and goes by Manny. Mr. Rosario volunteered at a Catholic Charities food bank for 20 years before becoming a recipient. Now, he is living with his two daughters in Harlem, mostly staying home as a precaution and recovering from knee surgery.

“Thank God, I’m OK,” Mr. Rosario said. “I feel good.”

Though Mr. Rosario’s favorite dish, rice with beans and chicken, was cooked by his late wife, Francisca (or Paquita, as he fondly called her), he says he is well-fed and grateful. And although Catholic Charities performs daily wellness calls to recipients like Mr. Rosario, he said he still misses talking with the people he once helped as a volunteer himself.

“They were good people,” he said.

Leaders at the Capital Area Food Bank and Catholic Charities project that food insecurity is likely to increase as the year goes on.

Hilary Salmon, a representative of the food bank, said her group estimates food insecurity could rise 50 to 60 percent this year in its region, which boasts some of the wealthiest counties in the country.

“You think, ‘Oh my goodness, this shouldn’t be happening in the capital of the wealthiest country on earth,’” Ms. Muthiah said “There’s obviously a lot that we, as food banks, are stretching to do and to respond during this pandemic, but we can’t do it alone.”

— Republished with permission from The New York Times Company
When Schools Closed, These Remote Learners Needed Extra Help

As New York City went into lockdown, some families faced additional challenges in helping their children keep up.

Since Joy Williams’s daughter, Verona, was born blind and quadriplegic, Ms. Williams has dedicated all her time to raising her.

After Verona, 17, transitioned to remote learning in March, Ms. Williams took on even more of her care. “I’ve become a physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist and a teacher,” said Ms. Williams, 52.

In addition to abruptly losing the in-person support that Verona had received at the Lavelle School for the Blind in the Bronx, Ms. Williams faced challenges just getting her daughter online for school. The iPad her daughter received from the city’s Department of Education had one app and did not accommodate her learning disabilities.

“Our students can’t turn the computer on by themselves or launch the Google Meet by themselves,” said Rebecca Renshaw, the executive director of the Lavelle School. “They rely on their parents because of these significant disabilities.”

Administrators at the school, which is private but state-supported and serves 125 students, realized the iPads were a problem for some of its students, who have visual impairments along with other disabilities.

To help get students ready for the new school year, school officials bought seven specialized tablets with a $2,500 grant from Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New York, one of 10 organizations supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund.

The city’s Department of Education allows any child who attends a public school or a private school that receives special education services to get an iPad. Even before remote learning began, the city offered software and hardware to assist children with disabilities based on a student’s specific educational needs.

But in recent months, the Lavelle School wanted customizable tablets to better accommodate remote learning for stu-

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The new tablets, Ms. Renshaw said, can download several apps, providing more choices for math, for instance, and settings can be adjusted to help students with visual impairments.

“There’s no barriers,” Ms. Renshaw said, adding that, with help from grants, the school had distributed about 100 specialized tablets to its students.

Having several ways to access remote learning also eased problems for students who are low-income, like Verona, who receives $464 in Social Security disability benefits each month. At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, 20 percent of families whose children attended the Lavelle School had only a phone, or no device at all, to access online learning, Ms. Renshaw said.

“I would say the biggest difference between what we’re able to offer now is that they’re not restricted in their access,” she said.

Verona received her iPad last month, and Ms. Williams said it had eased her daughter’s full-time remote learning from their public housing apartment in the Bronx.

“The support and everything I get from the school helps a lot because, some parents, we just don’t know how to navigate the iPad,” Ms. Williams said. “We’re both learning as we go along.”

— Republished with permission from The New York Times Company
The Pandemic Brought Loss. Now They’re Behind on Rent

In March, Ms. Criollo, a 48-year-old widow who supports three children at home as well as family in Ecuador, lost both of her cleaning jobs as the city shuttered. One employer, she said, delayed sending her last five weeks of pay — $2,400 she did not see until April.

Also in March, her landlord sent her a new lease agreement, increasing her rent to $1,475.67 — up almost $22 a month.

Without work or any public assistance, she quickly depleted her savings.

“Exactly in March when the pandemic started, that’s basically when I started to get desperate,” Ms. Criollo said in Spanish.

She scavenged food pantries — leaving at 5 a.m. to retrieve a numbered ticket for groceries, standing in long lines and returning home late in the day, sometimes “with empty hands — without anything,” she recalled.

By June, she had fallen $1,600 behind in rent. She turned to Bigs & Littles NYC Mentoring, which has helped her family and is an agency of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, another organization benefiting from The Fund. The agency put $1,000 toward back rent and provided a $500 gift card, both from The Fund, for utilities and other household expenses.

Ms. Criollo has returned to work as a maid at a hotel on the Upper West Side, though the 40-hour week is less than the 60 hours she had clocked between both jobs.

In addition, the hotel is among those lodging some 9,000 homeless people to help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in shelters. Navigating the needs of those struggling most during the pandemic, she said, is challenging. She also receives fewer tips.

Ms. Criollo has fallen further behind on rent, owing $3,861.44, according to her billing statement.

Months of negotiations with her landlord over the rent increase ended unsuccessfully last month, with the company citing her arrears, she said. Representatives from the building operator did not respond to calls and emails. ...

New York’s eviction moratorium expires at the end of the year. And researchers warn that across the country, tens of millions of people may be at risk of eviction. ♦

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By EMILY PALMER/NEW YORK TIMES
October 18, 2020

Sara Naomi Lewkowicz for The New York Times
Ms. Criollo supports three children, ages 8 to 16, working as a maid.
Cancer Cost Him a Kidney. The Pandemic Delayed a Transplant.

New Yorkers with medical issues faced additional burdens in lockdown, balancing protecting their health and staying afloat.

Robert Sanchez has spent much of his life waiting for the other shoe to drop.

At age 19, he began serving 15 years in prison for drug possession, and afterward, he dedicated himself to helping others who had been in similar situations. Then eight years after his release, he was told he was in rapid kidney failure and had just two weeks to live.

Mr. Sanchez, 52, found himself once again in this familiar Ping-Pong in December. A few days before he was set to receive his second kidney transplant, he learned he had kidney cancer.

After the cancerous kidney was removed, he was ready to try again for the transplant when the coronavirus pandemic hit New York City. As the city came to a grinding halt, Mr. Sanchez's operation was postponed.

“I remember feeling, wow, this is just another thing I had to overcome like I've overcome so much in my life,” he said. “I was asking myself, when does it end? When do things get better?”

Money was already running short. Sometimes, he found himself walking the two miles to the dialysis center, fearing that taking public transportation would expose him to the virus.

Mr. Sanchez, who receives $900 a month in Social Security Disability Insurance, would pay the essential bills he could, provide for his two small dogs and try to save enough to take a ride share to his dialysis appointments three times a week. When that wasn’t possible, he’d ask a city bus driver to let him ride free as he walked home.

“I would get tired because of my disease, so every now and then I would stop to catch my breath and keeping moving,” Mr. Sanchez said last month from his home in the Bronx.

As he tried to balance all these needs, Mr. Sanchez was repeatedly missing meals.

The dialysis treatments of the previous months had left him feeling exhausted, and he had to quit his job at a nonprofit working with incarcerated men.

“I liked the job because it was an opportunity for me to reach young men who, for whatever reason, are stuck in this place where they need guidance,” Mr. Sanchez said. “There aren’t many people to help guide them.”

In August, Mr. Sanchez found support when he was introduced to Catholic Charities Community Services. The group is part of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New York, one of 10 organizations supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. Through The Fund, Mr. Sanchez received $250 for food delivery, $200 for transportation and $150 for cleaning services.

“When you grow up the way I grew up, you’re not used to asking for help,” Mr. Sanchez said. “The humbling part is learning how to do that now and to be open to it. And to say, you know, I could use a hand, and admit to somebody, I’m not doing well.”

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Through the Eyes of a Volunteer/Donor

David Wezdenko, volunteer

By Jessica O’Connor

David Wezdenko is a Catholic Charities donor and active volunteer in both New York and Florida. Always passionate about supporting the underserved, once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, David was inspired by the heroic response he was seeing among first responders, charitable organizations, and the Church; he too wanted to do more. Drawn to Catholic Charities by his strong Catholic faith — “what gets me through life” — and his affinity with its mission, he decided to seek out volunteer opportunities with the organization.

Just before Thanksgiving, David volunteered at Catholic Charities’ Annual Turkey Distribution at the Kennedy Center in Harlem. “I was the one guiding people into the lines,” he noted. Getting involved personally gave David a new appreciation of both Catholic Charities and the clients it serves. David was struck by the diversity of the people lining up to receive food assistance. “What this confirmed,” he reflected, “is that poverty, maybe compounded with COVID, is agnostic to demographics.” He was also surprised by “the level of gratefulness and thankfulness that these people expressed in such a heartfelt way,” commenting, “You give them one bag of food, and it’s like you could have given them a bag of money!” During his volunteer experience, David entered into Catholic Charities’ mission to uphold the dignity of each person as made in the image of God, and he was heartened to see the genuineness of that mission in action. “The compassion and the approach to dignity that everyone from Catholic Charities demonstrated in the food line,” he beamed, “You have to see it to really appreciate the front-line workers at Catholic Charities.”

A couple of months later, David found another opportunity to get involved with Catholic Charities’ St. Nicholas project and its Adopt-A-Family program. He made a monetary contribution to help purchase Christmas gifts for a family in need but did not stop there. Seeing a volunteer opportunity to help pack, organize, and sort the gifts, he signed up to help and “was completely blown away” by the size and scale of the program, with rooms upon rooms filled with packages that people had contributed. Staff informed him that the level of giving had multiplied in light of the pandemic. David was again impressed by the Catholic Charities team he worked alongside in “Santa’s workshop” at the Cardinal Spellman Center in the East Village. In his words, “Their attitudes and their commitment just made you realize that this wasn’t a job for them; this was something they were really just passionate about, which, as a donor on one side, just made me feel much stronger about my commitment to a program like Adopt-A-Family.”

As a word of advice to fellow and potential donors, David offers, “Contributions are absolutely necessary, but if you have the time and a little bit of interest, do something like this, because it just turns that donation into an even much more rewarding experience.” Personally, he is eager to continue and even deepen his involvement in 2021. “What I find with Catholic Charities is, it’s all about the client. For a large organization, it’s not easy to maintain that culture, that focus and that drive,” he said, reflecting back on why he wishes to continue supporting the organization. “It’s a job, yeah, but it’s a passion, and you can tell. It may have something to do with the fact that maybe it is a Catholic-based organization, but... they don’t care whether you’re Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, etc., or you don’t believe in God, it’s all about ‘How can I help you?’”

Photo courtesy of Catholic Charities of New York

David Wezdenko is a Catholic Charities donor and active volunteer in both New York and Florida.
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