

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Chronicle

Altoona Office: Blair, Bedford & Huntingdon Counties

• Bellefonte Office: Centre & Clinton Counties

• Johnstown Office: Cambria & Somerset Counties

VOLUME ONE • NUMBER FIVE

SPRING 2016

TO LOVE AND SERVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES

In 75th Anniversary Year, Catholic Charities Continues to Fight Poverty, Provide Help and Hope in Eight-County Area

Responding to Daily Struggles in Local Communities: Affordable Housing Crisis, Unemployment, Food Insecurity

Seventy-five years ago, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown opened its doors to provide help and hope to the most vulnerable populations in our local communities. While the scope of services has evolved, the need remains.

A staggering number of residents in our region face poverty, unemployment, a lack of affordable housing, and food insecurity. Many of these individuals and families are just above the requirements for government assistance programs.

“On more than one occasion I have talked with people who are one paycheck or social security check away from being on the street with nowhere to go,” said The Most Reverend Mark Bartchak, Bishop of the Diocese of



More than 1 in 5 children in our service area live with food insecurity, meaning they have limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate food.

Altoona-Johnstown. “Financial support of Catholic Charities can help people from going over that edge. It’s not a place where anyone would want to be.”

Within our eight-county service area, which includes Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Clinton, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Somerset:

- There is a major crisis in affordable housing. Nearly half of all renters pay more than 30% of their income toward housing. The crisis is most acute in Centre County, where the average wage required to rent a two-bedroom apartment is \$19/hour.
- More than 1 in 5 children face food insecurity in 7 of the 8 counties, with Bedford County showing the highest rate of food insecurity for children at 23%.
- About 1 in 5 children live in poverty in all eight counties.
- Nearly a quarter of the 65+ population in Bedford and Somerset Counties is enrolled in PACE, the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly.
- Unemployment rates average 7.1% in Huntingdon, Somerset, and Bedford Counties, well above the current national average of 5%.

“Our staff witnesses these astounding statistics daily in the individuals and families who seek our help,” said Catholic Charities Executive Director Jean Johnstone. “Many life changes can cause financial crisis—job loss,

Continued on page 4

In this issue...

Catholic Charities at work in your community

Give with an Open Heart

Bellefonte Case Manager says that the act of giving in itself is what matters most.



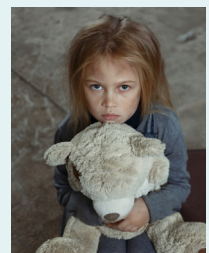
Answering Jesus' Call in Jubilee of Mercy

Catholic Charities observes various aspects of powerful message in Matthew 25.



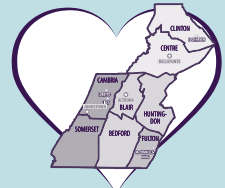
Student Homelessness On the Rise in Our Region

Astounding increase of 18% in just two years.



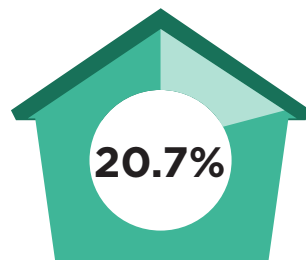
Celebrating 75 Years and Local Individuals Who are Devoted to Serving Others

Annual recognition dinner details announced.

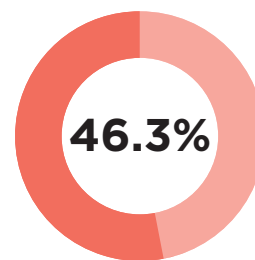


1 in 5

Children are food insecure



Households that are low income



Renters paying more than 30% of income toward housing

*Donor Profile***Truly Believing In Our Mission****Kevin Slonka and Doug Stoehr Help Launch Guild of Guardians to Extend More Support to More Neighbors in Need throughout the Year**

For many of our loyal donors, supporting Catholic Charities extends well beyond a single annual donation. Many stretch their giving throughout the year, to maximize their impact on the neighbors they serve.

That is especially true for Kevin Slonka of Westmont and Doug Stoehr of Duncansville, who are helping to launch Catholic Charities' Guild of Guardians, an annual giving program that enables supporters to pledge \$1,000 annually to help the organization budget to reach more people with more needs throughout the year. While \$1,000 may seem like a hefty amount, it breaks down to just \$2.74 a day—less than a fancy cup of coffee.

"I know that donated funds are going to people who truly have a crisis at that moment. I like the idea that my money will directly impact a person of family in need within a few days of giving."

- Doug Stoehr

"Many people who choose to make charitable donations usually do so around the holidays. That is wonderful, but many people need assistance throughout the year," said Slonka. "Contributing at the level required for membership in the Guild of Guardians ensures that Catholic Charities can provide assistance to our neighbors throughout the year. Any charitable organization needs a solid base of donors who truly believes in its mission."

Stoehr, who grew up in a family with a modest income, knows that it could only take a small financial shortfall to take a family or individual from financial stability to financial crisis.

"I've been blessed in my life and keep that at the forefront of my mind," he said. "If someone is down and out and unable to pay his bills, we need to help him."

While Slonka and Stoehr could have chosen any local charity to support, they chose Catholic Charities because they firmly believe in its mission.

"Each act of help is accompanied by counseling to ensure that those seeking help understand what they need to do in order to keep themselves out of this situation in the future," said Slonka. "It's not just giving out money; Catholic Charities educates everyone who walks through the door so they can become self-sufficient in the future."

For Stoehr, he gets satisfaction in knowing that his donation is going directly to people who need it.

"I know that donated funds are going to people who truly have a crisis at that moment," he said. "I like the idea that my money will directly impact a person of family in need within a few days of giving."

While both Stoehr and Slonka are actively involved in their churches (Stoehr at St. Michael's in Hollidaysburg, and Slonka at St. John Gualbert Cathedral in Johnstown), they stress that you don't have to be Catholic to help make a difference in the lives of our neighbors in need.

"You don't have to be Catholic to support Catholic Charities," said Slonka. "You simply have to care."

About Guild of Guardians

**\$2.74 a day
can make a major impact**

When you join Catholic Charities' Guild of Guardians by donating \$1,000 a year—which breaks down to just \$2.74 a day—you can help countless neighbors in need throughout the year.

Your gift will directly impact neighbors in your community.

Gifts can be made on a monthly, quarterly, bi-annual, or annual basis.

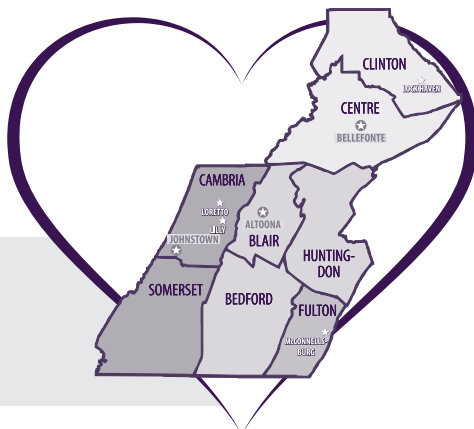
Guild of Guardians gifts are unrestricted and support the most critical needs of those served by Catholic Charities.

Annual Recognition Dinner & 75th Anniversary

Wednesday, June 1, 2016
5 to 8 p.m. | The Altoona Grand Hotel

Join Catholic Charities as we mark a milestone year (75 years of serving neighbors in need) and recognize those in our community who are devoted to helping and serving others. We will recognize those individuals—selected from nominations received across the eight counties of the Diocese—with the Monsignor William M. Griffin Humanitarian Award and the Matthew 25 Youth Humanitarian Award.

Find full details, including our exclusive dinner menu presented by Executive Chef Josh Wertz, at www.catholiccharitiesaj.org.

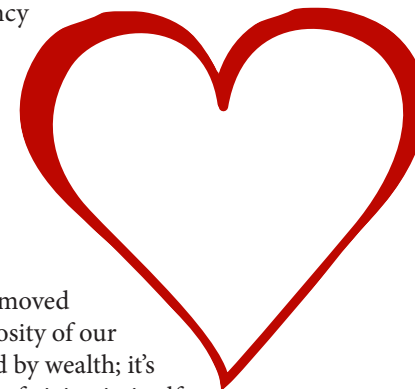
*Staff Feature***Charity is Valued by an Open Heart**

"There are a Lot of People Who Need Help, and Every Gift Makes a Difference"

We'd like to recognize outgoing Emergency Financial Assistance Case Manager at Catholic Charities' Bellefonte office, Moses Mbeshha. This summer, Mbeshha will be expanding his passion for human services as he departs to develop his own nonprofit, the Conscious Connect, based on social reform to restore and advance the essences of black communities and culture.

In his time at Catholic Charities, Mbeshha was moved by the clients he was able to help, thanks to generosity of our community. According to him, charity isn't valued by wealth; it's valued by an open heart. After all, he says, the act of giving in itself is what matters most.

"All small gifts add up and completely change someone's situation and his or her life," he said. "Whether you donate \$5 or \$10 or \$1,000, it helps tremendously. There are a lot of people who need help, and every gift makes a difference."



Answer Jesus' Call During this Jubilee of Mercy

Catholic Charities Enables Local Catholics to Put Their Faith Into Action Under Matthew 25

In observance of this year's Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy by Pope Francis, the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown has asked all local Catholics to focus on the message of Jesus in Matthew 25:35-40, which ends "*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did it for me.*"

This Lent, the Diocese encouraged us to observe various aspects of this powerful message. You can fulfill your observance throughout the entire year of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy by supporting Catholic Charities. Your donation will help to:

- Feed the Hungry/Give Drink to the Thirsty
- Shelter the Homeless/Welcome the Stranger
- Clothe the Naked
- Care for the Sick



When you make a gift to Catholic Charities, you directly influence an individual or family in your county that needs your help. Catholic Charities helps to provide emergency financial assistance and other vital resources to your neighbors in need, enabling them to:

- Purchase life-saving medications or medical equipment.
- Pay utility bills, including excessively high heating bills from this bitterly cold winter.
- Avoid eviction when a financial downfall causes them to fall behind on rent.
- Seek emergency shelter following eviction, a disaster, or a domestic dispute.
- Receive professional counseling to overcome major personal, family, or career obstacles.
- Receive critical pregnancy support, promoting the physical and mental well-being of a mother and her child during the pre- and postnatal periods.

Thank you for your generosity in helping your neighbors in need this Lent and throughout the year.

From the Executive Director

Responding to the Community's Greatest Needs for 75 Years, Thanks to Donors Like You



In its 75 year history, Catholic Charities has provided help and hope to countless individuals and families residing within the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese. We've offered a wide range of services through the years—from operating orphanages in the '50s, to supporting unwed mothers in the '70s, to sheltering the homeless and providing emergency financial assistance to thousands of local households today.

While our slate of services has evolved over the years, one thing remains the same: we're able to respond to the greatest needs within our community, thanks to support from generous donors like you.

Catholic Charities relies on voluntary donations from individuals, families, businesses, and churches throughout all eight counties, to provide emergency financial assistance and other critical resources. I want to assure you that 100% of donations made to Catholic Charities come directly to our office to help neighbors in need. Recent tragic headlines surrounding the Diocese make our fundraising mission more critical than ever. We are counting on ongoing support to continue helping local families, seniors, and individuals facing financial crisis—regardless of their faith or religion.

Often, there are misconceptions about our funding and our services because our name is Catholic Charities. We serve all people, and we receive support from all people. Financial crisis can affect anyone, and it has repercussions throughout all communities.

Our goal in our 75th year is to bring more people into our efforts to spread help and hope, and to let those who need us know they are not alone.

You can help us with this objective by spreading the word of our shared mission to your friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers—whether they're Catholic or not—to increase our level of support in the community and to help even more local individuals and families in need in the next 75 years.

In Sincere Gratitude,

Jean D. Johnstone, Executive Director

The official registration and financial information of Catholic Charities may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

5 Reasons Catholic Charities Needs You

1. **Neighbors helping neighbors:** Your gift stays in your county, impacting an individual or family, and your local community.
2. **A hand-up:** We help clients stabilize their finances so they are less likely to need emergency financial help in the future.
3. **Transitional support:** 86% of our clients need a one-time gift to manage temporary financial instability caused by a major life event.
4. **Serving all people:** Catholic Charities helps all people regardless of their faith.
5. **Growing need:** Widening gaps in existing social service programs leave many of our area's seniors and families facing hunger and homelessness, choosing between paying for medicine or utility bills, childcare, or food.

Right now, Catholic Charities can only fulfill 25% of requests for assistance. You can help us help more of our neighbors in need.

Yes! I want to help my neighbors in need.

☐ I'd like to join Guild of Guardians.

☐ One-time payment of \$1,000

☐ Four payments of \$250

☐ Please invoice me for installment payments.

☐ Two payments of \$500

☐ Monthly payments of \$83.33

☐ I'd like to make an annual contribution of:

☐ \$500

☐ Please earmark \$_____ of my gift to the Martha & Mary House.

☐ \$250

☐ \$100

☐ \$50

☐ \$35

☐ Other \$ _____

Make your check payable to "Catholic Charities" or donate online at
www.catholiccharitiesaj.org.

Name: _____
Street: _____
City, State, Zip: _____

☐ Please add me to upcoming email communications:
Email: _____

**Catholic Charities of the
Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown**
1300 12th Avenue
P.O. Box 1349
Altoona, PA 16603



Helping Neighbors Weatherize Their Homes through Education

In November, the Johnstown Catholic Charities office offered four classes on weatherization. In partnership with Jim Buday of the Alternative Community Resource Program (ACRP) and Ron Springer of the Department of Emergency Management, Catholic Charities provided a wealth of information on winter weatherization. Topics covered included:

- How to install basic items to cut down on heating bills (weather stripping, insulation, outlet covers, window plastic)
- Thermostat settings to help conserve oil
- Information on community financial resources (PCAP, LIHEAP)
- Basic safety information on how to keep your home safe in the winter

Attendees received free supplies to help winterize their homes.

Student Homelessness On the Rise in Our Region

Homeless Students in Pennsylvania Public Schools Increased by 18% from 2012 to 2014

Homelessness doesn't just impact adults. In fact, a growing number of students in our region have no place to call home.

According to Maureen Bourke, the Region 6 site coordinator for student homelessness through the PA Department of Education, in the 11-county region she serves (Armstrong, Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Indiana, Jefferson, and Potter counties), the homeless student population has steadily increased. Catholic Charities serves households in four of these counties: Blair, Cambria, Centre, and Clinton.

A growing number of students in our region have no place to call home.

"It varies from year to year as far as districts, but there has been a steady increase at least for the past four to five years that we've been able to solidify the data and look at the actual numbers," Bourke said in an interview with *The Courier Express*.

The article states that the number of homeless students attending public school in Pennsylvania increased by 18 percent between the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years — an increase more than double the national average of 8 percent, according to statistics reported by the U.S. Department of Education.



In 75th Anniversary Year... *Continued from page 1*

underemployment, a sudden illness, or the need to care for a sick family member. Within weeks, families dealing with a crisis can face homelessness, hunger, loss of utilities, and the inability to afford basic necessities."

According to Johnstone, many clients simply need assistance to bridge a gap—for example, to stay in their home, maintain water or electric service, or afford a uniform or specific shoes in order to accept or keep a job.

"The average request for assistance is around \$300," she

says. "This relatively modest amount is enough to be life changing. It's profound, especially when you consider the clients we serve are your neighbors, your friends from church, the cashier from your local grocery store, or the parents and grandparents you meet from your children's school."

Find a full county-by-county breakdown of the biggest struggles facing our communities on below or at www.catholiccharitiesaj.org.

A County-by-County Snapshot of Daily Struggles Facing Area Residents

The Biggest Issues Facing Each County Include:

Bedford County

23% of children are food insecure. (Highest rate in our service area)

Blair County

17% of residents are enrolled in SNAP (food stamp) benefits. (Highest enrollment rate in our service area, tied with Centre County)

Cambria County

Johnstown is considered the poorest city in Pennsylvania, according to an article published in 24/7 Wall Street. The city earned this designation due to low median incomes (\$25,542 vs. \$52,548), high poverty rates (26.8%), and low educational attainment of bachelor's degrees (11.2% vs. 27.5%).

Centre County

\$19 is the average hourly wage needed to rent a two-bedroom apartment, where the average rent is \$982.

Clinton County

48% of all renters pay more than 30% of their incomes toward housing.

Huntingdon County

7.7% unemployment rate. (Among the most severe in our service area)

Somerset County

23.5% of all residents over age 65 are enrolled in PACE.

**Represents a snapshot of top issues facing each county. Nearly all counties in our service area face similar struggles. Find full details at www.catholiccharitiesaj.org.*

Need Help?
Call or visit a Catholic Charities location near you.

Main Office Locations



Altoona Office:

Blair, Bedford & Huntingdon Counties
1300 Twelfth Avenue
Altoona, PA 16601
Phone: (814) 944-9388

Johnstown Office:

Cambria & Somerset Counties
321 Main Street, Suite 5G
Johnstown, PA 15901
Phone: (814) 535-6538

Bellefonte Office:

Centre and Clinton Counties
213 East Bishop Street
Bellefonte, PA 16823
Phone: (814) 353-0502

Martha & Mary House:

899 Bedford Street
Johnstown, PA 15902
Phone: (814) 254-4413