



Perla Rodriguez (right) and her twins, Sofia and Mia, smile after selecting their Easter baskets with youth volunteer, Daniela Mendez (left).

Easter Joy at Ventura Community Center

Perla Rodriguez is an unemployed single-mother who has full-time custody of her three-year-old twin girls. She has been a client of the Ventura Community Service Center for four and a half years.

Perla and the girls frequent the pantry for supplemental food assistance, diapers, and other basic needs items. Additionally, they participate in the Community Center's holiday programs, most recently, receiving Easter baskets for the twins in partnership with the "Loaves and Fishes Ministry" at St. Jude's Parish in Westlake Village.

Perla shares, "I am very grateful for Catholic Charities, because when I have been most in need, the agency has helped me especially in providing for my daughters. Client Resource Coordinator, Veronica Santiago, has always offered words of support and encouragement to face my situation with strength when times get difficult." ❖

St. Margaret's Center Continues Mobile Shower Program

When unexpected LA County budget cuts eliminated funding for St. Margaret's Center's longstanding mobile shower program, effective June 30, 2025, the Center faced an urgent challenge: raise \$50,000 in a short period of time or risk pausing one of the most essential services we offer to our unhoused neighbors.

Thanks to the generosity of our incredible community, we met that goal. With gifts from nearly 70 donors, led by a significant contribution from The Drollinger Family Charitable Foundation, we secured enough funding to keep the program running for another year.

For people like "Thomas," a St. Margaret's Center shower program participant, these showers offer far more than health, hygiene and connection to long-term solutions. They restore dignity. "Thomas" shared: "The other day I was walking down the street and saw a mother with her children. When they spotted me, the mother turned around. I feel disgusting. I can't even use the restroom at a fast-food place because



"Thomas" is grateful for St. Margaret's Center's mobile shower program.

I'm so dirty. I have a doctor's appointment today. I just want people to feel comfortable sitting next to me. This is the only place I have to take a shower. It helps me feel human again."

Every shower we provide is a reminder that everyone deserves to feel clean, respected, and human. Over the past year, St. Margaret's Center has offered this dignity to 1,289 unhoused individuals through our mobile shower program.

Thank you to everyone who stepped up so quickly and so generously. Your compassion is making a real and lasting impact. ❖

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Message from the Executive Director, Rev. Monsignor Gregory A. Cox

On June 6, Los Angeles experienced unrest in its streets. This occurred when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents served warrants to a number of locations to deport those undocumented. On June 7, ICE and protestors clashed and the National Guard had to deploy 2,000 troops to protect the Federal Buildings.

Immigration has always been a critical component to the growth and strength of the United States. Approximately 86 million people have legally immigrated to the U.S. between 1783 and 2019. The immigration laws have drastically changed over the decades, the politics during these changes have been contentious, and past policies impact the current political debate. Piecemeal legislation has left the United States with an archaic immigration system.

In 2023, 1.17 million people received their green cards. They were the people who became lawful permanent residents (LPR) of the United States. Green cards grant immigrants the right to live and work permanently in the US with a path toward citizenship. This number includes individuals who obtained green cards through family sponsorship, employment, refugee or asylum status, and other avenues.

Until we have comprehensive immigration reform, we will continue to have the problems that we are experiencing today. The foundation for immigration reform should include the principles of respecting the natural rights of people who emigrate in search of a better way of life and for nations to oversee and protect their borders.

A pathway for citizenship needs to be instituted for those deserving individuals, like the Dreamers, asylum seekers and protective status for Refugees. Proper guidelines need to be in place to provide interior enforcement of immigration laws. Explore a number of ways to expand the number of visas available to the economic times. New programs should assist immigrants with their adjustment to their new life in the United States.

There are additional issues that should be addressed by comprehensive immigration reform. Congress needs courageous leaders who can collaborate with others of opposing views. The goal of comprehensive immigration reform is to make the United States a better country and to create a process that is moral and dignified to those seeking citizenship. ❖

Success Story at Santa Barbara Community Services Center

In a period where we had many clients waiting in shelters for housing, Mark Zimmer came to us from the Rescue Mission, in need of a valid ID that he would need to facilitate the process of securing housing. Mark's perseverance landed him at El Carrillo, a complex geared to rehousing those impacted by homelessness. While living there from 2017-2021, Mark would see us as part of a group that came by van from El Carrillo to visit our food pantry.

In 2021, Mark was able to leave El Carrillo for an apartment in a small complex on Santa Barbara's east side. With the costs involved with moving and deposits, Catholic Charities helped Mark with rental assistance and, later, when a leak produced a water bill three times the average bill, we were able to help with that water bill.

Mark now appreciates things most of us would take for granted - the ability to have pet fish, having plants, making meals and having stable healthcare, among them. His experience of getting help, not just at Catholic Charities but at different places that supported him, renewed his sense of community and even humanity.

He now goes to bat for others, becoming a member of the Santa Barbara Tenants Union. He attends city council meetings to make sure that vulnerable voices are heard. A true success story, but one that is not finished, as Mark joyfully embraces the challenges that, like life, keep coming. ❖



Mark volunteered to serve at Holiday Feasts at the Rescue Mission.

Esperanza Provides Legal Support to Housing Insecure Immigrants

In early 2025, Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project was awarded a one-year grant from the L.A. County's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Center for Nonprofit Management to lead a coalition to provide legal services to housing insecure immigrants. Services include legal consultations, Know Your Rights (KYR) information, and case management services.

Services are provided through a mobile clinic, which allows the team to deliver outreach in areas such as Skid Row in downtown L.A. and at community fairs. The mobile clinic team is also furnishing Immigration 101 trainings to shelter providers and to the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority (LAHSA) to ensure that shelter staff are properly equipped to support the immigrant community. Since the mobile clinic started earlier this year, Esperanza has given nearly 100 legal consultations to housing insecure immigrants.

Esperanza also provides KYR presentations and legal consultations at homeless shelters and hosts weekly walk-in clinics to provide legal consultations and pro se clinics to assist immigrants' complete applications for asylum and work permits. These clinics are in partnership with various private firms.

For more information on the Mobile Clinic program or any of Esperanza's legal services please contact Kimberley Plotnik, Program Director at kplotnik@esperanza-la.org. ❖



Claudia Leon, Senior Community Education Manager, is at an outreach event to provide resources to unhoused immigrants in the Los Angeles area.

AYE Celebrates 60 Years of Service

On May 8, 2025, Archdiocesan Youth Employment Services (AYE) held its 60th Anniversary Benefit Dinner at the Taglyan Complex in Hollywood, celebrating six decades of empowering youth across Los Angeles. Themed "Building Bridges to Prepare America's Future Leaders," the event brought together over 200 guests, including civic leaders, workforce partners, alumni, and community supporters.

AYE Director, Manny Cerda, opened the evening by reflecting on the organization's legacy and its continued mission to provide equitable access to employment, education, and leadership development for underserved youth. Under his leadership, AYE has strengthened its vision while remaining deeply rooted in the communities it serves.

Former U.S. Representative Tony Cárdenas delivered a keynote message, highlighting the importance of investing in young people. Honorees included Prestige Career College and Sr. Mary Groth, LHC, both recognized for their longstanding commitment to youth development. Although Councilmember Heather Hutt was unable to attend, her office shared remarks of support.

The evening celebrated AYE's multigenerational impact and raised essential funds to sustain its programming. As AYE looks ahead, it remains committed to building brighter futures and preparing the next generation of leaders in Los Angeles. ❖



Manny Cerda, AYE Director, addresses the guests at the program's 60th Anniversary Dinner.

San Gabriel Region Assists Eaton Wildfire Victims

The Eaton Wildfire began on January 7, 2025, and those affected received immediate assistance through the first phase responders, such as the Red Cross and FEMA.

Catholic Charities' San Gabriel Region has become a second phase responder, providing short term support to victims of the Wildfire in the Altadena and Pasadena area since February 2025. We carry out weekly events at Sacred Heart Parish in Altadena and, to date, have served 380 households with gift cards ranging from \$50 to \$200 and also with basic need items, such as toiletries and hygiene kits. We partnered with Lestonnac Free Clinic from Orange County to provide additional support to 622 households in the form of \$800 gift cards.

Currently, we are launching a program called Disaster Aid for Host Families, which will provide host families with a monthly stipend to host wildfire victims for up to six months. Through a partnership with Catholic Charities USA, we secured funding to establish long-term assistance by coordinating the formation of community-based support groups. Our goal is to empower the Altadena community to support each other in their effort of rebuilding and ensuring long-term stability. ❖



Xochitl Zendejas, San Gabriel Regional Director, on the right, and Nicole Ybarra, San Gabriel Region Associate Program Director, on the left, are at Sacred Heart Catholic Parish in Altadena for weekly distributions.

GSS Expansion Pays Off for Young Scholar

Less than one year ago, Good Shepherd Shelter expanded its program to include middle school age children. The change was made to make the GSS program accessible to more families. While GSS only has an elementary school, there is a middle school nearby which made the expansion very feasible. The expansion became known as the GSS Youth Program. When “Jeremy” and his family moved into GSS, he was the very first member of the Youth Program and welcomed subsequent peers into the group.

Jeremy never missed any of his required activities, which included individual therapy, a social-emotional learning group, and an art therapy group. He consistently attended community events at GSS and was invited to participate in merit-based activities at his school. Jeremy, his mother, and his younger



Jeremy was proud to share all of his accomplishments with his family at graduation.

brother had all suffered considerable trauma, but did not let that stand in the way of taking advantage of the time the program allowed them to heal and grow stronger.

Jeremy was a mentor to his younger brother and the other children in our elementary school. He offered to help them with their homework and played with them patiently and attentively. When he and his family successfully completed the GSS program, Jeremy promised to return one day as a volunteer to continue mentoring children. In June 2025, Jeremy fulfilled one of his dreams by receiving high honors upon completion of the sixth grade and being named a leader of tomorrow. GSS is very proud of Jeremy for remaining true to himself, even amid difficulties. ❖



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Children participate in the Summer Camp programs, which foster growth, learning, and fun while school is out.



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