



Moorpark Pantry Plus and Jeffrey Have Long Friendship

In 2010, Moorpark resident Jeffrey Fisher was terribly injured in a workplace accident. More than 10 surgeries later, he still lives with debilitating spinal pain that keeps him from returning to work.

Soon after his accident and initial surgery, Jeffrey came to the Moorpark Pantry Plus for assistance. Ever since, he's been a client and special friend, receiving help from a number of the center's aid programs, including the pantry, the utility bill assistance program and, most recently, the rental assistance program to prevent homelessness, when unexpected car repair bills left him unable to pay his rent.

Jeffrey has taken up photography, doing photo-shoots as much as possible, though the COVID-19 shutdown has made this difficult. He wants to make sure the people at the Moorpark Pantry Plus know they helped a good man. "The good people at Catholic Charities didn't have to help me, but they did, and I am so grateful." ❖

Good Shepherd Shelter Family Moves Forward to a New Home

Good Shepherd Shelter is a Catholic Charities of Los Angeles residential program for mothers and children fleeing domestic violence. All the services are designed to help the families heal from the trauma they have experienced so that they may move forward and break the cycle of violence.

One of the shelter families recently did just that. Upon arriving at the shelter, mother and son had limited financial resources and very few belongings and also were carrying the heavy burden of pain and trauma. Working closely with the Family Services' team, mother set goals to improve her credit and address tax issues due to the financial abuse she endured from her husband.

Mom was also committed to addressing their emotional needs through the shelter's therapeutic services. Her son was significantly behind academically, which contributed to low self-esteem and behavior problems. Over time, he became interested in learning and the shelter's private school, staffed with trauma-informed teachers, proved beneficial as he learned effective ways to safely practice emotional expression.

With the help of the Sisters on staff,



Mother and son step toward their fresh start in a violence free life.

mother also received spiritual support, which provided her with additional coping skills that aided her in managing anxiety. As a result, she also strengthened her relationship with her son.

Deana Payne, Program Director, reports that the mother and son are grateful to Good Shepherd Shelter for giving them the much-needed support to overcome their trauma and move forward to a violence free life. Mom attributes her experiences in the shelter's programs as the catalyst that changed the trajectory of their lives. ❖

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

Two families went camping on a lake in California. They had a wonderful time, swimming, boating, water skiing, fishing, eating heartily, enjoying the great outdoors. Sunday came. It was too far to attend church. So, the seven children in the group decided to have a service of their own. They sang a few hymns. They read from a pocket Bible and, of course, they passed the plate, a pie plate.

What to do with the few dollars they collected? The children decided to give the collection to an organization that sends food packages to the hungry around the world. Those children had the spirit of giving to others.

During the last nine months, Californians have not only had to deal with COVID-19 but also with wildfires. We have endured great physical and emotional losses. Catholic Charities has increased our outreach to those who are suffering during these unusual times. We have provided food, shelter and utility services to approximately 142,000 people.

Older Adult Services and Intervention System (OASIS) is a Catholic Charities' program that reaches out to older adults. OASIS services are based on the belief that seniors live healthier and more productive lives when they are as independent as possible and safe in their homes. The program provides in-home services, case monitoring, information and referral, and friendly visiting. During the COVID-19 crisis, many of our elderly clients would have little human contact if it wasn't for the staff and volunteers of OASIS.

Like the children in the opening story, we need to look for creative ways, as a community, to meet the physical and emotional needs of others who are barely surviving. The best self-help is found in helping others. When all of this is behind us, may we be comforted, by the fact that we "had the spirit of giving to others." ❀

McGill House Helps Mom Rebuild Family

Josselyn was 17 when, her first son, Jayden, was born. Shortly after, she became addicted to drugs and lost custody of Jayden. "Unable to hold down any job and ashamed to be around my family, I became homeless."

Josselyn had another pregnancy, this time, twin girls. Her mother was granted custody. Josselyn continued to use drugs and was arrested, only to find out she was pregnant, once again. "I pleaded with the judge to send me to rehab. Near the end of my stay in sober living, a judge granted me reunification with my daughters."

Josselyn called 211 for help and was referred to Catholic Charities' McGill Street House. "It was my haven. I was able to have a home to go to every night, to co-exist with my daughters during our overnight visits, prepare meals, and sit down as a family for dinner. I felt a sense of normalcy."

It's been seven months since Josselyn left McGill Street House. With her own apartment and a new job, she maintains custody of her two-year-old son and has full reunification with her daughters. Josselyn hopes for more frequent visitations with her first son, Jayden. "I wake up every day and thank God for my blessings and a second chance to live a good life. Thank you, Catholic Charities San Gabriel Region, for giving my family and me time to heal." ❀



Josselyn and her four children are reunited.

Catholic Charities provides Family-Based Immigration Support

Roberto and Gabriela Ordonez-Marquez have lived and worked in Los Angeles since arriving to the U.S. in 1994. They had a church wedding in 1996 but did not apply for a marriage license at that time as they were undocumented and fearful of repercussions. Robert and Gabriela hoped for a chance to become legal permanent residents one day but did not know how to make this dream a reality.

Roberto learned about immigration assistance provided to the undocumented through Catholic Charities and, in 2019, made an appointment with an Immigration counselor. After a careful case review, Roberto was advised that a legal marriage would strengthen his application for lawful permanent residency. The couple followed this advice and, with the marriage license in place, Roberto's application was processed.

Gabriela was assisted through a Visa petition filed by her daughter, also named Gabriela, who is a U.S. citizen. Now Roberto and Gabriela are on a path to becoming U.S. citizens in a few years, a dream come true for this couple.

For more information about the work of Catholic Charities Immigration Services, please visit <https://catholiccharitiesla.org/irr-immigration-and-refugee-services/>. ❀



Mr. and Mrs. Ordonez-Marquez and Gabriela at her 2017 college graduation.

Santa Maria Center Doubles Number of Clients

Our Community Services Center in Santa Maria faced a major challenge as urgent maintenance issues surfaced, requiring the closure of the thrift store and restriction of access to the food pantry and client service offices. This center serves a vast territory, from the northern-most towns of the county to Santa Maria, the county's largest city, and south to the wine country of Los Alamos. In remote locations, such as Guadalupe and New Cuyama, live some of the poorest populations.

Happily, the clean-up problem became a unique opportunity to improve accountability and transparency, increase efficiency, improve quality and double the number of persons served.

As the coronavirus crisis hit, new needs arose in the at-risk community of our low-income clients. In the first week, more than 70,000 pounds of food were moved the old-fashioned way: one staff member operating one small blue hand truck.

As the number of clients increased, volunteers arrived to assist in the mission to serve the most vulnerable. We are especially grateful to the Knights of Columbus and the Franciscan Brothers of San Lorenzo Seminary for their dedicated service. Catholic Charities is establishing a strong, permanent presence to support those families in need in the growing agricultural and business area of Santa Maria and surrounding communities. ❀



Seminarians from San Lorenzo Capuchin Novitiate sanitize equipment and package groceries.

Guadalupe Center Youth Enjoy Summer Camp and Tutoring

San Fernando Valley children, who have been missing "live and in-person" learning and mentoring with teachers and coaches because of COVID-19, got a real boost of enthusiasm this summer at the Guadalupe Center's Summer Camp and Tutoring Program in Canoga Park.

The center's sports field and classrooms provided a welcome place of diversion and renewal of energy for children, middle-schoolers and teen "Junior Counselors." With social distancing and safety measures in place, the youth were given the opportunity to learn together, be mentors, play sports, have "hang out" time to "be a kid" in a safe environment, and forget about life's daily challenges for a while.

One family was especially blessed by the center's camp activities and energetic staff, volunteers and coaches. A single mom, working long hours to make ends meet, enrolled her two sons, ages eight and five, in the center's free Summer Camp and Tutoring Program. The boys enjoyed the hands-on science projects, such as building volcanoes and rockets, computer coding, cooking classes, field trips and more. The center also understood the family's special circumstances and made sure that additional food went home with them each day.

Guadalupe Center's Summer Camp and Tutoring Program help fulfill our mission of assisting the most vulnerable with a "hand-up" toward a better road ahead. ❀



Guadalupe Center provided an exciting Summer Camp.

St. Robert's Saturday Food Program Helps Henry

Henry stood outside on a bright late-August Saturday morning, in the parking lot of the St. Robert's Center in Venice. A cup of coffee in one hand, a lunch and some toiletries, that could help him get through another week, in the other.

St. Robert's is one of the few places he can count on these days, as he has for the last few years. "My last place, I was paying rent in Santa Monica, but with my work situation, I lost that," said Henry. "I was sleeping on the couch of a one-bedroom apartment with a friend, but he lost his job, so we lost that place. "One minute, I'm on Pacific Avenue in Venice, but the landlord raises the rent. Next, my roommate leaves town. I can't afford it on my own. That's life, isn't it? It's a roller coaster."

Explaining how he has worked in the motion picture and documentary film industry since the early 1990s, Henry lacks employment because of the pandemic. He joins a group of 100 every Saturday for grab-and-go lunches and pre-made grocery bags at the St. Robert's Saturday outreach. During the week, the facility focuses on its drop-in service, "The Landing," for young pregnant and parenting families.



A native of Nigeria, Henry says he used to travel to visit relatives but "now I can't even pay my bus fare." He could find solitude at the local library, but those are closed now.

Henry sees younger people on the streets, encamped on the boardwalk in Venice, and wonders how much their parents worry about them. "That's the trauma we have," he admits. "I don't wish homelessness on anybody. You don't know how difficult it is until you don't have a place." ❀



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Catholic Charities' Angel's Flight Shelter continues to provide critical services, including educational assessment and mentoring to homeless and at-risk youth, while observing COVID-19 CDC guidelines.



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