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Pope Francis’ visit to the United States coincided with my being hired by Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) as Director of Content Development, which includes the role of managing editor for this magazine. There is no causal connection between the two events, but in my mind there is a spiritual one.

During his visit, Pope Francis emphasized repeatedly the duty of people of faith to move outward from routines and comfort zones in order to encounter other people, especially those cast away by society. The point of the encounter is to realize more consciously the kinship and dignity that all persons have as children of God. Of course the pope not only preached this message, he also practiced it.

Along with many others in the U.S., I reflected on the words and actions of Pope Francis when he was in our country. I wondered too if people thought that the pope’s message was not really meant for everyone, or perhaps more pointedly “it wasn’t meant for me.” After all what can one person do in the face of society’s problems?

As I settled in at CCUSA and started working, which included writing about what the national office and local agencies were doing in celebration of the pope’s visit, the thought occurred to me that the Catholic Charities movement provides the answer to the question. Actually, it answers the question with another one.

Since Catholic Charities is already settled on the inherent dignity of every human being, there is no need to ask whether something should be done. The crucial question is what does this community or that person need in the situation they are in at the moment?

Catholic Charities embodies Christian discipleship. And the question for a disciple is not “if I should do something,” but “what can I do for my brothers and sisters?” Even a cup of water, offered in love, transforms a mere transaction into a moment of fellowship.

Pope Francis had nothing to do with me being hired by CCUSA, but his words and actions reminded me of why I wanted to work here in the first place. I am awestruck by the work Catholic Charities has done for more than a century. I feel privileged to join your ranks, and I look forward to working with you in serving all of our brothers and sisters.

David Werning, Managing Editor

To comment on this issue, please write to David Werning at dwerning@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org.
The visit of Pope Francis to the United States in September 2015 might have focused on the man himself, except that the man himself wouldn’t allow it. Pope Francis used his popularity to focus attention on the needs of people who are poor or excluded from the mainstream of society. When the cameras were on him—almost every step he took—they were also on homeless people or immigrants or prisoners with whom Pope Francis was sharing an animated moment. When he was talking to people with power, he continually reminded them of their duty to serve the least and most vulnerable populations among their constituents.

We take to heart our long tradition of extending merciful and compassionate care to persons in need. It is a special time for Catholic Charities as we immerse ourselves in the wisdom of documents like Deus Caritas Est by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’, along with his captivating words to the people of our country. Now is the moment for us to envision how we at Catholic Charities will fulfill the mandate to be singleminded in our work on behalf of poor people. Our recently launched strategic visioning process will help us all to speak with a unified voice to those in power and direct our efforts to respond to pockets of human suffering that cry out for our attention and care. We engage in this work to be the hands of Christ in our world today.

Some of you know that I had the privilege of meeting with Pope Francis during the New York part of his trip. During that encounter, I thanked him for all that he has done to raise the awareness of the plight of poor people across the world. Following our brief interchange I asked him if he would give me his blessing. I received that blessing on behalf of all our Catholic Charities members, volunteers, affiliates and staffs. My encounter with the pope was short, but powerful. It reminded me that every encounter each of us has with another person—rich or poor, famous or unknown—has the potential to be a blessing.

In fact, before meeting with Pope Francis, I had a chance meeting with another person who reminded me of the same truth. A colleague and I arrived at Penn Station just prior to Pope Francis’ visit to New York City. We were headed for the Dominican Sisters of Peace on East 68th, and we knew that getting there would be a challenge because of all the street closings. Just then an Uber car appeared and the driver, Ali, offered to take us to the Dominicans. He cautioned me that it would cost $62! Though the fare was steep, we had no alternative so we accepted and were on our way. During the ride, Ali engaged us in conversation. We told him that we worked with Catholic Charities and were in town for the Pope’s visit. We then talked about the pope and the good he is doing.

When we reached our destination and tried to pay, Ali said, “Oh no. It is the hajj and I am Muslim. Let this be my gift to you in honor of Pope Francis.”

We were so grateful for this kind-hearted New Yorker who celebrated our bond as human beings. All could have just driven to our destination in silence. We could have kept quiet too. But the example of Pope Francis reaching out to so many people was in the air and we took a chance at moving beyond the usual roles of driver and passengers.

Many Catholic Charities agencies took the occasion of the pope’s visit to highlight the needs of the communities they serve in the hope that more people will lend a helping hand to their neighbors. In the pages that follow you will find many of their initiatives. But Catholic Charities agencies have been serving the poor and vulnerable for over 100 years. An impressive example is Catholic Community Services and Catholic Housing Services of Western Washington, also featured in this issue.
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Pope Francis began his trip to the United States last September in Washington D.C., honoring the nation’s capital before moving on to New York and Pennsylvania. Though his visit was limited to the east coast, Pope Francis had the whole country in heart and mind. Addressing Congress, he said that he wanted to dialogue with all the “men and women who in their own quiet way sustain the life of society. They generate solidarity by their actions, and they create organizations which offer a helping hand to those most in need.” If the pope had been able to visit the Washington on the west coast, he would have witnessed this spirit of service and solidarity being lived out by the Catholic Charities agency in the Archdiocese of Seattle.

In the early 1900’s, as the population of Seattle boomed, then Bishop Edward O’Dea recognized that local clergy and women religious could not meet all the needs of the community. When he asked for help, hundreds of Catholic women responded by organizing aid for widows and orphans; creating access to foster and adoptive homes; and offering food, clothing and more. These humble beginnings provided strong roots that would grow to become the largest private social service agency in Washington State.

Over several decades, a number of different regional Catholic organizations formed to serve the needs of local communities. When Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen was appointed Archbishop of Seattle in 1975, he brought with him a vision of the Church that took a far more active leadership role in meeting the needs of the poor. In 1977, he established the Office of Catholic Charities to coordinate and administer the archdiocesan’s social programs throughout western Washington. In 1979, Archbishop Hunthausen appointed Michael Reichert as President and CEO of this office, to implement the Archbishop’s vision and bring it to life.

Michael’s appointment in 1979 makes him the longest serving director of any Catholic Charities agency in the United States. When he started, he had a team of 200 employees and a budget of $3 million. In the most recent annual report (2014), the organization—now named Catholic Community Services and Catholic Housing Services (CCS/CHS)—reported 3,337 employees, 13,719 volunteers, and a budget of just over $140 million. In no small measure, CCS/CHS fulfills the pope’s plea to sustain the “life of society” by extending helping hands, each year, to 125,000 children, families and elders “most in need.”

CCS currently operates 12 regional Family Centers, which offer multiple services including adoption, pregnancy support, case management, emergency assistance, transitional housing and much more. Two other major CCS initiatives include the Long Term Care System, which provides in-home and personal care for elderly and disabled persons; and the Family Preservation System, which offers services for youth and families with multiple and complex needs.

CHS develops and manages affordable housing for low-income populations and for those who have special physical and mental needs. Currently CHS offers safe, secure housing for over 3,500 children, adults and elders at 2,100 housing units on 50 properties throughout western Washington.

One might think that after so many years of service and with such impressive numbers, an organization would be tempted to sit back and rest on its laurels. CCS/CHS, however, measures success not in statistics but in lives changed for the better, and by this mark there is much more to do.
Josephinum, a restored historic hotel in downtown Seattle that houses another unique feature of the Josephinum is that it also houses a Catholic parish, Christ Our Hope, which was founded in 2010 and designated “Communities of Concern.” Through decades of service CCS/CHS has recognized that certain cultural communities—urban Indian, farmworker, urban Latino, African-American and Filipinos—have suffered greatly by being marginalized and by being excluded from economic opportunities. Michael laments that the same communities are worse off today than when he started as president four decades ago: “The dropout rates are just as bad, the crime rates are just as bad, the wellness indicators are just as bad.” Something different has to happen.

According to CCS/CHS, a big part of the problem is not what service agencies are doing, but what they are not doing. Catholic Charities agencies across the nation do amazing work serving the needy and advocating for justice. What can be improved upon is the direct engagement with the communities, working to develop the capacity for a community to take care of itself. “We don’t often convene deliberately into the community to organize with the community. It’s hard work, it can be disappointing work,” Michael admits, “but it’s essential work.”

CCS/CHS believes that significant change will come only when service agencies engage with whole communities, not just individuals. In order to give a sense of this work, two examples are offered here: the Josephinum, a restored historic hotel in downtown Seattle that houses formerly homeless adults, and the Life to Justice Initiative.

The Josephinum

CCS/CHS renovated the Josephinum to address the needs of poor and homeless individuals who exist in the midst of the vibrant, economic heart of downtown Seattle. The building contains not only 221 apartments but also supportive services provided by CCS/CHS including case management, mental health counseling, substance abuse services and income subsidy. Another unique feature of the Josephinum is that it also houses a Catholic parish, Christ Our Hope, which was founded in 2010 and is located on the first floor. The Very Rev. Paul Magnano, pastor, has watched his fledgling parish grow in faith and service, becoming a “beacon of hope in the heart of the city.”

The membership is diverse and eclectic consisting of condo dwellers, homeless people, workers, shoppers, visitors and Josephinum residents. All work together to enhance the spiritual and social well-being of each other. Christ Our Hope is another example of the “school of encounter” that Pope Francis continues to promote.

One person who testifies to the success of all that the Josephinum offers is resident Hope Green. She says that CCS/CHS saved her life: “They made me feel like I was worth it, I was important, and I never felt like that before.” With her human dignity honored, Hope made a decision to change her life, to pay off debt and to renew her driver’s license. She is no longer alone on the streets, but a member of a community, a member who gives and receives (Watch a video featuring Hope’s story at www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/c/end45).

The Life to Justice Initiative

CCS/CHS has joined with the other two Catholic Charities agencies in Washington State—in Spokane and in Yakima—to develop the Life to Justice Initiative, which is the concerted vision of the state bishops and their Catholic Charities directors to unify the principle of Life and Justice in a concrete way that reaches every parish.

The initiative contains three specific programs: 1) Prepares is a state-wide program, which increases diocesan and parish capacity to provide pregnancy and parenting support for pregnant women and their families to the child’s fifth birthday; and the 2) Black American and 3) Catholic Farmworker Initiatives, which enable both of these Communities of Concern to create capacity to claim their share of justice and economic development.

Patty Repikoff, Pastoral Advocate for Mission at CCS/CHS, says that the main goal of the Life to Justice Initiative is “to unite people in what Pope Francis is calling that encounter for dialogue.” In the Church today painful and unnecessary divides can occur between those who are focused on ending abortion and those who are focused on reducing poverty. The Life to Justice Initiative, Repikoff says, “is an attempt to build a bridge, and to unite [people] in a common focus about the poorest and most vulnerable people in our geographic areas.”

The Prepares program in each diocese has area and parish coordinators who orient volunteer teams about how to research local services available for families in need, how to connect them with basic supports, and how to serve as companions and advocates, including the formation of fatherhood mentoring groups and participation in public advocacy for stronger public safety nets to protect vulnerable families.

The role of personal encounter and dialogue is key. Repikoff says the message of Prepares is pro-life and pro-family: “We stand with you and your choice for life and we are going to walk the walk with you.” The hope is that the fruit of such an encounter will break down walls between “helper” and “helped,” creating deeper understanding of the gifts and obstacles in the lives of poor families and leading to greater advocacy for justice at every stage of their lives.

Both the Farmworker and the Black American Initiatives aim at building the capacity within their respective communities to enable people to be dignified agents of their own destiny. The African-American community in western Washington has suffered the historical legacy of racism and exclusion. The Farmworker community has suffered the effects of racism and a broken immigration system, resulting in scandalous labor conditions. Repikoff says that community organizers are helping both populations to develop leadership at the grass roots so they may have “a place at the table... to wield some economic and political power, and to wield some influence at the city, in the school system, in the county and at the state level.” CCS/CHS is encouraged that at present “voices from these communities are speaking directly to the mayor and city council and state legislature that weren’t there three years ago.”

Conclusion

CCS/CHS realizes that service agencies—and, really, society in general—need to engage with communities of concern, struggling with them as they go through their political fights and internal conflicts. Real, lasting change will not be made without the involvement of the community members. It’s about being in solidarity with them, listening to them, and then partnering with them to build their capacity to take care of themselves.

Psalm 34 says the Lord “heard the cry of the poor.” In other words, he listened to them as they expressed their needs with their own voices and their own experience. CCS/CHS is dedicated to doing the same, right here and now.
A bit of serendipity happened at the 2015 CCUSA Annual Gathering, held in Omaha, NE, September 10-12. The meeting, which brought together Catholic Charities professionals, volunteers and partners from across the United States, was entitled “Harvesting Hope in the Heartland.” Hope is one of the three theological virtues; it keeps us from discouragement on our earthly journey and therefore it is an important virtue to foster, especially for people working to end poverty and injustice. Hope is often mentioned along with the other two theological virtues, as in St. Paul’s famous saying: “So faith, hope, love remain; these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13).

This is where the serendipity happens: although there was no conscious intention to include love and faith as formal themes at the gathering, both kept appearing.

As participants mingled, networking with each other, attending workshops, and taking time for prayer, the three days were punctuated by four special moments marked with faith, hope and love: three major addresses to the entire assembly and a dramatic one man play.

Sister Donna Markham, President & CEO of CCUSA, officially opened the annual gathering with her presidential address, which focused on the love of Christ manifested in the work (and workers) of Catholic Charities. Sister Donna was followed immediately by Shane Lopez, PhD, Senior Scientist and Research Director of the Clifton Strengths Institute, who offered the opening keynote speech on hope. Carolyn Woo, PhD, President and CEO of Catholic Relief Services, formally closed the gathering with her keynote address, which described how faith is the foundation of service. The one act play, “Visionary at the Helm: The Bold Leadership of Monsignor John O’Grady” (Msgr. O’Grady led the National Conference of Catholic Charities from 1920 to 1961), showed how all the theological virtues came together in one person’s life.

All four moments are remembered here in appreciation to the speakers, and actor, for their witness and thoughtful presentations.
Sister Donna Markham delivered her first keynote address as President of Catholic Charities USA.

The Work of Love: The President’s Address

Sister Donna Markham gave her first presidential address at the 2015 Annual Gathering and formally opened the three-day meeting. Sister Donna anchored her talk to the gospel scene in which Jesus—on a Sabbath—cures a crippled man lying next to the pool of Bethsaida, and draws criticism from the Pharisees for doing work on a holy day (Jn 5:1-18). The clear impression, however, is that no one is working on any day in this place of misery, including the Pharisees who do nothing for the large number of sick there. Jesus transforms the place into a sign of his love by going to the sick person and healing him, despite the reproach and misunderstanding of the Pharisees.

Sister Donna then linked the work of Christ to the work of Catholic Charities members, who often enter places ignored by the general public and who endure criticism for helping people on the edges of society. She commended members for remaining steadfast in providing social services with compassion and advancing systemic reform that helps people on their journey out of poverty. Catholic Charities’ ministry continues despite the challenges in working with vulnerable populations and in advocating for change in a culture divided precisely on what kind of change is needed. Encouragement, however, is not lacking, Sister noted: Pope Francis’ focus on caring for those excluded from civilization’s benefits and his promotion of mercy as the first line approach to service gives inspiration and support to everything Catholic Charities does.

Essentially the work of Catholic Charities carries on and cooperates with Jesus’ ministry to the sick and outcast. Sister Donna, speaking on behalf of the entire network, invited the country to step with Catholic Charities to the edge of “the pool of Bethsaida,” that place where the ill, blind, lame and crippled lay, where those who are discarded by society can be found; where each of these unfortunate persons hopes for mercy. Catholic Charities goes to that place with the love of Christ and changes lives for the better.

Hopes of Hope: The Opening Keynote Address

Dr. Shane Lopez, in his remarks, focused on the virtue of hope as integral to the success not only of individuals or families breaking out of poverty but also of service providers who help others gain self-sufficiency.

Hope is a complex reality involving our cognitive, emotional and spiritual capacities, and how it is defined can vary from person to person. A basic definition, according to Lopez, especially for people on the edge of society, is “the belief that the future will be better than the present combined with the belief that one has some power to make it so.” Based on this definition, Lopez said that, according to his research, about 50% of people in America have hope, and the other 50% do not, including people whom Catholic Charities’ agencies serve. The challenge, then, is how to keep the one half hopeful and the other half ready to embrace hope.

Lopez recommended two fundamental concepts that Catholic Charities agencies could foster in their work in order to help clients get or sustain hope: 1.) people need to believe that psychologically investing in the future pays off now; and 2.) maintaining hope in one’s own life begets hope in others.

Lopez said that “the installation of hope is imperative to psychological and behavioral change... The more you’re able to give them the hope they need, the more they can change today.” He offered these “change strategies” that can help people psychologically invest in the future and take steps to break the debilitating cycles in their lives: goal-chasing, ways and will; and where/where plans.

Goal-chasing. A person who is hungry needs food, not a form to fill out. Care must be taken not to assign people goals that do not matter to them. “A hopeful change agent helps someone else do goal-chasing, and makes the goal concrete, attainable, and measurable,” said Lopez. Positive change is made more likely, as well, when the change agent walks with the client shoulder to shoulder, side by side.

Ways and will. Many clients of Catholic Charities agencies lack will power. The remedy involves helping the clients appreciate that “where there’s a way, there’s a will.” In other words, if people are taught “the how” to get something done, then their “will” kicks in. Both the ways and the will need to be taught: the power to make things better in the future and the ways to make those things happen.

When/where plans. For every goal being set and chased, clients can be taught to make a psychological appointment with themselves to work on the particular goal in the setting that is most conducive to them.

Lopez concluded by citing Robert F. Kennedy, who championed hope precisely for its ability to beget the same in others: “Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daries those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance” (University of Cape Town, South Africa, National Union of South African Students “Day of Affirmation” Speech, June 6, 1966).

“Whether we are concerned with a client suffering the effects of poverty or a co-worker in a dark moment, Lopez encouraged his listeners to get hope, because “hope is the stuff of change.”

Faith is the Foundation: Closing Keynote Address

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai having conversed with the Lord for forty days and forty nights, without eating any food or drinking any water, he brought with him ten words from the Lord for the community that grounded them in their faith and taught them how to honor their relationship with God and with each other (Ex 34:27-35).

When Dr. Carolyn Woo, President and CEO of Catholic Relief Services, offered the closing keynote address at the Annual Gathering, she had just finished lunch in the Grand Central Ballroom at the Hilton Omaha.
However, the fact that, like Moses, she had spent significant time in prayer with God was evident when she presented to the assembly her “ten words” as a foundation of faith that service agencies can apply in their work.

Although we cannot present Dr. Woo’s words on tablets of stone, we do hope that they will find their way to many cubicles and bulletin boards in offices country-wide.

I. Go out and preach the good news: the love of God is real and with us on this earth; it is for everyone, for all time.

II. We witness to God’s love by our holiness, which is our desire for God; and by our compassion, which is our concern for our neighbor.

III. Our witness to God has to happen through action.

IV. Our proclamation of God is intimately joined to our good relationship with each other.

V. Focusing on the generosity of God allows us to draw from his bounty and give to his people.

VI. Each act of giving is an act of thanksgiving when we recognize the source of every gift.

VII. Remember that what we do is God’s work; he takes the fruit of our labor and multiplies it.

VIII. Set high expectations focusing on what we can do rather than on what we cannot.

IX. Abide in Christ through a regular habit of prayer.

X. Be willing to take the next step, trusting that God will lead you on.

If inspiration was needed by anyone working in the Catholic Charities network, then he or she received an abundance through the performance of “Visionary at the Helm: The Bold Leadership of Monsignor John O’Grady,” which highlighted O’Grady’s 41 years of service as leader of the National Conference of Catholic Charities (NCCC), precursor to CCUSA.

O’Grady became secretary of NCCC in 1920, and he immediately drew attention for his style of leadership. Indefatigable, O’Grady refused to limit his advocacy for people experiencing poverty through sermons alone. Instead he left the rectory and parish boundaries to meet people where they were at. Two main principles drove O’Grady’s work, and both were delivered several times during the play in thick Irish brogue by the actor playing him: “I was always just interested in human beings,” and “My method of inquiry was to talk to people.”

O’Grady’s interest in people was not for curiosity’s sake, but for upholding their human dignity. Active during the Depression and World War II, O’Grady witnessed men and women, and whole families, fall into poverty. Public welfare was not meeting the need, and even seemed to be indifferent at times. So O’Grady vowed to become the voice speaking the spirit of charity to the government. The play recounted how at one moment O’Grady was in the sugar beet fields of Michigan listening to the plight of Mexican migratory workers, and then in the next moment he was in the halls of Congress pleading the workers’ cause.

There were of course countless similar moments, and O’Grady’s work helped to create the collaboration between the public and private sectors that endures today.

One might think that O’Grady’s drive was motivated by more than personal interest in one’s brothers and sisters, laudable though it may be. A deeper impulse can be detected in a quote of O’Grady’s spoken by the actor: “We must not relax our effort to build our private and public welfare programs on a firmer foundation. Service is based on love, and love is the very foundation stone of Christian life.”

The love of God moved O’Grady to work so tirelessly for people suffering from lack of money and resources, and to bring their distress into the light. The play was a reminder to us all to be the voice of charity in our own time so that people who are poor and vulnerable are not forgotten.
A wonderful concinnity characterized Pope Francis’ visit to the United States; words and actions combined to teach as much as they impressed. To cite just one example: after being welcomed formally by President Obama, the pope went immediately to a meeting with the U.S. bishops. In his talk he urged the bishops to practice the art of dialogue: “dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly.” Afterwards, the pope spent the rest of his trip dialoguing with the United Nations, with the U.S. Congress, with rich and poor, really with everyone.

The same concinnity can be seen in the decision to have the Year of Mercy follow upon the pope’s visit to the United States. Given that the visit to the U.S. carried the banner “Love is our Mission,” what could manifest that mission better than the practice of mercy? During his visit, Pope Francis went out of his way to encounter as many people as he could, not as a “shrewd strategy” but as the way to share Christ—the face of the Father’s mercy—with a fellow human being. Therefore, when he asks in his announcement of the Year of Mercy (Laudato Sì, LS) that disciples of Christ “go out to every man and woman, bringing God’s mercy to them, the pope is not a disengaged bureaucrat creating policies for others to implement. He is leading by example. He is also pointing to Jesus, who “by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God” (MV, 1). The pope emphasizes that “the mercy of God is not an abstract idea” (MV, 6). Divine mercy is a concrete action most firmly revealed by Jesus’ love poured out in his life and death. “Everything in him speaks of mercy” (MV, 6): healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and pardoning sins. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other” (MV, 9).

The call to be merciful may prompt some to ask questions like “what exactly is it?” and “how precisely am I to live it?” Pope Francis anticipated the questions, which he believes are the result of a lack of practice of mercy in the present time, and leads to a deterioration of meaning. Popular understandings of mercy hover around notions like pity and weakness. Even more widespread is the idea that mercy cheats justice, allowing the guilty to go unpunished. The pope’s response to these popular ideas is twofold. First, mercy is incompatible with weakness: “It is a programme of life as demanding as it is rich with joy and peace” (MV, 13); since it requires an active relationship with Jesus, an openness to his voice. Second, if a person is in relationship with Jesus, he or she will not only understand the damage evil wreaks, but also overcome evil with the good, including making reparation. Far from cheating justice, mercy extends the gift of forgiveness to the sinner enabling him or her to extend mercy to others.

Mercy thus becomes a way of participating in Jesus’ salvific love, or to use the pope’s provocative phrase, “God’s justice is his mercy.”

The way to live divine mercy becomes obvious to the one who has experienced it: to freely give what one has been given freely, always in and through the love of Jesus. And on this point, the program is pretty clear. The pope says, “Let us rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.” The way to live divine mercy becomes obvious to the one who has experienced it: to freely give what one has been given freely, always in and through the love of Jesus. And on this point, the program is pretty clear. The pope says, “Let us rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.”

We do these works of mercy because Jesus did them first, and we can even say that he continues to do them through us. Moreover, as the pope seemed to say, through his words and actions, “if love is our mission, then mercy is our way.”
On the flight from Cuba to the United States last September, Pope Francis gave this answer to a question about the kinds of people with whom he would meet: "I like to meet with all people. I consider that all people are children of God and the law. And secondly, a relationship with another person always enriches."

Pope Francis’ openness to encounter the person in front of him in the present moment was palpable via the media coverage that followed him every step of his visit. Even off camera he made time to meet people, and he did not discriminate between man and woman, adult and child, Republican and Democrat, rich and poor. He was modeling a message for the Church that he included in the bull announcing the Year of Mercy: “The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behavior after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception.” While the Pope could not physically meet everyone in the U.S., he did enrich millions of people’s lives through his words and actions.

Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Charities agencies across the country celebrated Pope Francis’ visit in various ways. What follows is a collage of those celebrations and memories, not only where he was physically present but also where he touched hearts.
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington (CCADW) celebrated the pope’s visit by inviting people to “Walk with Francis.” Individuals and families, parishes and schools and other organizations made pledges to follow the example of Pope Francis’ faith and service. Participants could promise to pray and ponder the pope’s messages of joy, mercy and love rooted in the gospel; they could reach out to their neighbors by serving at a community event or supporting a charitable organization; or they could act to promote human life and dignity; justice and peace; or care for the earth and the common good. The response was generous with over 100,000 pledges, including some from other local Catholic Charities agencies. Go to walkwithfrancis.org in order to view the inspiring responses.

Once Pope Francis arrived at St. Patrick’s Church, next door neighbor to CCADW, the Holy Father showed his own generous spirit through his availability to the people who came to see him. The church was filled with clients from CCADW’s Immigration Legal Services and Health Care Network, with whom the pope prayed. Moving outdoors, he immersed himself into the crowd of 300 homeless individuals shaking hands, kissing babies, receiving hugs and asking for prayers. It was an incredible moment for the Catholic Charities’ clients and for the more than 900 staff at CCADW. And while Pope Francis has returned to Rome, “Walk with Francis” continues not only as an effort of Catholic Charities but also through the pledge-makers’ acts of love and mercy.

To celebrate Pope Francis’ visit to the United States and his universal message of charity, especially for the poor and vulnerable, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York invited people of all faiths to share a welcome message with him by creating a short video of themselves reading or reciting these universal words of charity taken from the Gospel of Matthew (25:31):

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me…

Many people responded, from the famous to the unknown. Hillary Clinton posted a video in which she said that the words from Matthew “aren’t just religious principles; they’re core values of who we are as a people.” A choir from the Astor Services for Children and Families welcomed Pope Francis with a song, and Astor’s executive director, James McGuirk, thanked the pope for his witness to gospel values.

While he was in New York City, Pope Francis met with Francisco Duque Gonzalez and his family, who are being helped in their effort to gain legal residency by Catholic Charities. “It was amazing to be close to him, to be there with him,” Duque said. (Reynolds, Jessica. “Local Family Meets Pope in NYC.” thedailystar.com. Community Newspaper Holdings Inc. 27 September 2015. Web. 14 October 2015.)
THE FRANCIS FUND

In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, a Hunger and Homeless Committee was formed over a year before the papal visit, to engage advocacy and fundraising on behalf of the poor. The committee was chaired by Sr. Mary Scullion RSM of Philadelphia-based Project HOME, who spearheaded a “Mercy and Justice Campaign” that included establishment of “The Francis Fund” to honor Pope Francis’ 2015 visit to Philadelphia as part of the World Meeting of Families held there in late September. The Fund identified over 50 different faith-based and other non-profit organizations serving the region’s most vulnerable people, as deserving of support. With the theme of “Untying the Knots of Hunger and Homelessness,” the Fund succeeded in raising over $1.4 million from thousands of contributors. Those funds will be used to meet concrete needs of men, women and children in the Philadelphia region and Camden who are struggling with hunger, homelessness, and poverty, in the spirit of Pope Francis’ own special compassion and concern for our poor sisters and brothers.

The Francis Fund is an example of what Pope Francis called for in his address to Congress: “We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperat ing generously for the common good.” A beautiful expression of that solidarity was the Knotted Grotto, a domed lattice outside the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia, where an estimated 150,000 people tied white strips of paper on which their prayers were written and then to post the photo on a social media channel, thereby keeping the knot visible for all to see.

Mass on Sept. 27, the pope, known for his devotion to “Mary Undoer of Knots,” made an impromptu visit to the display to bless the grotto and the achievements of the Mercy and Justice Campaign.

A portion of the funds raised in this effort will support Catholic Social Service of Philadelphia (CSS) programs such as Casa del Carmen which serves immigrants in North Philadelphia, the CSS Family Service Center in the city of Chester, Mercy Hospice for homeless women in recovery, Saint John’s Hospice for homeless men, and St. Francis & St. Vincent Homes serving de pendent and neglected youth. CSS also published a special Papal Visit edition of its CSS Connections, which highlights how it will respond to Pope Francis’ call to be close to the outcast and neglected members of society. View the special edition on the CSS website: www.cssphiladelphia.org.

The grotto was designed by artist Meg Saligman. Before celebrating an open-air Mass on Sept. 27, the pope, known for his devotion to “Mary Undoer of Knots,” made an impromptu visit to the display to bless the grotto and the achievements of the Mercy and Justice Campaign.

At the beginning of the 40 Days, Catholic Charities Camden placed over 40,000 “knots” in the Diocese’s 65 parishes, a physical symbol inspired by Pope Francis’ devotion to Our Lady Untier of Knots. Each contained a statistic about poverty in the Diocese and invited parishioners to help “untie” the knots through involvement with Catholic Charities. A week of open houses was held at all of our centers throughout the Diocese, which gave parishioners and other members of the community the opportunity to meet their Catholic Charities agency face to face and learn more about ways to be involved going forward. To view highlights and events from Catholic Charities Camden, go to their 40 Days of Francis website: www.catholiccharities camden.org/40Days.

40 Days of Francis

“40 Days of Francis” was a time of preparation led by Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Camden for the visit of Pope Francis to Philadelphia which began on September 26, 2015. The 40-day period before his arrival was used to inform parishioners and members of the South Jersey community about the issues of poverty the region faces and to help them better understand the role of Catholic Charities in helping to untie the “knots” of poverty.

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On September 9, 2015, anticipating Pope Francis’ visit to the United States, CCUSA launched #End45, a national initiative to increase awareness of poverty and to motivate people to help show support for those in need. The goal of ending poverty is close to the pope’s heart. To the people of America he said, “I would encourage you to keep in mind all those people around us who are trapped in a cycle of pov erty, and “to fight against poverty...especially in its causes” (Address to Congress). CCUSA’s initiative encourages people to take a picture of their hand with “#End45” written on it and then to post the photo on a social media channel, thereby keep ing poverty front and center in the nation’s consciousness. But the effort in cluded more. CCUSA created on its website a page that features videos of real people across America who have overcome challenges with the support of Catholic Charities agencies. With Pope Francis, CCUSA acknowledges that with awareness there must be deeds too. During his visit the pope said, “Now is the time for cour ageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a ‘culture of care’ and ‘an in tegrated approach to combating poverty’” (Address to Congress).
CCUSA Welcomes Fr. Mark Pranaitis, C.M., PhD Special Assistant to the President

Reverend Mark Pranaitis, C.M., PhD, was welcomed to CCUSA during summer 2015. As Special Assistant to the President, Fr. Pranaitis serves as priest partner and “ombudsman” for the CCUSA mission and its Catholic identity. He represents the president, Sister Donna Markham, in issues related to or impacting, the mission of CCUSA and its Catholic identity. His responsibilities include, among other things, advancing CCUSA's efforts in social justice advocacy and exercising leadership in CCUSA's mission to reduce poverty in America.

Fr. Pranaitis recently completed a term of service as Assistant Provincial of the Congregation of the Mission (C.M.) Western Province during which he oversaw the successful merger of the former provinces of the Midwest, South, and West. The merger included the integration of business operations, the transfer of investment portfolios and managing on-going operations of the province office.

Prior to serving in provincial administration he was Associate Provost of DePaul University in Chicago. In that capacity he advised the provost and president on a broad range of topics while also overseeing international programs, continuing and professional education, suburban campuses, centers and institutes, and space assignments. Father Pranaitis continues to serve as a trustee of the province office.

For the past 19 years, Kathy has devoted her life to ensuring the safety and welfare of children, first with the Illinois Township Committee on Youth in Oak Park, then as a leader with CCCC, where she has led various programs supporting families in crisis.

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Kathy’s accomplishments and activities go well beyond the ones mentioned here. Her dedication to the safety and welfare of children is astounding. She has dedicated her life to helping children live better lives. For this reason, she is a model recipient of the Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan Award.

2015 Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan Award Winner

Through the Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan Award, CCUSA recognizes a person in the Catholic Charities network who has distinguished him/herself for dedicated service and leadership in the field of helping children, youth and families.

The winner of the 2015 award is Kathy Thayer, Vice President of Life Connections, a program of Catholic Charities of Central Colorado (CCCC). Kathy received her award at the 2015 Annual Gathering in Omaha, NE.

For over 35 years, Kathy has devoted her life to ensuring the safety and welfare of children, first with the Illinois Township Committee on Youth in Oak Park, then as a leader with CCCC, where she has led various programs supporting families in crisis.

For the past 19 years, Kathy has led CCCC’s Life Support Services (LSS) program, which serves families and children in crisis and poverty. Kathy shaped the case management systems and database tracking programs that allow the staff to better manage and serve those who seek services.

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In addition to university administration, Father Pranaitis has served in parish ministry and as the director of stewardship and development for a Catholic diocese in Colorado. He was awarded the Ph.D. in Organization Development in 2007 by Benedictine University. Prior to ordination in 1993, he worked as a salesman (telecommunication services and residential real estate).

New Website for CCUSA

CCUSA has launched a redesigned website. Visit CatholicCharitiesUSA.org to see the new and improved version. Users will find menus and pages that are easy to navigate. The content reflects all the work that CCUSA and Catholic Charities agencies are doing in the cause to end poverty and to help those who are poor and vulnerable.

In addition to basic information about the CCUSA national office in Alexandria, Va. and member agencies across the country, the website includes many stories that put a human face on issues like disaster relief, affordable housing and more. The website also features a new members-only section where subscribers can maintain a profile, access members-only resources and engage in discussions with colleagues.

The aim of the new website is two-fold: to reflect the sense of community that exists in the Catholic Charities movement and to provide compelling content that makes visiting the site worthwhile. If you have any questions, please contact webmaster@catholiccharitiesusa.org.
Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia Newport News Office Hosts a Picnic

Commonwealth Catholic Charities’ (CC Computer) Retention staff in Newport News held a picnic for their refugee clients. The theme was Welcome to Your New Community, a celebration of the refugees’ new lives in the U.S. Over 65 refugees from the Congo, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Burundi attended the event.

The picnic was held at a local park where a massive soccer game played by parents, children, volunteers and CC staff was enjoyed by all. Gently used clothing and shoes were given to families so the children would have new outfits to wear on their first day of school. The children also received backpacks and supplies.

Mealtime took place under a shelter decorated with bales of hay, corn stalks, pumpkins and a Welcome Home banner. A year ago, many of these families were living in refugee camps, fleeing war and persecution. Most could not have located Virginia on a map. The fact that they were together enjoying hot dogs and hamburgers, laughing and socializing, showed how far they had come in settling into American life.

Catholic Charities awarded $50,000 for Mentoring Program

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans’ Cornerstone Kids program was named an Angel of Change by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana (BCBSLA) Foundation and received a $50,000 grant for providing a mentorship program for Louisiana’s children of incarcerated parents.

Having a parent in prison can negatively impact a child’s quality of life, and it increases the children’s probability of being incarcerated themselves later in life. Cornerstone Kids provides these children with someone who will care for them and model and promote positive behavior.

“When someone goes to jail, the whole family is incarcerated,” says Ronnie Moore, director of the Cornerstone Builders program under which Cornerstone Kids is housed. “These are the forgotten children whose needs are overlooked.”

Families of the incarcerated are also oftentimes poor, and sending their breadwinner to jail increases their economic burden. These children are most in need of a mentor to help them cope with these challenges.

“Cornerstone Kids is truly an Angel of Change in the community that the Foundation is proud to support,” says Michael Tipton, BCBSLA Foundation president. “Our grant panel believed this mentoring effort is a smart and innovative approach to positively impact the well-being of Louisiana’s children who are adversely affected by incarceration by supplementing their development with a positive influence.”

The mentoring program is open to children aged 5 to 17 with at least one incarcerated parent. Mentors and mentees spend time together through one-on-one activities and group meetings. Mentors provide support and encouragement that promotes trust, confidence, enthusiasm, personal growth and positive thinking. In the last fiscal year, 31 children were served through this program, and volunteers gave close to 730 hours of their time.

“Being recognized as a community advocate by BCBSLA is an honor,” Moore reflects. “We hope this support raises awareness of the hidden costs of incarceration on children and the need to support these families.”

New Sewing Training Academy Opens in Nashville

On September 2, 2015, Nashville Mayor Karl Dean cut the ribbon to open Catholic Charities of Tennessee’s Sewing Training Academy, a new initiative designed to provide skilled employees for Nashville’s growing apparel manufacturing industry.

The Academy is the result of a unique collaboration between Catholic Charities, the Nashville Fashion Alliance, and Omega Apparel Inc., a local manufacturer. Start-up funding was provided by the Frist Foundation, the Memorial Foundation and other benefactors.

“The Sewing Training Academy is a wonderful example of a public/private partnership that will prepare Middle Tennesseans for skilled, well-paying jobs supporting the local growing apparel manufacturing industry.”

The Academy currently offers classes at three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Classes are held Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. - 12 noon at the Job Training Center. Ten students are admitted per class.

The first class of sewers, all women, started on August 31. They varied in age and ethnicity. Two of them—a mother-daughter duo—arrived in Nashville last year from the Congo. They speak some English, but through another nonprofit, they were able to have a translator with them part time during the program. Other students were refugees from Burma.

Catholic Charities will continue to help provide job opportunities to people who need them, including, but not limited to, those in the immigrant and refugee communities, who may then go on to achieve self-sufficiency through employment.

The Journey of Hope Luncheon: Catholic Charities Jackson, Mississippi

Catholic Charities Diocese of Jackson (CCJ) held its 10th annual Journey of Hope Luncheon on October 13, highlighting the agency’s 23 programs in the State of Mississippi. This year the featured speaker was Father Jonathan Morris, priest of the Archdiocese of New York and Fox News analyst for ethical and religious issues. 250 people of all faith traditions attended the premier fundraising event for CCJ. They heard Morris reflect on Pope Francis’ visit to the United States in September. “His message is so convincing,” Morris said. “Pope Francis is a natural pastor—that’s who he is… I love how the Holy Father urges us to reach out to the ‘throwaway people’ who need our support” to emphasize the dignity of all human life. Michael Thomas, Development Director for CCJ, stated that the luncheon exceeded its expectations in much needed donations and that Morris’ talk prompted a number of new donors to give.

Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) joined the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation (HWCF) as its 300th Associate Member in the spring of 2015 and the timing was perfect. During the summer, at-risk children no longer have access to free school meals, so many families turn to local food pantries.

HWCF and CCUSA delivered free educational materials to local agencies active in the USDA’s Summer Food Service Program. This “digital toolkit” included 50 tips for energy balance, tips for talking to kids about healthy, active lifestyles, an energy balance guide for adults and coloring pages for kids.

During the school year, parents of school-aged children are likely to learn something about the Together Counts™ program—they just may not realize it. The Together Counts program encourages balancing the calories we consume with the calories we burn. So you may have seen either a PTA flyer about a healthy fun fair or a newsletter from Boys & Girls Clubs with tips for being active. These are just a couple examples of how HWCF delivers its message.

Learn more at TogetherCounts.com.
Here is Maria, a client at our dental clinic. Maria is battling cancer. She was lucky enough to be blessed and greeted by Pope Francis when he visited the main office of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington, DC next to St. Patrick’s Church in northwest D.C. on September 24, 2015. The pope gave Maria a blessed rosary, which she wears around her neck.

Maria said that before meeting the pope she was always in pain, but after meeting him, she feels amazingly blessed too and has been feeling well enough to get out and garden once again.

Maria also spends a lot of time with her nephew, who has autism and whose picture is always ready at hand on her cell phone. She’s been helping her sister to raise him. Maria and her nephew are extremely close, even more so since the cancer was found in 2011. She was originally given 6 months to live, but is still here.

Maria came to our dental clinic because the chemotherapy made her teeth so weak they were breaking. In our clinic she found a new smile and a new family. And, as it turns out, the chance to meet Pope Francis.

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