

Utility assistance available for elderly, disabled or poor Arkansans 14

Golf tournament returns Oct. 2 to Hot Springs Village course 14

CATHOLIC CHARITIES Connections

SUPPLEMENT TO ARKANSAS CATHOLIC • CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF ARKANSAS • 2415 N. TYLER ST. • LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72207 • MARCH 25, 2023

AT A GLANCE Catholic Charities of Arkansas serves

Services that offer hope and the light of Christ to people in need

■ **Adoption Services:** Offers post-adoption support for those who have worked with the agency with an emphasis on search and reunions.

■ **Immigration Services in Springdale:** Provides low-cost immigration assistance in northwest Arkansas, including family-based petitions and DACA renewals, for individuals and families unable to afford other legal representation.

■ **Immigration Services in Little Rock:** Provides low-cost immigration assistance in central and south Arkansas, including family-based petitions and DACA renewals, for individuals and families unable to afford other legal representation.

■ **Refugee resettlement:** Ecumenical effort with sponsor teams to assist with resettling families from Afghanistan in cooperation with the Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the U.S. State Department

■ **Parish outreach:** Assists with developing parish-based ministries that respond to local needs, especially for the poor, vulnerable or those impacted by domestic violence.

■ **Prison ministry:** Responds to the spiritual needs of people who are incarcerated and their families with a network of volunteers who visit prisons in the state.

■ **Family assistance:** Short-term rent and utilities assistance to families and individuals at risk of becoming homeless, especially the elderly and people with disabilities.

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Refugee program is in it for long haul

Finding jobs and resident status primary focus

More than a year into assisting 22 families from Afghanistan and Syria, the Refugee Resettlement Program in central Arkansas is continuing to help them resolve issues they are dealing with.

In the fall of 2021, Catholic Charities of Arkansas welcomed and helped resettle 88 people. Catholic parishes and other Little Rock area churches formed teams of volunteers to sponsor these families. Today, the sponsor teams are still doing the work of helping these Afghan families start a new life in Arkansas. Catholic Charities of Arkansas and the sponsor teams are in it for the long haul.

The Refugee Resettlement Program is part of a national network of Catholic refugee resettlement programs. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Resettlement Office is one of nine non-government organizations authorized to receive refugees admitted to the United States. They assign Afghan refugees to local refugee resettlement programs in their network.

Sponsor teams are dealing with issues for their families that will take time to resolve completely.



Courtesy Catholic Charities of Arkansas

Ken Bohac (right), Afghan refugee resettlement caseworker, reviews immigration cases March 20 with **Ingrid Cas-trillo**, immigration specialist for Catholic Immigration Services-Little Rock.

For example, while many of the adults have found jobs, not all are earning a wage with health care benefits that will support their family. Others have started

to learn English and are getting more education to improve their lives in Arkansas.

The Refugee Resettlement Office is a coordinating resource

for the sponsor teams who are the day-to-day advocates for the refugees and their families. The

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Outreach lives out the Gospel with parishes

Parish outreach for Catholic Charities of Arkansas works with parish-based ministries to provide ways to live out the Church's social teachings.

At the helm is Sister Iliana Aponte, DC, parish outreach liaison for Catholic Charities. Sister Iliana's ministry is rooted in the Gospel and Catholic social teaching, which calls all people to recognize the fundamental dignity of every human life from conception to natural death. She is a member of the Daughters of Charity and a licensed social worker. Her work with parishes centers on developing ministries through general education and workshops.

In some cases, a specific ministry is identified as a need by a parish, and she helps them address it.

Whether it is coordinating a health fair, speaking to a Catholic group or journeying with a woman in need, Sister Iliana is at home serving the poor. In the 29 years since taking her final vows, she has served in San Juan, Arecibo and Ponce, Puerto Rico, and

in Miami, South Carolina and Arkansas. She is no stranger to serving among people experiencing poverty, trauma or the impact of violence.

Sister Iliana welcomes opportunities to visit parishes. She enjoys helping parishes that need assistance with outreach and advocacy efforts, educating parishioners to serve those who are poor and vulnerable and providing opportunities for spiritual growth. Often, she works in connection with other local charities, and she sees God at work when a family's needs are met through a parish's outreach.

Sister Iliana also manages the Charity Closet at the Catholic Charities offices in the McDonald Center at 2415 N. Tyler Street in Little Rock on the campus of St. John Center. A limited supply of children's clothing, diapers and personal hygiene products are available for people in need.

For questions about parish outreach, contact Sister Iliana (501) 664-0340, Ext. 403 or iaponte@dolr.org.



Courtesy Catholic Charities of Arkansas

Sister Iliana Aponte, a licensed social worker and Daughter of Charity, works in the Charity Closet March 20 in the McDonald Center at St. John Center in Little Rock.

Short-term assistance bridges urgent gaps

CCA works with clients to find utility help

When an Arkansan has a financial setback or emergency, paying for utilities can be a challenge. The Family Assistance Program of Catholic Charities of Arkansas provides short-term help for families facing hardships.

The program serves low-income families, the elderly and disabled people who are struggling to pay utility deposits and utility bills. The main goal is to increase self-sufficiency and prevent homelessness.

This past December, when the wind chill index fell below zero, many families needed help because they had no heat in their homes. The Family Assistance Program “bridged the gap” during that difficult month. Unexpected illnesses of a child or family members can also cause unplanned work absences.

Because many family assistance clients live paycheck to paycheck, an emergency can leave them unable to pay essential bills. To qualify for assistance, one cannot owe more than the previous and current month’s electric bill (for example, the February and March bill). To help as many families as possible, the family or individual will receive help with one bill, one time, up to \$100.

During the intake phone call, Catholic Charities assesses individuals’ income and expenses and discuss whether they qualify for other programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance



Gracey Stinson, Morguefile.com

The Family Assistance Program of Catholic Charities of Arkansas gives short-term help to low-income families, the elderly and disabled people who are struggling to keep the lights on.

Program, or SNAP. This discussion can lead the family to finding more help.

The Family Assistance Program partners with other ministries and agencies like the St. Vincent de Paul Society to help with one-time rental assistance. St. Vincent de Paul volunteers make home visits and assess the situation in person.

Family assistance is primarily funded through donations to the Poor Fund for Catholic Charities and the 25 percent of the annual CRS Rice Bowl donations collected during Lent that stays in Arkansas. Financial donations from anyone who wants to help are always welcomed.

For more information about the program or how you can help, contact Megan Moore at (501) 664-0340, ext. 379.

Refugees

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office assists refugees with their immigration applications, access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training and employment. The office also helps the sponsor teams who work with government agencies, schools and employers on behalf of the refugees.

An issue for every Afghan refugee is securing legal permanent resident status and a path to citizenship in the United States. They were granted temporary legal status when they arrived as parolees, and there are deadlines for each of the many steps they must take to apply for a change of legal status that will allow them to stay here.

Immigration law is complex, and requires people with knowledge and experience, who are also

CAN YOU HELP?

Donate a car or computer

Refugee resettlement caseworker Ken Bohac said refugee families most urgently need two items: a car for transportation and a home computer for school, work and family use. A few of these have been donated since the arrival of the Afghan families, and a few more are needed. Anyone interested in donating can contact Bohac at (501) 664-0340, ext. 459 or kbohac@dolr.org.

authorized under the law, to help the Afghan refugees with their situations.

Catholic Immigration Services - Little Rock is helping them, with assistance from local immigration

attorneys who share a concern for the well-being of the Afghan families who have been resettled through Catholic Charities of Arkansas.

Ken Bohac was recently hired as the Afghan refugee resettlement caseworker for Catholic Charities of Arkansas. He is the contact point for the sponsor teams, helping them and the Afghan families get the services they need.

“In meeting with the 20 Afghani and two Syrian families, we see their great appreciation for the opportunity to be here and their willingness to work hard to make a new life here,” Bohac said.

“The biggest need and hurdle for them is to learn English, which we are working hard to address; the need for meaningful employment, which we are actively seeking help with; and the need for cars and computers for these families.”

BRIEFS



James Keary, Arkansas Catholic file

Ron Berich, a member of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Hot Springs Village, putts on the 14th green in the Catholic Charities of Arkansas Golf Tournament Oct. 8, 2022, at Granada Golf Course in Hot Springs Village. The tournament returns to the Granada course in 2023.

TOURNAMENT RETURNS TO HOT SPRINGS VILLAGE GOLF COURSE

The annual Catholic Charities of Arkansas Golf Tournament will be Monday, Oct. 2 at the Granada Golf Course in Hot Springs Village.

Teams of four will tee off with a shotgun start at 8 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. This is the second year for the golf course to host the event. Golfers will compete for team prizes and

on-course contests, such as hole-in-one and closet-to-the pin.

Food and refreshments will be served, including Father Bill Elser’s homemade ice cream.

Registration is \$600 a team and includes green fees, carts and complimentary beverages. Proceeds from the golf tournament help Catholic Charities of Arkansas serve people who are poor or living on the margins.

For more information or to register a team, contact Megan Moore at (501) 664-0340, ext. 379.

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

You can follow Catholic Charities of Arkansas on Facebook and learn more about its ministries. Like the page at <https://www.facebook.com/ccarkansas>.



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■ **Catholic Charities Medical Clinic:** A healing ministry in the Catholic tradition, the clinic provides free health care services and prescriptions for people 18 years old and older who are unable to afford primary health care.

■ **Engagement with supporters:** Catholic Arkansas Sharing Appeal (February), Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl (Lent), annual golf tournament (October) and St. Nicholas Partners Appeal (December).

FOR INFORMATION

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CATHOLIC CHARITIES MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Catholic Charities of Arkansas of the Diocese of Little Rock is rooted in the challenge of the Gospel: To serve persons who are poor or marginalized; to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable; and to actively promote charity, justice and the sanctity of life in the Church and the community.



Malea Hargett, Arkansas Catholic file

Retired nurse Debbie Meiklejohn (left) coordinates with nurse Vicki Jackson Nov. 15, 2020, during a flu shot clinic at St. Theresa Church in Little Rock. Meiklejohn leads Catholic Charities' Faith Community Nursing Ministry.

Faith Community Nursing offers course to add spiritual healing

Faith communities can infuse hope into almost any environment. At Catholic Charities of Arkansas, the Faith Community Nursing Ministry, led by registered nurse Deborah Meiklejohn, infuses hope into the lives of people who might otherwise feel isolated and lonely.

Faith Community Nursing, a ministry offered by Catholic Charities of Arkansas with support from CHI St. Vincent, teaches nurses how to integrate a spiritual component into healing. Volunteers in the ministry begin with a four-session course for registered nurses.

The next Foundations Course will take place at St. John Center Friday, April 21, 5-9 p.m.; Saturday, April 22, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.; Friday,

May 5, 5-9 p.m.; and Saturday, May 6, 8 a.m.-2 p.m.

The course is approved by the American Nurses Association Scope and Standards of Practice. The main objective is to take nursing knowledge and combine it with spiritual care to prepare nurse "health ministers" to serve people in their parishes, especially people who are homebound.

There is no charge for a Catholic nurse to take the course. All fees are covered by Catholic Charities of Arkansas. Registered nurses who would like to learn more can contact Sister Iliana Aponte, DC, parish outreach liaison, at (501) 664-0340, ext. 403 or iaponte@dolr.org.

Additional information can also be found on dolr.org.

Search-and-reunion is new focus

Harris has led adoption agency for past 36 years

Antje Harris, director of Catholic Adoption Services for more than 36 years, transitioned from working full-time to part-time starting Nov. 1. The agency's focus is now on providing post-adoption support and assisting with search and reunions for clients who have worked with the agency.

Adoptees have a right to their truth and their story, Harris said.

"There is often a deep need to know more whether it is expressed or not," she said. "Some adoptees are concerned that they will hurt their adoptive parents' feelings by doing a search. Hopefully, the parents can understand this desire does not reflect on them as parents but on the importance of biological connections, heritage and identity."

The need can be even more relevant now with transracial adoptions. One sister, who was recently united with her biological brother who was presumed dead but was placed for adoption, said to him that he was lost and she had found him. Their reunion has been very positive for all.

Adoption Services Inc. was licensed in April 1984, and 66 of the adoptees placed are not yet of full legal age. The agency helps in requests for information and updates, supporting all parties in the adoption where possible. Some adoptions have been semi-opened while a child is still a minor to allow for more direct communication between the birth and adoptive parents. Not all placements can be this open for many different reasons, concerns and choices.

Any adoptee 18 years old and



mmirat, Adobe Stock

Catholic Adoption Services was founded in 1984, when open adoptions were rare. The agency may help a birth parent and the child they placed for adoption meet if both the parent and the adult adoptee request it.

older can request to be in contact with their birth parents if all involved choose to do so by mutual voluntary consent. There is no charge for these services. Some adoptees do not want to make contact until later when they are established and may consider having children. Some birth parents may not want to be located due to the sensitive nature of their original decision.

Harris pointed out that confidentiality could no longer be guaranteed with new laws and technologies. An adoptee 21 years old or older may request a copy of their original infant birth certificate through the Arkansas Department of Health for \$100. Other people try to locate each other through genetic testing. Both methods can have serious complications if not all want to be found.

Ongoing communication can

be essential to the health and well-being of an adoptee. Not all family medical conditions are known at the time of placement. Updated medical information is crucial, for example, with a newly discovered birth family history of breast cancer or other potentially inherited conditions, Harris said.

Important healing can occur with all involved in adoption. Birth mothers often want all involved to know that their decisions were made out of great love and hope for the very best for the child. The adoptee can acknowledge that truth by letting their birth parent know they recognize it was a painful decision made from necessity and love.

"Birth and adoptive parents can express the gratitude that goes both ways with everyone wanting the best interests of the child," Harris said.

Immigrant advocates disappointed over border proposals

Government proposes significantly limiting asylum to the U.S.

BY RHINA GUIDOS
OSV NEWS

WASHINGTON — In a word, Adrian Dominican Sister Attracta Kelly voiced the frustration a lot of immigration supporters feel toward the Biden administration: "disappointed."

One recent letdown came Feb. 21, when the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice announced a proposal that could significantly limit asylum to the U.S.

Worried about a potential wave of migrants heading to the

U.S.-Mexico border as the U.S. announces an end to pandemic restrictions in May, officials said they would turn away people who showed up to apply for asylum without first using "new and existing lawful processes" to enter the country, according to the proposal.

One program will allow nationals from countries that include Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Haiti to enter the U.S. if they have a financial sponsor. The government also wants migrants to submit online an asylum petition whose merits will be considered before they are allowed to enter the U.S., and to seek asylum in other countries before applying for it in the U.S.

The proposal was published in the Federal Register Feb. 23,

opening a period for public comment that ends March 27. Comments can be submitted online at federalregister.gov.

For advocates like Sister Kelly, a longtime immigration attorney who represents asylum-seekers, the proposal raises concerns about the safety of migrants who will not be allowed to seek refuge in the U.S. She scoffed at the idea that migrants could find in Mexico or elsewhere in Central America the safety the U.S. can provide.

They point to U.S. Department of State advisories warning against travel to El Salvador and Mexico. Two U.S. citizens were kidnapped and killed March 3 in Mexico.

The government says the proposed plan would help steer migrants away from dangerous and illegal border crossings and

toward safer, legal pathways to enter the country.

"We are a nation of immigrants, and we are a nation of laws," said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas during the proposal's release. "We are strengthening the availability of legal, orderly pathways for migrants to come to the United States, at the same time proposing new consequences on those who fail to use processes made available to them by the United States and its regional partners."

"As we have seen time and time again, individuals who are provided a safe, orderly, and lawful path to the United States are less likely to risk their lives traversing thousands of miles in the hands of ruthless smugglers, only to arrive at our southern border and face

the legal consequences of unlawful entry," he continued.

The proposal comes as the government is set to end May 11 federal public health emergency restrictions enacted at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. One of them, Title 42 of the Public Health Safety Act, was used by the former Trump administration beginning in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Title 42 allows immigration officials to quickly turn away migrants seeking asylum, citing concerns about spreading the coronavirus.

The Biden administration said in a statement that the proposal is a preventive "emergency measure" to dissuade migrants from arriving en masse at the U.S.-Mexico border hoping to be allowed in when Title 42 ends.