Fire gets response from disaster relief

CCA serving long-term needs of families left homeless in Mayflower

On the evening of Saturday, Oct. 14, a disastrous fire occurred at one of the apartment buildings of the Queens Manor Apartments in Mayflower.

Of suspicious origin, the fire spread quickly to a number of apartments. Nearly 50 residents were driven from their homes without warning, with only the clothes on their backs.

Immediately, Mayflower’s mayor and school superintendent set up a temporary shelter in the town’s elementary school. The American Red Cross responded, providing vouchers for hotels for those not able to stay with family or friends. Area churches began raising funds and collecting household items and clothing for the survivors.

Catholic Charities of Arkansas quickly became involved. Disaster preparedness and response coordinator, Tracy Eichenberger, went to the town and began case intake, working long into the night. Fourteen families were displaced by the fire. Of those, eight families were in need of long-term case management. Coordinating with Mayflower’s long-term recovery group, the Interfaith and Partners Disaster Recovery Alliance, Eichenberger triaged the cases, determining a priority of needs, and then set about obtaining the assistance needed.

Although all of the families have found shelter, not all have found permanent replacement housing. Eichenberger will continue to work with the families until all have found a new normal living arrangement, but there will be challenges. Even before the fire, a few of the families were struggling with finances. Through case management, she will work with the families and help them to formulate a plan that will allow for a workable future life. This case management requires a team approach, using the assets of the different resources available in the Mayflower community—churches, the Red Cross, town officials, the Salvation Army as well as Catholic Charities.

Rennie Tarpley, executive director of His Place His Way Outreach, has been instrumental in securing furniture and household items for the families through connections.

Local, U.S. disasters: Catholic Charities is there

In a preview of the Apocalypse, the end of the summer brought a series of disasters, one after another.

After years of having no significant hurricanes, storms came one after another causing extraordinary damages. Through it all, Catholic Charities organizations were on scene to provide assistance and help with long-term recovery.

The spring floods in Arkansas were the prelude. Catholic Charities of Arkansas established a case management office in Pocahontas as a base of operations. This office, staffed by Faye Spurlock, worked with long-term issues involving flood survivors and continues to help restore people to their new normal even to this day. This is on top of the super immediate response to the flooding provided by St. Paul Parish community in Pocahontas.

Catholic Charities of Arkansas extended help to other areas as well, including Saline, Pulaski, Faulkner, White and Lawrence counties, all through the efforts of disaster preparedness and response coordinator Tracy Eichenberger.

Hurricane Harvey came ashore in Texas Aug. 25, starting a six-day ravaging of Texas and Louisiana. Catholic Charities USA responded to the area to help coordinate the efforts of the local Catholic Charities organizations in the affected dioceses. Because San Antonio was not subjected to the storm damage, Catholic Charities of San Antonio set up a logistics depot and trucking an estimated $4 million in supplies to Hurricane Harvey survivors, using Catholic Charities in the Galveston-Houston area to distribute the relief supplies.

Catholic Charities of Arkansas was able to help channel funds and some supplies to the hurricane affected areas.

Immediately after, Hurricane Irma cruised through the eastern Caribbean, driving north up the west coast of Florida. The Emergency Management Specialist for the Florida Catholic Conference, Gabe Tischler, had plans in place through the Catholic Charities throughout the state to respond. Because of lessons learned from Hurricane Andrew, Florida was prepared to meet Irma. Again, Catholic Charities USA deployed additional staff to assist with the hurricane response.

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See DISASTER page 12
**Partners join in the spirit of St. Nicholas**

Artwork graces front of Christmas cards sent to prospective donors

As we enter the holiday season, let us not get too caught up in hustle and bustle that comes with this time of year. Christmas time is a great time of year to remember the spirit of St. Nicholas. He was a well-known saint who devoted his life to sharing his faith and helping those in need. Although his works of charity were performed long ago, he continues to inspire a season of kindness, generosity and joyfulness.

Each year, Catholic Charities sends out Christmas cards as a winter fundraiser. This particular fundraiser is special because the donor can specify which individual programs they would like their donation to go toward.

Programs include Parish Social Ministry, Prison Ministry, Adoption Services, Immigration Services, the Westside Free Medical Clinic and many more. There is also an option to give where the funds are most needed.

Donors also have the unique opportunity to be able to give their gift in honor or memory of someone, and an acknowledgment card will be sent to that person or their family.

Catholic Charities of Arkansas again held an art contest for St. Nicholas Partners Christmas card. The response to the request for artwork from Catholic schools was outstanding.

Office manager Bridget Lewis said, "We greatly appreciate all of the schools that send in artwork, and allowed their students to participate."

The first-place winner was Anna Kate Lipin from Our Lady of the Holy Soul School in Little Rock. The second-place winner was Matthew Pollock of St. Vincent de Paul School in Rogers. The third-place winner was William Stager from North Little Rock Catholic Academy.

Keep Catholic Charities in mind when thinking of nontraditional Christmas gifts to those you love. If the donation is made before Dec. 15, a card can be mailed to your loved one to be received by Christmas.

What better way to pass on the Christmas spirit, than to give back to those in need. Your donation will not only make a difference to someone around our state who need it most. Your donation, no matter how large or small, will make a difference.

According to Eichenberger, some of the families are now living in efficiency apartments, until larger units become available. These efficiency apartments do not have kitchens and the families are not able to prepare homemade-cooked meals.

The Adopt a Fire Family program will make a significant difference for these families during the coming holidays. If you are interested in sponsoring a family, contact Eichenberger at (501) 664-0340, ext. 420. Monetary donations or gift cards may be mailed to the Interfaith and Partners Disaster Recovery Alliance, P.O. Box 983, Mayflower, AR 72106.

"Thanksgiving and Christmas will be difficult for many of the families," Tarpley said.

**Abandoned’ migrant children can get help**

Springdale office reaches out to serve kids eligible for SIJS

Over the past five years, as other illegal immigration has almost ground to a halt, scores of young children — some as young as 4 years old — have made their way from Central America, across the dangerous terrains of Mexico, to our communities in Arkansas.

Many of these orphans and abandoned kids are thankful to be apprehended by the immigration officials of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the Arizona or Texas deserts, trusting that any fate in the U.S. gives them a better chance at survival than life in their home countries.

In November, a Catholic Charities representative met with a young woman who had fled the gang-controlled streets of Honduras to escape the gang’s “join-or-die” recruitment tactics.

Catholic Charities Immigration Services’ northwest office recently received a grant from The Denver Foundation to help kids like her, as long as they meet the following criteria:

- The child must be:
  - under the age of 18,
  - living with DACA or without any immigration status at all, and
  - live with only one biological parent or without both biological parents (Minors with a stepfather or a stepmother could still qualify).

Many children could qualify for a path to citizenship through this relatively unknown opportunity called Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Children who apply for SIJS must not get married until their green card arrives, lest they lose their ability to receive resident status through this form of relief. After five years as a green card holder, these children will be able to apply for U.S. citizenship. This truly is a remarkable opportunity for many of Arkansas’ immigrant youth.

Contact Catholic Charities Immigration Services in Springdale for more information at info@ccisnw.org or call (479) 927-1996. Services for these immigrant minors are free.

Disaster

**Continued from page 11**

People affected by Hurricane Maria wait to receive food aid in the headquarters of Caritas Puerto Rico Oct. 20 in San Juan.

CNS / Bob Roller

on Puerto Rico. Destroying the island’s entire electric infrastructure, severely damaging the water and sewer utilities, damaging roads and severely damaging or destroying as many as 250,000 homes, Maria leaves a legacy that will require years of rebuilding. Caritas Puerto Rico is on the ground aiding the recovery effort, assisted by Catholic Charities USA, Caritas Internationalis and Caritas de Espana.

After special collections were taken nationwide, Catholic Charities USA was able to deliver significant funding to local Catholic Charities organizations: $2 million in Texas, $2 million in Florida and $2 million in Puerto Rico.

All the while these major storms raged, Mexico recovered from a significant earthquake that damaged, among other areas, Mexico City. Caritas de Mexico was the leader in responding, Catholic Relief Services brought U.S. Catholic relief funds to assist with recovery efforts.

The fires in northern California created special challenges. The local diocese, the Diocese of Santa Rosa, suffered damage to schools, diocesan offices and the homes of staff and parishioners. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Santa Rosa worked in conjunction with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to find housing for those displaced by the fires.

Tragedy came to our country in the form of shooting incidents. Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada was on hand to offer assistance to survivors of the horrific shooting in Las Vegas with in-kind relief items and funds. Further, Catholic Charities of San Antonio has offered its help to the survivors of the most recent mass shooting in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

Fire

**Continued from page 11**

dations. Tarpley said he has crews who can pick up donated furniture, but an appointment will need to be made by calling Tarpley at (501) 344-1426. He asked that the items be in good condition.

Tarpley said an Adopt a Fire Family program has been started for the displaced residents, and sponsoring individuals, families, churches or organizations are needed.

“We need families or civic groups or churches to adopt them, love them, encourage them and help them get the things they need and just be there for them. This is especially important with the holiday season approaching. Thanksgiving and Christmas will be difficult for many of the families,” Tarpley said.

According to Eichenberger, some of the families are now living in efficiency apartments, until larger units become available. These efficiency apartments do not have kitchens and the families are not able to prepare homemade-cooked meals.

The Adopt a Fire Family program will make a significant difference for these families during the coming holidays. If you are interested in sponsoring a family, contact Eichenberger at (501) 664-0340, ext. 420. Monetary donations or gift cards may be mailed to the Interfaith and Partners Disaster Recovery Alliance, P.O. Box 983, Mayflower, AR 72106.
Rx for better health: Plant more trees

BY KAREN DIPIPPA

When people think of health care, usually the words sickness, wellness, exercise or dietary plans come to mind. While all of these are essential components to health and health care, there is another aspect of health that is ephemeral, essential and critical.

Nature has a role in the well-being of all of us and our Church teaches us that we also have a responsibility to protect the natural world. Most recently, Pope Francis emphasized our role in protecting green space, which is essential to optimal health, particularly in urban areas.

The Catholic Church has a tradition of caring for creation. One example is a USCCB statement: “We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the Earth is not just an Earth Day slogan; it is a requirement of our faith.”

Recent months make it apparent how nature affects every aspect of life. Who could avoid the news of the hurricanes, wildfires and flooding? Our lives as well as lifestyles are being challenged by the forces of nature. According to a summary statement in Funding Trees for Health by the Nature Conservancy with the Analysis Group and Trust for Public Lands, “new tree planting isn’t keeping pace with the mortality of existing trees either from natural causes or clearing of trees for new development.”

Citing the positive influence of trees, this document also includes a study “Green for Good” which reports the measurable healthy outcomes when trees and green space were planted as a buffer between a busy highway and an elementary school in Kentucky. The green space acted as an air pollution filter. Data was collected before and after the buffer was in place. It showed healthy persons decreased their inflammation levels and increased their immune system function after the planting of green space.

More healthy outcomes ensued. Trees help promote clean air, which in turn reduces asthma and other respiratory health as well as improves cardiovascular health. There was a correlation between the number of parks near a student’s home and a lower BMI later in life at age 18.

This report lists more benefits from trees. “Trees can help regulate water quality, water quantity and water flow.” Lastly, trees and green space reduce temperatures by cooling the air by acting as shade screens.

Although we don’t need a financial gain to protect creation, on the business side of things, a study in California shows that every $1 spent on a tree provides a $5.82 return. Nature connects life in interchanging ways. We need to protect this life, our planet and the lives of the forest. Because we cannot always prevent natural disasters, we need to take this longstanding tradition in Catholic Social Teaching to heart: be pro-life, be pro-all living creations, trees and other-wise.

Karen DiPippa is the director of Westside Free Medical Clinic in Little Rock.

Giving back

The student council at Christ the King School in Fort Smith donated $2,000 to hurricane relief from money it raised on Fridays during lunch by selling candy and holding the annual Father-Daughter Dance. Sixth-grader Ryan Crable, student council president (right), presented the check Nov. 2 to Rebecca Cargile of Catholic Charities of Arkansas.

Overall, Catholic Charities USA has donated $2 million to each of the major hurricanes this fall: Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Louisiana, Hurricane Irma in Florida and the Caribbean and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

In Benton, parishioners from Our Lady of Fatima Church assist in providing food, clothing, and financial assistance through the Churches Joint Council on Human Need. In Maumelle, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church of North Little Rock (Marche) helps sustain the Hope Ministry Alliance to distribute food and clothing.

In Jacksonville, St. Jude the Apostle Church supports Fishnet Missions to distribute food to the poor, the elderly, veterans and the homeless. In Jonesboro, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul provides monthly financial assistance to those in need.

The Catholic Church has a mission to take this longstanding tradition in Catholic Social Teaching to heart: be pro-life, be pro-all living creations, trees and other-wise.