

# Matthew 25



September 2023

A journal on ministry and service to the margins in western Oregon

Catholic Charities

## ‘God is in everyone’s story’

*From immigrant to community leader*

BY VANESSA GALLANT

CATHOLIC CHARITIES VOLUNTEER

Antoinette Awuakye is a Catholic Charities Board member and senior regulatory affairs specialist at Cambia Health Solutions. She was a young girl when she immigrated to the United States from Ghana.

Her grandfather Kwame, while a young man in Ghana, helped Catholic missionaries translate English into the local language. Kwame became Catholic, and every member of his family followed him into the church.

Antoinette’s father John grew up attending Catholic schools and took his faith seriously. As a high ranking official in the Ghana military, he led a somewhat privileged life. The family had a residence provided for them as well as maids and drivers. But as a man of faith and conscience, John could not accept a military coup that overthrew the established government. He was accused of being an American spy and was exiled in retaliation. With the cooperation of the CIA, he was granted asylum in Virginia but had to leave his wife and three young children behind.

As a result of John’s exile, the family lost their home, privileges and many friends. Her mother

Esther bore the stress alone while anxiously waiting to hear when they could leave the country and rejoin John. After about eight months and two failed attempts, they were finally on a plane bound for Virginia. Antoinette was 12.

“It was such a beautiful homecoming,” said Antoinette. “We were finally safe and together again as a family.”

Not long after they arrived in the U.S., her youngest sister Kizita was rushed to the emergency room. After several weeks in the hospital, she was diagnosed with sickle cell anemia. If they had not come to the U.S. and received such good medical care, Kizita would have died.

“God chose us to go through this and we are here for a reason,” said Antoinette. “We were forced to leave our country, but we were able to experience something so much better.”

Having to start over, her father went back to school to earn a degree in computer science. Money was tight but he made sure his children were enrolled in Catholic schools as they had been in Ghana.

During college at George Mason University in northern Virginia, Antoinette thrived academically but she lost connection with her Catholic faith. Years later, after moving to Oregon for work and law school, she met her future husband, Blayne, who would change all that.

“At that point I felt there was something missing in my life,” she explained. “I found my connection to God again and Blayne and I grew together in our faith.”

In 2001, her father was finally exonerated after a democratic surge



ANTOINETTE AWUAKYE

in Ghana. He was allowed back into the country.

“I believe God had a plan for us and he continues to walk with me,” said Antoinette. “My faith, which was passed down from my grandfather to my father to me, helps me stay on that path.”

Antoinette and Blayne are members of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Lake Oswego where two of their children attend grade school. Their oldest daughter is at Jesuit High School. Antoinette credits her pastor, Father John Kerns, for fostering a sense of belonging, helping her “find her space” and feeling at home in the parish.

Her father’s exile began a journey her family never expected. Forced to leave their homeland, they trusted in God’s plan and found health, happiness and redemption in a new life.

“God is in everyone’s story and has a plan especially during the hardest times,” said Antoinette. “He was in my story. He had a plan for us all along.”



Good Shepherd Village.

## New residents need supplies

In October, Catholic Charities of Oregon will welcome 142 households to their new homes at Good Shepherd Village apartments in Happy Valley. Many families will have very low incomes or be transitioning from homelessness. Parishioners and other donors are asked to bundle items below in a bin for these admirable households and deliver the bins to Catholic Charities headquarters.

### Family Welcome Kit

- Oregon calendar
- Map of area
- Jar candle with lighter
- Throw blanket
- Notebook and pens
- Kitchen/dish towels (2)
- Hand soap
- Chocolate
- Salt & pepper
- Umbrella
- Soccer ball
- A "Welcome home!" note

### Fill their kitchens

Refugees being served by Catholic Charities need plates, silverware, kitchen utensils, pots and pans. More than two dozen refugee families will be setting up house this fall in various locations.

These items can be dropped off at our offices, 2740 SE Powell in Portland. To arrange a donation pickup of these items at your home, please contact Peter Vins of Catholic Charities, [pvins@ccoregon.org](mailto:pvins@ccoregon.org).

# New board chair begins role

The new chairman of the Catholic Charities of Oregon board of directors is a native Oregonian who has served quietly but actively for decades in philanthropic roles.

When he was a child, the family were stalwarts at Holy Trinity Parish, where Jeff Yandle attended grade school and developed a sense of doing good in the world. His father Ken had helped found and run KGW-TV, and his mother Maribeth was an avid community volunteer.

He earned a degree at the University of Portland in 1981 and did post-graduate study at Moreau Seminary at the University of Notre Dame.

Jeff began a career in wealth management in 1984 and is now Senior Managing Director and Regional Manager at J.P. Morgan Wealth Management/First Republic. He has been named multiple times by both Forbes and Barron's



Jeff Yandle

as one of Oregon's best wealth advisors.

In addition to his role with Catholic Charities, Jeff serves on the board of Candlelighters for Children with Cancer and on the Investment Committee for the Archdiocese of Portland. He has served in many other capacities.

Jeff and his wife, Dr. Molly Moran-Yandle, have been married for 40 years. They have two children and four grandchildren.

## SEPT. 27: HISTORY OF SOCIAL ACTION

Learn about a young Catholic woman who went undercover to discover labor abuses in early 20th century Portland.

Meet a priest who faced off with an anti-religious Portland street preacher to make the point that Jesus, not Karl Marx, is the real friend of the laborer.

As Catholic Charities of Oregon marks its 90th anniversary, it's time to explore the agency's precursors and origins.

In a lecture set for 7 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 27, at Catholic Charities headquarters or on

Zoom, Ed Langlois, former reporter and editor for the Catholic Sentinel newspaper, will examine the history of social action among Oregon Catholics, who pioneered



many advances.

"The history makes one feel proud but also imposes a happy obligation to carry on," Langlois said.

To register, please scan the QR code at right or visit: [catholiccharitiesoregon.org/events/upcoming/oregon-pioneering-catholic-social-action/](http://catholiccharitiesoregon.org/events/upcoming/oregon-pioneering-catholic-social-action/)



Have a story about Catholics reaching out to those on the margins? Contact Ed Langlois, Catholic Charities communications director, [elanglois@ccoregon.org](mailto:elanglois@ccoregon.org) or 503.935.6187.



To read the extended versions of these stories, visit: [catholiccharitiesoregon.org](http://catholiccharitiesoregon.org)