

Matthew 25



November, 2023

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

Catholic Charities

Urgent need for refugee housing

Appeal goes out for houses, apartments and rooms for temporary stays

One of Oregon's leading refugee resettlement organizations is asking local property owners to consider offering spare rooms, available rental units, and homes for temporary housing.

The situation has reached a crisis level, said Claudia Munoz, program director of Refugee Services for Catholic Charities of Oregon.

"Public funding for short-term housing for refugees is running out, and we hope citizens of goodwill can step forward to help these brave people who have escaped danger," Munoz said.

In the past, Catholic Charities has housed refugees in hotels, but federal funding has been limited to specific populations, and there is no longer government funding to cover those costs, Munoz explained.

The initiative is meant for single refugees or couples without children because traveling as a larger group means more money for deposits and a couple of months of rent. The federal government provides each refugee individual with only \$1,375 to pay for housing and basic needs upon arrival, so for small groups, the money runs out fast, especially in Oregon.

Typically, temporary housing is needed for spans of three to six months.

Munoz is making the appeal to faith-based groups, landlords, Airbnb owners and even ordinary homeowners who have spare rooms.

In the past 12 months, Catholic



Debo, a refugee from the Central African Republic, softly plays his drum on the steps of a house offered to Catholic Charities by a Southeast Portland neighborhood. Many more housing units are needed in the next year.

Charities resettled 247 refugees. In the next year, the agency expects to resettle about 335 from places like the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Central America.

Those granted refugee status by federal authorities would face peril if returned to their homelands. The government asks agencies like Catholic Charities to resettle refugees. The process follows legal

and proper channels established by Congress which include extensive background checks and medical screenings prior to arrival in the U.S.

Because the Portland area offers the bulk of services like health care and federal offices, the temporary housing should be in or near Portland, Munoz said. If one church or neighborhood could offer multiple rooms, that would be most effective.

"We could build little communities where refugees can learn to navigate a new culture and community in a safe space," Munoz said.

Refugees are given phones that include translation software and are adept at using technology to communicate. Also, they are provided case management support for a minimum of 90-days after arriving in Portland.

Those with rooms to offer can contact Jesse Crawford at jcrawford@ccoregon.org or 503-805-3563.

For parishes interested in hearing more, Crawford and Peter Vins of the Catholic Charities Refugee Services team, pictured below, are ready and willing to come give a presentation.



Remembering Katie as she'd like it

One day each year, Catholic Charities outreach staff and volunteers stride into the morning and pass out sack breakfasts to homeless people on Portland's inner east side. The moment of encounter and hospitality happens each year as a tribute to Katie Nolan, an ebullient and adventuresome Catholic Charities social worker who died in 2009 while ascending Mount Hood.

Nolan, 29, believed in interactions with those on the margins and realized that spirits, as well as bodies, need nourishment. She was earning a master's degree in social work when she died.

In her time working for Catholic Charities, Nolan helped find housing for 62 women in the Portland area.

'Resilient, generous'

Natalie Wood, executive director of Catholic Charities of Oregon, issued a public statement Sept. 6 after a fire damaged St. Joseph Church in Salem:

"Our hearts go out to the wonderful community at St. Joseph Parish in Salem. Fire may have damaged their church, but the people are resilient and generous."

Featured speaker

Natalie Wood spoke recently at The Grotto in Portland during one of the monthly "Mass, Lunch & Learn" sessions. Attendees convene on the first Tuesday of each month for a speaker with lunch provided.

Wood discussed Catholic Charities initiatives in housing, homelessness and migrant ministry.



Catholic Charities staff created buttons with a likeness of Katie Nolan.

Domestic abuse trainings in Newport

A team from Catholic Charities of Oregon went to the largest city on the Oregon coast recently to train social service providers in options available for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and stalking.

The training drew 22 people and was held in collaboration with Newport-based My Sister's Place, which aids Lincoln County residents experiencing abuse.

Those who attended included domestic violence advocates from Newport and Lincoln City, staff in the Lincoln County School District, child advocates from the Department of Health and Human Services, community health providers, and culturally specific nonprofit advocates.

IT'S BEST TO BE PREPARED FOR THE WORST

It's knowledge they hope they'll never need to use.

Natalie Wood, executive director of Catholic Charities of Oregon, and Nicole Sherriffs, senior human resources manager, attended a regional training on responding to disasters.

The agency mounted a major response after wildfires devastated Oregon in 2020 and 2021. Now, it's poised to restart disaster services should more fires wreak havoc or earthquakes or floods arrive.

The training in San Jose, Calif. drew more than 100 Catholic Charities staff from Oregon, California, Washington and Nevada.

"CCO is one of the top three disaster response agencies and we are the only ones that stick around for the long haul doing long term recovery and case management," said Sherriffs.

Housing, a Catholic Charities specialty, has proven one of the most difficult challenges after disasters. "Collaboration and innovation are key to responding to housing needs," Wood said.

Father Thomas Ryan, of the Di-



John Herrera, Immigration Legal Services director for Catholic Charities of Oregon, gives a presentation to Spanish speaking abuse survivors.

The same day, Catholic Charities staff and My Sister's Place organized a community education event, presented in Spanish, about immigration options for survivors. Thirty-six community members attended. The event was advertised in social media, at the local courthouse, library, recreation center, housing authority, fish packing plant and restaurants.



Nicole Sherriffs and Natalie Wood of Catholic Charities of Oregon pose with Carol Spruell of Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge.

ocese of Metuchen, NJ, led a session on spiritual care and self-care during disasters.

"God doesn't need a defense attorney, he needs us to just listen," Father Ryan told listeners. Often, disaster survivors blame or question God, making some service providers feel they need to defend the Almighty.

Have a story about Catholics reaching out to those on the margins? Contact elangois@coregon.org or 503.539.6333.

Extended versions of these stories: catholiccharitiesoregon.org

