

Matthew 25



May 2024

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

Catholic Charities

One parish's efforts on homelessness

Ascension Catholic Parish in Southeast Portland has long offered shelter for the most vulnerable, starting in the 1980s.

Now, the parish is part of the church-based Family Promise network. The old Ascension school cafeteria holds 15 people, large enough to make a real difference yet small enough for the interaction to be meaningful.

Churches in the network shelter families four weeks per year. Ascension groups its four weeks in August so families can have an entire month to stay put. Volunteers make dinner, host overnight, drive, set up, and recruit and train volunteers.

"This shelter provides an opportunity to be part of the solution and it's a way for parishioners to get started in ministry to people experiencing homelessness," said Sharon Grigar, longtime pastoral associate at Ascension. "It helps engage parishioners outside themselves. We have so many parishioners who are very caring."

In general, families are given shelter for 90 days, usually enough time to help them find affordable housing at a site like one of Catholic Charities' 20 buildings.

Citing the passages in Matthew 25, in which Jesus explains that when we care for the needy we care for him, Grigar said: "It's a Christian responsibility. It's messy but it's important and it's worth it."



The Ascension parish hall served as an emergency weather shelter this winter. Across the parish grounds, the former school cafeteria is a family shelter each August. (Korin Kanzler/Catholic Charities)

Ascension is the only Oregon Catholic parish so far that offers space through Family Promise. But it teams up with The Madeline Parish in Northeast Portland, which sends volunteers and other support to its Catholic neighbor to the southeast.

Marylee Stahl, a member of Ascension, is secretary of the board for Family Promise of Metro East Portland.

"Getting volunteers is really really hard," said Stahl. Even though overnight hosting is the easiest gig, few people want to do it.

"It's hard to get people out of their comfort zones," said Stahl. "But it's good to teach people in the pews who the homeless are."

Stahl said volunteers are usually surprised at how gracious homeless families can be.

"When you sit down to have a meal with someone it makes it real," Stahl said.

In one family of six, the dad

worked full time but lost his job and eventually lost housing. The family stayed in the Family Promise shelter for four months and worked with the organization's housing specialist. The mother was able to enter a program for people with disabilities. Eventually, they found an apartment. Now, the dad wants to volunteer.

Another mom with a young son needed shelter and childcare because she worked nights. Working with Family Promise, she got a full-time day job and housing.

A family seeking refuge from an unstable government in Venezuela is getting shelter, and Spanish-speakers from Ascension are helping the family get stabilized.

"We obviously have a huge problem in Portland with homelessness," Stahl said. "You can't pretend it's not there. This is one little thing you can do to make a difference, even without spending money."

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Shelter from storm

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During the winter that just ended, Ascension Catholic Parish in Southeast Portland offered space for a Multnomah County emergency shelter. The location was Tony Rinella Hall, the parish's main non-liturgical event space.

The parish signed on just in time for the mid-January snow, freeze and ice. Almost 100 people found warm shelter at the parish Jan. 19-24.

The county provides staff, volunteers, food, water and bedding. During this storm, a record number of people were sheltered. Several Catholic Charities employees helped staff the shelter.

Large apartments?

Federal authorities have approved a number of large refugee families for arrival in Portland this spring, and Catholic Charities of Oregon has been asked to help them resettle.

Facing Portland's housing shortage, the agency is asking independent owners of housing to consider renting 3- and 4-bedroom units to the families.

"We'd like to reach more independent renters in general for all types of housing though, folks who understand the barriers our clients face and are willing to rent to them," said Jesse Crawford, refugee services housing coordinator for Catholic Charities.

"These families have survived great ordeals and are so happy to find safety in Oregon," said Ed Langlois, communications director for Catholic Charities. "We have seen how they have enriched neighborhoods."

Catholic Charities and its volunteers provide social services to the families.

Owners interested in renting properties can contact Crawford at jcrawford@ccoregon.org.

They promote Latine thriving

A long-established service organization working with Oregon's Latine community is seeking new board members to sustain its life-giving mission.

El Programa Hispano Catòlico, a member of the Catholic Charities of Oregon network, serves about 32,000 individuals annually via efforts in economic sustainability, education, community wellness, domestic violence healing and sexual violence survivor support.

The vision of El Programa is a Latine community living to its fullest potential.

A board recruitment happy hour is set for Thursday, June 6, 5 p.m.-7 p.m. at the El Programa office, 333 SE 223rd Ave., #100, Gresham, OR 97030.

El Programa Hispano Catòlico's roots go back to 1982, when a small group of outreach workers from Catholic Charities began to provide services to Latine migrant farmworkers.

Natalie Wood, executive director of Catholic Charities of Oregon, is



herself Latine and an El Programa board member. She urges leaders to consider joining the cause.

"El Programa Hispano Catòlico has a unique and powerful role in Oregon, applying the beautiful Catholic social justice principles for children, abuse survivors, families and seniors," Wood says. "This smart organization has set just the right path to help a community thrive. And now it needs bright leaders to keep it moving forward."

To register for the free happy hour, scan at right.



HISTORIC GALA SET FOR MAY 18

In 1844, six sea-weary Belgian nuns arrived at St. Paul Mission on the Willamette to open an orphanage in a log cabin.

So began the charitable work of the Catholic Church in Oregon.

For 90 years, Catholic Charities has carried on this legacy, caring for unwanted babies, unwed mothers, seniors, people who are homeless, refugees, migrants and families in need.

If you want to support this work, and have a good time, come to Celebration of Hope, set for May 18 at Avenue, an exciting new location that sets the standard for audiovisual presentations.

We'll be wearing fashions from 90 years back for an evening of period music, great food and stories about how you help people move

into the future with hope.

You'll be hearing from three women who have found a home off the streets with our Housing Transitions Program and Kenton Women's Village. And you'll get to see your friends.

Seating is limited, so act today.

For details, including how to register, scan at right or email donations@ccoregon.org.



Unable to attend Celebration of Hope or looking for other ways to support? Scan at right to bid in a silent auction.

