

# Matthew 25



May 2023

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

Catholic Charities

## Lunch among ladies

They call each other “ladies.”

That’s because when volunteers from Holy Redeemer Parish in North Portland visit Kenton Women’s Village each month, respect runs even deeper than the dishes of lasagna the parishioners bring for lunch.

“There is nobody as great as these people,” villager Elena Wilson says. Villagers have been houseless but now form community in a pod of tiny homes two miles from the parish.

“They are awesome,” Wilson says, having just emptied a plate over conversation and laughter. “They are a godsend.”

Catholic Charities of Oregon manages the village.

“I hope they come again because I really enjoy them,” says villager Toni Tuski, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Fran Smith of Holy Redeemer. “It means a lot to me. I really love them coming here. They’re good ladies.”

The pleasures flow both ways.

“These ladies are amazing,” Smith says of Tuski and other villagers. “They are so full of joy. I have learned from them that you can have some adversity or



Lunette Wimberly of Kenton Women’s Village and Pat Cronin of Holy Redeemer Parish chat after a weekday lunch.

sadness in your life but you can overcome it.”

Cherie Hadley, Catholic Charities’ program coordinator, says the lunches mean a lot to villagers. “They get to communicate and sit down and fellowship,” Hadley explains as a train roars past. “Someone serves them and they feel love.”

Leader of the Holy Redeemer team is Pat Cronin, who helped start the ministry not long after her husband died. “Women lose housing for so many different reasons,” says Cronin. “They deserve all the support and the recognition and the assistance and just the love that we can show to them.”

Two 20-something villagers appreciate the chance to engage with more seasoned women.

Lunette Wimberly, a 27-year-old community organizer, enjoys meeting with women who are both kind and clear about what’s



Toni Tuski of Kenton Women’s Village and Fran Smith of Holy Redeemer Parish discuss the joy of monthly luncheons.

right and just.

“Getting to speak with the ladies from this church about mission values and getting good points of wisdom from them is really nice,” Wimberly says.

The parish women say meeting the villagers has made them better human beings.

“They are very resilient,” says Andrea Belcher, a member of Holy Redeemer for 20 years. “I don’t know if I could love as much as they do in such conditions.”



Afghan refugees wait at Portland International Airport where a crew from Catholic Charities offered a greeting and help.

## Welcome to your new life

Catholic Charities of Oregon continues to assist refugees on a steady basis. Numbers vary widely according to federal policy and conditions, but the agency expects to welcome 400 families this year with housing, jobs, orientation, financial coaching and legal aid.

The start of many relationships is an airport welcome, with staff and volunteers meeting weary families the moment they emerge from the security area at PDX.

Depending on the culture and personality of refugees, there are handshakes or hugs, cheering or quiet resolve to get down to business.

At a recent airport greeting, an Afghan family of four included a couple with two daughters who had escaped danger and chaos. The husband had served as a guard at a U.S. military base.

The Catholic Charities team greeted the family, showed them to the luggage carousel and then hoisted heavy bags.

The crew took the family to their apartment. Settling, education, health checkups and orientation began over the next few days.

The following week, Catholic Charities staff were on hand to welcome more people escaping danger, this time from Guatemala. Next week, it could be Ukraine, Congo, Burma or Iraq.

## Counting when everybody counts

Meeting people who are houseless is not new for Julia Paulsen and Caitlin Gleeson.

As staff for Catholic Charities of Oregon, their weekly work includes visits to people living on the streets.

But at the start of the year, the pair ranged more widely, finding even more camps and asking more questions.

It was the Point in Time Count, when cities and counties nationwide see how many people are experiencing houselessness. Paulsen and Gleeson walked beneath bridges and freeway underpasses, through vacant lots and into urban nooks and crannies.

“It’s shocking to see where people are,” said Paulsen, coordinator of outreach services. Rose Bak, chief program officer for Catholic Charities, said Portland makes a real effort to count as many as possible. “We believe everyone on the street has value and deserves to be



Caitlin Gleeson and Julia Paulsen of Catholic Charities’ homeless outreach services set off on the annual Point in Time Count in January. The backpacks are full of items to be offered to people who are houseless.

included and recognized,” Bak says.

Paulsen and Gleeson say houseless people form communal groups. Members keep watch over each other’s belongings and share stories and laughs. During the count, one street family’s dog had just had puppies. The forms lacked a space for counting canines.

### PROFILE

## CHARITY AND JUSTICE A VITAL MIX

Rebecca Yazzie has served on the Catholic Charities of Oregon board of directors since 2016 and is current board chair.

She directs the Master of Social Work program at George Fox University, where she is associate professor of social



work. Growing up in a large Hispanic family as the youngest of six, Rebecca’s Catholic faith was shaped at an early age by her mother and godmother who modeled compassion, understanding and service to others.

Rebecca says both charitable works and social justice advocacy are key to addressing need. She admires Pope Francis for calling people to action on both.

Rebecca volunteers in social justice at Holy Trinity Parish in Beaverton. She fondly recalls spending time with her godmother who went to daily Mass, taught her the rosary and died at age 98. “She modeled how to live out her faith. She taught me to integrate my faith into everything I do.”

(A longer version of this story is available at [catholiccharitiesoregon.org](http://catholiccharitiesoregon.org).)

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.



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