

Low-income assistance stretched for those in need

written by Arkansas Catholic Staff |



Catholic Charities of Arkansas is on many lists around the state as a provider of charitable assistance to help families address food shortages, temporary housing, emergency and primary care medical expenses and other critical needs.

Requests are received from all areas of the diocese. Staff respond daily to requests for food assistance and free or low-cost medical services by connecting individuals with local food pantries and non-profit charitable medical clinics.

Other common inquiries and requests for assistance are made by people seeking temporary housing at a shelter or motel, help paying their rent, help paying a utility bill or the cost of a prescription drug, and occasionally help with paying funeral expenses.

The volume of requests typically is higher around holidays and at the end of the month.

People have different reasons for contacting Catholic Charities of Arkansas for help. Some have lost their jobs, others have experienced a medical condition or injury that prevents them from working, and there are seniors living on a fixed income, sometimes with other family members to care for.

For example, it is not uncommon to receive a request from a grandparent with a disability who is providing for their grandchild because her or his parents cannot. Inflation is also a factor for people who work at low-wage jobs without health care benefits or paid sick leave.

Since the funds available to Catholic Charities of Arkansas to support this ministry are limited and come mostly from donations, only a small number of requests for financial assistance can be satisfied. To increase its capacity to help more people, Catholic Charities of Arkansas works with other helping organizations whenever possible, especially the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

An emphasis at Catholic Charities of Arkansas has been to strengthen our partnerships with the local chapters of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. These partnerships have enabled the two Catholic charitable groups with a common mission of serving the poor to combine resources and reach more families in need.

Andrew Schaefer, a diocesan seminarian who works a few days a week with the staff at Catholic Charities of Arkansas, has spent time with both groups.

"I have been blessed to work both at Catholic Charities and with St. Vincent de Paul volunteers, and these two organizations really live out the Church's teaching of 'the preferential option for the poor,' he said. "They embody the corporal works of mercy and truly serve each person as if they were Jesus himself."

To donate to Catholic Charities' assistance program, send a check to 2415 N. Tyler St., Little Rock, AR 72207 or visit dolr.org/catholic-charities/ways-to-donate.