On any given Friday, there is a line at Catholic Charities’ Ecumenical Soup Kitchen (EK) on Chew Street in Allentown. Clients start lining up well before the 12:30 p.m. opening. The clients still lined up at the Soup Kitchen on Fridays, even during the last five months of the COVID-19 social distancing order.

The EK doors may have been closed, but that didn’t stop Catholic Charities from providing essential boxes of food for families and individuals to take with them, all while following CDC regulations and social distancing.

The regular soup kitchen clients were not able to receive their normal hot meal, as the kitchen had to be closed due to the pandemic. Instead, individuals and families received emergency food boxes sized according to the number of people living in a household, intended to supplement a family’s groceries with a three to four-day supply of food, which also would allow them to save a portion of their grocery budget for other necessities.

Lindsay Sarver, former Executive Administrative Assistant, who coordinated the grocery box distribution efforts, made sure anyone in the EK neighborhood who was facing nourishment insecurity was provided a box. The food boxes contained everything from fresh milk and eggs to canned chicken; from bread and pasta items to baby food.

Clients were even treated to fresh, locally grown produce thanks to the Central City Project run by Allentown Central Catholic High School.

Sarver utilized a mix of donated foods and monetary donations to keep the food supply stocked. A number of “Donation Drive-Thru” events were held in the parking lot of the Vegan Butcher on Union Blvd. in Allentown, as well as ??????????. These food drives resulted in a collection of well over 10,000 pounds of food!

Tucker Silk Mill in Easton also provided critical donations. Jason Hoy, owner of the Silk Mill, very creatively encouraged patrons to purchase food at cost that Jason then distributed to Catholic Charities and other local food...
**Ombudsmen Advocate for Long-Term Care Patients**

Catholic Charities has begun providing a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program in Lehigh and Northampton Counties. The Ombudsman Program works to resolve complaints and issues on behalf of individuals residing in long-term care settings, such as nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and personal care homes. The program is designed to support and empower consumers by resolving individual complaints involving long-term care service while working to improve and enhance the long-term living system for the residents and their families. The Ombudsmen empower residents by educating them on their rights under federal and state law. The Ombudsmen advocate for those who are unable to advocate for themselves.

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**Dear Friends,**

I’m sure most recent communications from non-profit organizations are filled with stories of how the pandemic has affected them and their services. My message will be no exception and that’s because the unprecedented Corona Virus pandemic has forced us all to stretch our minds to think differently; to make the best use of resources, to engage volunteers more fully, and to learn to be flexible so that we can continue to serve those who depend on us. We do this because the need does not stop – not for a pandemic, nor any other unpredictable obstacle!

Inside, you’ll read how an outstanding group of volunteers and staff found ways to keep up food services for the hungry, despite the forced closure of our soup kitchens. You’ll also read about several new programs we are able to offer, thanks to our growing staff.

We’re also featuring information about a unique and very exciting way we are partnering with the Diocese of Allentown on an event that will greatly benefit Catholic Charities among others.

And, of course, you’ll see pictures of our annual Gala, held at the beginning of March, just before our lives changed so dramatically.

I want to thank our staff, volunteers, Board members and all of YOU, our generous and compassionate donors who have seen to it that we can continue answer the calls of need and that our food pantry “cupboards” are full, just like our hearts.

May God continue to bless you!

Rob

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**Nourishing Bodies, Hearts, and Souls During The Pandemic ... Continued from pg. 1**

banks in the Lehigh Valley. Largely sourced from local farmers, these fresh farm-to-table foods have been a wholesome and welcome addition to the food boxes.

St. Thomas More Parish, under the leadership of Deacon Chris Kinsella, has raised more than $10,000 (MORE NOW?) in monetary donations and collected more than 4,000 (!) pounds of food during multiple food drives. Bimbo Bakeries also donated at least 200 loaves of bread weekly.

All of this could not have been accomplished without a team of 25 or more volunteers who collect the groceries, conducted food drives, hauled potatoes, packed boxes and handed them out over several days each week. They shopped, bagged, carried and cleaned over and over again so that Friday’s distributions can smoothly. In addition to donating their time, they also made financial donations and brought new volunteers on board.

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**Christian School, and coordinator of the school’s “Central City Project” (CCP),**

*Mergel shared her thoughts, “I am thankful for experiences like this that remind me how grateful we should all be to regularly receive such a blessing as milk in our homes. We are so grateful for donors and organizers that can facilitate these blessings and resources to the families around us.”*

To date, Catholic Charities has distributed over 1,977 food boxes that have served 8,008 individuals. (NEED NEW NUMBERS)
On March 8, 2020, Catholic Charities’ annual Gala attendees were celebrating the goodness of our donors and honorees. It seems like decades ago, but it has been just six months. Just after the celebration, all of us were thrown into a very different set of socializing rules and life as we knew it changed dramatically because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past six months, YOU, our incredible donors, have stepped up to allow Catholic Charities’ critical services to continue. Hungry families were fed; homeless and near-homeless individuals found hope; older adults received guidance and support; veterans received rent and other direct assistance, the suddenly unemployed got their utilities paid, and many others got help. These services continued because YOU reached out and shared your compassionate gifts.

As a result of social distancing and the uncertainty of reserving a venue at this time, Catholic Charities’ annual Gala will not be held in March as it has been for the past 13 years. We will move toward social media fundraising, virtual events, a different timeline, and the instinctive generosity our donors have shown us. Though it will be difficult to replace the $260,000 that was raised at last year’s Gala, we will explore safe, alternative methods of fundraising.

The good news is that we have the opportunity to partner with the Diocese of Allentown on a brand new virtual event called Cooks With Collins, which will benefit participating parishes, as well as Catholic Charities! Look for more information about this exciting and entertaining event in your Church bulletin, on ADToday, by email and on our website, www.catholiccharities.org.

So, where will we be six months from now? No one will wave a magic wand. No one will conjure up a glimpse of the future in a crystal ball. No one knows definitively if we will all be back to work, school, and normal activity. One thing we DO know for sure is that there still will be people in need and they still will look to Catholic Charities for help. With your help, we will be there for them!

A gift from you will make a difference in the lives of those struggling! If you would like to make that critical gift now, please feel free to use the enclosed envelope to mail your check, or go to our website - www.catholiccharities.org, and click the DONATE button.

May God continue to bless you!

Because of YOU...

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May God continue to bless you!

Pottsville Area Soup Kitchen - The Mission Continues

The current COVID-19 crisis has affected everyone – some physically, others emotionally, and many financially. People living “paycheck to paycheck” may have found themselves laid off or out of work entirely. Businesses are struggling to survive.

In the midst of all this, the patrons who depend on a hot meal every day from Saint Patrick’s Soup Kitchen in Pottsville are still there and their need has not gone away. Many are homeless, some have mental health issues or other health challenges, and many simply don’t have the financial means to eat properly.

According to Terry Alexander, Catholic Charities Coordinator for the Pottsville Area Kitchen, “Our patrons are a vulnerable population. They struggle when things are going well and now they will be even more vulnerable.”

“Many of these folks don’t have the luxury of frequent hand washing, masks, or other health precautions that we might take for granted,” Terry said. “We might not have our volunteers right now but the patrons still have me and I’ll make sure they get fed!”

Since the start of the pandemic, Terry has been cooking, cooking, and cooking. She prepares the meals at the Pottsville Soup Kitchen each afternoon from 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. then puts the food in take-out containers for each patron. Patrons start to file in at 5:00 p.m. and Alexander serves until 6:00 p.m. After the meal service, it’s clean-up and sanitize time.

Patron numbers have been increasing steadily. The number of meals has grown from 35-40 per day to 60-70 per day at times.

Patron numbers have been increasing steadily. The number of meals has grown from 35-40 per day to 60-70 per day at times.

Meals are served at the spoon kitchen Monday to Thursday and Sunday.

When a local non-profit organization told Terry they were going to do a school lunch delivery program and were looking for some help, she joined forces with them, cooking, bagging and delivering lunches to more than 160 children every weekday.

Thank you, Terry, for the amazing and dedicated work you continue to do!
**New Faces/New Places**

Catholic Charities welcomes new staff members:

Will Araya
Supervisor, PPL OnTrack Program

Jennifer Arciere
Supervisor, Ombudsman Program

Janet Brown
Ombudsman Case Manager

Edith Burga
Lowcost Soap Kitchen/Community Center Coordinator

James Eppey
PPL OnTrack Utility Case Manager

Kerby Hoagy
Ombudsman Case Manager

Maybelline Jimenez
Ombudsman Case Manager

Jeremy Leidich
PPL OnTrack Utility Case Manager

Alberto Martinez
PPL OnTrack Case Manager, Carbon County

Heidi Mercado
Case Manager, Carbon County

Breanna Moore
Case Manager

Nichole Peardon
Still a temp?!

Estefanía Pierce
Case Manager

Jodie Tawwab
Case Manager

The Dollar Energy Team – Lori McGeehan, left, and Lisa Camilli.

Catholic Charities Tapped To Facilitate PPL Program

PPL’s OnTrack program provides low-income households with reduced payment amounts and debt forgiveness. The program was first piloted by PPL in 1993 in response to a Public Utility Commission (PUC) Policy Statement that developed guidelines for Customer Assistance Programs. PPL expanded OnTrack in 1999 and again in 2004. Participation continues to grow at a fast rate, reaching more than 64,000 participants in December 2019.

The primary features of OnTrack include:

1. A reduced fixed payment amount based on ability to pay
2. Arrearage forgiveness over a specified period of time (18 months)
3. Protection against shutoff of electric service
4. Referrals to other programs and services

The benefits of OnTrack participation are as follows.

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**Dollar Energy Program to Help Those Eligible in Berks County**

Dollar Energy Fund’s Pennsylvania Hardship Program provides one-time assistance grants that are applied directly to a limited-income household’s utility bill. Funding is available on a first come, first served basis and eligibility requirements vary based on the utility company. In Berks County, partnering utility companies are Met-Ed (electric) and Pennsylvania American Water (water).

**PROGRAM DATES:**

Open October 1 through November 30 for service that is off or in threat of termination.

Beginning December 1 and continuing through January 31, 2001, applications will only be accepted for customers whose service is off.

Beginning February 1 and continuing through February 28, 2001, applications will be accepted for customers whose service is off or in threat of termination.

Starting March 1, 2001, funds permitting, the grant program is open to all eligible applicants regardless of service status.

At all times, if LIHEAP and Criss are open and the applicant is eligible, he or she must apply for these programs before applying for the Dollar Energy Grant.

**SINCERE EFFORT OF PAYMENT:**

Applicants must have paid at least $150 on their electric accounts and $100 on their water accounts in the last three months.

**BALANCE REQUIREMENT:**

Applicants must have a balance on their utility bill of at least $100. The maximum grant amount the applicant may receive is $500, and applicants can only receive one grant per utility, per program year.

There are other requirements required including documentation from the clients such as ID, SS#, copy of utility bill, proof of income for the last 30 days, etc.

So far this program year, Catholic Charities has had 34 applications processed with $9,274 in grants paid for the agency. The average grant amount is $338.68. Catholic Charities receives an agency reimbursement of $9.00 from Dollar Energy for each application processed for a total of $306.