

Gifts to Appeal help Service Center operate

LAKE CHARLES – The Catholic Service Center of the Diocese of Lake Charles helps meet the challenges and needs of hundreds of people each year. From helping with payment of an overdue mortgage or rental payment to payment of a utility bill (gas, electric and/or water) when disconnection is imminent to assistance with providing food baskets, the Service Center and Catholic Social Services try to make life a little easier for those most truly in need.

The Diocesan Services Appeal, formerly known as the Bishop's Services Appeal, makes it possible for these services to continue. A large portion of the annual budget for the Service Center and Catholic Social Services comes from the gifts made to the annual Appeal, which this year will begin on the weekend of November 4-5 in most parishes of the Diocese.

Over the years, from the time the Center was located on Martha Street, to two locations on Broad Street and now to its current location at 1112 Bilbo Street, the staff has seen thousands of people and been able to help a vast majority of those who come through the doors.

According to Jettie Greene, Director of Social Services, the Center also can help those who are need of assistance with funeral expenses or even the occasional bus ticket for someone who may have become stranded in the area.

"We had a family of four - parents and two kids - who had been staying on the beach," Greene said. "A police officer brought them to the office and we were able to help them get back to the Lake Jackson, Texas, area. The man had come to Southwest Louisiana for a job and when they arrived he found it didn't exist, stranding the family. They were actually living on the beach. We got the call and were able to help them the same day. Situations like that we work on a case by case basis."

In fact, not long ago Greene was able to assist an elderly citizen with payment of her utility bill after the director of Elderly Services for the Sheriff's Department brought the woman's need to the Center's attention.

Without the funding to keep the doors open, made possible by gifts to the Diocesan Services Appeal, many of those who are most in need would be without anywhere to go for help.

"Many of our clients in their initial contact with us are upset because they don't feel they have a way out," Greene said. "It is so rewarding because by the time they leave, I get a hug and they are very grateful and thankful that we were there to help them."

The help with rental or mortgage payments and utility payments is only available to those people who qualify once every 18 months.

According to Greene, the Service Center is not financially capable to give continuing assistance over a long period of time. "We are a temporary solution to emergency situations that families may face from time to time."

"People who come to the Center must have sufficient income to cover regular expenses and that income must be within federal poverty guidelines in order for us to help them with utility and rental or mortgage payments," Greene said. "We also look at whether the person has gone to other agencies or is a repeater in our system. We want

to be fair to everybody and make sure that people who really need it can be helped.

"Potential clients must have documentation, a photo ID, their utility bill, and proof of their most recent rent (or mortgage payment), when they come to us," she continued. "They must also tell us if they receive food stamps or other assistance. We ask that they bring proof of that, and also if they have been on Section 8."

"We have to establish a need for the assistance before we offer it. We discriminate against no one; anyone can come - Catholic or those of other faith traditions, those of any race, creed, national origin, or political affiliation."

As for providing food, the Center will try to provide food baskets to those who qualify on a monthly basis. "We can certainly refer them to other agencies in the City of Lake Charles, Calcasieu Parish or in other areas of Southwest Louisiana as well."

The Center's office hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, though it is closed for lunch from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. Appointments, which are required, can be made by calling the Center at 439-7436 from 8:30 a.m. to noon on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. "We don't accept calls for appointments on Mondays or Fridays because of other duties and we limit the calls we accept from 8:30 to noon," Greene said. "When someone calls they talk to an intake officer and have a pre-assessment completed before an appointment is scheduled. It's all done over the phone. Even if they pre-qualify for the appointment, that doesn't guarantee that we can help them."

The Center receives more than 1,000 calls per month, according to Greene, and every one is returned in a timely fashion. "Only about one-eighth of those calls are from people who qualify for assistance. Our calls increase when other agencies are unable to help due to financial constraints. Recently one agency had such a situation and our call volume increased."

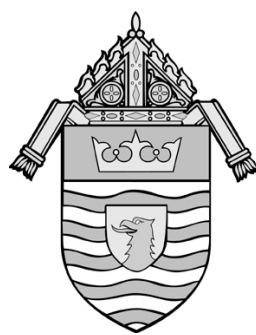
For those who qualify, assistance with prescription medication may also be available. "We provide prescription assistance but we don't help with narcotics, pain medication, stimulants, or hormones," Greene said. "For blood pressure medicines, diabetes drugs, and the like, we can provide help in acquiring those for qualified individuals."

The medicine guidelines are different. "A person can qualify every six months for those individuals who don't have insurance or are underinsured. The amount of assistance varies depending on the type of medication and the person's income."

For Greene and the other staff working at the Catholic Service Center, "All are welcome in this house!"

"The need is the thing," Greene concluded. "We are here to serve people from all over the Diocese of Lake Charles, north or south, east, or west."

The Catholic Service Center is one of the agencies of the Diocese of Lake Charles that would find it difficult if not impossible to function without funds raised through the Diocesan Services Appeal.



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To the People of God of the Diocese of Lake Charles,

Each Fall under our founding Bishop, Most Reverend Jude Speyrer, and our former Bishop, Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, the Diocese of Lake Charles has had a Bishop's Services Appeal. The BSA, as the appeal was known, was to generate monies to fund the Diocesan operations. The Diocesan operating income is derived from basically three sources: 1) an 11% "tax" on monies received in the thirty-eight parishes of the Diocese; 2) grants through organizations that offer assistance for various ministries; and 3) the Bishop's Services Appeal. The goal for this annual appeal has been \$500,000 and each parish bears a portion of the goal depending on the size and financial resources of the parish.

The Diocesan offices provide services to the parishes while having financial responsibilities to maintain buildings, to staff offices, and to employ personnel necessary to operate or function as a Diocese. For example, following Hurricane Rita, Diocesan personnel were asked to focus the services of their offices towards helping with relief and recovery efforts. The Diocesan offices facilitated receiving and distributing food, clothing and household items as well as dispensing \$1.6 million to people in need.

Last year because of Hurricane Rita and the hardships to many people in Southwest Louisiana, the Consultors of the Diocese recommended to me, as Diocesan Administrator, that we not burden the parishes further by initiating an appeal. People were struggling with personal needs and we were recipients of the generosity from other Dioceses throughout the United States in helping us financially cover Diocesan operating expenses that would normally have been received through the BSA. As an aside, some parishes continued to have monthly collections for the BSA that contributed more than \$75,000 to the Diocese. I would like to thank those who so generously supported the Diocese in our time of need.

This year the Diocesan Consultors recommended that we change the name of the appeal. 1) We do not have a Bishop to call this year's appeal the Bishop's Services Appeal. 2) The funds received from this appeal are for the operations of the Diocese. Therefore, we will call this year's appeal the DIOCESAN SERVICES APPEAL.

We in Southwest Louisiana have been blessed. You will be invited through your Church parish to return to the Lord a portion of the Lord's generosity to you by giving financially to the Diocesan Services Appeal. Over the next few weeks, you will be hearing more as to how you can do your part.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Harry D. Greig

Rev. Msgr. Harry D. Greig
Diocesan Administrator



More than 250 people were on hand in their lawn chairs under cloudy skies and underneath a borrowed tent at Sacred Heart of Jesus in Creole for the celebration of Mass on the Sept. 24 anniversary of Hurricane Rita by Rev. Joseph McGrath. Father McGrath noted that in the past year people have come together in faith to help each other in the community and noted that you "can't check your religion at the door. Without your faith you can get the most fantastic insurance settlement, but what do you have."



The Rev. Vincent Vadakkedath, in center aisle, gives his homily to the people of St. Eugene Parish in Grand Chenier on Sunday, Sept. 24, the anniversary of the passage of Hurricane Rita through Southwest Louisiana. The storm seriously damaged the church, but Fr. Vadakkedath had nearly a full house with more than 120 people squeezing into the Church, which is still being repaired. In his homily Fr. Vadakkedath reminded his parishioners of the people, strangers in many cases, who came to the community to help out following Hurricane Rita.



The Rev. Aubrey Guilbeau, rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, was the celebrant of an anniversary Liturgy at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron. Parishioners brought their own seating to the Mass attended by more than 100 people. In his homily Father Guilbeau urged everyone to "continue to be of service to one another."