

Archbishop Lori lauds West Virginia diocese's Catholic Charities center for affirming 'human dignity'

WHEELING, W.Va. — From the minute he walked into the Catholic Charities Neighborhood Center in Wheeling, Archbishop William E. Lori said he could “sense not only services and good things being done for people with needs, but a sense of welcome.”

He felt “the affirmation of human dignity,” the Baltimore archbishop said following a visit to the center on a Saturday in March to the center.

Archbishop Lori, who is apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, was accompanied by Beth Zarate, CEO of Catholic Charities West Virginia, and board members from across the state.

“We are very grateful to Archbishop Lori for his generosity of time,” Zarate said. “His commitment to encounter the people of West Virginia, to include Catholic Charities’ services, is inspiring and appreciated.”

Grant Coleman, interim coordinator of the neighborhood center, began the tour as clients were finishing up breakfast. Both breakfast and dinner are served daily, he said, to about 170 people. This is a service, he noted, that could not be provided without the support of local businesses.

“We get a ton of donations from the local community,” Coleman said. Most donations come from Reisbeck’s supermarket, Walmart, Target and Panera Bread.

Providing food for the hungry is a large part of the center’s ministry. It takes a total of 300 volunteers to prepare, package and then deliver meals to shut-ins throughout the region. Most of the people served, Coleman said, are people who do not qualify for services elsewhere.

Coleman led the group into the center’s food pantry, which is meeting a great need

in the community, he said. “Every Tuesday and Thursday, we open this up to about 400 to 500 families a month,” he said. Families sign up to receive provisions and are able to fill a box of food.

Project HOPE/Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department operates a public health homeless outreach health care clinic under the direction of two medical doctors and a registered nurse.

Primary health services include general medical exams, over the counter medication dispensing, general health consultation, referrals and other services. Clients served by Project HOPE are required to pay for services. Wheeling Hospital provides medications for the clinic at no charge.

Eye care is provided at the center by Lenscrafters, the Anwar Eye Center and the Lions Club.

The center also offers Hospitality House, which is transitional housing for families going through hard times. Families have a safe and clean private residence for up to six months; they receive help establishing services available to them and also get assistance with the steps they need to get back on their feet, program officials said.

The center was founded in 1969 and, since then, has been providing an array of services to those in need. The center annually serves more than 80,000 meals in house and through its meal delivery program. Daily services include breakfast and dinner, laundry, showers, phone service and children’s services.

Additional help includes case management, the food pantry, enrollment in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, assistance with utilities and cleaning supplies.

“The center continues to operate with hundreds of volunteers who give their time and boundless unconditional love,” Zarate said. “There is no greater power than the passion of these servant hearts. Catholic Charities is committed to best practices in social work to move people forward and to stability, honoring the dignity and uniqueness of each individual we encounter.”

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