

Catholic Charities needs help to reach fundraising goal

When Kathleen Kirkpatrick arrived in Baltimore on a snowy day in January, she thought she was starting her life anew only to be faced with an unthinkable letdown.

The former mortgage broker had lost her job in North Carolina and was having no luck finding new employment after selling her home and spending nearly all of her \$500,000 nest egg. Following several telephone interviews with a potential employer in Baltimore, she was flown to Charm City for a face-to-face meeting.

The employer never showed up – leaving Kirkpatrick scammed and stranded in a strange city with only \$50 in her purse. Kirkpatrick went to a hotel that first night, later returning to the airport where she would sleep for four nights. She finally approached the airport police for help only to be ordered to vacate the premises by 1 p.m. that day or be arrested for vagrancy.

“I had half a million dollars,” Kirkpatrick remembered, “and, all of a sudden, I’m looking at going to a shelter. I never thought my life was going to take that turn.”

Kirkpatrick, 64, found support through Catholic Charities, which sheltered her at Sarah’s House in Anne Arundel County. The agency also helped her find permanent residence at one of its homes for low-income seniors in Grantsville. Today, Kirkpatrick works 20 hours a week as a greeter for Social Services in Garrett County.

“I’m rebuilding my life here in Maryland,” Kirkpatrick told a group of Catholic Charities donors who gathered Dec. 7 at Our Daily Bread Employment Center in Baltimore for the 31st annual Catholic Charities Leadership Breakfast.

“I had no idea what to do,” she said, choking back emotion. “I want to thank you all for saving my life.”

In a time when many people are facing unemployment and circumstances they never imagined, William McCarthy Jr. believes Catholic Charities and its supporters are

helping them live with dignity.

This year's leadership breakfast campaign raised a record-setting \$2.3 million of its \$2.5 million goal - helping to support the many programs operated by Catholic Charities.

"People are realizing that they are supporting their neighbor - not just people they don't know," Catholic Charities' executive director told The Catholic Review. "They see a face with the challenges people are facing today, whether it's joblessness, housing insecurity or hunger. They can identify with it."

Catholic Charities celebrated two milestones this year: the 30th anniversary of the opening of Our Daily Bread and the 30th anniversary of the opening Basilica Place in Baltimore, the agency's first supportive senior housing community.

Since opening, Our Daily Bread has had nearly 11,000 consecutive days of operation, providing 7 million meals and amassing 1.5 million volunteer hours.

There are now 21 additional senior housing communities that have joined Basilica Place, providing homes for 1,775 low-income seniors. Work will begin on the construction of two additional communities later this year, McCarthy said, adding 190 new apartments.

"Our staff is unbelievably passionate, committed and dedicated to those we serve," he said. "Their work is a vocation."

Abigail E. Smith, chair of this year's leadership breakfast committee, noted that the first breakfast attracted 35 people and raised approximately \$50,000. More than three decades later, it has grown dramatically as services have evolved to help those in need.

"The campaign will continue for several months," Smith told supporters, "and I ask that you reach out to others who may want to share in our mission."

Kirkpatrick, who described herself as "happy," after finding a new home in Maryland, remembered something her mother often told her.

“Sometimes,” Kirkpatrick said, “the Lord puts us on our back so we learn to look up for help. It took me 63-and-a-half years to understand what she meant, but on a snowy day in Baltimore, I did look up.”