

# Catholic Charities warm hundreds in Baltimore with meals, shelter

As 2018 began with temperatures in the single digits, hundreds are finding food and shelter through Catholic Charities of Baltimore.

On Christmas Day, Baltimore City officials issued a Code Blue Alert, which is designed to reduce the number of hypothermia-related deaths for the vulnerable, including those who are homeless.

One of the more reliable havens in the city is the Our Daily Bread Employment Center Hot Meal Program, located on the Fallsway. The Catholic Charities program has served between 500 and 900 people every day for 37 years, 13,367 days straight as of Jan. 3.

With temperatures in the low-20s, the number served for lunch Jan. 2 reached 560. No matter how many people line up outside of the building, which also serves as an employment resource center, all are served.

“Elements drive (high turnouts), as well as their (guests’) money,” said Penny Lewis, director of Our Daily Bread.

A 98 degree day in August, for instance, might bring 900 guests; many experience decreasing financial resources at the end of the month. Many are experiencing homelessness; many guests work, but cannot afford both food and shelter.

More than 100 parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore provide hot meals to Our Daily Bread. On Jan. 2, lunch was a hot meal of macaroni and beans, provided by the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland.

Guests choose their meal and beverage. As they pass the kitchen when leaving the cafeteria, many say thank you to the volunteers.

“Our Daily Bread is a wonderful, beautiful place,” said Diana Tierney, a guest. “I am very excited and happy every day when I see all the faces and volunteers that come in to help us.”

With 55 volunteers needed every day, all are welcomed.

The crew Jan. 2 included Don and Evelyn Dailey, parishioners of St. Gabriel in Woodlawn, who help at Our Daily Bread every Tuesday.

“(Volunteering) is healthy mentally and physically,” said Dailey, 83. “And, I like the food!”

He generally works the dishwasher, but the frigid temperatures Jan. 2 caused a water line to burst, leaving the machine unable to run.

Lewis joined the staff of Our Daily Bread two years ago after a career in corporate banking. She first experienced it as a volunteer, in 2007.

“(Working here) keeps you humble,” Lewis said.

Lewis said the main goal of the center is to ensure self-sufficiency. After completing their meals, guests have the opportunity to learn about the resources and programs located down the hall.

“They have the opportunity to change things,” Lewis said.

The center is open 365 days a year. When the weather prohibits volunteers traveling

there, men in the Christopher Place Employment Academy, who live in the building during the two-year job readiness program, come downstairs and help.

They also assist in serving to the senior citizens who come to the center for breakfast.

After lunch at Our Daily Bread, many walk across The Fallsway to the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center (WHRC), another Catholic Charities program.

WHRC is an “entry-exit” shelter, meaning that guests can leave belongings at their bed through the day. Achieving the shelter’s goal of permanent housing can take anywhere from days to years.

“I’m off the streets,” said Jeff Baker, who is a volunteer resident monitor at the shelter doing laundry and other groundskeeping tasks. “I have a place to sleep every night.”

Throughout the day, anyone can utilize WHRC programs. Grief counseling, budgeting workshops, yoga and socialization in the form of bingo help solve root problems that often lead to homelessness.

Located behind the building, the “Shed of Respect” offers a safe storage space for the belongings of up to another 75 individuals not staying at WHRC, allowing them freedom to travel to another shelter, and to appointments and jobs.

“It’s very important that individuals can find out that these services are available,” said Lee Martin, program director of WHRC and an alumnus of Calvert Hall College High School in Towson.

Normal capacity of WHRC is 275, with beds for 175 men, 75 women and 25 who need convalescent care. From November through March, 60 additional beds bring

the shelter's bed count to 335.

When those who line up outside WHRC are not able to get a bed, the center works to transport them to other shelters to make sure that no one has to bear the cold.

"We believe in cherishing the divine within all," Martin said, referencing the motto of Catholic Charities. "(People who are homeless) need as much help as they can get."

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