

# Faith comes alive at Catholic Charities

*Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien has asked individuals to serve as guest columnists in August. William McCarthy is a parishioner of Church of the Nativity in Timonium and serves as executive director of Catholic Charities.*

I am grateful to Archbishop O'Brien for allowing me to share my experiences and thoughts on being called to serve. As I end my first year as executive director of Catholic Charities, I have been enriched by God's calling to share my gifts and blessings in service to those in need and witnessing the generosity of spirit in so many others.

The opportunity to lead this most compassionate and effective agency was a calling. God spoke to me, and I answered. Over the past year, I have met literally hundreds of individuals who were called, who listened and who are the backbone of our services for the poor, children and their families, seniors and people living with developmental disabilities.

To cite a few examples, I, along with my son, spent a few days during the blizzard last winter serving at Our Daily Bread with a man who himself lives in a homeless shelter. He volunteers at ODB because he believes he is called to serve others. I've met high school students who have delighted many of our seniors at the Jenkins Senior Living Community by holding festive "proms," playing games, giving manicures and sharing camaraderie. There are dedicated folks who mentor and provide holiday celebrations for the children at Villa Maria and St. Vincent's, and Girl Scout troops who make sure that no child goes without a birthday cake. There is a resident from the Oak Crest Community who continues his teaching career preparing men to take the GED exam at Our Daily Bread Employment Center. I've met a busy obstetrician who, with a group of 25 of her friends, prepares and serves meals three times a month for the women and children at My Sister's Place Women's Center.

There are men from my parish, Nativity, who eat dinner regularly with the men in

residence at Christopher Place Employment Academy, becoming mentors, friends and role models. Four of the region's medical institutions – St. Joseph Medical Center, St. Agnes HealthCare, Johns Hopkins Medicine and the University of Maryland Dental School – provide pro bono medical and dental services at our Esperanza Center. And there are more than 100 volunteer physicians who provide primary and specialty care there as well. When you consider this abbreviated list of examples, you can see that everyone has something to contribute.

Why do people share the gifts of their time, talent, and treasure with those in need? The answer to this question is personal to each of us, but there are central themes. First, people are innately generous and compassionate. Second, many want to have a positive and profound impact on their community and on the lives of people. Finally, people realize that by sharing their gifts, their own lives are enriched.

We can't change the world or improve the economy, but I can tell you what Catholic Charities did do last year. We served 320,000 meals at Our Daily Bread and My Sister's Place Women Center; provided housing for 2,700 people who would otherwise be homeless and for low-income seniors; placed 511 people in full-time jobs in a very difficult economy; served 8,113 families in Our Child and Family Services programs; and provided healthcare services to 3,500 members of the immigrant community, 250 of which were children.

All of this was possible because thousands of Catholic Charities staff and volunteers answered the call to serve. You can see that Catholic Charities is the place to make your faith come alive. It certainly has for me.