No one ever plans to become homeless. But it can happen in an instant. Many people are just a job loss or illness away from financial disaster. In Memphis, we know that more than 1,200 people experience homelessness on a daily basis.

Earl Wilson was one of them until very recently.

A series of unfortunate circumstances resulted in Wilson losing everything he owned, as well as his livelihood, and he found himself living in one of the men-only homeless shelters in Memphis.

Wilson paid his shelter fees by cleaning the facility’s bathrooms, but he was looking for ways to improve his life. Then he learned about Manhood University, a City of Memphis program that teaches men skills such as time management and financial literacy.

Although he completed the program, Wilson remained homeless. But when he met the street outreach navigator for Catholic Charities of West Tennessee (CCWTN), Wilson’s life began to change. CCWTN has the only street outreach worker in the city charged with reaching out to all homeless people.

Wilson started coming to Catholic Charities for “walking bags” of food, and he got his first suit from the Catholic Charities Clothing Closet, which is stocked with donations. The outreach worker connected Wilson with a caseworker, and CCWTN employees helped him find an apartment and prepare some resumes for a job fair run by the City of Memphis. The 51-year-old was immediately offered a position in the sanitation department.

“I feel like I am getting another chance,” Wilson said. “I have seven children and seven grandchildren, and I feel like this is something that will make them proud.”

Dana Brooks, Director of the Housing Ministry at CCWTN, said, “We are always so grateful when we can help someone like Mr. Wilson. But, sadly, our grant funding is very specific and there are many important needs that we cannot meet.”

Some of those needs include such basics as move-in kits, which include airbeds, cleaning supplies, towels and a shower curtain for clients moving into housing from shelters. Housing Ministry grants only cover that benefit for veterans, so non-veterans experiencing homelessness do not receive those items.

Other needs include the ability to provide emergency utility assistance or car repair because people often lose jobs because they cannot afford to repair their cars.

“We appreciate our donors’ support in helping us meet the needs of people living on the margins,” Brooks said.

Catholic Charities is launching a Teen Advisory Board to promote leadership and philanthropy among local youth. Applications are open to rising sophomores, juniors and seniors at any local high school or home school. This is a great opportunity to develop leadership skills, gain service hours, and learn more about the mission of Catholic Charities of West Tennessee. The link to the application can be found at cwtn.org/volunteer. Applications are due by the end of August.

Please email mandy.lamey@acc.cdom.org if you have any questions.
Teenagers put HEART into volunteer work

A group of teenagers from Georgia, Ohio, Texas and Mississippi met poverty in Memphis recently through Catholic HEART Workcamp and Catholic Charities of West Tennessee (CCWTN).

Catholic Charities served as one of 20 volunteer sites in Memphis for the mission-oriented Catholic youth camp that brought together 138 young people from all over the country for a week of service, worship and activities.

The group kicked off their week at CCWTN with a neighborhood cookout, serving hot dogs to the agency’s clients, as well as people in the neighborhood who are experiencing homelessness. They also served in the Food Pantry and Clothing Closet at Catholic Charities, and did painting and cleaning projects. In addition, they assembled women’s hygiene kits that CCWTN gives out to clients and the homeless who come into the lobby.

Here is what the some of the campers had to say:

"It was really eye-opening and touching for me to see that because I have not experienced the homeless." Philip Pilat, adult chaperone, Shiner, Texas.

"Being a Christian, you are supposed to serve people, but this (Catholic HEART Workcamp) is the only Christian camp I have been to where you are actually serving." Riley Johnson, 17, Shiner, Texas.

"This teaches you some really good life lessons, like how to paint, and that being nice to someone can really mean a lot of them." Summer Brewer, 16, of Laurel, Miss.

Catholic Charities distributes grants to West TN non-profits

Catholic Charities of West Tennessee has distributed $6,600 in grants to eight small non-profits in West Tennessee through the Jackson Deanery Development Committee (JDDC) grant process.

The JDDC program uses 25 percent of the donations collected for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development at churches throughout the Catholic Diocese of Memphis to fund these important efforts. A committee that includes Catholic Charities staff, Bishop David P. Talley, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis, Fr. Robert Marshall, Vicar General of the Diocese of Memphis, and members of the West Tennessee Catholic community made the following grant selections for West Tennessee non-profits that applied to the program.

- **Agape House**, a crisis pregnancy center in Martin, Tenn., received $900.
- **Hardin County Jesus Cares**, a Savannah, Tenn., organization that assists with urgent services such as food and utility assistance, received $900.
- **Project Outreach of Fayette County**, a nonprofit that provides emergency assistance such as food and clothing, received $900.
- **RIFA**, an organization that operates a soup kitchen, food bank and thrift store in Jackson, Tenn., received $900.
- **FYI Clinic**, which provides free ultrasounds to diagnose early pregnancy in Camden, Tenn., received $900.
- **The Knights of Columbus Council 1101** in Jackson, Tenn., which provides Christmas baskets to families in need, received $900.
- **Project HELP**, which provides utility assistance to low-income families in Paris, Tenn., received $600.
- **WE CARE Ministries, Inc.**, which provides low-income clients a chance to receive dental and vision care in Martin, Tenn., received $600.

CCWTN seeks school supply donations for children in need

Nearly 40 percent of children in Memphis live in poverty, which is an annual income of $25,750 for a family of four. So, it makes sense that buying school supplies can be a real challenge for such families. That is why Catholic Charities of West Tennessee engages in a school supply drive each year to help the children of our clients who come to us seeking such basics as food, clothing and housing.

You can help. Just order online from our Amazon Wishlist at tinyurl.com/CCWTNschoolsupply, and your donation will ship directly to Catholic Charities. Donations can also be dropped off at Catholic Charities (1325 Jefferson Ave.) now through Aug. 1. Keep an eye out for a Volunteer Saturday event to pack the school supplies.
On my first full day at Catholic Charities of West Tennessee (CCWTN), we had one of our cookouts in the side yard. It was a beautiful day, relatively cool after the early heat of May, and folks were in a festive mood. The aroma of the hot dogs drew everyone to the grill, after which we could enjoy a snow cone.

These cookouts are a terrific opportunity for volunteers to share in the ministry of CCWTN. On that June day we witnessed some beautiful young people volunteering from Emmanuel Center Memphis. They were very conscientious, but also very welcoming to our neighbors who came for lunch.

Fig Tree Director John Kovach had hung some blouses, shirts and slacks from our clothes closet on the fence near Cleveland. By the end of the morning, all had been taken.

At times, it seems that the ministry here at Jefferson and Cleveland is divorced from parish care for the poor. Parish Social Ministry Director Therese Gustaitis has worked hard to foster a spirit of collaboration between CCWTN and our parishes. She regularly publishes opportunities for parishioners to volunteer.

Several years ago I came across a saying that has guided me since. (It sounds like St. Vincent de Paul, but I have not been able to discover its exact source.) Contact with the poor is the eighth sacrament.

As Catholics we have so many opportunities for union with Christ. We can open the Scriptures at any time. We encounter Him in one another as we gather to pray or to serve or just to enjoy one another's company. We meet Him in a most powerful way in the Eucharist.

Have you ever thought about encountering Him in the poor? In his beautiful Exhortation "Rejoice and Be Glad" Pope Francis highlights the importance of Matthew 25. There Jesus reveals that when we feed the hungry, or clothe the naked or visit the sick/imprisoned, we serve Him. Pope Francis calls this passage “a page of Christology.”

In other words, meeting Christ in the poor takes its place among the ways in which He reveals and unites Himself to us. And as we see Our Lord in them, we hope that they see Him in us. We evangelize them by our kindness, our attentiveness to them as a person, our bringing help and providing hope.

If we do not take advantage of the Scriptures, of the Eucharist, of presence to fellow Christians, we are malnourished. Could we also say that about presence to the poor? Many of us (myself included) live in areas of relative affluence. We can easily drive about our city without seeing any poor people. Contact with Christ in His poor takes a special effort for most of us.

CCWTN tries to make that contact possible. We build bridges over which we can cross to encounter Christ in the poor. Your own parish probably also provides those opportunities. Together – our parishes and CCWTN - can help us draw closer to Christ, while at the same time easing the burden of the poor. A win-win, no?

Msgr. Al Kirk
Interim Executive Director
Catholic Charities of West Tennessee
WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING Benefactors FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT:

- Buckman Charitable Trust
- Mr. and Mrs. Michael Waddell
- Suntrust Foundation
- Dr. and Mrs. John Hanneken
- Mr. Charles White
- Ladies of Charity of Memphis
- Ms. Karen Barnett
- Mr. Dion Pogson
- Mr. and Mrs. Tim Nicholls
- Mr. Chris Perkins
- Mr. and Mrs. Michael S. Goghnour
- Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Wilczynski

Mission Statement: Following the teachings of Jesus Christ, we provide help to those in need and bring them hope by supporting them on the path from poverty to self-sufficiency.

Service Overview: Catholic Charities of West Tennessee serves people regardless of religious beliefs, socioeconomic status or ethnic background. Catholic Charities is not just for the Catholic community, it is from the Catholic community.

Visit us at CCWTN.org

Catholic Charities of West Tennessee is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your donations are deductible as allowed by law.

Catholic Charities was honored to present Bishop David P. Talley as the first speaker in our new quarterly Breakfast Speaker Series for First Responders to Poverty – monthly donors to our mission.

First Responders gathered early at Church of the Holy Spirit June 6 to enjoy a meal catered by Bryant’s Breakfast and to learn more about Bishop Talley’s passion for serving Christ by serving the people on the margins of the community – especially those living in poverty.

“Christ is present here and now but he is present in a special way in the broken body of the poor…and marginalized,” he said.

He reminded the First Responders that their generosity and faithfulness in supporting Catholic Charities helps to “satiate the hunger and thirst Christ has in the poorest of the poor.”

The next First Responder Breakfast will be in September at Church of the Holy Spirit. The speakers will be Jan Taylor, program manager of the Baptist Operation Outreach Clinic for the homeless at Catholic Charities, and Dana Brooks, Director of the CCWTN Housing Ministry. Anyone can sign up online to become a First Responder at https://www.ccwtn.org/about/first-responders/.