Giving joy is a Christmas tradition for Catholic Charities of West Tennessee. Through the Gifts for God’s Children program, Catholic Charities provides Christmas gifts and food to more than 200 families who could not otherwise afford gifts for their children. This year, 105 of those families are also part of the Jubilee Catholic Schools, which are currently in their last year of operation. Through donations and private funding, the first Jubilee Catholic School opened in 1999 with the goal of providing low-income families with high quality educational opportunities. The Jubilee Catholic Schools are now a network educating more than 1,500 students.

“We wanted to honor the work that the Jubilee Schools have done in Memphis by partnering with their leadership to select families to adopt this year,” said Rachel D’Addabbo, Catholic Charities project manager. All seven Jubilee Schools are participating in the program.

Other families being adopted will be selected through Catholic Charities programs including the Housing Ministry, Immigration Services and Driving the Dream, which is a program that helps people move from poverty to self-sufficiency. Catholic Charities will also identify families to be served through existing community partnerships with agencies such as MIFA and Meritan.

The families being served include about 450 children. Families will also receive food baskets that include frozen chicken or turkey. It is so easy to support Gifts for God’s Children. You can purchase directly from our Amazon wishlist at tinyurl.com/GFGCwishlist. You can donate at ccwtn.org/new-donate. And you can volunteer at our Gifts for God’s Children Distribution Days Dec. 18-20 by signing up at ccwtn.org/volunteer.

CCWTN honors Holy Family Award winners

Catholic Charities of West Tennessee (CCWTN) recognizes valued partners each year in its Holy Family Awards, which honor the efforts of individuals, groups and organizations who have committed to advancing the mission of Catholic Charities of West Tennessee.

“Each of these honorees inspires us by their generosity and allows us to grow through their active support,” said Dick Hackett, executive director of Catholic Charities. This year’s award winners include:

**Philanthropic Partner: Kroger**

This long-time and valued partner of CCWTN supports our mission with food and volunteers, especially in our Fig Tree Emergency Services food outreach.

**Community Partner: United Way of the Mid-South**

This vital partner is involved in nearly all of our ministries that seek to address and mitigate the effects of poverty, including our Fig Tree Food Pantry, one aspect of our Housing Ministry and citizenship services for newcomers to our nation. In addition, Catholic Charities is one of four care coordination hubs for Driving the Dream, a program funded through United Way that helps move people from poverty to self-sufficiency.

**Volunteer of the Year: Ginny Geer**

Mrs. Geer has spent her career working in grants management and compliance, and she brings her expertise to work for Catholic Charities every week, ensuring the accuracy of the numbers we report on all of our service activities. She recently took on the role of quality assurance for the data in our new Driving the Dream program, as well.
What could bring a suburban grandmother into the heart of urban Memphis every Monday? Joy.

“Every Monday, I find true joy as a volunteer in the food pantry at Catholic Charities,” said Diana Lyons of Olive Branch, Miss. The food pantry is open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday and provides families with a week of food. It is part of the Fig Tree Emergency Services program of Catholic Charities, which provided food and clothing to more than 20,000 people last year.

“God’s people are helped there every day,” Diana said. “They leave knowing they are loved and respected and that we are there to share God’s goodness and bounty with them.”

Diana is also a member of the Cursillo movement within the Catholic Church in which people commit to spiritual growth beginning with a three-day retreat and then following up with weekly group meetings where they discuss how they are integrating their faith into their lives through piety, study and action.

Through her experience with Cursillo, Diana said she has learned that one of the qualities of piety is being joyful: “Our joy is truly authentic, constant and sure because it comes from deep within. We know how to be both happy and joyful people because we are living temples of the Holy Spirit,” she said.

And that is the kind of joy she experiences by serving the clients at the Catholic Charities food pantry.

“It happens every time. God sends people there who are touching us,” she said. “We are helping them, but they are touching us in different ways. It is nothing but a blessing.”

Diana recalls a bit of advice that one client gave her, something she uses in everyday life. “Be blessed by the best and don’t worry about the rest.”

Building a life that works

Victor Walls had been living in a men’s homeless shelter for a year when he came to Catholic Charities of West Tennessee.

He didn’t like living at the mission because it was so hectic and crowded. “You have to sleep on a mat on the floor,” he said.

We quickly connected the U.S. Army veteran to our Driving the Dream program because he was willing and able to work. Driving the Dream is a program that helps people move from poverty to self-sufficiency by connecting them with resources and providing guidance and encouragement to make their dreams come true.

Victor told us Driving the Dream coordinator that his dream was to work at a large downtown hotel because he enjoys seeing the people come and go.

So she helped him get an interview at the Sheraton Downtown, where he has held a full-time position maintaining the employee cafeteria since April. He now lives in an apartment near his workplace.

Victor, 56, is happy with his job. “Everybody here is so friendly and nice,” he said of the hotel. After work, he enjoys going home to relax and watch the television that he bought for himself.

Helena Scanlan, the human resources generalist at the Sheraton Downtown, said “Victor is just a joy to the staff. Every staff member brags about him.”
Hey, Buddy

From time to time, I join three or four friends for lunch. I was last to arrive recently when we got together for some famous Memphis Bar-B-Q, so I jokingly said, “Who’s buying?”

Steve said he would buy. When the waitress got to me, I ordered a Bar-B-Q salad and a to-go order of four Bar-B-Q sandwiches. In different ways, all but one of my friends asked if I was taking dinner home to my family.

My quietest friend said, “No, Hackett’s a liberal now. He’s just taking something back to his buddies.” He explained to the group that my buddies are the people we serve in our food pantry at Catholic Charities. As we enjoyed trading barbs, I was finally able to make the point that feeding the hungry is not liberal or conservative – it’s a blessing.

Steve was blessed that day at lunch because he picked up the to-go order check. Memphis has so many people from all walks of life who are blessed, and we all have the opportunity to serve in different ways.

Another example of that occurred as I made my way back to the office. I noticed a private company replacing a crumbling sidewalk across the street. I stopped to talk to the owner and explained that we had a crumbling sidewalk beside Catholic Charities. It’s a problem because so many we serve are disabled. Some are military veterans who have lost a limb and are in wheelchairs. Others are quite elderly. Our crumbling sidewalk forces them to step or roll into the street to get to our entrance.

The contractor for the company came over to look at our sidewalk and, within 10 minutes called back and said that he would get the permit and replace the damaged sidewalk at no cost.

When they started on the repair work, I could see his crew and heavy equipment from my office window. I smiled. My four buddies who Steve brought Bar-B-Q sandwiches were watching them work. One buddy, Mathew, helped by throwing a chunk of concrete into the front end loader.

One question you may ask yourself: Am I liberal or conservative? Those we serve don’t care, nor do I. My buddies can see inside our hearts, just as God can.

Another question you may ask yourself is this: What can I do to be a blessing to others? Here is a suggestion, seriously: Please call me, if you want to buy my lunch with a to-go order. When we serve those in need, the blessings go both ways. Being a blessing means showing our buddies God’s love. We all can make our lives complete with a buddy.
WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING BENEFACTORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT:

- Speer Charitable Trust
- United Way of the Mid-South
- Kroger, Delta Division
- Richard and Paula Lynch
- Tom and Anne Marie Kadien
- Eric and Connie Scott
- Mike and Julie Wharton
- Paragon National Bank
- The Hohenberg Foundation
- Bill and Stacia Rosatti
- Jonathan and Tracy Frase
- Bill and Julie Duncan

Thank You!

During this Advent season, the staff and customers of Catholic Charities of West Tennessee simply want to say thank you to all who support our mission in any way. We are grateful for you and could not carry on our work without you.

Thank you and have a most blessed Christmas.

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.

Find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram & YouTube
Visit us at CCWTN.org

Catholic Charities of West Tennessee is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.
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