Summer camp makes world of difference for children

Camp Love & Learn opened up a new world for sisters Mildred and Jocelyn Vazquez when they started attending the seven-week summer camp for at-risk children, and it set both girls on the path to careers in education.

Organized and run by Catholic Charities of West Tennessee, Camp Love & Learn provides academic enrichment, nutrition and fun to students entering kindergarten through fifth grades who otherwise could not afford a summer day camp. Thanks to grant funding and generous donations, participating families pay only $25 per child per week.

The sisters enjoyed camp so much that they returned to volunteer as teenagers and then joined the staff as teaching assistants after high school. Thanks to their experience as teaching assistants, both are majoring in education at Rhodes College, where they are both on scholarship and just completed their freshman and sophomore years. The sisters attended elementary school at Little Flower Elementary and St. Michael Catholic School and went on to graduate from Immaculate Conception High School.

“It was when I worked in the kindergarten at camp that I really decided I wanted to do something with kids when I was older,” Jocelyn said. “They were just so excited to make you happy and were so sweet to each other.”

Mildred said that working at Camp Love & Learn “really helped me choose the career I wanted. I realized I really did like working with kids, and that is why I am going to major in educational studies.”

Jocelyn and Mildred’s parents learned about the camp while taking English classes at Catholic Charities, and the girls met other children at camp whose parents had come from different places around the world to make a new life in Memphis.

New this year, Camp Love & Learn will have Chromebooks, which allow children to use an online learning program that they can adapt to their own level to build reading skills.

Mildred and Jocelyn believe the camp is an important program to have in Memphis. “It is really important because there are students like me who have working parents who aren’t able to afford specialty one-week camps,” Mildred said.
Honor roll students from Our Lady of Sorrows (OLS) Catholic School gave the gift of time to Catholic Charities this spring as volunteers – some of the many people, young and old, who make our mission part of their lives and make a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

“I liked that I felt helpful,” said Benjamin Moreno, 11. “I learned that not everyone has the same life as others. Some might have harder decisions.”

The OLS group brought fresh eyes to Catholic Charities because none of the children, ages 11 to 13, had ever been to the agency before.

For Felecia Thomas, the dream of having a job with benefits seemed almost unattainable while living in a rooming house with her children. But one day when she was waiting to go to the Clothing Closet at Catholic Charities of West Tennessee, she heard about the Driving the Dream program and immediately asked to learn more. “It was the help I had been praying for,” said Thomas, 48, a mother of five.

Driving the Dream harnesses the power of the helping organizations in Memphis to support the poor on their path from poverty to self-sufficiency. Catholic Charities is one of two care coordination hubs leading this approach in Memphis, designated and funded by the United Way of the Mid-South. Just two months after beginning, the program has already helped 19 people.

Because Thomas felt unsafe in the rooming house, Care Coordinator Deloris Clayborne helped her and her children find placement in the Missionaries of Charity shelter for two weeks while she assisted them in leasing an apartment. Clayborne also arranged a job interview for Thomas at a large Downtown hotel, where she will be a full-time member of the housekeeping staff.

“She really takes the time to be concerned about you,” Thomas said.

Volunteers add value to Catholic Charities’ work

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The children served in the Fig Tree Food Pantry and the Clothes Closet before observing an English as a Second Language class.

“I am glad to have a roof over my head, food in my mouth and a way to get back and forth to school. Not everyone has that,” said eighth-grader Marisa Mongeon.

Helping people in need provided insight for seventh-grader Yuliana Flores, who said that some might simply look at the customers of Catholic Charities and see “the poor.”

“We are all the same,” Yuliana said. “We just have different qualities.”

Wish List

We have an extra special need this season for:

- Children’s books (K-5)
- Table games
- Undergarments (all sizes for all ages)
- Travel-sized hygiene products
- Small gifts for Birthright moms

Please call (901) 722 – 4750 or (901) 722 – 4797 For more information on donations
Sponsor a Camper

2018 Sponsorship Program

Camp Love & Learn is a seven-week summer enrichment camp operated by Catholic Charities that focuses on a multicultural group of at-risk children. For 2018, we have one camp location at Berean Baptist Church.

Our camps include Educational, Nutritional and Recreational components that are funded by private donations, grants and weekly camper fees.

Help provide a child with a safe, fun and educational summer. For more information, please contact Virginia Davenport, Program Director, at virginia.davenport@acc.cdom.org or call 901-722-4716.

- One-Month Sponsorship: $600
  Invitation to tour camp and photo with camper.

- One-Week Sponsorship: $150
  Invitation to tour camp.

- One-Day Sponsorship: $30
  Thank you letter from camper.

- Other Amount: ___________________________

Please make checks payable to Catholic Charities of West Tennessee with “Camp” in the memo line or visit ccwtn.org to donate online.

Name: ___________________________________
Address: __________________________________
City, State & Zip: ____________________________
Phone/E-mail: ______________________________

By the Numbers

Camp Love & Learn helps at-risk children avoid the “summer slide,” or the propensity to lose academic gains made during the previous school year.

For 2017, 98% of campers who took pre- and post-tests maintained or increased their test scores in Math during the summer. And 88% of campers who took pre- and post-tests maintained or increased their test scores in Reading.

More than 75% of children served in 2017 came from families with an income below $50,000. And nearly 50% of children served in 2017 came from families with an income below $30,000.

You can support this program by choosing to Sponsor a Camper through this Camp Sponsorship insert. You can also support the camp by donating online at ccwtn.org and designating Camp Love & Learn.
This contrast reminds me of a question I once heard someone ask: “Who am I, and why am I here?” What a thought-provoking question. Indeed, why are we here?

My answer is simple: To walk with the poor and support them on their path to self-sufficiency.

On one of the coldest days this winter, when it was just 9 degrees Fahrenheit, I saw a homeless man sitting on the curb, toes protruding from one duct-taped shoe while he worked with a piece of broken glass to remove a rock embedded in the other foot. He was bleeding profusely but apparently didn't feel the pain due to the extreme cold.

Another street friend removed his own sock (one of several he was wearing) and helped put it on his injured friend's foot. The man was comforted, no longer alone, and I saw an example of the best of Memphis - responding to help another in pain.

So many people in our community walk alone. More than 1,400 people in Memphis are homeless, and many, many thousands more live in poverty. Nearly 27 percent of our neighbors are living out their lives at the poverty level, which is an annual income of $25,100 for a family of four.

The numbers are striking, and the problem can seem overwhelming. But Memphis is also a city of great generosity, a city with creative spirit and grit. So much good exists alongside such great need.

### Expansion of food program serves those most in need

On any given day, 53,730 people in Shelby County depend on churches, non-profits or soup kitchens just to eat. This is an example of the food insecurity that plagues our region. Nearly 405,000 residents in the Mid-South Food Bank’s 31-county service area are food insecure, which means they don’t have consistent access to adequate food for active healthy lives.

Because Catholic Charities of West Tennessee understands that need, we have expanded our Fig Tree Emergency Services Food Pantry from three days per week to five days a week. On average, the number of people served by the food pantry has increased by approximately 220 per month this year, compared to 2017.

People gain access to local food pantries through a voucher system operated by the Memphis Inter-Faith Association (MIFA), and Catholic Charities vouchers are among the first chosen every day.

The food pantry is also the only “choice” food pantry in Memphis and has recently been reorganized to look more like a grocery store. Customers are encouraged to choose the items they prefer from the selection, based on the number of items allowed each customer.

“This new approach is a win-win for all. Our customers really like being able to choose the foods that they like best,” said Therese Gustaitis, Catholic Charities Assistant Executive Director. “Our volunteers tell us that this is a much more dignified approach to food distribution.”
We would like to thank the following benefactors for their generous support:

- Speer Charitable Trust
- Ladies of Charity
- Urban Child Institute
- United Way of the Mid-South
- Hyde Family Foundation
- Benevity Community Impact Fund
- FedEx Global Distribution
- Paragon National Bank
- Bill and Julie Duncan
- Bill and Stacia Rosatti
- Richard and Paula Lynch
- Mr. Albert Cantu
- Mr. Abel Arce

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. Your donations are deductible as allowed by law.