



FROM THE DESK OF FR. MIKE

Today we celebrate the Fifth Sunday of Lent (And Happy St. Patrick’s Day as well). We are fast approaching Palm Sunday and Holy Week, now just one week away. Are you trusting the Holy Spirit to grace you in your prayer, fasting, and almsgiving? Ask the Holy Spirit to perhaps even deepen your prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in the remaining days of our Lenten journey. How did the encouragement of Fr. Frank to open yourselves to God’s grace bless you this past week as you remain committed to your Lenten disciplines?

Operation Rice Bowl is an annual effort in parishes during Lent. Students in our Religious Education program and parish school include the Rice Bowl Sharing as part of their collective almsgiving. Many parishioners use this as one of their “almsgiving” charities during Lent. You can still find the Rice Bowls with accompanying prayers and ideas at the entrances to the church. Know that checks written out to the Church of St. Mary for Operation Rice Bowl, in addition to any change or paper currency, are also appropriate for your almsgiving.

The work of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) touches the lives of many of God’s children across the planet. The climate changes we deal with in Chicago are nowhere near as devastating as those experienced around the world. My friend, Fr. Deo, who visited us last August, has shared the devastating impact of draught on the crops that would have been food for his region of Zambia. To be further educated about CRS and their worldwide outreach you can view the link: crs.org. I received the following prayer from CRS in a recent email:

COME, GOD OF THE VULNERABLE

Father in heaven, we didn’t see them but you did —
the hundreds and thousands of human beings trafficked each year to join the millions who are trapped in modern-day slavery.

Under terrible conditions, they work in factories, plough fields, harvest crops, work quarries,
fill brothels, clean homes and haul water. Many are children with tiny fingers for weaving rugs
and small shoulders for bearing rifles.

Their labor is forced, their bodies beaten, their faces hidden from those who don’t really want to see them.
But you see them all, God of the vulnerable.

You hear their cries and you answer by opening our eyes, and breaking our hearts and loosening our tongues to insist:
No más. No more. Amen.

The prayer, *Come, God of the Vulnerable*, may make some people uncomfortable. The world we live in is messy, and in need of God’s grace. Each of us are called to be agents of that grace, in simple and small ways. Parishioners have been generous in caring for our neighbors in need, the migrants at our doors. The following is an update on the life-changing ministry of Catholic Charities.

Catholic Charities - Welcoming the Stranger: Our Migrant Care Response

Since buses of migrants and asylum seekers began arriving in Chicago from Texas in August 2022, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago has partnered with our parish, government, and community partners to connect new arrivals with safe, long-term housing and provided resources and materials to meet their basic needs. We have a dedicated team of 130 + bilingual individuals working on the frontlines each day, serving with courageous and faith-filled compassion, hope, and joy.

Response Snapshot

- Total arrivals to Chicago area since August 2022, reported by the City of Chicago 36,077
- Total individuals directly supported by Catholic Charities Migrant Care Initiatives 22,921
- Adults and children reunited with families outside Chicago 4,893
- Individuals living in shelters & hotels who have been connected to housing 13,798
- Individuals aided with work authorization & Temporary Protected Status applications* 3,800
- Individuals housed & accompanied through the Parish Family Sponsorship Program 430 (116 families)

[This data snapshot is updated every two weeks. For more information on new arrivals, visit the City of Chicago’s New Arrivals Situational Awareness Dashboard. *Individuals aided with work authorization & TPS may have also received housing/parish sponsorship support – category likely includes duplicate clients. Together with our parish partners and with philanthropic support, Catholic Charities has also distributed 9,000 Ventra cards and 7,500 gift cards to new arrival families across the city. We continue to serve thousands through Catholic Charities’ anchor programs at our community centers across Lake and Cook counties, including providing fresh food through our pantries, welcoming them as guests to our community suppers, and connecting them to other services. For more information, contact welcomethestranger@catholiccharities.net]

May God bless us with clean, compassionate, and generous hearts these Lenten days as we approach Palm Sunday next week,