

CARITAS NOW

CATHOLIC CHARITIES BROOKLYN AND QUEENS MAGAZINE | STORIES OF THOSE WE SERVE

125⁺
YEARS OF CHANGING LIVES



Hope Renewed:
Stories that
Inspire

Jubilee Year 2025

LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,


I am pleased to present the latest edition of Caritas Now Magazine, titled "Hope Renewed." This Spring 2025 issue highlights the incredible stories of the individuals we serve, perfectly coinciding with this year's Jubilee Year—a time dedicated to spiritual renewal and reconciliation. Embracing the Jubilee theme of "Pilgrims of Hope," our goal is to uplift our community amid the ongoing challenges of this year and showcase our work through the lives of our clients we are proud to serve.

Within these pages, you'll meet Kevin, who has bravely navigated the complexities of schizophrenia with our unwavering support. You'll also hear from Daniel and Surafel, two peers who have overcome addiction and are now using their experiences to guide others at the Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Clinic. Thanks to our Homebase program, Adrian's journey from potential homelessness to stability exemplifies the transformative power of support. Additionally, you will read about Patty Dwyer, a vibrant retired senior who is enjoying life at our Peter Striano Residence in Howard Beach. Each of these stories illustrates the remarkable resilience of our community and the profound impact of our services.

Our commitment to helping those in need remains steadfast as we continue our mission for the next 125 years. We take immense pride in being the hands of Jesus for individuals and families facing adversity.

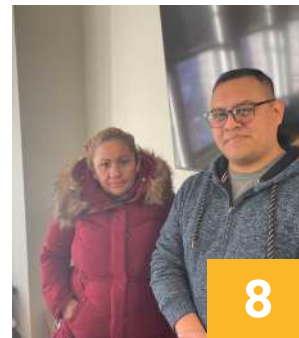
This issue also includes a special insert featuring an impact statement and financial overview. This insert provides insights into how contributions positively affect change in our communities. Upholding transparency and accountability is essential for nurturing the trust and support of our valued donors.

We are profoundly grateful for your continued generosity and support. Together, we can create tangible change in the lives of those who rely on our services.

Peace,
Rw. 

Monsignor Alfred LoPinto
President and CEO
Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens





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*** SPECIAL INSERT -- 2024 IMPACT STATEMENT ***

For over 125 years, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens has been providing quality social services to the neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens and currently offers 160-plus programs and services for children, youth, adults, older adults, and those struggling with mental illness. Since 1975, Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corporation, the affordable housing developer of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, has been transforming vacant land and buildings into affordable housing units and transforming the lives of individuals and families. We've completed more than 4,567 units with supportive services for seniors, families, veterans and the formerly homeless. Since 2020, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens has provided much-needed food packages and services at 60 Catholic Charities parish-based food pantries and has distributed over \$19 million in food.

CARITAS NOW Magazine will bring you quarterly insight into the programs and services offered by Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens.

For more information, or to be removed from our list, contact:

CARITAS NOW MAGAZINE: 191 Joralemon Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

CARITASNOW@ccbq.org or 718-722-6202

Hope Renewed: Stories that Inspire

In this issue, we highlight the inspiring journeys of our clients who have faced and successfully overcome significant challenges. These stories emphasize the powerful influence of hope and resilience within our community, showcasing how Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens empower individuals to reclaim their lives and thrive.

As we celebrate this Jubilee Year, we invite you to reflect on the important themes of renewal and strength found in these testimonials, which are rooted in trust and community. These compelling narratives illustrate the profound impact of hope and resilience, demonstrating how Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens supports individuals in their journey to reclaim their lives.

Kevin Wilson Finds Stability Through Schizophrenia Care

Kevin Wilson has been attending the **Corona Behavioral Health Center** since 2011 after he was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and was hospitalized several times.

After he earned his Master's degree, Kevin started to experience symptoms of his condition. He could no longer work, his relationships became strained, and he felt his creative light had diminished. For many years, Kevin would submit his artwork to local organizations such as Fountain House, an art gallery in Hell's Kitchen, but due to his progressive hearing loss, Kevin had trouble going out into his neighborhood on his own.

Kevin sought out help from Corona Behavioral Health Center, one of the many program sites for Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Services, which is focused on compassionately serving those dealing with substance abuse disorders and mental illness.

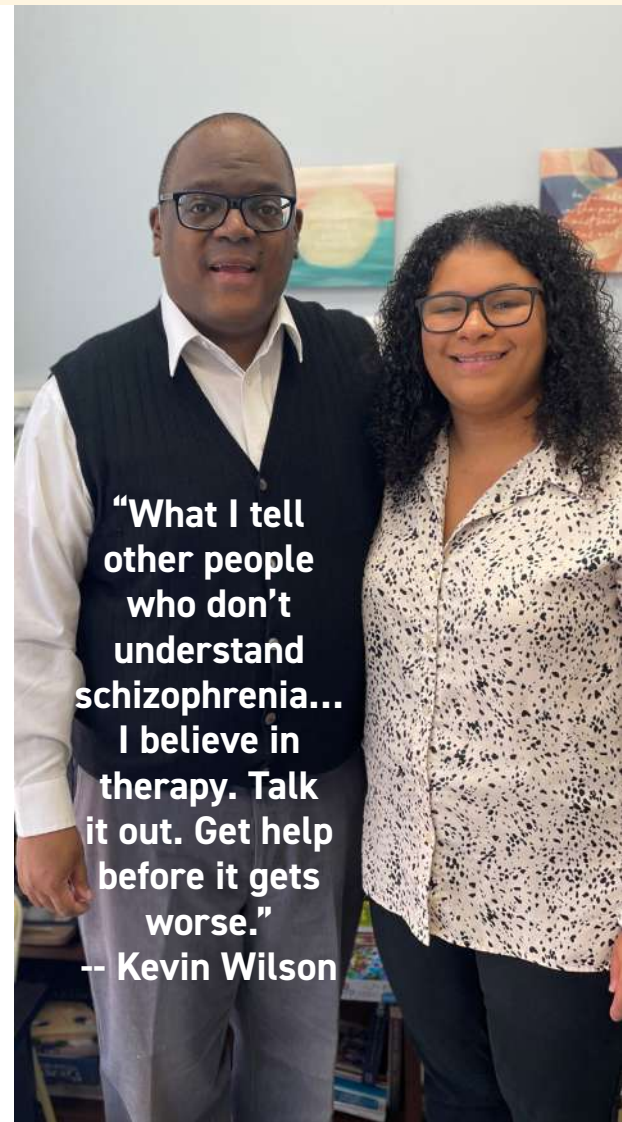
The agency's five **Catholic Charities' Behavioral Health Centers** (located throughout Brooklyn and Queens) help people navigate the social services

system and monitor individual cases. The Behavioral Health Services team works to alleviate the stress that comes with struggling from mental health issues, housing, family circumstances, and access to other vital services. All Behavioral Health Services follow an approach to health care that emphasizes wellness, recovery, trauma-informed care and physical-behavioral health integration.

Since Kevin began keeping regular appointments with his therapist at the Corona Behavioral Health Center, he has been able to improve his social skills, make new connections, and express himself through his artwork.

"What I tell other people who don't understand schizophrenia... I believe in therapy," Kevin said. "Talk it out. Get help before it gets worse."

Kevin's developments while working with Corona Behavioral Health Center have led him to rediscover his passions, receive guidance and gain a strong support system. ■



**"What I tell other people who don't understand schizophrenia... I believe in therapy. Talk it out. Get help before it gets worse."
-- Kevin Wilson**



"If I can share a little hope with somebody, they in turn might be able to do the same."
-- Daniel Warner

Surafel and Daniel Turn Pain into Purpose

Individuals facing substance use challenges can find essential support through Catholic Charities' **Opioid Prevention and Treatment (OPT) Program**. This initiative offers Peer Support Services and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) to help people regain control over their lives. Located at the **Catholic Charities Bohan-Denton Flatbush Behavioral Health Clinic**, and offering services to all clinics within our portfolio, the OPT Program features trained peer counselors who use their personal experiences and skills to assist those grappling with mental health crises and substance use issues.

The power of peer support lies in the ability of those who have faced similar struggles to provide a unique understanding and empathy. Peer counselors encourage individuals to connect with resources, reintegrate into society, and make informed treatment decisions. They create a supportive environment that fosters recovery and assists people in navigating complex situations.

Daniel McGowan Warner, a peer counselor in the program, illustrates this journey powerfully. After battling

substance use for nearly two decades, which stemmed from childhood trauma and mental health challenges, Daniel began to find hope through peer support. His experiences cost him relationships, jobs, health, and family connections. "I found hope not only in clinical services but also in hearing messages of hope from others who had walked a similar path," Daniel said. Now sober for over eight years, he has been a peer counselor at Catholic Charities for about two and a half years.

"Helping others strengthens my own resolve," Daniel shares. "Part of my recovery involves assisting others." He feels that sharing hope can create a ripple effect in the community.

Surafel Getachew's journey reflects similar themes of recovery and support. After struggling with substance use and spending time in prison, Surafel began to find purpose in helping others. His recovery journey led him to become a Certified Recovery Peer Advocate. "Helping others became one of my best coping mechanisms," Surafel noted. Now sober for ten years, he has dedicated the past four years to being a peer counselor, focusing on positive choices for those

facing mental health and substance use challenges.

Surafel is currently pursuing a BA in Addiction Studies at SUNY Empire State University to enhance his effectiveness in this role, recognizing that his past experiences provide valuable insights to assist others. "I'm grateful for the chance to positively impact others' lives," he stated, recounting how he helped someone reduce a month-long wait for MAT medication to just a week.

The stories of Daniel and Surafel resonate with themes of hope and community that Pope Francis encourages during this Jubilee year. Through Catholic Charities' comprehensive support system, many individuals are reclaiming their lives and gaining independence. "Thanks to a multifaceted support system, I've reclaimed control over my life," Daniel reflected. Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens is dedicated to fostering connection and empowerment for those navigating challenging times, emphasizing the role of community in the recovery process. ■



Nurturing Ummay Shaolin and Her Son

The Jubilee Year is often celebrated as a time of reflection, renewal, and hope, which resonates deeply with Ummay's journey. Last September, Ummay Shaolin, 33-years-old, came to the **Catholic Charities' Charles F. Murphy Early Childhood Development Center** in need of childcare for her two-year-old son. The program staff prioritized her case and her child's needs since she was living in a shelter in Coney Island, Brooklyn.

Considering the dangers of her living situation in the long term and its potential impact on her son's development, the program swiftly stepped in to provide a secure and nurturing environment. Ummay's son was enrolled in the Early Head Start Program, which offers a range of developmentally appropriate activities through the Montessori approach. The center prepares children with activities that promote cognitive, social, emotional, language-literacy, and physical development. The center not only focuses on the child's development but also ensures the safety

and security of the entire family.

After getting her son enrolled, and as part of her requirement for permanent housing, Ummay pursued employment with the program. Ummay had a degree and qualifications in early childhood education from her home country of Bangladesh and obtained a degree equivalent here in the United States. She was encouraged to apply for a Teacher's Aide Position at the center. The program's team helped guide her through the hiring process.

Today, now in a stable living situation, the Early Childhood Development Center not only provided her with a stable job but also offered career path assistance, enabling her to work towards a better future while addressing her childcare concerns. This support has not only helped her son develop appropriately for school but has also transformed Ummay's life. "I am deeply grateful for the program, which I consider a blessing," Ummay said. "They provided us with a supportive environment,

employment opportunities for me, and childcare services for my child."

Located at eight different locations throughout the boroughs, the Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Early Childhood Development Centers provide free Early Head Start and Head Start services to low-income families to help prepare children for a school environment. While Head Start provides services to children ages three to five-years-old, Early Head Start provides services for children six weeks to three-years-old. These programs are aimed at preparing children for a successful transition to a school environment. ■



"They provided us with a supportive environment, employment opportunities for me, and childcare services for my child."

--Ummay Shaolin

“With Catholic Charities, I found a way forward. They gave me a second chance when I needed it most, helping me clear my path and rebuild my life.”
--Adrian Patten



better—just in time for the holiday season.

“I felt an immense weight lifted off my shoulders this holiday season,” Adrian said. “I’m now in a wonderful apartment, my children are comfortable, and our days are brighter. I thank God daily for connecting me with the Homebase program. To Catholic Charities and Mr. Taylor, I am eternally grateful for your services. May God continue to bless you all.”

In this Jubilee year, when stories of hope and renewal are relevant themes, Adrian’s journey is a powerful reminder of the message to live in fraternity and help those in need. The support and care given to those in need from community-based programs offered by Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens help fuel resilience, such as Patten’s strength during his housing crisis.

“Through it all, my kids remained my light. With the support of Catholic Charities, I found a way forward. They gave me a second chance when I needed it most, helping me clear my path and rebuild my life,” Adrian said. “Today, I wake up motivated and optimistic, determined to be the best version of myself for my children. My story isn’t just about hardship—it’s about resilience, renewal, and the power of love to inspire change.” ■



A Safe Haven for Adrian Patten

Adrian Patten, a 43-year-old veteran, was facing eviction when he came to the Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens **East Flatbush Homebase Homelessness Prevention Program**, one of five Homebase programs offered by Catholic Charities, in July 2024.

Adrian is a father of two with an 11-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son. He owns a business called Brooke Street Wings, named after his firstborn daughter.

Due to the struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic, dealing with foot surgery recovery, Patten lost motivation and fell behind on rent. The debt grew to a point where he “couldn’t see a way out,” Adrian said.

With the housing court issuing an eviction date of September 2024, Patten had to act and decided to meet with the Homebase team for assistance.

The Homebase Homelessness Prevention program, provides services to those who are at risk of entering a shelter due to rental arrears, overcrowding or substandard housing, and to those who have a prior shelter history as part of aftercare services. Services provided include case management, tenant/landlord mediation, advocacy/benefit entitlements, short-term financial assistance, referrals and varied

workshops that can help individuals who are at risk of homelessness. Adrian urgently sought assistance from Homebase in finding relocation options and securing a subsidy for ongoing rental payments.

“With two children who look up to me and after undergoing surgery earlier this year, the obstacles regarding my income and housing began to pile up,” Adrian said. “But once I walked into Catholic Charities, I felt my situation was taken seriously, and action was taken swiftly.”

With guidance from Homebase, Adrian was found eligible for services. Thanks in part to his veteran status, Adrian qualified for city subsidies for rent. He was also referred to other veteran services such as the Volunteers of America Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), which assists with obtaining VA benefits and public benefits.

Due to Adrian and Homebases’ combined efforts, the court issued him an extension which allowed Adrian and the Homebase team time to work diligently to resolve his housing crisis. In October 2024, Adrian secured the keys to a beautiful new apartment, where he could finally provide stability for his two children.

The timing couldn’t have been



“The families that come here just genuinely want to provide for their families, and we provide them with the tools and resources to improve their situation.”

--Omar Carillo Perez

Itala Navigates New Beginnings

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, in line with our mission to serve all of God's children, empowers vulnerable immigrants, asylum seekers, and newcomers through programs like the **Moving Forward Program**. This program offers crucial social support, including referrals, direct assistance, and education, enabling immigrants to navigate challenges and access opportunities, thereby inspiring them to take control of their lives.

Supervisor of Moving Forward Program Direct Services Omar Carillo Perez is an immigrant himself and knows firsthand how important the programs are to help people get on a track set up for success. “The families that come here just genuinely want to provide for their families, and we provide them with the tools and resources to improve their situation.”

In 2024, the Moving Forward Program assisted 1,650 individuals. One of these individuals was Itala, a mother from Venezuela who fled poverty and violence to secure a better future for her son. Upon her arrival, she

was welcomed by Omar and his team, who immediately addressed her urgent needs with transportation assistance, gift cards for essentials, and clothing for job interviews. This support was a turning point in Itala's life, enabling her to take the first steps towards a brighter future in the U.S.

The program works closely with the **Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Office of Mission**, which provides immediate emergency assistance to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and access to medical and other essential emergency services. In 2024, the Office of Mission supported over 7,000 migrants by offering case management, a soup kitchen for warm meals, access to legal support through affiliate **Catholic Migration Services, Inc.**, and even personal services like haircuts. This comprehensive and holistic approach ensures that newcomers receive the support they need to start their new lives.

The Moving Forward Program encourages participants like Itala to pursue English language classes and provides pathways to vocational training. For Itala, English classes in Spanish

were especially beneficial, as she aims to build a new life in the U.S. With a work permit, she is eager to embrace employment opportunities. The program not only provides support but also opens doors to new opportunities, empowering individuals like Itala to create brighter futures.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens also expanded its reach to offer diverse technological, construction, and health job prospects. Over 800 migrants were provided access to OSHA training, and over 1,000 workforce development referrals were made last year, helping immigrants with work permits establish meaningful career paths. With the introduction of a job developer position, Moving Forward will further enhance its support, ensuring that individuals like Itala can achieve their dreams and create brighter futures. The dedication and compassion shown by Omar and the team, alongside the collaboration with the Office of Mission, continue to impact the lives of those they serve significantly. ■

**"I am grateful for the opportunity to empower my students."
-- Charito Tubera**



Charito Tubera: Breaking Barriers

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' **ESOL Programs (English for Speakers of Other Languages)** offer free literacy classes to adult English learners.

The classes focus on enhancing their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension skills. Held twice a week at seven locations across Brooklyn and Queens, the program aims to help non-English speakers improve their skills and overcome language barriers.

Instructor Charito Tubera understands the challenges of navigating a new country with limited English. At 18, she moved from the Philippines to the United States and faced difficulties in achieving fluency. "Native speakers spoke quickly, making it difficult for me to grasp the language structure," Charito recalls.

Motivated to improve, Charito engaged in many conversations with native speakers and eventually earned a bachelor's degree. She began teaching ESL as a volunteer at Columbia University and joined Catholic Charities as an ESOL instructor in November 2024. Here, she found a renewed passion for educating those in need.

In her classes, Charito helps participants thrive by teaching essential communication skills for daily life, such as understanding transportation language. "Teaching at Catholic Charities has deepened my appreciation for cultural diversity," she says. "I am grateful for the opportunity to empower my students."

The ESOL Program also provides social and immigration services alongside workshops on healthy living and healthcare resources. Thanks to dedicated instructors like Charito, community members can access quality English courses free of charge. ■

Community Outreach Services Offers Marie --and Others, a Lifeline

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens provides vital support to individuals and families through its **Community and Outreach Services**, which include **Food Pantry Programs, Health and Wellness Services**, and Community and **Mobile Outreach Centers**. The services also feature a mobile outreach van that helps reach hard-to-access, isolated neighborhoods.

To combat food insecurity in low-income communities, Catholic Charities offers over 60 parish based food pantries, distributing fresh produce, dairy, and meat, as well as shelf-stable items. In 2024, the Food Pantry Programs alone served over 425,000 people, providing 3.8 million meals and issuing 1,200 Health Buck coupons for local farmers' markets. "Access to quality, nutritious food is a basic human right," said Debbie Hampson, Senior Director of Community Outreach Services.

The Health and Wellness Services offer workshops, support groups, and resource fairs. In 2024, they hosted 19 events, serving 4,281 adults and 475 children, while promoting health awareness and providing access to healthcare and SNAP benefits.

The Community and Mobile Outreach Centers assess clients' needs to provide information, resources, and limited financial assistance. "We see hardworking individuals and families trying to make ends meet in the face of rising costs," Hampson noted.

For example, Marie, a 60-year-old woman, sought help from the Community Outreach Center after a hip replacement surgery left her unable to work. The center supported her with three months of rent and utility bill assistance, allowing her to return to work in September 2024. "Catholic Charities provided a lifeline for me; now I can focus on rebuilding my life," said Marie. ■





**"Everybody I live with is kind, and I have a lot of friends here."
--Patty Dwyer**

Patty Dwyer: Thriving in A Caring Community for Older Adults

Since 1975, the **Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corporation**, the affordable housing provider of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, has developed 26 senior housing buildings with 2,186 affordable units for low-income seniors, allowing them to comfortably age in place with access to social services and activities.

Patty Dwyer, 73, has lived at the **Peter J. Striano Senior Residence** in Howard Beach for 12 years. Before moving in, she rented an apartment in the area but was eager to secure a spot in the new residence because of the scarcity of affordable housing options nearby. "There aren't many apartments in this area, only unaffordable condos and co-ops. So, when it was opening, I wanted to get in," Patty shared.

After placing her name on the waiting list, Patty faced a delay in hearing back due to high demand. However, following Hurricane Sandy, which

displaced many residents, she moved in with her sister. "Then, all of a sudden, I get this phone call from Catholic Charities saying we have an apartment for you," Patty recalled.

Patty moved into her new apartment shortly after and expressed her gratitude for the living conditions. "It's a very nice apartment. They even use my unit as a model for tours, which is pretty cool, and the rent is affordable on my fixed income," she stated. As a retired nurse, she values the financial stability that her residence provides.

To help keep her bills low, Patty participates in the agency's Community Solar Agreement with the **Laudato Si Corporation**. This initiative, launched by Catholic Charities' new corporation, Laudato Si, in 2021, is part of the organization's response to Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on climate change. Catholic Charities collaborates with Bright Power to install solar panels on underutilized rooftops of their affordable

housing portfolio. Patty signed up for this program in 2022, allowing her to save approximately \$75 a year on electricity costs. "Solar is 100 percent better—forget about it," she told The New York Times in February 2025.

In addition to affordable housing, Catholic Charities operates 20 Older Adult Centers that offer extensive activities and services such as lunch, educational workshops, exercise classes, discussion groups, and organized outings. The Striano Senior Residence houses the **Howard Beach Older Adult Center**, where Patty enjoys spending time with friends during events and classes.

"There is a senior center in the building itself, and they offer everything from dancing to arts and crafts to day trips," Patty explained. "I'm the decorator for events and holidays. We also have nice lunch-ins. Everybody I live with is kind, and I have a lot of friends here." ■

Francia Cruz: Beyond Home

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens offers residential housing programs to assist individuals with diverse needs, including those who were formerly homeless or facing mental health challenges. The **Supportive Housing Program** provides affordable, permanent housing along with supportive services such as case management, mental health and substance use disorder support, and access to medical care. Supportive Housing staff connect individuals to various community resources, including medical, psychiatric, dental, recreational, and vocational services.

Francia Cruz has been residing at **Catholic Charities' Bishop Sullivan Residence** in Brooklyn since spring 2024. In addition to having a safe and affordable living environment, her social service worker helps her navigate the medical insurance process, aids her in accessing medical clinics, and ensures she receives her medications.

"My experience here has been wonderful," Francia said. "I enjoy the group activities, the holiday celebrations, and the staff are very attentive to my needs."

Catholic Charities Supportive Housing has a strong track record of stabilizing individuals' lives and decreasing their reliance on homeless shelters, hospitals, mental health facilities, and the criminal justice system.

Catholic Charities' Supportive Housing residential programs offer six residences that provide safe and stable housing for individuals dealing with mental health issues, chronic health conditions, histories of trauma, and other difficulties. ■



Israel Tavera: From SYEP to Case Manager

During the summer, when young adults are looking for valuable work experience and an extra income while on break from school, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens offers a **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)** for people ages 16 to 24, allowing young adults to discover new interests, gain leadership and workplace skills, and prepare for future careers. Program participants work 25 hours per week and are paid minimum wage.

Israel Tavera, a current case manager for **Catholic Charities' ESL Program**, began his journey with Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens at SYEP in 2019 when he was 17 years old.

SYEP staff facilitates a job readiness orientation for participants that focuses on professional identity, health and stress, financial literacy and higher education. They also host guest speakers and resource tables. After attending the orientation, Israel was placed on a worksite in his neighborhood for a six-week internship program.

"There is a supervisor at your worksite, and they make sure your job performance is good and that you're gaining experience that helps you pursue a higher position later on," Israel said. Israel's positive and rewarding experience encouraged him to continue his relationship with Catholic Charities after the program and throughout his college career.

"I have other skills, like speaking Spanish, so that helped me be more involved with the community. During the pandemic, I was able to help out at food pantries," Israel said. "At that point, they promoted me to site monitor at SYEP, and I was able to do that while studying at John Jay College."

During college, Israel remained in touch with Sheldon Peters, Director of Project Management at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, to participate in volunteer opportunities.

"Whenever I could volunteer and help, I would go to food pantries. There were times during school that I wasn't even getting paid, but I would just go to help out," Israel said.

Due to Israel's connection with Peters, when Israel graduated from college in 2024, Peters reached out and offered him a case manager position at Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services.

As a case manager in the ESL Program, Israel is able to provide clients with resources and information to guide them to beneficial services offered by Catholic Charities. "The new job is a new challenge. I can help the community in both languages, which I like, and I try to help out as much as possible in communities in need," Israel said.

Israel's experience with SYEP not only set him up for success in the professional world but fostered a love for volunteering and allowed him to form connections that have given him new career opportunities. ■

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Save the Date!

Saturday, April 12, 2025

The Coat of Arms Club
St. Joseph's University Chapel

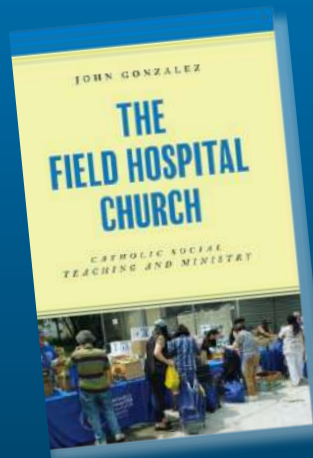
Thursday, June 26, 2025

The Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan +
Peter J. Striano Memorial Golf Classic
North Hills Country Club

Thursday, September 25, 2025

Bishop's Humanitarian Award Dinner
Cipriani Wall Street

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THE FIELD HOSPITAL CHURCH *Catholic Social Teaching and Ministry*

By John Gonzalez

Pope Francis stated, "The church needs to heal wounds and warm hearts; it needs nearness." This vision emphasizes the importance of Catholic social teaching and pastoral ministry in tackling today's social challenges.

Celebrate our own Director of Parish and Community Relations, Dr. John Gonzalez's debut book, ***The Field Hospital Church***! This essential read dives into the Catholic social tradition and pastoral ministry's role in today's world. Featuring an introduction by Rev. Msgr. Alfred LoPinto, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens. it's a must-have! **Grab it now at 30% off using code: RLFANDF30**
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