

## A Fond Farewell

*Sister Maria Heppler, OSB, Appointed Sub-Prioress of Mount St. Scholastica*



*Sr. Maria Heppler celebrates over 35 years with Catholic Charities.*

It's hard to say goodbye, especially when it comes to Sister Maria Heppler. Sister Maria, Director of the School Consultation Program, has been a part of Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas for over 35 years - the longest serving employee in the history of the organization. A Benedictine Sister of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, she is leaving for an appointed role as sub-prioress for the monastery.

Sister Maria began her career as a teacher. After five years, she knew she was being called to help children in another way. School counseling seemed like the perfect combination for her since she was a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in the State of Kansas with a M.S. in Counseling Psychology from Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, Maryland, and a B.S. in Elementary Education with a Minor in Theology from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas.

On January 1, 1982, Sister Maria began at Catholic Charities as a school counseling consultant. The program started just two years before, with three archdiocese schools. This year, there are 14 school counselors serving 19 Catholic elementary schools in Douglas, Franklin, Johnson, Nemaha, Shawnee and Wyandotte counties.

As the school counseling program grew, so did Sister Maria's responsibilities. In 1987, she became the program's director and was instrumental as its purpose shifted from preventative to crisis-focused counseling. School counseling consultants were now dealing with issues such as bullying, cyber bullying, suicide, depression, anxiety and abandonment. "We saw a change in the family structure, which resulted in different types of issues in the schools," says Sister Maria. "There were addictions in the families and many more mental health problems. What we really began doing is therapy in the schools."

Sister Maria also began coordinating Catholic Charities' Crisis Support Team for the entire Archdiocese. Whenever tragic events happened at a Catholic elementary or high school such as a loss of a student, teacher or parent, she went on-site and worked closely with the administration to develop and implement a plan to help the grieving students and staff.

"Throughout it all, I hope I've been a compassionate, non-anxious, steady presence and support to those who are in the Catholic schools serving the needs of the students," says Sister Maria.

In late August, Sister Maria will assume her new position assisting the prioress and coordinating daily activities for the 124 Sisters who are in residence at Mount St. Scholastica. While she welcomes the opportunity to have more interaction with the Sisters, she says she'll miss working with Catholic Charities' school counseling program. "I've been very proud to work for Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas," adds Sister Maria. "It's a wonderful ministry that truly responds to the changing needs of the community."

## Students Give Back through Eagle Scout Projects

*Hope Hero Shout Out!*

There are many ways to volunteer and make a difference at Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas. Three Boy Scouts did just that this summer through their Eagle Scout projects.

Thompson Penn, a freshman at Rockhurst High School, regularly helps load the Catholic Charities truck with food donations at Ascension parish. He also sorts clothes at TurnStyles from time to time. So when it came to choosing his Eagle Scout project, Thompson knew he wanted to do something for the organization that does so much for others.

Thompson took on transforming the overgrown courtyard at Catholic Charities' Central office. He trimmed and removed unwieldy plants, planted new shrubs and mulched. In addition, he added a personal touch to the landscaping, installing what has become a Lenten tradition in his family -- the Stations of the Cross.

Like Thompson, Paul and James Masoner have been active volunteers with Catholic Charities. Paul, a sophomore, and James, a junior, at Bishop Miege High School, help sort food at Hope Distribution Center and assist refugees moving into their new homes.



*Paul and James Masoner give Shalom House residents a quiet place for rest and reflection.*

"I decided to reach out to Catholic Charities for my Eagle Scout project because I wanted to help the less fortunate through my faith," says James.

For their Eagle Scout projects, the brothers chose to repair and renovate the outside area behind Shalom House, Catholic Charities' men's shelter. James led a team of Scouts, building and staining three new benches for the patio. Paul and his team followed-up, taking apart the deteriorating pergola above the patio. After re-staining the corner posts, they built a new slat-structure to provide a peaceful, shaded area for the men.

"Thanks to the efforts of these young men, we can now utilize these outdoor spaces, providing areas of prayer, solitude and reflection for those we serve," says Ken Williams, Catholic Charities' President and CEO.



*Thompson Penn installs The Stations of the Cross as part of his Eagle Scout project.*

## Seminarian Offers Summer of Service



Andrew Gaffney, seminarian for the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

When he rolled up in his 1969 red Chevy Stepside, seminarian Andrew Gaffney had no idea what a summer internship at Catholic Charities would entail-but he was excited to find out. Serving others just seems to be in his DNA.

Andrew has prepared his whole young life for an opportunity like this. In high school he set his hopes on attending nursing school. His ambition: to save lives within the confines of an emergency department.

Then, one day while in chapel he heard a still, small voice calling him to discern a vocation to the priesthood. Later, his parish priest helped validate that calling with a book titled, "To Save a Thousand Souls."

Fast forward four years and Andrew obtained his Bachelor of Arts from Conception Abbey and will continue his studies this Fall at the Augustine Institute in Denver. In between, he spent the summer serving his neighbors in need through Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas.

At 23 years old, Andrew is the youngest seminarian to intern with Catholic Charities. But, his youth combined with his passion for serving, helped Andrew keep up with a challenging schedule.

"I had no idea just how much Catholic Charities did," admits Andrew. "It is so much more than food."

Andrew wanted as much interaction as possible with the people served by Catholic Charities. Without hesitation, he jumped at the opportunity to participate in a myriad of programs including Shalom House, a homeless shelter for men. Here, Andrew not only served meals to the residents, he dined with them.

Andrew also played a key role in operating one of the 30 Kids Summer Food sites where area children and their caregivers were invited to receive free lunch throughout the summer. Each day, Andrew would deliver the meals, post the signs, and set up the room. Finally, he'd serve the children lunch and engage them at the activity station where they could create artwork to take home. Getting to interact with the children and parents as they sat and ate a meal together was one of his favorite parts of the program.

On days he wasn't serving lunches, Andrew assisted in the food pantries stocking shelves and helping shoppers locate items within their family's guidelines. Andrew found it eye-opening to see what people are struggling with. He added that it gave him a greater appreciation when working with people in need.

As the summer fades and Andrew packs his belongings to head west, he leaves some sound advice for others looking to get involved with Catholic Charities.

"Go into it full steam. Catholic Charities is an incredible place and whatever you put into it, the more you get out of it," instructs Andrew. "Catholic Charities will forever hold a great place in my heart."

## Aspire Celebrates Successful First Year

One year ago, Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas launched Aspire Cleaning Service. While it is a full-service, bonded and insured commercial cleaning company, it is also Catholic Charities' newest social enterprise.

"Aspire, along with our TurnStyles' thrift stores, enables Catholic Charities to provide a value back to the community, while fulfilling our mission of serving the poor," says Ernie Boehner, Chief Operating Officer.

Since its start, Aspire has been a source of meaningful employment for vulnerable or underemployed individuals who are determined to overcome barriers to sustain their families. "We invest in them by paying livable wages and working one-on-one with them on career development," adds Jasmine Baudler, Aspire Cleaning Service Manager.

As a result, Aspire's employee and customer retention is close to perfect - a rarity in the commercial cleaning business. Also, as a social enterprise committed to a greater good, Aspire helps others served by Catholic Charities. Profits generated by the company are put back into Catholic Charities' programs and services to help those in need throughout a 21-county service area.

"Aspire has so much to celebrate," Jasmine adds proudly. "We continue to grow and provide more than just employment, we give individuals the hope of a better life for their families."



View the Aspire video online at: <https://youtu.be/6Q7wHL0wzis>

## WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Help feed the hungry! We are currently seeking additional volunteers to serve in all four of our metro-area pantries during business hours. These pantries are located:

- 2220 Central Avenue, Kansas City, KS
- 1708 Steele Road, Kansas City, KS
- 9806 West 87th Street, Overland Park, KS
- 333 East Poplar, Olathe, KS

For more information, contact Michelle Carlstedt, Director of Volunteers, at 913.433.2080 or visit our website at: [catholiccharitiesks.org/volunteer/opportunities](https://catholiccharitiesks.org/volunteer/opportunities)

