



Young people are bombarded regularly with erroneous information or cynical messages about the Catholic Church. Often, these young people feel ill prepared to defend our faith. One of the most beautiful and effective ways to share the Church's mission is by showing her works: Every day, the Catholic Church, through its ministries and people live the good news of Jesus Christ by caring for the most vulnerable – the poor, elderly, sick, imprisoned or forgotten. In fact, the Catholic Church could be called the largest social service network in the world. In the Diocese of Arlington, the Bishop's ministry to serve the poor and vulnerable is most easily demonstrated through the outreach and work of Catholic Charities. This message of the love and compassion shown by the Church is one that resonates with young people. Bishop Burbidge has asked that this message be shared with our young people.

### **Remembering with Gratitude: How Catholic Charities ministries serve the vulnerable.**

Catholic Charities created a video which highlights some of their ministries in the Diocese of Arlington each year. This video highlights just three of their many, many services to support the vulnerable and less fortunate in our communities. Take six minutes to watch this video, then take the rest of your time hearing more about each of these ministries, reflecting upon a few questions, and then discerning how God might be calling you to respond.

#### **1. Begin with a brief prayer and reading:**

*Matthew 25: 34-40: Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

**2. Watch the video:** <https://tinyurl.com/ArlingtonCatholicCharities>

**3. The first ministry highlighted in the video is Emergency Assistance (read the description below and spend time discussing the questions.)**

[Catholic Charities Emergency Assistance](#) helps to prevent homelessness and the termination of essential utilities for vulnerable households. It only takes one bump in the road for a household to fall behind on rent or utility bills such as gas, electric or water. Catholic Charities' financial assistance helps individuals and families navigate through these tough times. Most of those assisted are living paycheck to paycheck and struggle to afford necessities such as food, housing, transportation, and childcare without careful budgeting. Even a modest loss in income can have catastrophic results. Households facing medical emergencies, the death of a loved one, divorce, or a reduction in work hours may find themselves at risk of homelessness or going without heat.

Of the 3.34 million people who live within the Diocese of Arlington almost 200,000 live at or below the Federal Poverty Level. Every county and city in our Diocese has pockets of poverty, especially in our backyard: the heavily populated areas of Fairfax County include 60,671 people living in poverty and in Prince William County 23,649 people live in poverty. The poverty rate in rural areas is as high as 16.0% in Richmond County and 16.3% in the City of Winchester.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the EA ministry has experienced an increase in demand for assistance, particularly in the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Neck which have higher poverty rates.

In our interviews with clients from households that are at risk, we hear the reasons why people continue to struggle to make ends meet: the high cost of food and gas, the surging cost of utilities and rent, and the lack of full-time jobs with benefits.

### **Questions to consider:**

1. How many months do you think your family could remain in its current situation without a paycheck? Losing just one month of salary is enough to put most families into a dire situation. What does that say about how we should be living as a Christian in our community? As a member of a school or parish?
2. The video opens with the statement, "Some people give from a spirit of bounty. The volunteers and the people who I've connected with who donate here, give from a sense of real love and compassion." How do I give of my time or treasure?
3. What are some ways that we as a group of students could assist others? How might we develop a motivation that comes from love rather than a spirit of bounty (or because we were asked to as a part of this exercise?)

**4. The next ministry highlighted in the video is Pregnancy and Adoption Support (read the description below and spend time discussing the questions.)**

[Catholic Charities' Pregnancy and Adoption Support](#) ministry (PAS) provides pregnancy support to woman and families in need, as well as adoption services for infant and older child placements. We focus on strengthening the family prior to the addition of a child through birth or adoption. We offer our pregnancy support clients pregnancy options counseling, ongoing case management and support. We strive to help women and families to make well-thought-out and informed decisions about what is best for them and their child(ren) and work with them to accomplish those goals- be it to parent their child or place them for adoption.

For adoptive families, PAS provides intensive training, support, and preparation to best prepare families to grow through adoption. Catholic Charities families are open to having an “open adoption”, which is an ongoing relationship between the child’s birth family and the child and adoptive family. Decades of research support that this is best for the adopted child.

PAS provides collaboration and support to ensure communities have information on ethical adoption practices and support services available to families in need. Staff work to challenge and correct adoption stigmas and misconceptions.

Our Catholic faith teaches us that families are the foundational building block of society. We believe children flourish when they experience the love of a mother and father in a safe, stable, and healthy family, be it a biological or adopted one. Additionally, all children deserve life and family, including the unborn and children who have been abused and neglected and are in the foster care system awaiting adoption. Last year, we served more than 430 individuals through direct adoptions, adoption support, and crisis pregnancy assistance.

**Questions to consider:**

1. Adoption, pregnancy support and family welfare were the first services our local Catholic Charities offered when it opened in Alexandria 75 years ago. What does offering these services say about what the Catholic Church teaches about human life, and the importance of the family?
2. Critics of the Catholic Church say that it is against abortion, yet “does little” to support women who choose to have their baby. How is this an unfair assessment? What is one thing you learned about today which Catholic Charities is doing to be completely pro-life in their support of babies and mothers?
3. What are some ways that we as a group of students could support women and families? How might we become more pro-life in our own lives?

**5. The next ministry highlighted in the video is Migration and Refugee Services (read the description below and spend time discussing the questions.)**

[Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services](#) has been welcoming refugees to the Diocese of Arlington since 1975, when the end of the Vietnam War and fall of Saigon, the capital city, forced out hundreds of thousands. We have continued to welcome refugees from all over the world ever since. Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) is one of the most active and public ways that the Diocese and the Church “welcomes the stranger” in love and solidarity. Jesus and his family were themselves refugees when they had to flee into Egypt. They were able to return to their homes after a time (when things were safe again) but so many refugee families can’t return to their home countries and will never be able to.

Over the past eight years, the focus at MRS has been on helping Afghans who faithfully served alongside U.S. personnel in their war and now those who have fled the tragedy that has overtaken Afghanistan as the government fell. MRS helped 401 Afghans resettle in our area last fiscal year. It has resettled an additional 800 Afghans this fiscal year and expects to resettle 200 more in the coming months, bringing this year’s total to 1,000.

MRS relies on funding from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and state and federal grants, as well as financial donations from local parishioners and private donors. It relies also on the efforts and love of thousands of volunteers and donors to help refugees establish a new home for themselves in Northern and central Virginia. Without the support and generosity of people in our schools, parishes, and the larger community this work would not be possible.

**Questions to consider:**

1. In our culture, the term “stranger” can be synonymous with a “bad” or “dangerous” person. It is understandable why we may recoil at the idea of “welcoming the stranger.” Discuss this. What are our parents really telling us when we are told to “stay away from strangers?” In our opening reading, we hear Jesus talk about “welcoming the stranger.” Who is Jesus referring to? Why does the Church speak so strongly about welcoming them to live among us and to share our lives with them?
2. The entire situation with Afghanistan is tied up with a lot of politics, Republicans vs. Democrats, border walls, etc... There are a lot of emotions that you might feel when discussing our Church or government inviting people to come live in our country. However, Jesus does not mince words...we are called to welcome the stranger into our lives. Did this video change any of your thoughts on this highly politicized situation?
3. What are some ways that we as a group of students could be more welcoming of the “stranger among us”?

## 6. How you can be the hands and feet of Christ?

Catholic Charities relies on a dedicated corps of volunteers, including students and young adults, to serve individuals and families, including those who appeared in this video. Among other things, these volunteers help collect and deliver food for the hungry, provide winter coats to refugees and other newcomers, and spend precious time with seniors.

**Below are volunteer opportunities for you to do individually, as a family, or with other students. After reviewing these items and those on the provided website, discuss if these might work for you or propose other ways that you can work to serve the vulnerable and less fortunate in our communities.**

- **St. Lucy Food Project**  
Occasional weekend and evening group opportunities at the St. Lucy Food Warehouse, Manassas, and other locations, for packing and sorting food donations to supply local food pantries and other food distribution sites. Call 703-479-2975 ext. 100 for details.
- **Christ House Evening Meal Community Group**  
Help provide evening meals to homeless and low-income men, women, and children at Catholic Charities Christ House in Alexandria. Email: [Aniliza.Juan@ccda.net](mailto:Aniliza.Juan@ccda.net) for more information.
- **St. Martin de Porres Senior Center**  
Accompany seniors on weekday field trips or participate in group activities. Email for inquiries [Maria.mellor@ccda.net](mailto:Maria.mellor@ccda.net)
- **Migration and Refugee Services**  
Sponsor 1) an educational refugee simulation event for a class or the school. MRS can conduct a Zoom session that gives you a small taste of what a refugee's flight feels like or we can advise you on setting up a live refugee simulation on campus and/or 2) a donation/collection drive to benefit MRS clients. Gather up such things as winter coats, health supplies, gift cards, etc. Email [Lourdes.Iglesias@ccda.net](mailto:Lourdes.Iglesias@ccda.net) for more information.

### Off-site Service Projects:

**Senior Activity Kits:** <https://bit.ly/seniorkits>  
[https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/10263](https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/10263)

**Mother's home care kits:** <https://bit.ly/Motherskits>  
[https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/10092](https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/10092)

**Hygiene Care kits Youth:** <https://bit.ly/YouthHygienekits>  
[https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/10960](https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/10960)

**Hygiene Care Kits Adults:** <https://bit.ly/Adulthygienekits>  
[https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/10961](https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/10961)

**Feed A Family :** <https://bit.ly/StLucyFAF>  
[https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/10947](https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/10947)

**Client Affirmation Jar Project:** <https://bit.ly/Affirmationjar>  
[https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/10993](https://volunteer.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/10993)

### **Catholic Charities special projects**

If you're interested in serving on special projects that arise – such as coat or backpack distribution, food sorting, etc., either as an individual or with a group, email [volunteer@ccda.net](mailto:volunteer@ccda.net) and be put on a list to contact when service opportunities arise.

To see other volunteer opportunities, visit <https://volunteer.ccda.net>

### **Other Pro-life Opportunities:**

- **Parish Respect Life Committee:** Every parish in the diocese has been asked by Bishop Burbidge to form a Respect Life Committee to advance public information and education, advocacy and prayer for the protection and respect of every human life from conception to natural death. Check with your parish to learn who heads this vital effort and how you can participate. For more information, contact [respectlife@arlingtondiocese.org](mailto:respectlife@arlingtondiocese.org).
- **Gabriel Project:** The Gabriel Project offers emotional, spiritual, material, and financial support through a pregnancy helpline and parish-based volunteer “Angel” support. To learn more visit <https://helpforpregnantwomen.org/en/home>
- **PrayForLife.org:** This is an on-line portal where caring pro-life citizens of Northern Virginia can easily schedule prayer vigils on the public sidewalk in front of abortion facilities, stay connected, and keep up to date on local developments. Did you know that “no-shows” for abortion appointments can go up as high as 70% when we simply stand in prayer before an abortion center? Your peaceful prayer witness can save lives. Learn more and find resources at [PrayForLife.org](http://PrayForLife.org).

## **Social media:**

In a world where many things around us seem to be falling apart, encourage young people to – as Mr. Rogers said -- “Find the helpers!” Following the good work the Church does through Catholic Charities to help people in need in our community can inspire young people. Encourage them to find inspiration and spread good news with their friends by follow Catholic Charities and the Diocese of Arlington on social media:

### **Catholic Charities:**

Instagram: @CatholicCharitiesCDA  
@ccda\_adoption

Twitter: @CCDArlington

Facebook: @CatholicCharitiesArlington  
@pregnancyandadoptionsupport

Blog: [Pregnancyandadoptionsupport.com](http://Pregnancyandadoptionsupport.com)

### **Diocese of Arlington:**

Instagram: @ArlingtonChurch

Twitter: @ArlingtonChurch

Facebook: @ArlingtonDiocese

## **7. Close by reading this quote from St. Teresa of Avila and a brief prayer:**

*“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” - Saint Teresa of Avila*

**Thank you for taking the time so learn more about Catholic Charities and considering ways to serve in your community!**