



Go Make Disciples

Frontline workers lean on Catholic faith while serving during pandemic

By Jolene Schonchin
The Sooner Catholic

As the number of coronavirus cases and hospitalization were rising daily around the nation, dedicated Catholic men and women within the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City were serving on the frontlines, helping others, caring for the sick, protecting and serving the communities, and educating students through it all.

While people were told to stay home, these unsung heroes were in the middle of the pandemic every day. Dedicated people such as health care professionals, educators, city workers, law enforcement officers, food suppliers and emergency management teams helped those in need, leaning on their Catholic faith to get them through.

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Michelle DeLeon, a labor and delivery nurse at Oklahoma Children's Hospital. Photo provided.

Church celebrates Christ the King while nation celebrates Thanksgiving

By Charles Albert
The Sooner Catholic

After the Spanish Flu 100 years ago, Pope Pius XI gave Catholics the Feast Day of Christ the King to "hasten the return of society to our loving savior."

Christ has always been known as the King. As Saint Paul told the Philippians, "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bend of those in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth." In Revelations 19:16, "Christ is referred as

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Sr. Barbara Joseph sits in her new "mobile meals" bus that helps feed the homeless. Photo provided.

Sr. BJ's Pantry gains new bus to deliver meals, hope

By Eliana Tedrow
The Sooner Catholic

Sister BJ's Pantry has taken the ministry on the road with the use of a new "mobile meals" bus. Going mobile allows volunteers to bring meals, clothing and even prayer to their friends on the streets while helping keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's really one of the few ways we can get out there and see our friends who are still on the street because we can't have large gatherings anymore," Sister Barbara Joseph said.

Sister BJ's mobile meals travel around downtown Oklahoma City on Sunday mornings in search of those who need assistance. She said she recognizes the impact her ministry has on

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Catholic campaign helps bring affordable food, work experience to OKC communities

CCHD national collection Nov. 21-22

By Brian Smith
For the Sooner Catholic

RestoreOKC is one of the national grants from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development in the archdiocese. CCHD is the national anti-poverty program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, working to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ. It is overseen by the USCCB Domestic Justice and Human Development Committee for which Archbishop Coakley serves as chairman.

With support from CCHD, RestoreOKC created a program called Restore Farms that partners with the northeast side of Oklahoma City. The farms' mission is to, "empower our youth with experiences in basic job skills, sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship and incentivize graduation and higher education for long-term community opportunity."

In northeast Oklahoma City, 73 percent of children live below the poverty level. The community also has the highest school dropout rates and incarceration rates in the nation. Children are struggling and being systematic-

ly left behind and have limited access to food compared to surrounding communities.

"People have a lot of assumptions as to why the youth in our community dropout of school; lazy, not smart enough. However, that is 100 percent not the truth for our interns. They are so smart; the truth is they are trying to meet their basic needs. We have kids who work to provide their family with food. School feels like a fantasy for them," said Ann Miller, farm director of Restore Farms.

Restore Farms focuses on providing job training for youth in the community and healthy food access for the neighborhood.

Restore Farms hired 15 students in middle school and high school to intern at the farms. They learn about agriculture, landscaping and basic job skills. Most importantly, they learn responsibility and increase personal development alongside their peers.

Upon graduation from high school and the Restore Farms internship program, the interns can attend college with a full scholarship at one of the universities partnered with the program. Currently, Langston University is the only partnered university, but the program

continues to grow. Restore Farms focuses on teaching this generation the importance of giving to their community, so the next generation has the confidence to continue doing the same.

A Restore Farm intern said their favorite part of the job is harvesting and cooking with the food that grows in the garden.

"We have guest chefs come and teach us how to cook, and I enjoy learning more about that because I want to become a chef."

Another intern said their favorite part is landscaping because "the hard work you put into something becomes pretty."

In addition to job training, Restore Farms creates and supplies healthy and affordable food. Restore Farms uses a grocery market, a community garden and organically grown food through their aquaponics system.

Programs like Restore Farms rely on grants from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to serve communities in the archdiocese. To learn more about CCHD, go online to usccb.org/committees/catholic-campaign-human-development. Provide a gift through the envelop provided for the national collection on Nov. 21-22 or check parish online offertory.

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the less fortunate, but said her volunteers often receive as much good from the ministry as the people they serve.

"It happens all of the time," she said. "The ministry helps the volunteers' faith. It shows them that God really does provide for us."

Their new bus is one of the most recent examples of God's continual provision for the ministry.

Within one month of their idea to search for a bus, they had found

and secured one. Sister Barbara Joseph said the day after they decided to purchase the bus, she opened a letter with a check inside big enough to cover its expense.

"It was kind of obvious," she chuckled, "We were doing what the Lord was asking of us."

After the bus was acquired, renovations ensured they could keep people safe while providing the storage space needed. Over the next month, seats were pulled and shelving and a new plexiglass window were installed to allow

volunteers to safely hand out food and other items.

Ryan Maxwell, a volunteer for the past four years, said he saw a lot of people living on the street during the pandemic and wondered how many of those people could be found on Sunday mornings. It didn't take long for them to begin reconnecting with friends, old and new.

"We quickly learned we would be able to get them a hot breakfast, socks, hygiene products and blankets," Maxwell says. "Once you begin to make friends with people on the street, it's hard on volunteers not to be able to see them. To reconnect with them was really great."

The bus only has been in service since October, but volunteers already serve about 100 hot meals every Sunday.

The ministry is supported by monetary gifts and volunteers, especially those from The Order of Malta of Saint Eugene, who get up early every Sunday to cook, assemble and package breakfast burritos.

Pam Archer, a volunteer for the past six years, said it's fun for her to yell out the window, "Hot breakfast! Who wants a hot breakfast?!"

"I absolutely love it," she said. Archer and her husband, Tim, volunteer together for both the pantry and Sister BJ's foot clinic.

"It's fun because when someone yells out the window, 'Do you want

a free hot breakfast?' they are so happy and grateful. It's just wonderful."

The bus was blessed by Arch-



Sr. Barbara Joseph gets help customizing her new "mobile meals" bus to feed the homeless. Photo provided.



Volunteers help serve hot meals in Oklahoma City. Visit srbjpantry.com to learn more about this ministry. Photo provided.

bishop Coakley and recently applied graphics to help people better identify it.

To support Sister BJ's mobile meals to help with gas and other expenses, go online to srbjpantry.com. The pantry also has a Facebook page.

Eliana Tedrow is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.