A Christmas Message of Charity

Dear Friend of Catholic Community Services of Utah,

With the Advent Season upon us, I am reminded of the great love our Savior has for each and every one of his children and how he manifested that love by living as an example of Charity and Mercy to all, regardless of circumstance. For Christ himself new the challenges of poverty, as he began life under the same circumstances as many of our friends in need.

When I think of Joseph and Mary traveling hundreds of miles and searching house to house for refuge, I try to imagine how cold and hungry they must have been, how desperate for shelter and safety they were as they prepared to welcome their unborn baby into this world. I have often wondered how I would have reacted if Joseph and Mary had come to my door. Would I let them in? Would I have even answered?

Unfortunately, the story of Joseph and Mary’s journey is not unique to biblical times. At Catholic Community Services of Utah (CCS) we are witnesses to the plight of the most vulnerable every day. We see it in the refugees who have survived the unthinkable to knock on our doors for shelter and care. And we see it when our low-income and homeless friends come to us for food and warmth.

Always at this time of year, I recall a refugee family we resettled some years ago. Much like the Holy Family a husband and very pregnant wife were forced to leave their home in Iraq; however, it was not to register in the city of their birth, but instead to flee from violence and danger. They made their way to Egypt, escaping in the dead of night, leaving all their belongings behind, concern for the safety of their unborn child propelling them forward. Exhausted and hungry, they were taken in by a kind older couple who gave them a spare room. Just days later the wife gave birth in that very room. The little family knew they could not stay there and began their process of resettlement. Two years later, after completing their security checks, they were resettled by CCS. Upon meeting them, as I do with all the refugees I meet, I imagined what would have happened to them if they had stayed, or if no one answered their call for help.

Each day we are faced with these same decisions and are given the opportunity to emulate Christ by lifting up someone in need. Let us not forget Christ’s love for us and his enduring teachings. Let us care for the sick, poor, and homeless, and make the decision today and every day to answer the door, to head the call for help. Together, we can make a difference. Together, we can welcome the refugee, the immigrant, the homeless, the hungry. Join us by making a donation to bless those in need and save lives today.

Happy Holidays!

Bradford R. Drake
Executive Director

www.ccsutah.org
2016 Humanitarian Awards Dinner  By: Danielle Stamos
Elizabeth Smart, Humanitarian of the Year

On Friday, November 4th, we hosted our annual Humanitarian Awards Dinner. This year we honored Archbishop John C. Wester of the Catholic Diocese of Santa Fe President, Russell M. Nelson of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Elizabeth Smart. It was a memorable night as the community came together to honor the humanitarians making a difference in the lives of those most in need.

Elizabeth Smart delivers message of the importance of charity at the Humanitarians Awards Dinner on November 4th.

Smart, now a broadcaster and victim’s advocate, said that during her time in captivity they visited our St. Vincent de Paul Dining Hall. “[I] would never have known what it was like to be hungry, to go without, to be cold...and what a blessing that meal was at that point in time.”

With the help of generous supporters such as the George S. and Dolore Doré Eccles Foundation, Gerald J. and Sharon Seiners, the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake, Morgan Stanley and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints all proceeds raised from the Awards Dinner went directly to our eight life-sustaining programs.

Special guests of the evening also included a musical performance by the Burundi Drummers and a presentation our Refugee Resettlement Director, Aden Batar, for his work as liaison to the White House on behalf of refugees in Utah.

We can’t wait for next year’s Awards Dinner and hope to see you there!

Archbishop John C. Wester speaks with President Russell M. Nelson at the Humanitarian Awards Dinner.

Backpack Bonanza
By: Danielle Stamos

Thanks to all your generous donations Backpack Bonanza 2016 was another great success! We were able to distribute 3,600 backpacks filled with school supplies to homeless, low-income and refugee children.

We partnered with Big Budah and Fox 13 to help spread the word and collect as many backpacks and school supplies as possible to ensure that every child has the opportunity to start the school year ready and prepared to learn.

One of our biggest donors each year is 12 year old Armani McFarland from Northern Utah. This year, she collected 1,077 backpacks all on her own!

Although the economy is rebounding and more people are reaching self-sufficiency, backpacks are often at the bottom of the priority list, so thank you for making a difference in the lives of children in need.

With President Russell M. Nelson at the Humanitarian Awards Dinner.

Current Donation Needs and Volunteer Opportunities

Donation Needs

-Hygiene Products: Toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, lotion, soap, combs/brushes, small wash cloths, razors, sanitation pads, diapers (all sizes)

-Food: Non-perishable food items. Bottles of water

-Clothing: Clothing for men, women and children including coats/ jackets, hats, gloves, shoes, and socks

Joyce Hansen Hall Food Bank
To volunteer, please email volunteer@ccsutah.org

Volunteer Opportunities

-Refugee Resettlement
-St. Vincent de Paul Dining Hall

Please call 801-363-7710 or 801-977-9119 to donate, or deliver items to 437 W 200 S, SLC. or 745 East 300 South SLC, UT 84102

Or visit our website at: www.ccsutah.org

The Mamesani family after being reunited in Salt Lake City.

A Story of Success
By: Danielle Stamos

The Mamesani family was separated in 2010 when the parents were arrested due to accusations that they were affiliated with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). With their parents imprisoned, the five children were shuffled between family members and countries until they reached a refugee camp in Kenya with their aunt. There, they stayed for four years while they applied for resettlement and waited for security clearance.

Life was not easy for them in the refugee camps. They were young and hard work was required by all. The oldest children endured threats and lived in fear of what would become of their family.

In March 2015, the children were finally accepted for resettlement and were told they would be placed in a loving foster home in our Refugee Foster Care program, while their aunt would be in the adult refugee program. We worked hard to find a family who was willing to take in all five children since their strength came from staying together throughout their long journey.

Life was new and different in Utah, but they started learning the language and soon excelled in school. However, they never gave up hope for their parents that they would be reunited with their parents and continued to search for them from abroad.

A few months after arrival they learned that their mother had been exonerated and was living in a refugee camp. The children advocated for their mother’s resettlement and were told they would be placed in a loving foster home in our Refugee Foster Care program, while their aunt would be in the adult refugee program. We worked hard to find a family who was willing to take in all five children since their strength came from staying together throughout their long journey.

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The mission of Catholic Community Services is to practice gospel values of love, compassion and hope through service, support and collaboration.