Catholic Charities counseling services helps people to find hope and direction in their lives and overcome difficulties they experience. We are committed to promoting growth and change with a deep respect for each individual’s and family’s life experience. We promote physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health and well being to all. We believe that by helping those who come to us gain a more accurate understanding of themselves and the people in their lives they will be able to lead a more satisfying and productive life. Our counseling staff are professionally trained and licensed at the top level of licensure. Counseling services are provided at all of our service locations. We serve people of all ages, ethnic/cultural backgrounds, faith and non faith traditions, and economic backgrounds. Insurance is accepted and may cover the cost of the counseling services. A sliding fee scale based on household income and family size is available for individuals and families who do not have insurance coverage. Over 38% of our clients selected Catholic Charities for counseling because we are faith based. Eighty percent reported an overall satisfaction with the counseling services. During this reporting cycle, 2,023 people received counseling services.

Counseling clients complete a Client Satisfaction Survey self report. Here are some quotes from our counseling clients about the counseling services:

“When I came, I was in a difficult place in life. After talking and setting goals and standards for me things have gotten a lot better with day to day Living.”

“My way of thinking has changed for the better. I have learned that I can’t change anyone but myself.”

“Counseling helped steer us in the right direction and bring us closer together as a couple and a family.”

“My whole outlook on life has completely changed for the better.”

“I absolutely love my counselor. She is the first of many I’ve had. Now I look forward to my session and do not feel judged ever.”
“Catholic Charities has helped me a great deal. I don’t even want to think what might have happened had I not come for counseling. My counselor helps me stay on track and keep moving forward.”

Project Rachel

The Project Rachel post abortion counseling ministry takes its name from Jeremiah 31:15-17, “Thus says the LORD: In Ramah is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping! Rachel mourns her children; she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more. Thus says the LORD: Cease your cries of mourning, wipe away the tears from your eyes. The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward...There is hope for your future.” Catholic Charities holds all life as sacred. We acknowledge that we live in a society in which the unborn are unprotected and that many lives are touched by the reality of abortion. In addition we also believe in the compassion and mercy of God who forgives. Through Project Rachel, our post abortion healing program seeks to reach out in compassion to the post abortal woman, man, family members, and friends suffering from the aftermath of abortion. Forgiveness and peace of heart is offered through counseling and referral for the sacrament of reconciliation. With help, those affected by abortion can move forward renewed and reconciled with self, the unborn child, family, community, and with God. A 800 phone line is designated for Project Rachel calls so people hurting from the aftermath of abortion can get 24/7 information about post abortion healing and reconciliation. Counseling services are provided by our licensed counselors at all of our locations. Insurance and sliding fee is available. Referrals are made for the sacrament of reconciliation. We work closely with the Pro-Life Secretariat office of the USCCB (Unites States Conference of Catholic Bishops). The number served is included in the counseling number.

Adoption

Catholic Charities has been creating families in the Diocese of Winona for 72 years. We are a child placing agency licensed in Minnesota. Our licensed social workers provide domestic infant adoption services, international adoption services, and designated adoption services. We have a supervised provider agreement with Holt International of Eugene, Oregon to complete adoptive studies and provide post placement supervision with Minnesota residents living in our serving area who want to adopt internationally. Designated adoption services are provided to adoptive applicants choosing not to be a part of our domestic adoption program, but are in need of individual services such as a study or post placement services. In the domestic adoption program our licensed social workers pair married couples (man and woman) looking to adopt with birthparents looking to place their child for adoption. Our social work staff help to facilitate the match between birthparents and adoptive couples and assist with the process of freeing the child for adoption and placement of the child in the adoptive home, as well as the supervision of the adoptive placement through the adoption legalization. The adoption staff is committed to
providing support and guidance throughout the entire adoption process both to the adoptive couple and the birthparents. In all of these efforts the welfare of the child is of primary concern.

The domestic adoption program is dependent on the adoptive applicant’s reimbursement of expenses for its support and continuation; however in order to eliminate cost as a barrier to adoption, a portion of the adoption fees are based on a percentage of income with a minimum and maximum cap. Any deficits are supplemented by other charitable contributions. Foster care placement is an option; however, the majority of children are placed directly out of the hospital into the adoptive home. There are a number of different ways domestic infant adoption happens. Pregnant women may come to the agency looking to place their child in an adoptive home, which has always been a service option, and we are ready to assist both the adoptive parents and birthparent in that process. Another way in which adoptive parents and birthparents are making a connection is through various social networking options. For example they may connect on our Face book page or go to our website and look at our “Ready to Adopt” couples and then decide to come to the agency for assistance with the adoption. We are constantly making changes in technology and balancing online communication with the more traditional face to face contact. We want to ensure confidentiality for our clients and at the same time utilize online media and resources to serve adoptive families and birthparents. We offer a “Journey to Adopt “educational support group for our families who have completed the adoption study process and are ready to adopt. To include all of our families in the group meetings, we Skype with participants from across our diocesan serving area. We are proactive in our efforts to make sure both adoptive parents and birthparents have a full complement of services. During this reporting cycle, 120 people received adoption services.

Catholic Charities Adoptive Families share in their own words what adoption has meant to them:

“We send our daughter’s birthparents a letter and picture every few months, and each night we pray and offer thanksgiving to God for her birthparents bringing so much joy to our family. Adopting our daughter has been the greatest blessing in our lives. “

“Our son will be turning 3 in just a month and there has not been a day that has went by that we haven’t thanked God for his plan for us. We would not have this amazing child if we had not followed his plan and we also continue to pray for his birth mom every single day hoping she is ok and that someday we can meet again”.

“What you can do for us this holiday season is to say a quick prayer for our son’s birthmother who helped remind us what Christmas is all about. Her unselfish decision provided us with the best Christmas present ever.”

“Parenthood is more than we ever even dreamed. Our children bring endless joy to our days, and each and every day we thank God for their birthparents, which chose life and made our dream of having a family come true. This saying is on our wall in our living room because it describes our
adoption experience perfectly: "Everyday holds the possibility of a miracle." Our children are and will always be a constant reminder of the beauty of adoption."

"Adoption has been a blessed event in our lives. We can't imagine loving anyone as much as our child. He has been the joy of our lives and has allowed his parents the opportunity of having a family. We are extremely grateful to his birthmother for bringing him into our world."

Post Adoption Service

Post Adoption services are provided to adopted adult individuals, birthparents, adoptive parents of minor children, and siblings, who may choose to engage in a post adoption process with the agency that is the caretaker of the permanent adoption records. Since Catholic Charities has been placing children in adoptive homes for 72 years we have many permanent adoption records and have an archive location at our Winona office where they are stored. We provide a full complement of post adoption services to those making inquiries. The process may include a request for medical or background information or an actual search for contact. Fees are charged. Assistance and counseling is offered to all who come looking for services. While some individuals have a desire to search others may not have any interest. The request for service is unique to the person making the inquiry. Catholic Charities adheres to Minnesota statutes and rules regarding post adoption search and records. We are committed to providing information and guidance in the post adoption journey. During this reporting cycle, 300 people received post adoption services which included intermediary exchanges between birthparents and adoptive parents.

Pregnancy, Parenting, and Adoption

Catholic Charities believes in caring for the gift of life and provides positive alternatives to abortion. We have been providing services to pregnant and parenting women for 72 years. Support and assistance is provided at no cost to help women, men, and their families to choose life for their expected baby and to care for their babies after birth. All of the services are provided in the context of Catholic Social Teaching and support the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. A pregnancy information line is staffed by agency social workers 24 hours a day. Often a person may think they only have one alternative — abortion — but when they call our pregnancy information line they learn about viable alternatives to abortion. They learn they are not alone and that we will help them every step of the way. Our social work staff has an in-person contact with the caller within 48 hours of the call and we go out to those in need of service to take away barriers to service. We are responsive and accessible and advocate for all who need support. Persons faced with an unplanned pregnancy receive the support needed to self determine what will be the best plan their baby. If the
birthparent chooses to make an adoption plan for their child, Catholic Charities offers adoptive families who have an approved adoption study and are ready to accept a child into their home. If the birthparent chooses to parent their child, Catholic Charities will provide support and help to make a parenting plan. Our initiatives include improving family stability and self sufficiency through the provision of education. Financial Literacy education and Safe Sleep education is provided to all clients who are making a parenting plan for their child. A Nurturing Healthy Families program service is offered monthly to promote positive parenting.

Since 2006 Catholic Charities has been the recipient of a Positive Alternatives Grant through the Minnesota Department of Health. Our program services clearly support the goals of the grant which is to encourage and assist women in carrying their pregnancies to term, in caring for their babies after birth, and to provide accurate information on, referral to, and assistance with securing necessary services.

We are currently exploring a scholarship program that would provide a pathway for pregnant and parenting women in completing their education and achieving family financial stability and self sufficiency. We know that unexpected social and financial barriers have the potential to negatively impact education completion. This program which we are calling “Onward and Upward” would provide comprehensive case management service to help pregnant and parenting women to identify education goals and provide ongoing social and financial support to complete their education and secure employment.

During this reporting cycle, 683 people received pregnancy, parenting and adoption services.

Here are quotes from birthparents that made an adoption plan for their child:

“I have chosen to share my experience about adoption and my life and what Catholic Charities has done for me. It was hard to give up our little girl that we loved so much, but she is in better hands. Catholic Charities has always been good and trusting to us.”

“I was very young being pregnant with my second child and was struggling being a full time single mother in college with limited income. Sometimes it was very difficult making ends meet. I did not want to bring a baby into the world and struggle to raise it. I found Catholic Charities and they welcomed me with open arms. I found a wonderful couple that could not have children. I felt so comfortable and secure with them and knew they would take wonderful care of my baby. They were with me during labor which was very comforting. I do have regrets, but knowing my baby is with a wonderful family makes me feel better, but it still hurts from time to time.”

“Catholic Charities provided me with a place to come and talk about my feelings and thoughts. They helped me with every aspect of my pregnancy and adoption.”
“The adoption experience changed my life by teaching me that I need to learn to rely on others more. I have realized that it is ok to need help and support, even a shoulder to cry on. My plans for the future involve graduating from college and going to graduate school.”

“I just wanted to thank you for giving me the opportunity to help out with your Adoption program. I cannot explain what working with you has done for my healing process. Sharing my story has let me feel proud for what I’ve done instead of hiding it (which is what I did for so long).”

Mother Child Assistance Fund

We know life is a gift from God and we also know that this gift can come when life is full of challenges. The Mother Child Assistance Fund helps women to carry their baby to term and helps women with babies by providing the direct support they need to work through difficulties they are facing. Financial assistance is available for rent, utilities, medical expenses, and child care, or other necessities. Each fall during Respect Life month a Baby Bottle campaign is held to support the fund. With just a simple baby bottle to collect coins, $46,000.00 was raised by parishes across our Diocese. During this reporting cycle 104 women received financial assistance. The average amount given out $350-$400. This has been a wonderful collaboration between Catholic Charities and the Diocese of Winona. The Mother and Child Assistance Fund completed its 8th year during this reporting cycle.

Quotes from recipients of the fund:

“I recently had a baby. I am the only one supporting the household. My check is not sufficient to cover all of the expenses. I am worried about meeting the rent payment. The assistance would be greatly appreciated.”

“This is wonderful assistance that has helped us a lot. Our situation is similar to what a lot of people are experiencing (lay offs). I consider us to be lucky and blessed to have people help us in difficult times.”

The assistance will help us greatly with our living situation and will benefit the welfare of our child which is our main concern, to have a roof over our head and food in our stomachs.”

“I am currently pregnant with my 2nd child and the father of my child has not helped us at all with our financial difficulties. This charity is my last hope to keep us in our home. Raising 2 children by me is tough enough but this assistance will help out so much.”
“The Mother Child Assistance Fund will help me get caught up on my rent so I will not get evicted and be able to raise my baby in a stable environment.

“When I am trying to do all of the right things for myself and my child, sometimes I need extra help that I can’t give myself. The Mother Child Fund can help me to stay on track.”

“The Mother Child Assistance Fund is greatly needed in our community. I am a single mother of 4 unable to work and can feel very alone and overwhelmed. This fund is a blessing that I will never forget and helps provide security for me and my children.”

“The Mother Child Assistance Fund will help me get caught up with my bill and it will better my chances to get a home for me and for when my baby comes. Having a home will help me to succeed in my goals.”

“The Mother Child Assistance Fund will help me stay responsible and help me in my time of need with rent. I always paid my bills on time but this month I am going to have a baby. This would help me stay on the straight and narrow.”