VITA Generates a Classic “Win – Win” Situation

Taxpayers and the volunteers who prepare their returns both benefit

Catholic Charities’ Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) provides free tax preparation assistance to income-eligible individuals and families in Winona County. The service is provided entirely by volunteers.

During the 2017-2018 tax filing season, 40 trained VITA volunteers completed state and federal tax returns that generated an incredible $812,602.00 in tax refunds to 1,026 Winona County residents, a 9% increase in program participants from the prior year. This very significant increase benefiting people who can really use the help, was due, in part, to the addition of a tax preparation site in St. Charles, MN hosted by St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, while continuing to offer the program in Winona. As the 2018-2019 tax season wraps up, the team is on track to serve even more people than last year.

Clearly, VITA yields a significant and tangible “win” for low-income taxpayers. But VITA also provides a less tangible but very real “win” for its volunteer tax preparers.

Volunteers lead every aspect of this impressive VITA program. Volunteer training and program oversight is the responsibility of volunteer Walt Carpenter, who values his leadership role with the program as an opportunity to invest in his community. “It’s a great opportunity to give back to the Winona community. The gratitude of the people we are able to help as well as the monetary benefits we are able to secure for them brings me a great deal of satisfaction.” Moreover, he added, “the volunteer team we work with is top-notch!”

When asked why he volunteered with the VITA program, John Broadwater said “I was looking for a volunteer opportunity that would allow me to feel a part of the community in retirement and I appreciate being able to use some of my professional abilities to help people with their tax returns. It is gratifying to work with clients who genuinely appreciate the help.” Similarly, volunteer Paul Kilkus replied, “The greatest satisfaction comes from knowing I am helping low-income people get their taxes done for free.”

The VITA program is supported by Catholic Charities’ Active Aging Program. Services are made available, in part, through a grant provided by the State of Minnesota Department of Revenue.

After a brutal winter the Winona Community Warming Center closes this week and will re-open in November 2019. Your support of this vital program provides immediate help to persons who would otherwise risk death, injury, or illness because they lacked shelter in the dead of winter in Minnesota. Shelter nights provided through February 2019 are 94% higher than February 2018!
You’ll Want to Hold on to This!
Bulletin insert provides a quick overview on the scope of our work

This edition of Stir Into Flame includes your very own copy of the bulletin insert, Transforming Lives ... from the inside – out. It provides a quick overview on the scope of our work including brief program descriptions and their volume of services, office phone numbers, and our website address.

The bulletin inserts will be included in parish bulletins throughout our diocese prior to the Catholic Charities Annual Appeal on Mother’s Day weekend, May 11th and 12th. But, as a Spirit Circle member, you get your own copy now. You’ll want to hold on to it and refer to it often.

The theme of this year’s Annual Appeal is Transforming Lives ... from the inside – out. Using a caterpillar-into-a-butterfly concept, the theme highlights how our work, accomplished with your help, transforms the lives of those we serve.

MARY’S KITCHEN TABLE
Mary Alessio, Director of Advancement answers questions around Mary’s Kitchen Table.

“A Question for Dessert?”

I recently had dinner with someone who was intrigued by the mission of Catholic Charities. My friend posed this question: Why does Catholic Charities take care of those who are not Christian? In all honesty, this was a “heavy” dessert question when I would have preferred a little crème brulee. But, it just shows that God puts us in positions to live the mission of Catholic Charities 24/7 and I felt humbled to offer my response.

As we all know from the Gospels, Jesus did not limit his ministry and saving grace to only the Jewish people. He did not condition his healing, compassion, and love to certain groups or tribes of people. It was open to all, without exceptions.

The stories of the centurion, the woman at the well, the Canaanite woman, and the Good Samaritan are all examples of non-Jews blessed by Jesus or whose example of compassion and caring is held as a model for us. Jesus’ saving grace was there for all - regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, or faith tradition, in the words of Catholic Charities’ branding message.

Years ago my Irish Catholic Mum gifted my brothers and me with a series of books (In Conversation with God, by Fransisco Fernandez Carvajal). I’ve always held dear a particular section that addressed my dinner companion’s question:

A Christian's calling makes us open and respectful to others, one who is able to reach an understanding with the most diverse kinds of people, regardless of their age, their cultural background, their personality, their character or their circumstances. The Holy Spirit acts where there is unity and true charity. Our task as Christians entrusted to us by God is not to exclude anyone; we do not leave any soul out of our love for Christ.

I am humbled and honored to have served many whose faith traditions differ from mine. I hold their friendship dear and they are family to me. I routinely receive loving texts at Christmas and Easter from friends who are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist.

In closing, our primary value at Catholic Charities is: Made in God’s image and likeness, every human life has dignity. No exceptions! Love your way ~ Mary