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Catholic Charities professionals meet in San Diego for Annual Gathering

[GENERAL](#)

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By Bill Gangluff, Chief Communications and Marketing Officer, Catholic Charities USA

Members of the Catholic Charities agency network came together in San Diego Sept. 21-23 for the 2021 Annual Gathering. The group last met in fall 2019 so being able to assemble carried extra meaning as friends, new and old, were able to meet in-person once again. The event was cancelled in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Part networking and part learning, this year's Gathering — themed "Hope Is Bold" — welcomed more than 300 Catholic Charities professionals, volunteers and partners from across the U.S. to advance our work, strategize how to further reduce poverty, and celebrate our shared identity. Catholic Charities

Diocese of San Diego, celebrating 100 years since its founding, hosted the event.

Catholic Charities USA President and CEO Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, addressed the group and posed a powerful question, “What time is it?” Throughout her remarks, she revealed the answer — that it is healing time. She marveled at the resiliency and commitment of the leaders, staff and volunteers of our member agencies.

“We have been stretched to the limits of our capacity to extend compassion and fundamental human kindness,” she said. “But somehow, with God’s abiding care, we have made it through.” Sister Donna noted the Herculean accomplishments of the network in the past year — 20 million pounds of food distributed, 44 million meals served, hundreds of pallets of water given to disaster survivors, emergency housing for 179,417 people, \$22 million of cash and in-kind support to more than 237,000 migrants and thousands of refugees, and workforce development and jobs training for more than 32,000 people.

She ended her talk by discussing the impact of the “social determinants of health and wellbeing,” such as housing, food, health care, employment, a safe community and an education, that overwhelmingly contribute to a “framework for healing” for those who are broken under the weight of deep poverty.

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“Working at Catholic Charities is no ordinary ‘job,’” Sister Donna said. “It is a profound ministry of healing. As conduits of the Gospel, our daily work brings hope and healing to communities in pain and to people who have often felt abandoned or reviled.”

Father Bryan Massingale, the James and Nancy Buckman Professor of Theological and Social Ethics as well as the Senior Ethics Fellow at Fordham University’s Center for Ethics Education, presented a keynote address on “radical hospitality” — or the idea that we should embrace, like Jesus did, those who are on the margins.

Father Bryan explained radical hospitality is rooted in Jesus’ ‘meal ministry’ as he ate with sinners such as tax collectors, prostitutes, and other societal outcasts.

“In every society, sharing a table is one of the most fundamental gestures of who counts, who matters, who belongs,” Father Bryan said. “Meals are times of both belonging and exclusion. And Jesus ate with them and he did it in the name of God. Jesus loved them all.”

“Jesus believed that human hierarchies, human distinctions, human identities meant absolutely nothing,” he went on. “He extended radical hospitality to the ostracized, the misfits, to those who don’t belong.”

Father Bryan noted this welcome embrace won't be easy in today's politically-charged climate.

“We’ve learned that like goes with like. We look at differences. We magnify those differences. We fixate on those differences... We’ve learned that those who are different don’t belong together,” he said. “And we create a world and policies that keep those who are different from being with us.”

Father Bryan concluded his remarks with a challenge to welcome all to our table.

Throughout the Gathering, musical inspiration was provided by Old Saint Patrick's Church in downtown Chicago and members of the Diocese of San Diego.

The Sept. 22 evening gala aboard the historic aircraft carrier USS Midway gave attendees the chance to bask in the beautiful sunset and panoramic views of the downtown San Diego Bay. The gala was sponsored by the Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego.

The event would not have been possible without the generous support of our key sponsors. ITK Solutions Group was the primary event partner, and additional sponsors included Arent Fox, CLASSY, CLINIC, Diversified Foods, Greater Mission, Provisio Partners, and Virtuous. Avid Exchange and Genoa Telepsychiatry were exhibitors and CMS was a virtual sponsor. EMPOWRD, Michael Dominguez LLC, Gift Card AID, Home Depot, My Logo, and Greater Mission provided in-kind support.

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Catholic Charities USA

2050 Ballenger Ave, Suite 400
Alexandria, VA 22314

Tel: 703-549-1390

Email: info@catholiccharitiesusa.org

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