



Formerly The Bishop's Appeal

# Pandemic Pivot

As with everything else in 2020, the services provided to parishes and parishioners by departments of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany had to adjust when business as usual came to a halt. We are proud to share this glimpse of highlights of how these challenges have been met...and insight into some new ways of work.

Diocesan Appeal gifts impact this and more!

## Catholic Charities Responds –

**Vincent Colonno, CEO**

- Shutdowns, layoffs, illness – these directly impact the people who rely on our services. Our Meals on Wheels program in Schenectady County is still making deliveries, our shelters remain operational, even our domestic violence programs have adapted among an increased need this past year.
- We are seeing new faces. People who've never needed additional support are turning to us for help.
- Our CC MOVE Food Distributions are seeing unprecedented crowds. Our neighbors need food and to keep up with that need, we've increased the size and frequency of these distributions. Even so, lines of cars continue to stretch around the block, with people waiting hours for a box of food to feed their family.
- Over the course of 2020, Catholic Charities provided over 2 million lbs. of food to over 125,000 individuals. These efforts have not stopped in 2021. Our CC MOVE team has hosted 20 food distributions to date, reaching over 45,000 people (as of Feb. 2021).

## Catholic Schools Office –

**Giovanni Virgiglio, Superintendent**

- The Catholic Schools staff supported our schools in swiftly pivoting to remote instruction during the shutdown AND all RCDA schools were able to open to in-person instruction 5 days a week for all students and all grade levels this past fall.

- Staff worked around the clock with the principals to achieve these monumental tasks combing through the ever-evolving guidance and expectations set by state and county health departments.
- Secured \$100,000 in competitive technology grants to support and enhance distance learning in our schools... equipment, infrastructure, wifi, etc.

## Communications Office –

**Mary DeTurris Poust, Director**

- Segued to an off-site, virtual operation due to use of the most up-to-date technology for social media, web updates, video and more.
- Created a pandemic resource page [www.rcda.org/coronavirus](http://www.rcda.org/coronavirus), where health and safety updates, links to livestream Masses, ways to keep the faith alive at home, tips for managing COVID-induced anxieties, opportunities to donate to parishes online in collaboration with the Stewardship Office, and access to the latest news from the Catholic Schools Office, Catholic Charities, and even the CDC were posted. Similar updates, links, and opportunities were posted on diocesan social media platforms.
- The greatest demand was helping parishes get their Masses to the masses via livestream, Facebook live, and other methods. A resource page on the RCDA website was created and we fielded countless questions in order to help parishes reach their people from afar. The list of parishes livestreaming their daily and weekend Masses has grown by leaps and bounds over the past year: <https://www.rcda.org/livemass>

## The Evangelist –

**Mike Matvey, Editor**

- The Evangelist pivoted quickly to installing a full capabilities remote work access platform. This allowed The Evangelist to continue to provide diocesan news and updates about the coronavirus without missing a beat. When New York State went into PAUSE last March, The Evangelist in reality hit the START button to an all new way of working. The transition was seamless and there was never a doubt that The Evangelist would deliver the same high-quality product, whether in print form or on its various social media platforms.

## Evangelization –

**Tom Cronin, Director**

- Pints with Priests/Sips with Sisters – Kept momentum from the Young Adult brew pub and coffee house gatherings by moving to virtual gatherings with Bishop, priests, and sisters.
- Diocesan Evangelization Gatherings - Assembled 12 “fellow fishermen/women” from all size parishes in order to collaborate, maintain communication, and brainstorm to stay focused on our mission.
- Assisted in planning & promotion of virtual parish events. For example, a Zoom event showing an episode of Augustine Institute’s “The Search” with Chris Stefanick included about 100 attendees with Chris Stefanick joining for a live Q&A.





- Partnered and mentored young adult groups to collaborate together such as the leadership teams of Adirondack Catholic and Capital Region Catholic. Supported their efforts including coordinating the presence of Bishop Ed & Fr. Michael Gaitley at their 33 Days to Merciful Love virtual consecration.

### Office of Information Technology –

**Geralyn Fox, Director**

- Equipped employees with secure remote access over a virtual private network (VPN) which had not previously existed, allowing staff to access diocesan resources from home during the pandemic. IT staff provided trouble-shooting for pastoral center staff & parishes with the challenges of remote technology.

### Office of Lay Ministry and Parish Faith Formation –

**David Amico, Director**

- Connected faith formation and youth ministry leaders through a series of open meetings & virtual office hours that provide an ongoing venue for support, best practices and idea strategizing to continue their work.
- Collaborated with Safe Environment Office to implement and virtually train leaders in a new diocesan-wide curriculum (Circle of Grace) to provide safe environment training for children and youth.
- In collaboration with the diocesan Consultation Center, provided a virtual two-part series, Out of Darkness into Light, for leaders to reflect on their pandemic experiences and to find paths forward on the journey. In January, we continued this theme with Sr. Kitty Hanley, CSJ and spiritual directors from the Holy Ground program in a virtual directed retreat.

- Marriage ministry was able to adapt all the support and programming for couples preparing for marriage to virtual formatting.

### Office of Stewardship & Development –

**Nancy Spadaro Bielawa, Executive Director**

- At the urgent request of Bishop Scharfenberger, we worked quickly to provide a vehicle for online offertory giving for all 126 parishes in the diocese which has generated \$90,267.44 in offertory revenue to date for 76 parishes. The diocese has been absorbing the administrative costs associated with providing this tool (staff time & materials). [Note: only the fee charged by the credit card company is deducted.]
- Provided ongoing fundraising expertise to parishes on promoting and generating offertory revenue.
- Moved logistics of Diocesan Appeal to the staff of the Office of Stewardship & Development (OSD - staff of 2) with only promotion work left to parishes with content provided by OSD. For the Diocesan Appeal, cost to raise \$1.00 = 5¢, 15¢ below the national average of 20¢.
- Ran a mini-campaign to raise funds for retired priests who offered Mass on a regular basis but who unexpectedly lost that income due to shutdown of Masses. Raised \$100K which has thus far benefited 20 retired priests.

### Vocations –

**Fr. Anthony Ligato, Vicar for Vocations**

- As the Pandemic spread in Italy, Bishop Scharfenberger and I made the decision to bring home our Seminarians from Rome on March 11, 2020. All but one of our Seminaries sent their Seminarians home to their dioceses to

continue their academics remotely. The total number of men who had to be housed at the St. Isaac Jogues House of Formation (SIJH) increased to 18 men. The challenge of housing included the expansion of food services as well as other household services which the Seminarians helped to meet.

- Normally the Seminaries would be overseeing the day-to-day Formation of the Seminarians but that moved to my position. We met this challenge through Zoom, emails and texts.
- The federal government requires all international students to have one in-person class a week. The waver of spring 2020 had expired for the fall. Due to COVID restrictions, the Pastoral Center classrooms could not be used so with the help of the Diocese, we were able to have the entire SIJH wired for internet to create a classroom where the instructor could teach in-person and the class could be live-streamed to other Seminarians across the state and country. This also improved the connectivity of our residents in SIJH who have to take other courses at St. Bernard's or Maria College remotely.
- Through all the challenges, we have been able to expand the Formation programs for Priesthood and Permanent Diaconate, and we have 37 men in Priestly Formation with 5 new men currently entering in the fall of 2021. This is the largest number of Seminarians for the Diocese of Albany in more than 50 years. We have 7 men in Permanent Diaconate Formation with another 8 in discernment. Bishop Scharfenberger will ordain 5 men to the Transitional and Permanent Diaconate on May 22, 2021 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and we will ordain 5 men to the Priesthood on June 19, 2021.



**RCDA**

**OFFICE of STEWARDSHIP & DEVELOPMENT**

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