

Insights and Encounters

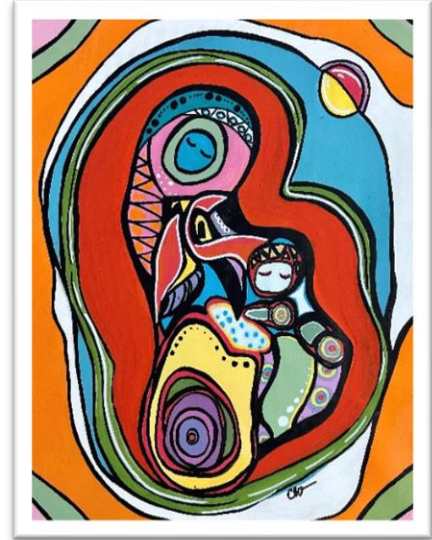


Catholic Charities' Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 1 ~ Issue 2

In this issue:

- Catholic Charities' Christmas Card Design Contest
- CCS – Welcome!
- CCAST Advent Mass
- Christmas Reflection



December 15, 2023

COMMUNITY/FAMILY SERVICES • PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS • SENIORS • CHILDREN AND YOUTH • YOUNG PARENTS

Catholic Charities Christmas Card Design Contest 2023

As we prepared for the upcoming Christmas season, Catholic Charities decided to reach out to the numerous member agencies in our Catholic Charities family and tap into their creative spirits. We asked them to submit their designs for our digital Christmas Card for a chance to win a \$200 prize.

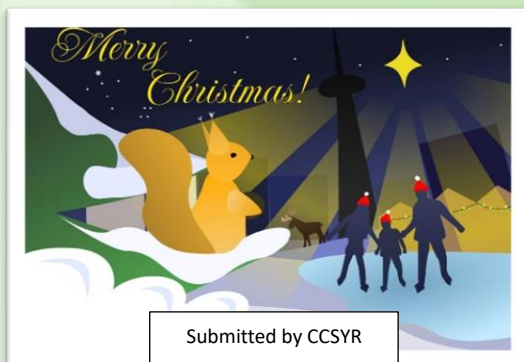
We received entries from clients of multiple agencies, including [Catholic Community Services of York Region \(CCSYR\)](#), [LA Centre for Active Seniors](#), [Mary Centre](#), and [Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers](#). You can see some examples of their work below.

After reviewing all the submissions, we unanimously selected this beautiful piece by Charlotte W., a Grade 12 student from Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers. It depicts a mother with her young son, a fitting image for the season.

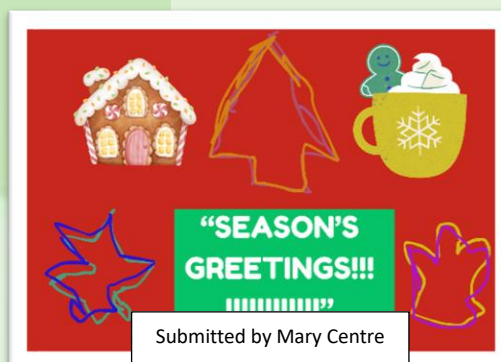
Charlotte attributes her inspiration to Indigenous artist Daphne Odjig.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more about the artist and her inspiration.

WINNING DESIGN for 2023
By Charlotte W.



Submitted by CCSYR



Submitted by Mary Centre



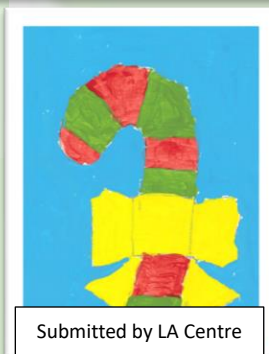
Submitted by Rose of Sharon



Submitted by LA Centre



Submitted by Rose of Sharon



Submitted by LA Centre



Submitted by Rose of Sharon

CCS Welcomes Maya !



[Catholic Crosscultural Services](#) (CCS) extends a warm welcome to newcomers from their first step at the port of entry, guiding them through every phase of their settlement journey in Canada. Among the many stories of resilience and hope we've encountered, Maya's (pseudonym) story stands out as a particularly inspiring testament to the power of community support and personal determination.

Maya arrived at CCS as a referral from another Violence Against Women (VAW) service provider. In her home country, she was a promising pharmacy student whose ambitions were cut short by an early marriage. Maya's past was marked by an abusive relationship that not only endangered her physical well-being but also left deep emotional scars.

Once in Canada, her abusive partner's controlling behavior further restricted her ability to explore new opportunities and rebuild her life. After courageously leaving this toxic relationship, Maya still faced pressure from her family and community to reconcile, a decision that weighed heavily on her. This experience, coupled with a new environment and language barriers, made her initial days in Canada incredibly challenging.

At this critical point, CCS intervened to provide essential support and guidance. We provided Maya with the tools and support to navigate her new life – from basic necessities like understanding public transportation to more complex tasks such as managing personal finances and legal documentation. Our team worked closely with her, respecting her pace and preferences, empowering her to make decisions for herself and her child.

The transformative journey for Maya began with Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes, a crucial step in regaining her confidence and independence. Education was not just about language proficiency; it was about reconnecting with her lost dreams. Slowly, Maya started to see a path forward, to a life where she could be self-reliant and pursue her aspirations in the medical field.

A significant milestone in her journey was obtaining her own housing. This achievement symbolized more than just a physical space; it was a sanctuary and a community where she could nurture her dreams and offer a stable environment for her child.

Today, Maya's story is a beacon of hope and a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit. She embodies the strength that comes from overcoming adversity and the transformative impact of supportive services like those offered by CCS. Her journey from a survivor of abuse to a confident, independent individual ready to embrace her future, is a testament to the potential that lies within each newcomer we welcome into our community.

Maya's transformation is not just her own victory; it's a shared success, a testament to the collective effort of organizations like CCS, the generous support of initiatives from [Catholic Charities](#) and [ShareLife](#). It underscores the profound difference we can make in the lives of newcomers, helping them transition from the shadows of their past into a brighter, hopeful future in Canada.

Catholic Children's Aid Society Advent Mass 2023



Celebrating the Advent Season Together!

Hymns, advent wreath candle lighting, and prayers of the faithful were some of the highlights of the [Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto](#)'s first in-person mass at 2206 Eglinton Ave. East Office since the COVID-19 pandemic, led by Father Edwin Gonzalez from St. Maria Goretti Church. The Advent Mass was hosted on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, and brought together CCAS colleagues who responded in celebration and exhilaration.

Having moved into our office building in November 2019, the Relocation Planning Committee had reserved a designated space for our chapel in anticipation of celebrating the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent within our own office space. That plan was put on hold when the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a series of health and safety restrictions in our workplace. Our liturgical celebrations were moved out of the office, into virtual environments and we were also hosted externally by our local church Saint Maria Goretti in Scarborough. What may have seemed like an initial setback, was a blessing as it allowed us to forge deep and lasting relationships with our local priests and local church community. Father Edwin and Father Elias were always welcoming when we called upon them to support our liturgical needs.

Now, we have the opportunity to host liturgical Masses within our own four walls, with the resounding help and support from our local Priests and Church community. Our "Planting the Seeds of Faith" initiative, which focuses on developing and growing service recipients' Catholic faith and identity, has inspired us to invite children, youth, and caregivers to our future Masses.

Advent can be a penitential season, the Embers days in December remind us that we must be reconciled with God to be renewed before the coming of the Christ Child. Our Advent mass also occurred on the Feast of Saint Nicholas, so we thought it would be appropriate to give everyone attending an Advent chocolate calendar to take home to their families and build anticipation to the upcoming Christmas Season.

Offsite masses and virtual liturgies may have sustained us during the pandemic, but nothing can replace in-person gatherings of people coming together in worship. Advent is a time for preparation as we wait for the birth of our Saviour. Gathering in person at our workplace with staff and service recipients allows us to enter a community of faith that renews our hearts collectively, in preparation to receive our Lord.

“We are, at our heart, a church that flows from the life and experience of refugees.”*

In Our Own Words



Catherine Mulroney
CCAT Blog
Contributor

*This piece has been abridged. For the full article, follow this [link](#).

Millions of Christians around the world are readying to celebrate Christmas, recalling an event that has at its heart a migrant family forced to flee persecution. Our homes are decorated, the gifts bought, and seasonal cookies and favourite meals are being prepared.

Yet right here on our doorstep, more than two thousand years after the birth of Christ, we face a refugee crisis of our own. Residents of Toronto have been shocked this year to find refugee claimants [sleeping on the streets](#) because there simply are not places to house people fleeing their home countries or seeking a better life in Canada. Complicating matters has been various levels of government bickering over who is responsible for related issues. The expedited release of the federally committed \$97 million, to provide shelter for refugee claimants, would help ease the current pressure being felt in the City of Toronto.

As a result, with the city facing other societal pressures, from budget battles to a rise in homelessness, there simply have not been enough beds to provide people who had placed their hopes in Canada. And with winter soon upon us – and the cold weather already here – the situation is becoming more urgent every day.

Recent information indicates that many new immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants are in the shelter system. Unfortunately, funding has not increased to help shelters cope with the increased need.

We are, at our heart, a church that flows from the life and experience of refugees. The Christmas narrative that begins Jesus’s earthly ministry includes his family having to flee to Egypt, just days after his birth, to escape King Herod’s brutal edict to murder young children.

That’s why the Catholic community needs to educate ourselves about the issues surrounding refugees, digging deeper than superficial headlines. Many of the member agencies of Catholic Charities see refugees on a regular basis and can attest to the exceptional challenges refugees live out daily as they attempt to build a new life in Canada.

Education includes understanding that anyone filing a refugee claim is thoroughly vetted before being accepted. [And, as numbers of claimants rise](#), it is important to remember that, as crises grow around the world, Canada remains, mercifully, a beacon of hope and promise. People who have been involved in sponsoring refugees describe the experience [as life-changing](#), for both refugees and sponsors.

Sadly, modern life continues to create refugees, whether fleeing war in Ukraine, or war in the Middle East, or the ongoing sorrows of Afghanistan. It’s a reality that, for Catholics, should bring to mind Matthew Chapter 25.

“And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing?” his disciples ask Christ, and he explains that any time we encounter someone in need, we are encountering him. The question is how we respond.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

The Unfolding of the Christmas Story in Our Hearts – by Agnes Thomas

A pressing concern in my city revolves around the challenging dynamics of housing and homelessness, coupled with the disheartening revelation that our city stands out as one of the loneliest places in the country. These reports would seem untrue and shocking from a wealth and prosperity perspective. However, I am stating this only as a reference point for the reflection today as I find similarities to what unfolded in Jerusalem more than two thousand years ago. You may not be religious and/or choose to follow or believe the Christmas story; however, the timeless lessons offer insights for all. The story reveals an alternative approach to how we should respond to social issues such as these, transforming our homes and cities into a source of joy, hope, and radical hospitality for those feeling unhoused in our city and for those who are desperate and lonely in our homes, communities, and neighbourhoods. The juxtaposition of a king being born in a stable among barn animals seems so unreal, just as do people sleeping in the streets of our fast-paced, high-tech modern society; if we don't see it, we often don't believe it.

The first lesson we learn from Mary, Joseph, and Jesus is, that there is an atmosphere of serenity and peace with where they are, and they seem to be at home within themselves even though they lack the basic necessities required for a newborn baby and mom. When we are 'home' within, we come to believe we have enough, we are enough, and we will treat life that way, and we find ways to welcome the stranger in our midst with the little we have.

The second lesson is from the shepherd's visit, where a community of people wait to celebrate the newborn baby. Surrounding the manger, there is joy; life is respected as sacred and a gift. No one seems to be bothered by the sight of the rundown manger or the animals. There is no judgment cast upon Mary, Joseph or their newborn baby. Instead, there is gratitude and hope for the future.

Joy can be found in the centre of poverty and suffering. Welcoming strangers and celebrating life can happen anytime and anywhere if we choose to create a community, even among strangers. One way to beat loneliness and social isolation is by contributing to the creation of a community. Having a mansion in the middle of a city and living alone is not exactly the happy image of a prosperous life. Material possessions occupy space in the physical environment, but the true treasure is in creating a home among people with love and acceptance.

A third important lesson is embracing vulnerability and accepting life as it is gifted to us. There is no shame and blame. The life that unfolded on that wintry night in Bethlehem showed us the importance of living in the moment, holding it precious, trusting that all will be well and making peace with the world. Are we able to live that level of vulnerability even in our most trusted relationships? Do we trust our life enough to believe it will be okay and that goodness will come? The Christmas story and the season should help us to remember and to re-live it in our home. This is part of the story parents and elders should share with the children while they find ways to make it a joyful season. It should also prompt us to ask how we are responding to the people in need among us. How do we respond to the vulnerability we see in our workplaces and homes? Do we turn away from it and think how shameful and unfit someone is because they showed or shared their need with us?

A final lesson I draw from the scene is that there was contentment and orderliness in the air; they were not trying to fix anything that was beyond their control. They were focused on what they could control and fix within their immediate surroundings. We often feel overwhelmed and paralyzed by the magnitude of issues we regularly see, hear, and experience. The Bethlehem story teaches us to focus on what we can control.

We, too, can choose to be part of this joyful season by finding joy in a small act of kindness, offering peace when in a conflict, sharing a smile with a stranger, giving an unconditional hug to a friend or family member, opening our purse or home to a person in need and the list can go on. Let us re-enact the story of Bethlehem this Christmas to show our gratitude for the king who was born in the manger.

Special Announcements

PAPAL HONOURS AWARDED FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE

On Thursday, November 30, 2023, the Most Rev. Francis Leo, Archbishop of Toronto, presented Papal Honours to six individuals who have exhibited the highest standards and values in their contributions to the Catholic Church. These honours are conferred by the Holy Father, Pope Francis Leo, following nominations by their local Church.

Among the six recipients being recognized that evening, was none other than Michael Fullan, our former Executive Director. Michael retired in April of this year, after 29 years at the helm of Catholic Charities. Many former colleagues, Board members, and CCAT staff were on hand to celebrate with Michael and his family, that evening.

CCAT will strive to continue the work that Michael shepherded in his time with our organization.

You can read more in the Catholic Register:

[Archbishop Leo bestows Papal Honours on six \(catholicregister.org\)](https://www.catholicregister.org)



On the Horizon...



Catholic Charities Podcast

January 2024

In January 2024, Catholic Charities will launch its new podcast and video channels with the inaugural episodes examining the history of Catholic Social Services in the Archdiocese of Toronto.



Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto provides social services, leadership, and advocacy for its member agencies and the people they serve. At its core is Catholic Social Teaching that focuses on the poor and marginalized, urging us all to build a just society and safeguard the dignity of every person.



Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto

How you can contact member agencies of Catholic Charities

MEMBER AGENCIES

COMMUNITY/FAMILY SERVICES

Catholic Community Services of York Region
1-800-263-2075
www.ccsyr.org

Catholic Crosscultural Services
416-757-7010
www.cathcrosscultural.org

Catholic Family Services of Durham
1-877-282-8932
www.cfsdurham.com

Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin
905-450-1608
www.cfspd.com

Catholic Family Services of Simcoe County
1-800-726-2503
www.cfssc.ca

Catholic Family Services of Toronto
416-921-1163
www.cfstoronto.com

PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Mary Centre
416-630-5533
www.marycentre.com

Saint Elizabeth Health Care
905-940-9655
www.sehc.com

St. Bernadette's Family Resource Centre
416-654-9810
www.stbernadettesfrc.org

St. Michael's Homes
Our Place Community of Hope
416-926-8267
www.stmichaelshomes.org

Silent Voice Canada
416-463-1104 TTY
416-463-3928
www.silentvoice.ca

SENIORS

Centres d'Accueil Héritage (CAH)
416-365-3350
www.caheritage.org

LA Centre for Active Seniors
416-452-4875
www.lacentreforseniors.ca

Houses of Providence
(Unity Health Toronto)
416-285-3666
www.providence.on.ca

Society of Sharing
416-413-0380
www.societyofsharing.org

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto
416-395-1500
www.torontoccas.ca

Covenant House of Toronto
1-800-435-7308
www.covenanthousetoronto.com

YOUNG PARENTS

Rosalie Hall
416-438-6880
www.rosaliehall.com

Rose of Durham
(Young Parents Division of CFS Durham)
905-432-3622
www.roseofdurham.com

Rose of Sharon
905-853-5514
www.roseofsharon.com

Vita Centre
905-502-7933
www.vitacentre.org

AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

Camp Ozanam
(Society of St. Vincent de Paul)
416-364-5577
info@ssvptoronto.ca

Good Shepherd Ministries
416-869-3619
www.goodshepherd.ca

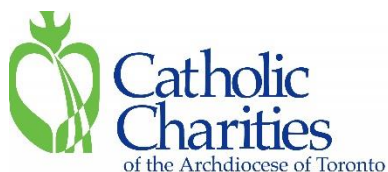
Birthright International
1-800-550-4900
www.birthright.org

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys
FertilityCare Toronto
416-465-2868
www.fertilitycare.ca

Natural Family Planning Association
416-481-5465
www.toronto.naturalfamilyplanning.ca

To learn more about
Catholic Charities go to:

www.ccat.ca



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