CATHOLIC CHARITIES℠
KANSAS CITY ST. JOSEPH
TO SERVE & TO LIFT

# HopeMatters

Vol. 6 No. 1 | Catholic Charities of Kansas City – St. Joseph | www.catholiccharities-kcsj.org | May 2026

# INTRODUCING HANNAH'S HOUSE

## CREATING SPACE FOR COURAGE, CARE, AND NEW BEGINNINGS



Catholic Charities is culminating our 146 years of adoption services with an exciting venture for expectant mothers. We are delighted and thankful to introduce Hannah's House, a new home created with care and deep hope for the next generation. Hannah's House is a different kind of maternity home specifically for mothers considering adoption. For mothers choosing adoption, the birthmother journey often requires not only emotional and spiritual support, but also tangible assistance. Hannah's House exists to meet those needs, offering a safe home and a strong network of care.

In addition to a peaceful place to live during pregnancy, mothers staying at Hannah's House are connected to the wide range of services available through Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph from food, to employment, to connection to education. These services are an integral part of the program, ensuring that each woman receives holistic support tailored to her unique situation and goals.

One of those extra services is shopping at The Market. Our self-shop food pantry helps ensure mother and child's nutritional needs are met with dignity and choice. Birth moms may also take part in resume-building workshops and job search support, empowering confidence as they prepare for life beyond the stay at Hannah's House. These services are designed to support independence, dignity, and long-term wellbeing.

Most importantly, each mother at Hannah's House is supported through case management with an experienced adoption professional, who is with her from her first day until long after the birth of the baby as needs arise. This relationship provides guidance, emotional support, and consistent care, helping each woman navigate layers of decisions with clarity and confidence, knowing she will never be alone.

### JOIN US

for a Mass and Open House
at Hannah's House

**Thursday, May 21st**
**10:30am – 1pm**

email cf@ccharities.com
to get location details.

RSVP to our Open House

The nurturing environment of Hannah's House will remain intentionally small, welcoming up to two mothers at a time. This allows for an individualized participation where each woman is truly known and cared for. At the heart of the home is a devoted house mother, a religious sister whose gentle presence brings comfort, encouragement, and a steady rhythm of daily life rooted in respect and compassion.

The name Hannah's House draws inspiration from scripture. St. Hannah's story is one of faith, trust, and sacrificial love. After years of prayer and waiting, she entrusted her son, Samuel, to a purpose greater than herself—an act of courage that continues to inspire. Her story reflects the strength and love of the mothers who will find refuge here: women who choose adoption rooted in deep and selfless love.

As we announce the launch of Hannah's House, we do so with gratitude and hope. This new program reflects our belief that no mom should walk this journey alone. Through safe housing, compassionate presence, and access to the supportive services of Catholic Charities, Hannah's House offers mothers a foundation from which new beginnings can grow.

Please visit: **www.hannahshousekc.org** to learn more.

**By Ashley Everett, Director of Marketing and Communications at Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph**

# FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO



The Hope Ball 2026 was a beautiful celebration. We started the evening with Bishop James Johnston presiding over Mass. Our theme centered around patriotism featuring our veterans programming given this is our country's 250th anniversary.

At the ball, attendees got to meet many of our veterans, thank them for their service and congratulate them on their journey from homelessness to being housed and stable. Guests heard a common theme during our veterans' testimonials: "Catholic Charities helped me get back on my feet." One gentleman said, "I felt like it was my sister coming to help me as she cared so much." Our staff provided housing and workforce training, enabling the dignity of self-reliance to resurface in their lives; such a beautiful thing.

In addition to our veterans, we honored several young adults who have given their time and talents to further the mission of Catholic Charities and are a part of Our Lady of Hope Service Society. They were recognized for living out their Catholic faith in this secular world.

As Hope Ball is our largest ongoing fundraiser, we celebrated the donors who are financially guarding this mission. Our donors are providing the funding needed to ensure people can receive food, the homeless have a place to live, a pregnant mom is able to bring a new life into the world, children without parents have a place to call home, and many other programs. If you are a donor helping financially guard this mission, thank you, thank you, thank you! I cannot thank you enough as this work could not go on without you.

Now as we look to Hope Ball 2027 we are seeking nominations for debutantes and gentlemen to be honored at next year's Hope Ball as part of Our Lady of Hope Service Society. High school students need to have donated 20 hours of volunteer service through Catholic Charities of Kansas City – St. Joseph. Encourage the students in your life to start or finish their volunteerism this summer by going to catholiccharities-kcsj.org/volunteer. And once they have completed their service hours please nominate them at catholiccharitiesball.org/nominate.

Celebrating those we care for and those who are ensuring the mission continues, is the goodness of Hope Ball. Please mark your calendars for next year, March 6, 2027 and consider sponsoring, buying a table & hosting a parish party at your church. For more information on Parish Parties reach out to Jody at jbreuer@ccharities.com.



**By Karen Noel, Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph**




## Thank you, Kansas City, for your incredible generosity through the 2025 Giving Machines!

Because of your kindness, Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph will provide 648 bags of cheese, 1,482 jars of peanut butter, 853 family meal kits, 83 utility assistance gifts, and 65 rent assistance supports- totaling $56,110 in care for our neighbors in need.

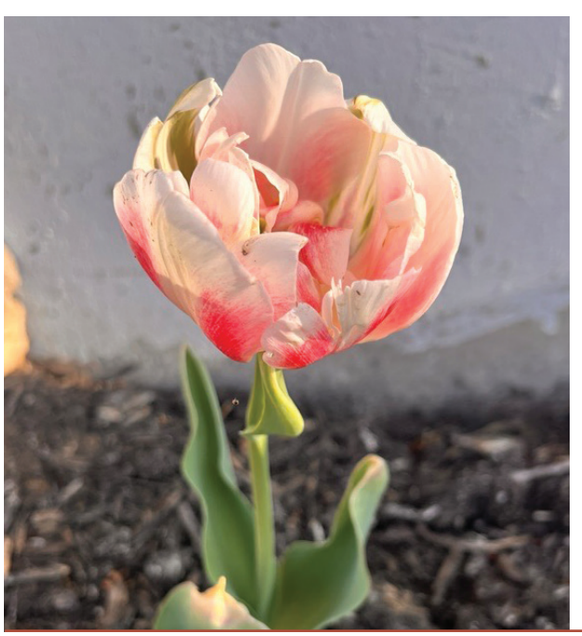


# BEGINNING, AGAIN

I've never been the kind of person who wanted things to stay the same. I've always craved more: a fresh start, a clean page, the feeling of standing at the very beginning of something. The beginning of a book, when you're meeting the characters for the first time. The beginning of a run, when your body is buzzing before your feet start to move. The beginning of a home project, when I casually say to my husband, "What would you think about…" and we both know it's already begun.

Beginnings hold a kind of energy—a quiet hope. If you think about it, our lives are marked by beginnings. The beginning of parenthood, seeing that blue line for the first time. The beginning of an empty nest, when the house feels…different. The beginning of a new era that maybe you didn't plan, but suddenly find yourself in. Do you remember those beginnings? I do.

I grew up in a 100-year-old Victorian home without a furnace or air conditioning. In the winter, my family heated the house with an antique potbelly stove. In the summer, the tar on our street bubbled up, and we'd pop it with our fingers. We lived in a rural town that had once thrived around a pottery factory, but when it closed, the town slowly faded. Even as a child, I felt it: that dread that we needed something to begin in its place. We can't just let it end and have nothing left for the town! My imagination carried me far beyond my years and my surroundings. What if we moved? What if we brought others into the town? Maybe we could start a new school? A new sports venue? I didn't realize it then, but I was drawn to the beginning of something because beginnings carry hope and I couldn't just sit there and watch the hope end and disappear in my town.

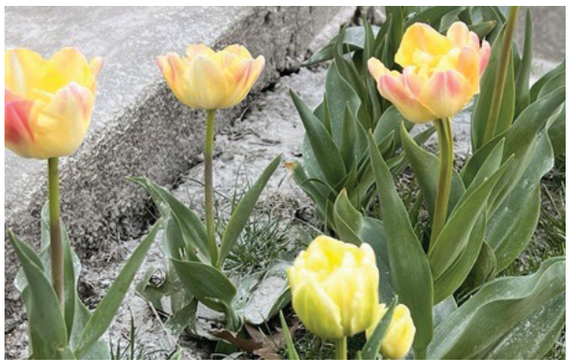


*"What I found was simple and profound: the world needs givers. Not perfect ones, not wealthy ones, just people willing to begin."*

Then came another beginning—college. A new city, new friends, new ideas. Everything was unfamiliar, and to me that meant everything felt open. That's where something shifted in me. In my young adulthood, I realized how important it was not just to receive, but to *begin* giving. I began participating in international mission work, driven by that same curiosity I'd always had—what's out there? What I found was simple and profound: the world needs givers. Not perfect ones, not wealthy ones, just people willing to begin.

But beginning isn't always easy. There was a time, as a young mother, when my husband and I were considering a move to Hong Kong. It was a fantastic opportunity with all the exciting plans, stretching goals, and honestly also a little overwhelming. I prayed, I thought; I wrestled with the decision. Then, a friend said something to me I've never forgotten: "You're afraid to say yes because you don't believe that what God has for you there could be better than what He has for you here." That stopped me. Because at its core, that's what *ending* sounds like. It whispers, "This might be as good as it gets." It convinces us to stay where we are—not because we're called to stay, but because we're afraid to begin, again.

I think we do the same thing with giving. We hesitate. What if the economy collapses? What if my stock drops? What if it doesn't make a difference? But giving of our time, talent, and treasure through Catholic Charities was never meant to be about certainty; it's about trust. What we offer—our time, our resources, our compassion—is placed in God's hands. What He does with it, how it grows, where it takes root—that part isn't ours to control. We're just called to begin.



Last fall, my family helped me plant 100 spring bulbs in our yard. I've gardened long enough to know how it works: you plant, you wait, and eventually something grows. But this year, perhaps because it was the kids' first time, felt different. Every shoot pushing through the soil, every tulip beginning to open, every yellow daffodil trumpet was a new beginning. These had never been here before. My kids planted these! What started months ago, buried and unseen, has come to life in a way that brings delight and joy.

And maybe that's the beauty of beginnings. They don't just happen once. They happen again and again. I used to think beginnings were big, obvious moments: the move, the race, the decision that changes everything. But more often, beginnings look small. A conversation you choose to have. A risk you finally take. A gift given without knowing what will come of it.

Beginnings don't always announce themselves. They're buried, like those bulbs, long before anything breaks through the surface. Which makes me wonder how many beginnings are already in front of us—waiting, not for certainty, but simply for someone willing to begin.



**By Jody Breuer, Senior Director of Development at Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph**

# BEGINNING THE UPWARD BATTLE

"New beginnings" is a phrase that sounds hopeful and simple. But for many veterans, reentering civilian life is anything but easy. A new beginning is rarely a clean slate. Instead, it is often an uphill battle marked by invisible wounds, systemic barriers, and the weight of lived experiences that cannot simply be left behind.

For veterans living with traumatic brain injuries, PTSD, physical disabilities, or years of survival-based thinking shaped by combat, starting over is not a single moment in time. It is an ongoing effort—one that requires resilience, support, and perseverance. What may appear from the outside as a "coming home" or a "fresh start" often feels, to the veteran, like the beginning of a long and unfamiliar climb up a mountain they weren't expecting.

This year, our rapid rehousing partnership with the Veterans Administration intended to serve 475 veteran families who were either homeless or facing eviction. Just six months into this expansion of services, we have already served 647 veterans, and the numbers continue to rise. This growth is not because the need is brief or isolated, but because housing instability among veterans remains persistent as mental health needs, rising costs, and economic uncertainty continues to compound.

For some veterans, the emerging presence of war, whether through global conflict, media coverage, or personal memory, can intensify the impact of PTSD. Stress increases. Anxiety becomes harder to manage. Suicidal thoughts rise. For veterans already living on the edge of homelessness, a "new beginning" doesn't even feel possible.

Our rapid rehousing process is the essential first step, but it is not the finish line. A new beginning does not erase trauma, restore trust, or immediately create stability. But it does offer a starting point, a place to regroup and begin climbing again with support. I am reminded of Parker, a combat veteran who was experiencing literal homelessness when we met him just a few months ago. He was living in his car, which was completely broken down. He had no family support and no clear direction. Like many veterans, Parker did not lack motivation; he lacked guidance through systems that are complex, slow-moving, and often unforgiving.



Honoring those who served- some of the veterans supported by the Catholic Charities Veterans Team at a Veterans Day celebration in 2025.

**VIDEO: Hope Ball 2026: A Celebration of Veterans**

Scan Me

Over the following months, his climb began. Parker was housed through a veteran specific housing program. With advocacy and support, he was connected to the VA and assisted through a disability review. After years of receiving only 10% disability, Parker was finally awarded the 80% disability rating he had earned and deserved. That single correction became a turning point in his upward path.

With stability came progress. Parker was able to repair his car and secured part-time employment. He began thinking beyond daily survival and toward the future. Today, he speaks seriously about plans to obtain his own home and has already begun saving to make that goal a reality. Each step represents a hard-won gain on a steep climb.

Veterans like Parker often reach a point where moving forward feels too difficult to do alone. When trauma, bureaucracy, and everyday stress intersect, even the strongest individuals can falter. New beginnings are fragile. They require patience, consistency, and an understanding that progress is rarely linear.

An upward battle does not mean failure, it means effort. It means persistence in the face of setbacks. Every veteran deserves not just housing, but dignity, stability, and the opportunity to build a life of their own choosing. A new beginning may start at the bottom of the mountain, but with the support of Catholic Charities and social workers who care, our veterans don't climb alone.

**By Kathy Ficcadenti, Director of Community Housing and SSVF at Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph**

# JUDY HENDERSON WINS TWO AWARDS

If you have been to the Serve & Lift Center, you have probably met Judy Henderson. It's her radiant smile that greets people who walk through our doors. Last year, Judy published a memoir, *When the Light Finds Us,* about the nearly thirty-six years she spent in prison for a crime she did not commit.

We're excited to announce that Judy's book has recently won two awards! In March, Judy was honored with a gold medal in the "Biography/ Memoir: Inspiration" category of Illumination Book Awards. The Illumination Book Awards highlight the very best in writing from a Christian perspective. They honor books, like Judy's, that help Christians navigate life through spiritual inspiration and personal growth.

*"I wrote it to share hope. To share courage. To share the miracles that God can perform."*

In April, Judy won a second award, this time a Christopher Award. The Christopher Awards were established by Father James Keller in 1949 to celebrate writers, filmmakers, and other artists who have used their talents to change the world for the better. Past winners include Jimmy Carter, Ken Burns, and Mary Higgins Clark. Actor Steve Guttenberg, who is among this year's recipients, said that the Christopher Awards represent "a chance to make a difference in this world."

Judy has certainly made a difference! Her book, *When the Light Finds Us,* is an uplifting testament to resilience and the power of faith. Judy says, "I wrote it to share hope. To share courage. To share the miracles that God can perform."

Judy never gave up hope. She *couldn't* give up hope—she had two children waiting at home for her. Her unwavering fight for her freedom included studying law (she became a certified paralegal while in prison) and countless appeals to the state of Missouri. After three decades and six governors, her fight finally paid off. Governor Eric Greitens pardoned her in his first year in office.

*When the Light Finds Us* chronicles her early life, her wrongful conviction, and stories from her thirty-six years in prison, where she was known as, coincidentally, "The Governor." She earned this moniker of respect from her fellow inmates who experienced her as a leader: someone filled with compassion, always helping others. Some of her stories are harrowing, some humorous. If you've read the book, you might remember how to make prison cake. Crush a bag of cookies and mix with 3/4 can of soda. Microwave for three minutes. Frost with a melted chocolate bar. Judy swears that it's delicious.

Since the publication of *When the Light Finds Us*, Judy has traveled around the country doing television interviews, podcasts, and speaking at events. Her daughter, Angel, often speaks alongside her, to share the perspective of a young girl growing up deprived of a mother because of a prolonged, unjust incarceration. To this day, Judy continues to fight for the children of incarcerated parents.

She says, "I feel the community needs to…reach out to these children because they need that support. They need guidance. They need to know there is a better way of life."

Judy says, "everybody that I talk to says [the book] is extremely inspirational and want to read it, not just once, and not just twice, but they keep the book to refer to. That is such an honor to me to see that my journey, my life, can touch so many others in such a good, positive way." We recommend that everyone read *When the Light Finds Us* at least once. You can find it on Amazon and wherever books are sold.

**By Steve Hagelman, Videographer & Social Media Analyst at Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph**




Judy Henderson, KC Receptionist, holds her award-winning memoir of resilience and hope.

# NEW BEGINNINGS: STRENGTHENING LIVES THROUGH SKILLS, FAMILY & FAITH



SCAN ME

Volunteer Sign-Up



## SUMMER SERVICE HOURS

**For High School Students**

Give Back. Earn Hours. Make a Difference.
Open to students working toward the 20 service hours for the Our Lady of Hope Service Society—or any high schooler looking to serve.
Bring your lunch and stay the day, or come for a few hours.
8001 Longview Rd, KCMO 64134

**Choose your own adventure—please RSVP with above QR code:**

**Opportunities Include:**

**Eye Glass Clinic Prep**
• June 25 | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM • July 15 | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

**Landscaping**
• June 22 | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM • July 21 | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

**Market Kitchen Prep**
• June 15 | 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM • July 13 | 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM

## GOOD DADS WORKSHOP

**Every Wednesday in KC Office**

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Building Strong Fathers & Families
A 16-part, evidence-based course designed for fathers—especially at-risk dads—who want to be more engaged in their children's lives.

**Topics include:**

• Communication & Values • Responsibility & Child Support
• Masculinity & Discipline • Practical Parenting Tools
• Stress & Anger Management

**Must Register:**
**Email: sbeers@ccharities.com**
**816-203-2890**





## READY, SET, LEARN

**Social Butterflies Workshop**

**4th Wednesday of each month in KC Office**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM (No appointment needed!)
A welcoming space to learn, connect & grow!
An interactive program for young children and caregivers focused on building social-emotional skills and school readiness.

**Topics include:**

• Social-Emotional Development • Social Skills & Interaction
• Child Development • Relationship Building & Parenting

Meet & Greet | Snacks | Learn Together

**8001 Longview Road, KCMO**
**Email: cf@ccharities.com**

## STORIES OF MERCY

**Learning to Live Faith in Action**

**Faith, Stories & Works of Mercy**

A parish and school outreach program featuring a curated story, discussion, and prayer to help children live out the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy.

**Benefits:**

• Strengthen faith through engaging stories • Flexible 7-book series
• Build empathy & compassion • No cost & minimal prep

**Designed for:**

Pre-K | K–2nd | 3rd–5th Grade

**Sign-up to participate today. Contact:**
**Emily Aden, BSN, RN, 816-659-8285**
**Email: eaden@ccharities.com**

# CARS4KC: TURNING OLD VEHICLES INTO NEW BEGINNINGS

What if the unused car sitting in your driveway could become something more than a forgotten set of keys on the counter? What if it could be transformed into fresh groceries on a family's table, a safe place to sleep, or a second chance for someone working toward stability? Through Cars4KC, a Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph program, we turn vehicles into tools for hope, making it a natural fit for our theme of New Beginnings.



Your vehicle donation helps families like Jennifer and Emma's.

At its heart, Cars4KC is simple: you donate a vehicle that then fuels life-changing programs across our community. But what many people don't realize is just how flexible and impactful, the program truly is.

Cars4KC accepts much more than cars including trucks, tractors, boats, recreational vehicles, farm and construction equipment, motorcycles, ATVs, and even snowmobiles all qualify! Whether your donation is a dependable late-model vehicle, well-loved and tired, or a complete clunker that hasn't run in years, it still has value. Every vehicle tells a story, and Cars4KC helps write its next chapter.

So, how does it work?

Catholic Charities partners with Midway, a local trusted vehicle-processing expert that handles every detail. After a vehicle is donated, Midway evaluates it based on factors like age, make, model, and mechanical condition. From there, they determine the best way to generate the greatest possible return in support of Catholic Charities' mission.

Some vehicles are resold. More often, they are carefully recycled and repurposed. Usable parts are salvaged, materials are responsibly processed, and nearly every component is put to good use. This environmentally mindful approach reduces waste while maximizing the financial impact of each donation, proving that good stewardship and good outcomes go hand in hand.

Each month, Midway sends Catholic Charities a check, with the proceeds from donated vehicles. Those funds go directly into our programs that help neighbors move forward when life feels stuck.

Your vehicle donation helps provide safe housing for a family in crisis, stocks our food market for hungry neighbors, and supports veterans as they work toward stability and independence. It also funds job training programs, strengthens adoption and early childhood services, and even parenting classes. One donation can touch dozens of lives, and spark countless new beginnings.

Some people hesitate to donate because they assume their vehicle isn't "good enough." The truth is that most vehicles qualify, even if they don't run. Even if you cannot find your title; help is often available to secure a replacement. Cars4KC is professionally designed and managed to remove barriers, making participation easy and accessible.

In this season of New Beginnings, consider that you might have a car that could fuel this mission. With Cars4KC, your old vehicle isn't at the end of the road. It's fueling something new, for someone who truly needs it.

Visit our website to learn more: **cars4kc.com**




Turn your old car into something that helps children move forward.

By Ashley Everett, Director of Marketing and Communications at Catholic Charities of Kansas City–St. Joseph

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Catholic Charities of Kansas City – St. Joseph
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Kansas City, MO 64134
816.221.4377

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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT!

Join us! Begin your volunteer journey, email: Volunteers@ccharities.com

### Jill Winters

You might say Jill Winters was led to Catholic Charities by the gentle hand of the Blessed Mother herself. In high school, a car accident left her in a coma for two weeks. While in the coma she felt sheltered by the loving embrace of Mother Mary, asking for her when she awoke. Later, her dad encouraged Jill to use the settlement from the accident to buy rental properties, which turned out to be yet another miracle. Today those properties house the formerly homeless through our community housing program. They also afford Jill enough time to be one of our most devoted volunteers, helping in the food market and with other events and programs.

### Mike Tesmer

Over a decade ago, Mike Tesmer reached out to Catholic Charities to see how the Knights of Columbus could help—and they've been by our side ever since. From providing children's coats in winter to building shelving for our food market and supplying brats for events, their impact has been constant. A current board member, Mike also supports our programs and serves as a liaison with sponsors. If you admired the elegant Hope Ball program, its printing was his handiwork. Mike shares, "Working with Catholic Charities is a wonderful way to give back to the community we live in, supporting the most vulnerable around us." Thank you, Mike—we couldn't do it without you.

### Claire Wise

Every Hope Ball debutante and gentleman is responsible for at least twenty hours of community service. One of this year's debutantes, Claire Wise, spent her time volunteering with a community partner of ours, Blessings Abound Thrift Store. She also put together meal kits and birthday kits, full of everything necessary to help her neighbors in need celebrate in style. We love that Claire finds such joy in helping others and are so proud of her and the other debutantes and gentlemen in this year's Our Lady of Hope Service Society class.





