

Catholic Charities' Wee Care Ministries assists families with infants and young children

JOSEPH PURELLO

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For parents of infants and young children, a major expense is the regular purchase of diapers, baby wipes and clothing. The yearly cost of diapers can range from \$600 to more than \$1,000 per each child using diapers. Diaper purchases alone can make up a significant percentage of a monthly budget for families struggling to make ends meet.

Why do many households struggle with the cost of diapers and other baby items? While some families living in poverty or near poverty thresholds receive varied types of "safety-net" government assistance to obtain needed food, housing and health care, the purchase of diapers, baby wipes, and baby clothing usually must be made from limited family budgets. Second, washable cloth diapers are often not a viable option. Many licensed child care centers permit only disposable diapers (which must be provided in advance of daily care). Parents who want to use cloth diapers but who lack access to a washer and dryer or a laundromat nearby find that choice difficult to make. Transportation hurdles also often force some families to buy diapers from local convenience stores near their home that often charge significantly higher prices for baby care items.

Catholic Charities Wee Care ministries of the Lenoir and Winston-Salem service regions assist families with young children by providing many of the items families find difficult to afford when facing tight budgets. Families seeking assistance can call Catholic Charities to get help from a case management coordinator, in English or in Spanish. Catholic Charities staff can

also try to connect families living outside of Lenoir and Winston-Salem with access to diaper banks and other services, as well.

Gina Cabrera, case management coordinator in Catholic Charities' Lenoir office, sees this work as a special ministry.

"Wee Care is about helping the smallest in our communities, by making sure parents have a place to turn when they need help," Cabrera says. "Parents have given their children life, and they are little blessings, but sometimes due to poverty, job loss or simply because the job they have does not pay enough, all needs cannot be covered. That's when Catholic Charities can assist."

"In many households facing limited income, parents with babies struggle to keep their little ones clothed, and a major expense for these families is diapers. In addition, babies outgrow their clothes and regularly need larger sizes over the first months and years of life," according to Becky Dubois, Piedmont-Triad office director for Catholic Charities. "Providing assistance with diapers and baby clothes relieves the financial burden for families who need their resources for other household expenses."

Catholic Charities welcomes financial donations (go to www.ccdoc.org/donate) as well as donations of baby items, especially diapers. Perhaps your parish or school might consider hosting a "Diaper Drive" to help stock Wee Care storage rooms of Catholic Charities? Catholic Charities will provide "ready to go" flyers for bulletins and will arrange pick up of bulk collections of diapers and wipes. Please call either the Lenoir or Winston-Salem Wee Care contact numbers to explore offering such assistance, and if you are making an individual donation of items, please



PHOTO PROVIDED

Gina Cabrera, case management coordinator at Catholic Charities' Lenoir office, is pictured in the storage room of the Lenoir Wee Care Ministry. She sees this work of Catholic Charities as a special ministry.

call several days in advance to schedule a donation drop-off.

JOSEPH PURELLO is director of Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte's Office of Social Concerns and Advocacy.

Get more info

Catholic Charities' Wee Care assistance starts with a phone call:

■ Lenoir Office, 328-B Woodsway Lane N.W.:

828-434-5710

■ Winston-Salem Office, 1612 E. 14th St. N.E.:
336-727-0705

Appointments for item pick-up are scheduled in Lenoir and Winston-Salem. If a voicemail message is reached, please leave name, phone number and home city. Items offered are: diapers, baby wipes, infant and toddler toiletries, and new and gently used clothing and baby blankets - for infants and toddlers up to 2 years old.

'Taking it a day at a time'

Airport Chaplaincy slowly emerges from holding pattern

SUEANN HOWELL
SENIOR REPORTER

CHARLOTTE — Custom-made cloth masks and blue-colored vests emblazoned "chaplain" are now standard uniform for volunteers with the Interfaith Airport Chaplaincy at Charlotte Douglas International Airport. As the airport ramps up its operations, the airport chaplains have returned following a hiatus of nearly three months. But their ministry has had to adapt to the "new normal" prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 33-member team, like thousands of airport and airline staff, were unable to work at the nation's 10th busiest airport during the height of the pandemic due to business shutdowns and a statewide "stay at home" order.

"When you step down from processing 120,000 people a day (at the airport) to 11,000 people a day, there is a system shock," explained Deacon George Szalony, the airport chaplaincy's executive director.

The Airport Chaplaincy honored public health restrictions put in place to fight the pandemic, ceasing its three Sunday worship services and converting its in-person support efforts to electronic and phone outreach.

"We had an online 24/7 presence (on the chaplaincy website) and staffed the phone line," Deacon Szalony said. "People could reach out to chaplains that way."

Their biggest concern? Those thousands of airport employees either laid off or dismissed from their jobs because of the shutdown.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Volunteer chaplains at Charlotte Douglas International Airport are clearly visible as they mingle with airport employees and the traveling public, in this photo from late 2019. For years the chaplains have provided a comforting "ministry of presence" to people in times of need or crisis, and as the airport resumes normal operations this summer they are gearing back up as well.

"Those were the shopkeepers, restaurant servers and cooks, folks who assisted with the wheelchairs and bus drivers," said Deacon David Reiser, an airport chaplain

for the past 10 years. "The chaplaincy attempted its best to communicate to these workers that spiritual and emotional assistance was available if needed. Unfortunately, many had already left their positions prior to the word getting out to them."

Some of the chaplains had grown to know some of the workers through their "ministry of presence," and they were able reach out and pass the word on to those in need.

"I've noticed that although a phone call to check on someone was OK, it was not the same as seeing the person face-to-face at their posts," he noted. "Much of the 'ministry of presence' is a smile and a nod, maybe an occasional 'hello' and a word on how they are doing. That was not possible over the phone or even Zoom (video conferencing)."

As North Carolina has begun relaxing some public health restrictions, the airport is seeing more flight arrivals and departures, and the uptick in business has meant some stores and restaurants are beginning to reopen. Employees are cautious, wearing face masks and gloves and trying to maintain social distancing.

"I've been back to the airport for the last six weeks and have slowly seen it come back to life, albeit still very slowly," Deacon Reiser said. "But, as I walk around or am on the bus from the parking deck, many returning employees are glad to see a chaplain around and are sometimes surprised to see that some of us are back offering our ministry."

More travelers are passing in and through the airport, he also noted, but they're not the usual business travelers he was used to seeing on his daily walks through the terminal. Most are people going on vacations, and most of them are wearing face coverings.

Deacon Szalony has been back at the airport now for