



Labor Day is
September 6

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Catholic Charities, 'most daring agency,' hits 90th

By Jack Sheedy
News Editor

HARTFORD—It has been called one of the first organizations of its kind in the country. The Diocesan Bureau of Social Services – now known as Catholic Charities – was formed 90 years ago this year, and parishes throughout the Archdiocese are celebrating.

The celebrations on Sept. 25 and 26 will coincide with the centennial celebration of Catholic Charities USA, said Rose Alma Senatore, CEO of the archdiocesan organization.

"We're sending letters out to parishes, and we've gotten a wonderful response," she said.

She said the archdiocesan-wide celebrations are intended as a thank-you to Catholic Charities' trustees and many volunteers. "The celebration is mainly to get out the word of the message of help and hope," she said. At the annual Catholic Charities meeting in October, she said, there will be another celebration with volunteers and staff.

The Connecticut organization had its roots in Bridgeport in 1915, according to *Hartford's Catholic Legacy: Leadership*, by Sister of Mercy Dolores Liptak. Father Matthew J. Judge of Sacred Heart Parish and Father Andrew Komara of St. John Nepomucene petitioned Bishop John J. Nilan to set up a local Catholic Charitable Bureau. Five years later, that organization's success led to the opening of three other offices, including the Dioc-

esan Bureau of Social Services in Hartford.

Father Judge said then that it was one of the first such groups in the country, after the founding 10 years earlier of the National Council of Catholic Charities.

Msgr. Thomas S. Duggan, then-editor of *The Catholic Transcript*, wrote in an editorial in December 1920 that what had begun in Hartford that year was a model for the country and was "by far the boldest, the most daring project ever set in motion by any church."

Today, those programs serve more than 34,000 people annually. Catholic Charities has more than 38 offices in the Archdiocese and employs some 500 people. Services include child care and school readiness programs, family and mental health counseling, services for at-risk youth in inner cities, residential services for developmentally disabled adults, services for migrants and refugees, and more. The nonprofit organization's adoption and pregnancy counseling programs actually predate the organization's founding.

Significant Catholic Charities initiatives have come to fruition within the past three years. Ground was broken on Wadsworth Street in Hartford in 2007 for a new building for the Institute for Hispanic Families, replacing an old, outgrown building on Jefferson Street.

The new, 22,000-square-foot facility cost almost \$7 million, funded largely by the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. Located in the heart



CATHOLIC CHARITIES MILESTONES – Catholic Charities has launched several projects in recent years. From left, the blessing of the Institute for the Hispanic Family in June 2008; CEO Rose Alma Senatore speaks at the reopening of the Catholic Charities Family Service Center in New Haven in August 2008; and the ribbon-cutting in September 2009 of Cathedral Green affordable housing in Hartford. (*Transcript* file photos)

of the Latino community, the new IHF opened in June 2008. "That had been hoped for for 20 years, maybe even longer," said Peter O'Donnell, director of fund development for Catholic Charities. "That's a success story. There are elderly and children in the same building."

The IHF offers English as a Second Language; recreational, cultural and social activities; education and counseling about substance abuse and domestic violence; day care services; and more. It serves more than 1,000 families.

In August 2008, the Archdiocese of Hartford reopened the former St. Donato Church building in New Haven as the new home of the Catholic Charities Family Service Center. The 6,000-square-foot facility cost \$1.7 million to refurbish

and has 15 offices, meeting rooms, a kitchen and an elevator. It provides family services for children as well as mental health and substance abuse counseling services for adults.

Coincidentally, the 501 Lombard Street address is where Catholic Charities first opened its New Haven office 90 years ago.

In September 2009, Cathedral Green affordable housing opened to 28 families in the former St. Joseph Cathedral School, in Hartford's Asylum Hill area. The 53,000-square-foot building had been completely gutted and renovated with two- and three-bedroom apartments ranging from 1,100 to 1,300 square feet each.

The project cost about \$9.1 million, with seed money from

the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. "They're lined up around the block to get in," said Mr. O'Donnell, who added that there are no vacancies at the moment. Eligible families must be below the poverty line, and rent is on a sliding scale based on need, he said.

Ceremonies and activities marking Catholic Charities' 90th anniversary and Catholic Charities USA's 100th anniversary will vary from parish to parish, Ms. Senatore said. Some parishes may choose to commemorate the event with articles in the bulletins. Volunteers and staff members are available to speak during or immediately after a Mass. Some parishes will also offer the showing of a video about Catholic Charities and its services, she said.

"... A democracy without values can lose its very soul." — Pope John Paul II