



Archdiocese of San Antonio

Most Reverend Gustavo Garcia-Siller



Catholic Charities Advisory Board Installation Remarks February 2, 2016

It is a pleasure to be with you today, as we prepare to install the new members to the Catholic Charities Board of Advisors. We are truly blessed that each of you have said "Yes" to this important role of service to those in our communities that are most in need. The creative advice you will provide to Catholic Charities' leadership will help us to continue to identify and meet the challenges ahead in an effective and efficient manner.

I am sure some of you may be wondering what you said "Yes" to, and what may lie ahead. Well, I could lay out an elaborate organizational scheme, but you can read that in the bi-laws. The unknown and often unexpected demands of the future will require your many individual gifts, perspective, and life experience to help Catholic Charities to navigate through the often stormy waters ahead.

Pope Francis has declared 2016 as a Year of Mercy. In doing so he helps us see that God's love and compassion is what we must reflect in all we do as his servants in ministry. The Holy Father said: "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love." His words reflect the 75-year legacy that has defined the mission of Catholic Charities. Each of you, in your own way, are called to be missionaries of mercy. We value your vision to help us feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, free the captives, heal the sick, and do so much more. These are not just symbols of service, for Catholic Charities this represents a "to-do" list that, in practical terms, confront our many ministries every day.

As an advisory board, you will not carry the responsibility of governance, and that will free you up to assist in advancing the mission of Catholic Charities in many other ways. José Antonio, will, I'm sure, seek you out as a sounding board for new and sometimes incomplete ideas and ask you to help him make them more effective or reconsider them entirely. You will have the freedom to bring your insights to the table and, together, continue to build ministries that will impact

positively the lives of families, individuals, and communities who need to feel the mercy of God in direct and loving ways.

Catholic Charities serves tens of thousands of people each year. While the numbers are impressive, we must not get lost in statistics. Each one of our brothers and sisters we serve have a name, a face, a life's story, and the right to hope for their future.

In December's issue of Today's Catholic, I read about a wonderful example of the difference Catholic Charities can make in someone's life.

In her column, Elizabeth Paseur wrote about a man who came to the Guadalupe Community Center with his three sons. "We discovered he did not have a permanent home and was on the verge of being homeless. After he lost his job, his family had to leave the home they were renting and moved to an extended stay hotel, but were at risk of having to live in their car as they had spent their last \$100.

While the case managers met with this gentleman, the Summer Food and Nutrition Program staff fed his sons lunch. They identified him as veteran and discovered that he also is a very qualified individual with experience in management. Catholic Charities not only provided him with food for his family, we also connected him with two Veterans support groups to help him secure an apartment and give him money

to pay the rent at the extended stay hotel while he searched for a permanent living arrangement.

This family came to Catholic Charities facing potential homelessness and left not only feeling a sense of hope, but a stronger sense of self."

This story provides a deeply personal understanding of the message that Pope Francis shared with Catholic Charities U.S.A. during his visit last fall. He said: "Jesus keeps us knocking on our doors, the doors of our lives. He doesn't do this by magic, with special effects, with flashing lights and fireworks. Jesus keeps knocking on our door in the faces of our brothers and sisters in the faces of our neighbors, in the faces of those at our side." When we perform these Corporal Works of Mercy, we are in the presence of the Lord and loving him.

Through Catholic Charities, the Church enriches the lives of families, providing them with the tools to a build meaningful future on a solid foundation. We give young mothers a chance to give birth to their babies, but also the opportunity to provide them with dignity and hope.

As you know, we have many ministries, too many to name here. Our work serves men, women, and children...regardless of race, religion, or age. After all, need does not respect any of these factors. I offer you

the challenge and opportunity use your imagination to help us discover new and even more efficient ways to be God's instruments of mercy.

The work of Catholic Charities is as compelling and urgent as the news events of the day. While everything we do does not make headlines, the tragic news of our time often shapes our priorities and our ministries. As the refugee crisis continues to grow, Catholic Charities is prepared to do whatever we can and whatever is necessary. In an Express-News story José Antonio, explained our intentions clearly: "We are not here to judge people coming from Syria, we're here to help all refugees coming from every single country. For our part, we just want to help people."

When families coming to the United States from south of the border, Catholic Charities continues to be engaged in the work of helping mothers and their children seek solutions to unjust and merciless incarceration. We do all that we can to guide them through a complex and legal maze that sadly, too often does not lead to a just decision.

One of our great challenges requires Catholic Charities to try to respond to a throw away society that discards the people around us because the culture deems them inconvenient and no longer useful. As our population continues to age, Catholic Charities reaches out to senior citizens, acknowledging the many gifts and life experiences they have

that can help build a stronger and more merciful community through programs like the Foster Grandparents Program. We help them improve their quality of life in many ways. We must protect and defend all life as a precious gift from God, from conception to natural death.

Everyone cannot know everything, nor can each person be passionate about every cause. But through your efforts we can help stem the tide of indifference that leaves people to wander aimlessly and painfully through life. Each of you have said "Yes" to an opportunity to make a real difference in our community, one person at a time. Every person who has lost hope leaves an empty place in our midst, and wounding society and robbing us of the richness each person brings as Children of God. Every life matters...every life counts.

My sisters and brothers I ask you to use your knowledge, passion, and network of influence to help Catholic Charities not only feed the hungry, but also be a strong and fervent voice for those in need. We must also battle for the right to live the foundational values of our faith, and carry out the mandate of love that is central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There are movements in our nation, today, who would criminalize our ministry and ignore our constitutional rights to live our faith in the public square. As valued advisors, you can help us fight this

noble and necessary battle with a spirit of dedication and urgency. We must undertake this fight on the basis of principle, not partisan politics.

The issues are many, and the needs are endless. We must not allow the enormity of the task to steal our joy and enthusiasm for service. We must do all that we can, but let us remember the encouragement given to us by Blessed Mother Teresa, "If you can't feed a hundred people, feed just one." She certainly was never satisfied that all that was needed was done, but she also never let that enormity of the task diminish her passion to serve the poor every day.

In his homily at the closing Mass for the Meeting of Families, the Holy Father quoted Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, "Whoever gives you a cup of water in my name will not go unrewarded." These little gestures are those we learn at home, in the family; they get lost amid all the other things we do, yet they do make each day different...They are little signs of tenderness, affection and compassion."

I thank each of you for saying "Yes" to this mission of mercy and tenderness. I will pray that you will find your joy in this important work. I will pray that you will not allow the words, "The poor will always be with you" to be a source of frustration, but a source of God's grace that will urge you forward and be a blessing to the work of Catholic Charities.