



Hope in the Good Life NEWSLETTER

The latest uplifting updates from Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska

Our clients are at the heart of our work



One of my routines at the end of each calendar year is to clean out the file cabinet drawer in my office. Generally speaking, with the exception of legal documents, I operate on very little paper; most of my notes and tasks these days can be found within my CSS Google account. However, the file folder that consistently overflows is filled with notes from donors, staff, and clients.

I make a concerted effort to retain letters written by clients or notes of my encounters with clients so that no matter how busy I get with emails and meetings as a director, I can always go back and recall my time as a case manager—**navigating the challenges alongside our clients as they fled an abuser, searched for employment, or applied for citizenship.**

One letter that I reread each year was written by a former client of the St. Gianna Program several years ago. She wrote:



My name is Laura. I am currently incarcerated and due for parole this summer. As part of my reentry and recovery plan, I am seeking transitional housing and would like to apply for the St. Gianna Women's Homes project. During my time of incarceration, I have had the opportunity to think about who I am and who I want to become. In my past relationships, I have been extremely abused. Since the age of 15, I have been restrained, spat on, forcibly injected with drugs, and verbally, emotionally, and sexually assaulted. I was threatened, often at gunpoint, and monitored by a GPS tracker. Now, I have a beautiful young daughter who I don't want to have to endure the terrors that I did. I want to break the cycle and I know that it has to start with me. I truly believe that I have found that confident woman within me ready for a new beginning. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to apply for the transitional housing program. Thank you.

Rereading Laura's letter each year serves as a reminder that behind every CSS policy, budget, and meeting agenda are people—people who, through unimaginable hardship, have persevered and found the courage to carry on. In sharing their stories, they invite CSS to walk alongside them as they move toward lives marked by greater purpose and hope.

-Katie Patrick, CSS Executive Director

Soon, a seat for everyone at the OPEN TABLE

As many of you know, the CSS Hastings office is moving to a new home at 124 S. Colorado Ave in early 2026. With this transition, we are taking the opportunity to re-envision some of our services. **One area I am personally excited about is our Open Table sack lunch program.**

Our new facility will dramatically expand this ministry by providing a welcoming dining area and an accessible chapel. **Instead of just handing out a bag at the door, we will soon have the space to invite neighbors inside to sit, rest, receive prayer, and share their stories.**



Our Open Table Sack Lunch program's new dining area will soon welcome neighbors to nourish body and soul.

Our goal is to begin serving hot meals and drawing in local speakers, musicians, and bands to create a vibrant community atmosphere. This evolution will allow our wonderful volunteers to shine in new ways as they offer hospitality. Ultimately, we are building a space where barriers break down—a place where people from all walks of life can sit together and recognize each other as neighbors. I hope it becomes a bold new chapter for hospitality in Hastings.

-Jonathan Kiehl, CSS Hastings Regional Director



Celebration of HOPE

"You are not alone"

GALA PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Don't miss a wonderful evening celebrating & supporting CSS!

Join us Saturday, March 14th, 2026 | Embassy Suites Lincoln

2026 HEART OF CHRIST AWARD:

St. Gregory the Great Propaedeutic Stage Seminarians



Every year at Celebration of Hope, we honor an individual or group who exemplifies the Heart of Christ. **We're excited to share the recipients of our 2026 Heart of Christ Award: St. Gregory the Great Propaedeutic Stage Seminarians.**

The propaedeutic year is the foundational stage of priestly formation, focused on human and spiritual growth, prayer, community life, and discernment before formal academic studies begin. During this year, the men deepen their relationship with God, cultivate healthy habits, grow in self-awareness, and learn to live as disciples rooted in prayer and freedom from worldly distractions. As the Program of Priestly Formation explains, this stage introduces men to "the life of the Church as a community in which excellence of character is nurtured," grounded in the Eucharist, Sacred Scripture, and communal prayer as they discern their vocation within a supportive community.



Propaedeutic Stage Seminarians during a street walk encounter

As part of their formation, the seminarians are sent into the community through various apostolates, including Catholic Social Services. Three of these men serve regularly with us, dedicating their time to befriending those experiencing homelessness. They go out on street walks, not to fix or solve, but to **encounter**—listening, building trust, sharing faith, and simply being present. In these encounters, the seminarians meet Christ in the faces of the poor, while also confronting their own poverty and dependence on God. They use what they learn in both classes and Mass to share God's love.

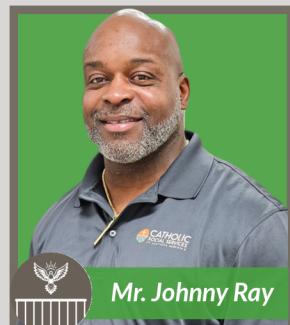
One particular encounter stands out to me. The seminarians shared the Gospel reading for the day, the 99 sheep and the one lost sheep, with a woman named Hannah. Carlos spoke about how **we are ALL lost at times** and how the Good Shepherd seeks us when we are scared and hurting. Hannah shared moments in her life when she felt lost and cried out to God, unsure if He was there. Chris offered parts of his own testimony, describing moments of God's presence in darkness. Dan then invited Hannah into the CSS chapel to pray, leading her in reflection and sharing Scripture, including Matthew 11:28: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* Afterward, Hannah shared that she had never felt truly **loved** or cared for and had lived much of her life alone. We encouraged her to continue to share her heart with Christ and that she is not alone on this journey. **In moments like these, the seminarians truly embody the Heart of Christ—present, compassionate, and deeply rooted in love.** Please join us on March 14th as we share additional glimpses into their Christ-centered work and celebrate their service!

- Alexis Brouillette, CSS Outreach Coordinator

CSS FEATURE & SPEAKER: Prison and Reentry Apostolate (PARA) & Mr. Johnny Ray

We're excited to feature the **Prison and Reentry Apostolate (PARA)** during our upcoming Annual Celebration of Hope Gala on Saturday, March 14th. It will be a wonderful opportunity to share some of the initial work that the program has accomplished both inside prisons and jails, describe the efforts that have been made to provide financial assistance as men and women navigate reentry, and the future opportunities around the corner.

In order for our donors, volunteers, and community members to have a better understanding of what our PARA program hopes to provide for the incarcerated men and women who will be assisted as they reenter their local communities, CSS will have a special guest speaker, **Mr. Johnny Ray**. Johnny Ray spent 33 years in prison, and he had his life-sentence commuted. He spent several months working at CSS on the Maintenance team, until he found another job closer to home in Omaha. His testimony as a Catholic and his life of faith has been so inspiring to other incarcerated brothers and sisters, volunteers, and community members. **We are so excited for our attendees to hear about his life, his time during incarceration, how God entered into his life and transformed him, and the ways that his faith prepared him for reentry.**



Mr. Johnny Ray

Mr. Johnny Ray will provide insights into his process of reentry, what that looks like for others, and the challenges that men and women face as they transition back into their communities while navigating the complexities of their charge, family relationships, job hunting, and finding ways to make ends meet. The reentry process has many dimensions, and we look forward to sharing some of what people face as they reenter society, how PARA comes alongside our formerly incarcerated brothers and sisters, and what opportunities can be found to volunteer and provide assistance.

- Levi Bans, Prison and Reentry Apostolate Director

Refrigerator REFERENCE

Catholic Culture & CSS Calendar

How & why we're performing the Works of Mercy
in response to the Call of God- join us in our mission!

Our Catholic Culture: Lenten Prayer Intentions

The Church emphasizes prayer as a core pillar of Lent, alongside fasting and almsgiving, to foster spiritual renewal in preparation for Easter. All three practices draw us closer to God; prayer stands at the foundation of daily Christian life, opening our hearts to the needs of the world. As the Church teaches, intensified prayer during Lent is central to our penitential journey, a truth echoed by St. John Paul II, who reminded us that "prayer joined to sacrifice constitutes the most powerful force in human history." During Lent, we ask that you and your family join us in praying for the intention listed each day.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>"As Lent is the time for greater love, listen to Jesus' thirst... He knows your weakness. He wants only your love, wants only the chance to love you."</p> <p>-St Teresa of Calcutta</p>			18 FEBRUARY <i>Ash Wednesday</i> A Holy Lent	19 Health and Intentions of the Holy Father	20 Bishop Conley	21 For the gift of Wisdom
22 The Seminarians studying for the Diocese	23 The women and children served in the St. Gianna Program	24 Our communities	25 Our country	26 Our farmers and ranchers	27 All parishes of the Diocese	28 For the gift of Understanding
1 MARCH All Catholic Schools of the Diocese	2 Those served by Catholic Social Services at our Auburn regional site	3 Our elected officials	4 The volunteers of Catholic Social Services	5 For all Catholic college and university students	6 Return to the Faith of family and friends	7 For the gift of Counsel
8 All Religious Orders of the Diocese	9 Those served by Catholic Social Services at our Hastings regional site	10 Our families	11 Peace	12 For the lonely and isolated	13 The poor souls in Purgatory	14 For the gift of Fortitude
15 Increase in Faith	16 Those served by Catholic Social Services at our Imperial regional site	17 For all Pro-Life organizations	18 For the sick and suffering	19 <i>Solemnity Feast of St. Joseph</i> For all Knights of Columbus Councils in the Diocese	20 For the Lincoln Diocesan Council of Catholic Women	21 For the gift of Knowledge
22 Increase in Hope	23 Those served by Catholic Social Services at our McCook regional site	24 For perseverance in faith	25 <i>Solemnity Annunciation of the Lord</i> Being open to God's will	26 The benefactors of Catholic Social Services	27 Those served by our Prison Reentry Apostolate (PARA)	28 For the gift of Piety
29 Palm Sunday Increase in Love	30 Those served by Catholic Social Services at our Lincoln regional site	31 For those joining the Catholic Church	1 APRIL For an increase in invocations to the priesthood and religious life	2 <i>Holy Thursday</i> All Priests of the Diocese	3 <i>Good Friday</i> Devotion to the Eucharist	4 <i>Holy Saturday</i> For the gift of Fear of the Lord
5 Easter Sunday	<p>"The glory of God is that man lives. Behold, man lives in Christ. Here is the moment in which what he, Christ, said is accomplished: 'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live' (John 11:25)." - St. John Paul II</p>					



Trumpet Fest 2026
Sunday | Feb. 15th
2:00 PM
St. Joseph Church Lincoln
Enjoy an afternoon of music from the area's finest trumpeters.
More details at csshope.org/trumpetfest

HOPE IN THE GOOD LIFE PODCAST | Episode 65: From Crisis to Community -Welcoming the Stranger Together

Podcast host John Soukup revisits a story of welcome that still matters today. In the aftermath of the 2021 evacuation of Afghanistan, CSS Volunteer Jeff Kanger (right) opened his home to an Afghan family seeking safety and security, hosting them until CSS helped secure a permanent home. As the new year begins, this conversation reminds us that welcoming the stranger isn't a one-time response to crisis, but an ongoing commitment to mercy, dignity, and Hope in the Good Life. Hear the story at csshope.org/podcast



CSS AUBURN: Reflecting the spirit of service & season

The final months of the year were marked by extraordinary challenges and an outpouring of community support, resulting in a remarkable alignment of need and help. **We are profoundly grateful to have met these escalated needs, serving three times our usual number of individuals in need from October to December.** Our dedicated staff and volunteers at SFGT also rose to the occasion during our busiest season, achieving above-average store sales and encounters.

I cannot give enough credit to our incredibly servant-hearted team for their dedication and the gracious way they serve. We are committed to being friends and supporters to everyone that enters the door –staff, volunteers, shoppers, and clients alike. **Our current goal is to inspire and embolden everyone to believe in themselves and trust God's plan, knowing that together, we will accomplish more.** While we can't do everything, we strive to do small things with great love, which often inspire further acts of kindness.

This spirit of service was beautifully demonstrated at the beginning of winter. A single mother, without local friends or family, found her car wouldn't start on the first cold snap, preventing her from getting her son to daycare and herself to work. **A situation like this—limited resources, a small paycheck, and a failing vehicle—can quickly lead to a lost paycheck, a lost job, and lost hope.** Recognizing the urgency, I provided transportation and connected her with a local mechanic, guaranteeing payment from CSS thanks to the extra generosity of our donors this holiday season.

The mechanic followed us to her apartment complex, got the car running after a few tries, and took it to his shop overnight for a full evaluation. She shyly stood by, quietly thanking him for his help.

The next day, when asked what she owed, he cheerfully replied, "Merry Christmas!" He explained, "Helping others with our time and talents is what we're supposed to do, right? I know how to fix cars. You told me life has been tough for her, but she's a hard worker—got a job and she's working. That's what I like to see! So, Merry Christmas!"



CSS Auburn team & volunteers

As I watched her give him a grateful hug outside his repair shop, I realized it was a true "Hallmark Christmas Movie" moment. **Her genuine appreciation meant more than any monetary payment.** It's small, heartfelt moments like these—the circle of life and love—that truly define our work. We are thankful not to be in her shoes, but honored to help her and others take steps forward in the shoes they were given. **Thank you for joining us in this mission.**

—April Boellstorff, CSS Auburn Regional Director

CSS IMPERIAL/McCOOK: The Giving Season "keeps on giving"



In the seasons of Advent and Christmas, we prepared for and celebrated the season of giving. For the past three years, St. Patrick parish in Imperial has been host to St. Isidore Gift & Thrift's Angel Giving Tree. On this tree there are small envelopes labeled with different dollar amounts that a person can fill with a Visa gift card or gift card from a local grocery store. These cards are then given to St. Isidore's to help bolster its outreach to meet people's needs.

Here are two examples of how we've used those cards to help those in need and celebrate the giving season throughout the year.

Jessie brought Bonita into the store the morning after a 2 a.m. fire. There was nothing left. Bonita was wearing the clothes she had on when she woke up to the smell of smoke. Bonita had been to the doctor to get medical attention for the injury she incurred getting out of the house in the dark. Bonita was distraught, almost in shock, so Jessie gave store personnel sizes of clothing and shoes Bonita and her boyfriend needed - clothing and shoes Bonita could put on easily considering the injury she suffered. Store personnel rushed to find some articles, but not as much as they hoped. Bonita was asked to wait for a moment as the store manager went to the office to grab some of the gift cards given last Advent and Christmas. **When she was handed the mix of cards, Bonita broke down in tears as she expressed her deep thanks.** She planned to use all the cards for food.

Then there was the couple who moved to Imperial to start anew after the husband lost his job in Kansas. They were living in the motel with the last few dollars they had, hoping for a job interview to pan out. If the interview was successful it would be two weeks before the first paycheck. A few small appliances for their room were found to prepare food, and the process was started of getting the assistance through CSS for the first month's rent in affordable housing. **A handful of those Angel Tree gift cards bought food to tide them over.** St. Isidore's staff kept in contact with the couple to see if they needed further assistance. He got the job and they're doing well.

The gift cards St. Isidore's receive enable staff to help people on the spot in a very tangible way. Thank you to the members of St. Patrick for helping St. Isidore's help those in need. You once again have outdone yourselves in giving over \$2,500 in gift cards this season and providing Hope in the Good Life throughout the year!

—Bill Sullivan St. Isidore Gift & Thrift Store Manager



"Thank you for walking alongside our clients and being present to them in their time of need." -Katie Patrick, CSS Executive Director

How may we pray for you at CSS?

Share your prayer intentions with us, and we'll offer them during our **Rosary** in the CSS Lincoln Chapel. You may also submit requests anonymously online at csshope.org/pray

HOPE IN THE GOOD LIFE NEWSLETTER | JAN/FEB 2026



I'll support *Hope in the Good Life!*

You may also use this form to correct any mailing info found on the front panel

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email address: _____

Support enclosed: \$ _____

Check to receive an annual statement ONLY
(individual thank you letters for each gift will NOT be sent to you)

Donate online!
csshope.org/donate



Thank you!



"Everything is looking up for me and with your help it made everything possible. God bless you and hope you have a safe year with good health and happiness."

-CSS Family Support Services client

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Ordinary acts of care & Hope in the Good Life

A big part of my role is working directly with individuals and families who walk through our doors needing immediate support. Walk-in assistance is often the first point of contact for people who may feel overwhelmed, embarrassed, or unsure where to turn next. Whether someone is asking for diapers, hygiene items, or basic personal care supplies, my goal is to meet them with compassion, respect, and a listening ear.

Providing personal care items, cleaning products, and diapers may seem small, but I see firsthand how meaningful these things are. A parent can breathe easier knowing they have enough diapers for their baby. Someone receiving hygiene or cleaning supplies often shares how relieved they feel just to be able to care for their home and family with dignity. **These basic needs are deeply connected to a person's sense of self-worth, and it's an honor to be able to offer that support.**

Over the past several months, we have seen a noticeable increase in the number of people seeking walk-in assistance. More families are reaching out for diapers, cleaning products, and hygiene items as costs continue to rise and budgets are stretched thin. Many of the people we serve are working, caring for children, or managing unexpected challenges, yet still find themselves needing extra support. This growing need makes our work even more important and reinforces how critical community support is during this time.

This work would not be possible without our partnerships with local churches. The drives they organize for diapers, personal care items, and cleaning supplies are a true example of the



Diana with a CSS Hastings Family Support Services client

community coming together to care for one another. **These efforts help remind people that generosity doesn't have to be complicated to make a meaningful impact.** Every donated item represents someone choosing to help a neighbor in need.

Hope in the Good Life means meeting people with kindness and a smile, especially during moments when life feels heavy for them. It means giving people dignity—not judging their situation, but simply being present and supportive. Sometimes hope looks like a bag of diapers or hygiene items, and other times it's just knowing someone took the time to listen.

To me, the "good life" isn't about having everything figured out. It's about knowing that **when you're struggling, there are people and communities willing to step in and help.** Being part of that moment—no matter how small—reminds me why this work matters and how hope can be found in the most ordinary acts of care.

-Diana Amaya, CSS Hastings Bilingual Family Support Services Coordinator & Case Manager



PO Box 30425
Lincoln NE 68503-0425

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#HopeintheGoodLife



(S.A.G.)

Hope in the Good Life Newsletter

JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2026



Please join us!



SOCIAL TIME: 4:30 P.M. | DINNER: 6:00 P.M.

- SILENT AUCTION finale
- LIVE MUSIC to enjoy during the evening
- HEART OF CHRIST AWARD: St. Gregory the Great Propaedeutic Stage Seminarians
- FEATURING: Prison and Reentry Apostolate (PARA) with guest speaker Mr. Johnny Ray

\$80.00 per person, \$160.00 per couple

Reservation Response Form

Yes! I'll attend 2026 Celebration of Hope on Saturday, March 14th. Enclosed is \$_____ to reserve _____ places (\$80 per person).

Note: There is no charge for priests or religious to attend but a RESERVATION RESPONSE CARD IS REQUIRED for seating purposes.

No, I/We cannot attend, but enclosed is a gift to support the work of Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska.

Enclosed is \$_____ to sponsor the cost of a Priest or Religious to attend.

Name(s) of attendees: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Parish: _____

Please make checks payable to Catholic Social Services. To register online with a credit card, go to csshope.org/celebration2026



Mail with payment in the provided envelope (please include any seating assignment requests and dietary restrictions as a note) no later than March 9, 2026 as seating may be limited.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES PO BOX 30425 LINCOLN NE 68503



COMING IN HGL EXTRA FEBRUARY EDITION digital only:

We have MUCH more to share with you (too much to fit in a single newsletter!) including more stories and reflections on our encounters with neighbors across southern Nebraska. Join our digital communication list: csshope.org/connect

