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Catholic Charities Adds First Director of Disaster Services

PORTLAND, Ore., Jan. 25, 2021 – Catholic Charities of Oregon adds its first Director of Disaster Services to the agency. Jennifer Masotja, an expert in disaster response operations and a recent Emergency Manager at the Multnomah County Department of County Human Services, has joined Catholic Charities as the Director of Disaster Services, announced Deacon Rick Birkel, Ph.D., Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Oregon.

“With the hiring of Ms. Masotja, Catholic Charities begins a new era in its history, and positions itself to take a leadership role in disaster preparedness, response and recovery in Oregon,” said Dr. Birkel. “Our recent experience responding to the wildfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the urgent need to build greater capacity in Oregon to respond to disasters that will increasingly define our lives and threaten to destroy the lives of those who are poorest and most vulnerable. Ms. Masotja brings the experience, vision and skills we need to urgently respond to the needs of disaster victims across the State.”

In the midst of a tumultuous 2020 that presented us with a global pandemic and devastating wildfires – along with resulting personal disasters – Catholic Charities of Oregon rallied quickly to partner with local and national partners, including the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon and parishes across the state, to learn how it can best support those in the community whose livelihoods were uprooted, and who now have uncertain futures. The agency has been an active member of Catholic Charities USA and continues to partner with FEMA, the Oregon Health Authority, and others to organize sustained disaster relief and response activities.

Catholic Charities of Oregon identified a need to more strategically coordinate disaster response efforts with public, private, and parish partners across Oregon to ensure opportunities for immediate and lasting response efforts. Bringing on its first ever Director of Disaster Services will allow the agency to effectively implement relief programs such as disaster casework and disaster case management, immediate financial assistance, delivery/distribution of bulk food and other commodities, volunteer intake and mobilization, and targeted community outreach.

Ms. Masotja will lead Catholic Charities of Oregon’s readiness, response, and recovery to disasters across the state. She will represent Catholic Charities with our local and national partners, county and state emergency management, and FEMA to ensure strong working and mission-oriented partnerships with all of the agencies.

“Disasters greatly impact all members of our community. However, those experiencing; racial and ethnic disparities and inequities, poverty, food and housing insecurity, communication limitations and other vulnerabilities, such as undocumented and mixed immigration status, are often the most destabilized,” said Masotja. “I have spent the last 11 years of my career focusing on supporting our community through preparedness and response, and I am very excited about the opportunity to also focus on recovery, as the impacts on individuals, families and communities from a disaster can last decades.”

Ms. Masotja’s career in emergency management began with the Oregon State Public Health Division assisting hospitals, clinics and health departments with emergency preparedness and response planning. She then became the Emergency Manager for the Multnomah County Department of County Human Services and most recently served as a Unified Commander in the Multnomah County Emergency Operations Center in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and all co-occurring events.

Ms. Masotja received her graduate degree from Portland State University and undergraduate degree from University of Oregon. She also served over two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Botswana, Africa.

About Catholic Charities

Since 1933, Catholic Charities of Oregon has been a trusted ally of the most poor and marginalized, and a leader in finding innovative solutions to poverty and injustice. The agency is proud to serve all God’s Children as the Official Domestic Relief Agency of the Catholic Church in Oregon. Catholic Charities of Oregon is a member of Catholic Charities USA and of Caritas International, the global network of agencies that make up the charitable arm of the world-wide Catholic Church. The agency is headquartered in Portland at 2740 SE Powell Blvd. For more information call (503) 231-4866 or go to www.catholiccharitiesoregon.org.

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