

CARITAS For Children, Celebrating 18 Years

By Christopher T. Hoar

In the summer of 1998 in the beautiful rolling hills of Poland's countryside, my life changed forever. Approaching the city of Częstochowa by train, my wife Barbara and I could see the towering spires of the national shrine of Our Lady of Częstochowa for miles. I will never lose the memory of those events 18 years ago, they are imprinted on me personally, deeply and permanently.

On that day we had the beautiful encounter with Bartek and Klaudia, the siblings we fell in love with, adopted and have called son and daughter ever since. But this is not only a personal adoption story, it is also the story of the genesis and founding of CARITAS For Children. It was a greatly spiritual encounter and one that continues to unfold, even today. It is this example of how God can work His plan through our lives in very special ways that I want to share.



That summer in 1998 with the Polish children at the orphanage in Częstochowa.

Our personal adoption story is also how CARITAS began as a ministry of adoption support and evolved into the founding of a Catholic Lay Apostolate that is CARITAS For Children today – which has expanded to include operations on three continents, six countries, and 22 locations. This ministry has touched thousands of families throughout the world, mostly from the United States, but also Australia, Asia, Canada, Europe, Japan, Central America – all the places where CARITAS exists to serve others. It is

certain, when God works a plan through us, He does incredible work reaching as far and wide as only His love can reach.

During that summer in Poland in 1998 while in the process of our adoption, Barbara and I had a chance to spend time with about 25 to 30 children from the orphanage run by the Little Servant Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Częstochowa. The director there, Sister Rafaela, had already helped us meet Bartek and Klaudia, and frankly, the love and excitement made our decision very fast. These were to be our children. Yet it was also important that we spend some time with them there, to help them adjust to what was happening.

By then Bartek and Klaudia had lived at the orphanage for five years. We quickly learned much about the history of the place and how it functioned and how children could be adopted there in Poland. Many children had come and gone from there and the sisters were like their guardian angels as they lovingly took care of them all. Yet it was not the same as being in a family.



Father Boland, and me with two of the Polish children who needed homes.

The other children living at the orphanage would come around us, checking us out, asking for a mommy and daddy too. *Mój tata?* (my daddy?) was a chanted whisper in my ear. Even today I can remember. In the emotion and awakening of the need going on all around us, it felt like a call from the Holy Spirit to do something. We didn't know what, just yet, but it was certain we would continue to discern the possibilities.

After returning home to the United States with our newly adopted children, I had a chance to share our experience with a good friend and business client, Father Mike Boland, (who is now Monsignor Mike Boland) President of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago. He agreed we could establish our own ecclesial relationship with the Charities and what followed became a Catholic Lay Apostolate,

to be known as CARITAS For Children. Our purpose, initially, was to answer that call to help find adoptive families for as many children from Poland as we could.

During the next few months, we returned to Poland and began to make the needed connections with the government offices of Adoption and Care, who were empowered to authorize inter-country adoptions from Poland.



With Sister Rafaela, and Father Boland at the front entrance to the orphanage.

In the fall of 1998, Barbara, Fr. Mike and I traveled to Warsaw and Częstochowa, finalized agreements with Sister Rafaela's help with the Polish authorities and the official adoption program of Catholic Charities in Chicago was formed. It also made official the beginning of CARITAS For Children as a Catholic Lay Apostolate.

When I look back, we started by coming to adopt a child, but I came to see that the Christ we found in our children was looking for me. We were all brought together, Father Boland, Barbara, Sister Rafaela and me, at the foot of the cross, to start a journey that began 18 years ago, connected within our Catholic faith to look for new ways to share with hearts of love that we believed was God's plan for us, immensely blessed by an amazing encounter of caritas, mercy, divine-love – enriched ever since.

Over the past 18 years, CARITAS has evolved from assisting in adoptions to a global ministry serving orphaned and marginalized children through Catholic child sponsorship and enrichment programs in Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Poland.

God has continued to put people in my life to make this happen. And I am humbled by the amazing people who have assisted us along the way. Monsignor Boland has stayed with us through the evolution

of CARITAS For Children and to this day he is a member of CARITAS' Board of Directors. CARITAS For Children continues to assist [Catholic Charities](#) where we can with their [Polish adoption program](#), although we've transformed and spread so much further throughout the world building relationships.

The growth of CARITAS For Children has been a personal faith journey for me as well. I can remember a quote from Bishop Don Hying, (Diocese of Gary, Indiana) during a CARITAS For Children retreat he conducted a few years ago. He said, "When we begin to know Christ we begin to know ourselves."



With Monsignor Boland at Catholic Charities of Chicago, still working together after 18 years.

Through our work in building CARITAS I have come to know Christ in a much more powerful way. CARITAS For Children's programs do feed, clothe, and educate children in desperate need, which empowers them with the skills they need for a better future, but I have also come to understand that this is not enough, something more is needed. That something more is the very person of Christ made visible and real in all our efforts. It is in fact, the Christ who is in us all.

As a global ministry of the Church, we know CARITAS For Children makes a valuable contribution in the name of Christ and His Church toward understanding what is needed to help establish a base of justice that grows within God's love across the many places where we work.

I believe that foremost is to begin with love as the motivating principal behind all these efforts, and a specific kind of love. It is caritas-love. It is the kind that gives to the other from the whole heart without seeking recompense or reward, for the virtue of loving is God's own reward. Without this love, the spiritual energy of Christ which accompanies it, and the sacrifice it requires and entails, these efforts remain solely society's attempts to bring about a better world through material help and human development. With divine love at the center, the spirit of a person – their very soul, is offered refreshment and care, which is always our ministry's aim, which seeks to empower the entire person, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Our entire ministry – for the people we serve, is built on the foundation of relationships with one another. Our mission calls us to accompany those we are privileged to serve, and journey with them in their joys and struggles, nourishing their physical and spiritual hungers, as we all make our way in this world toward the fullness of life in that place where no human limitations exist and we are embraced forever in divine love.

[Click here for ways you can participate in the mission of CARITAS For Children!](#)