

Summer 2020



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Director's Report

Dear Friends of the Legal Network,

Since March 16, 2020, Catholic Charities Legal Network has been conducting all of its client services, such as client intake, on a remote basis due to the Covid-19 quarantine in the Washington Metropolitan Area. The Legal Network's services are still very much in demand since some of our clients have experienced problems with their jobs, child custody and other family disputes, landlord-tenant concerns, and growing consumer debt issues. There is a silver lining in this cloud, however, since many of our clients are still able to communicate with our staff by telephone and email. The remote telephone service has also been helpful to several of our clients who still need legal help while either they or immediate family members are recovering from Covid-19.



The Legal Network's staff has conducted virtual presentations on wills and advanced medical directives to both Catholic Charities staff as well as to patients, clients, and consumers throughout the agency. In fact, six such presentations were conducted by the staff during May and June. After the presentations, some requested wills and related legal documents which the Legal Network's staff have helped them obtain in an expeditious fashion. Many thanks to Esther D. Coleman, staff attorney, who has led the charge in assisting our clients with wills and advanced directive documents since the quarantine began.

Kelly Thompson, staff attorney, has been heavily involved with the coordination of ongoing legal support to the underserved communities of the District of Columbia through her work with the DC Consortium of Legal Service Providers. She has helped to ensure that people in need of legal assistance during these trying times are aware of the work that the Legal Network is doing and that we are still open and available to help.

At the Legal Network's staff meetings, we have discussed how our clients are handling the stresses of being quarantined as well as protecting their health. Many have been trying to educate their children through online learning from local schools. Other clients have difficulties with family members which can cause increasing tensions within families. Still others lack money for essentials such as food, rent, mortgage payments, transportation to get to work, and healthcare.

Retired Judge Leo Green and Daniel Collopy, both Legal Network staff attorneys, in addition to providing legal advice to many of our clients, have also been helping Catholic Charities with its food distribution program for Prince George's County residents in need.

Based on the above, I hope you can see that we are concerned that our clients receive not only vital civil legal services, but also other holistic services offered through Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington.

I hope you will continue to support Catholic Charities Legal Network by volunteering and making a financial contribution to our program.

Thanks for taking time to read our newsletter.

Sincerely,
Jim Bishop
Director
Catholic Charities Legal Network

Legal Network in Action

In June, Leo and Dan drove up to Germantown to meet with a young mother of two who is fighting cancer and deportation to execute a standby guardianship agreement to make sure that her children will be protected by her sister if she dies or is deported. Working with Rachel Bennion and her colleagues at Immigration Legal Services, Leo drafted the documents and Dan was brought in to help execute the documents. It was great spending some time with the client and her young sons, but it was tough seeing the tears in her eyes as she signed the documents.

17th Annual Golf Tournament



Monday, October 5, 2020*

This annual tournament at Belle Haven Country Club in Alexandria, Va. supports the pro bono legal services that the Catholic Charities Legal Network provides to low-income individuals.

Anyone who is interested or has any questions can email Kelly Thompson, Staff Attorney, at kelly.thompson@cc-dc.org.

*Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a possibility that our annual golf tournament may have to be replaced by a virtual event this year. We hope you will still consider making a contribution to our program.

68th Annual Red Mass & Brunch

The 68th annual Red Mass will be held on **Sunday, October 4, 2020 at 10:00 AM** at the **Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle**.

Congratulations to Msgr. Vaghi

Congratulations to Msgr. Peter J. Vaghi, Catholic Charities Legal Network Chaplain, who recently celebrated the 35th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

A brunch recognizing outstanding attorneys and law firms that provide pro bono services to clients of the Legal Network will follow the mass. Brunch will be held at the Capital Hilton (1001 16th St NW). Brunch tickets are \$60 each or you may purchase of table of 10 for \$700. Priority seating is given to table purchases. Register for the brunch [here](#).

We are grateful for his ministry and support throughout the years.



Pro Bono Survey

Each year, Catholic Charities Legal Network asks all volunteers who gave their time over the past fiscal year (July 1-June 30) to document the hours and the value of those hours in order to fully quantify the positive impact made by pro bono attorneys and legal professionals.

If you have not yet filled out the report, please do so by clicking [here](#). The report is due **Friday, July 24**. Email Kelly Thompson at kelly.thompson@cc-dc.org with any questions.

We couldn't accomplish what we do without the pro bono service of multitudes of volunteers!

Volunteers Needed

The Legal Network seeks volunteer attorneys to handle pro bono cases in DC and Maryland in the areas of family law, consumer debt/bankruptcy, will drafting, government entitlements and housing. Bilingual attorneys who speak Spanish or French are also needed at this time.

Annual Report

The Legal Network's annual report will soon be released and posted [here](#).

Death Penalty Virtual Event

Thank you to Brian Stolarz and Alfred Dewayne Brown for our Netflix Watch Party and subsequent Q&A on *The Innocence Files, Episode 8, The Prosecution: Hidden Alibi*. Alfred Dewayne Brown's story is unthinkable, but it happens with more frequency than we might realize. We must continue to stand up for and support access to legal services for those who cannot afford an attorney. Without Brian's "yes" to file and defend Mr. Brown's writ of *habeas corpus*, an innocent life would have been needlessly taken. In our Legal Network, pro bono attorneys help clients with civil legal cases that mean the difference between housing or homelessness, a job or joblessness, and chaos or stability in a child's life.



If you missed the event, you can watch the episode of *The Innocence Files* at your convenience on Netflix, and [here](#) is the link to the Webinar recording with Monsignor Enzler, Mr. Stolarz and Mr. Brown. (Photo l to r: Alfred Dewayne Brown, Jim Bishop & Brian Stolarz)

Legal Network Intern Q & A



Christina Higgins
Georgetown University Law Center

Why did you choose to intern for the Legal Network?

I chose to intern for the Legal Network because throughout several classes in law school, I learned about the unsatisfactory statistics of the number of American citizens who are in desperate need of legal resources, but never obtain them based on inadequate finances or lack of access to helpful information. Providing legal services to low-income individuals and communities is a critical component of ensuring equal access to the justice system. I view my work with the Legal Network as an

effort to combat the access to justice crisis, given that I assist attorneys in providing free legal services to clients who may not have been able to afford them.

How is interning for the Legal Network helping your legal career?

Interning with the Legal Network has helped me with my legal career because it has provided me with an opportunity to practice my legal research and writing skills for clients facing actual legal dilemmas, and receive constructive feedback on my work product.



Jamese Hawkins
University of the District of Columbia, David A. Clarke
School of Law

Why did you choose to intern for the Legal Network?

I chose to intern for the Catholic Charities Legal Network after meeting Dan Collopy at a Pro Bono Fair for Federal Employees last fall. I believe my purpose in life is to be a voice for underprivileged and underrepresented individuals, so after learning more about the mission and values of the Legal Network, I knew this would be the perfect place to intern!

What are some of the challenges you are facing working remotely?

Working remotely is great, and I have not experienced many challenges. I am a second-year part-time law student at the University of the District of Columbia, and I work full-time as a Paralegal Specialist at the Internal Revenue Service Office of Counsel, so my days can be pretty hectic. I have been working remotely and taking classes online since March, and the lack of commute has allowed me to spend more time studying and working on Legal Network projects.

How is interning for the Legal Network helping your legal career?

Interning for the Legal Network has helped my career by providing early opportunities for substantial and meaningful direct interaction with low-income clients, who often have no voice in the legal world. It has also given me the opportunity to develop skills through experiences that reach far beyond the classroom. Also, I am gaining experience in a far wider range of subject matters than I am exposed to in my current full-time position.

Kourtne Trice
University of the District of Columbia, David A. Clarke School of Law

Why did you choose to intern for the Legal Network?

I chose to volunteer for the Legal Network because a fellow classmate was volunteering there and expressed how great of an experience it had been. I then did some research on the Legal Network and thought it would be a great opportunity.

What are some of the challenges you are facing working remotely?

Overall, balancing being a mom, school and work has been a challenge as far as working remotely. I was laid off due to COVID, but studying for finals and trying to keep up with the volunteer work was a bit difficult. However, I have learned to manage my time and have gotten better at balancing home/work life.

How is interning for the Legal Network helping your legal career?

Volunteering for the Legal Network has helped give me practice with legal research and drafting legal documents. This will go a long way as I pursue my law degree.



Justin Wedgewood
The Catholic University of America, Columbus School of Law

Why did you choose to intern for the Legal Network?

I spent five years as a Catholic school teacher and parish youth and music minister before going to law school. I recognized that interning for Catholic Charities Legal Network would be an excellent way to gain valuable legal experience, while at the same time fostering my appreciation for the ministry and mission of the Catholic Church.

What are some of the challenges you are facing working

remotely?

I have been working remotely ever since Catholic University made the decision to do so in March. Finishing up my first year of law school online provided unique challenges, but I have been able to apply what I learned in making that transition to my intern experience at the Legal Network. One of the biggest challenges I am facing is not being able to be in the physical presence of the clients I am serving.

How is interning for the Legal Network helping your legal career?

Interning for the Legal Network is giving me a broad exposure to many areas of the law. My experience thus far has allowed me to apply what I have learned in my first year of law school to help serve the needs of the poor and vulnerable in our Archdiocese. I am also refining my legal research and writing skills and receiving feedback from experienced attorneys. Being able to explore many different areas of the law is helping to guide me in discerning my future legal practice area.



Ramon Centeno

Why did you choose to intern for the Legal Network?

I chose to apply to Catholic Charities Legal Network because it is the best of both worlds in my eyes. Over my two years at university, I fell in love with the world of law and its system. The Legal Network allowed me to mix two of my great passions: to study and understand the law and to give back and serve the community and those in need. The work that Catholic Charities

does is a fantastic thing and I had to join in, do my part and apply myself in any way I could.

What are some of the challenges you are facing working remotely?

Working remotely has both its ups and downs. While the ability to work from home and all its comforts is nice, it lacks personality. Meeting and speaking with someone face-to-face is something important to me and something awfully hard to replicate over an email or video call. However, the men and women working with Catholic Charities Legal Network have been nothing but hard working, friendly and open. The drive and effort they put in, I feel, closes the gap of the lack of face-to-face communication.

How is interning for the Legal Network helping your legal career?

Interning for the Legal Network has been an eye-opening experience. A professor once told me that there are some things you simply cannot learn from a class, and she was very correct. Aside from the fantastic network and people working with me, the knowledge I have learned as to how the legal system works and can be applied is truly priceless. I have gained a new level of professionalism, communication and teamwork skills that is unique to Catholic Charities. It is an experience I would not trade for the world and something I could have never learned in a class.

We ask you to consider making a tax-deductible donation to Catholic Charities Legal Network. Your support allows us to continue providing first-rate *pro bono* legal services to families and individuals in DC and Maryland. Simply click the button below or send a check in care of Jim Bishop to Catholic Charities Legal Network, 924 G Street NW, Washington, DC 20001. Thank you!

[Donate Today!](#)

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The generous support of the DC Bar Foundation and individual, corporate and law firm donors enables our Catholic Charities Legal Network team to continue to offer the highest quality pro bono civil legal services to our clients. Thank you on our behalf and on behalf of the clients we serve.