



# Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

*Tony DeGol*

*Secretary for Communications*

126 Logan Boulevard  
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648  
Telephone: (814) 695-5579  
Facsimile: (814) 696-9516  
Cell: (814) 937-1418  
E-mail: tdegol@dioceseaj.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information:  
Jean D. Johnstone  
(814) 944-9388

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## MEDIA ADVISORY

### *Catholic Charities Feels the Pinch of State Budget Battle; Safety Net in Jeopardy for Blair County Residents*

(Altoona, PA) – The state budget woes in Harrisburg are hitting home for the Blair County office of Catholic Charities, Inc., of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, even though the agency does not rely on state funding for daily operations.

As of July 1, Blair Senior Services is expected to lay-off staff and stop seeing clients for its homeless/housing assistance program. This is in reaction to a recent letter from the Blair County Human Services Office, which said the County could not guarantee state Human Services Development Fund (HSDF) or Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) funds for any of its providers. Blair Senior Services uses both funding streams to pay for their case workers' salaries. Blair Senior Services has cancelled all appointments scheduled on or after July 1, and has been referring clients to Catholic Charities since late June.

“Blair Senior Services is in a difficult position, and we understand the agency’s decision to cut staff and services during these uncertain times,” said Jean D. Johnstone, Executive Director of Catholic Charities. “We will do our best to maintain a safety net for those in need.”

Catholic Charities is now the largest agency in Blair County that can assist with emergency shelter for the homeless, rental assistance and utility assistance, Johnstone said, noting that she is seeing a significant increase in requests since Blair Senior Services started referring clients to her agency. Johnstone said adequate funding will not be available to accommodate all of the additional calls for help, and the Catholic Charities staff may not be big enough to handle the extra caseloads. Catholic Charities' Emergency Financial Assistance program is funded by the Diocese, private donations and the United Way of Blair County.

Catholic Charities is sending out a plea for prayers and financial support from the community to help offset the increased demand the agency is facing. “In these difficult economic times, we do not want to turn our backs on anyone,” Johnstone said. “But we cannot answer the calls for help without the continued generosity of Blair County residents.” Anyone wishing to donate to Catholic Charities can mail or drop off contributions to the Altoona office at 1300 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue 16603.

Johnstone also stresses that residents who know they will have trouble paying rental and/or utility bills should contact her office as early as possible to ensure that Catholic Charities has adequate time to address the issue.

Catholic Charities operates offices in Altoona, Johnstown and Bellefonte. The agency answers the call of Central Pennsylvania residents by providing caring and compassionate services to persons and families in need, informing the community about critical social issues and advocating for policies that enhance human dignity and ensure basic human rights.