

***Catholic Charities
of the
Diocese of Davenport***



***IMMIGRATION OFFICE
ANNUAL REPORT, 2015***

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Davenport Immigration Program Annual Report, 2015

Although over 20 years old, four years ago, the Immigration Office of the Diocese of Davenport, became the largest element of the Charities effort . The Office is a legal office working exclusively in family-based immigration. Accredited by the US Department of Justice, our two Immigration counselors assist US citizens and legal permanent residents to petition for work permits, for their immediate relatives to join them here, and to progress from legal resident to full citizenship.

Last fiscal year, the Office opened 300 cases, 65 cases where clients needed assistance on older cases or cases originally handled by other offices. In addition, our counselors held 158 consultations with potential clients. Due to the provisions of US law under which we operate, our counselors are accredited for legal procedures for immigration, but are not lawyers admitted to state bars. For this reason, we cannot assist every client seeking services, and a careful consultation is needed to determine if we can provide the care needed or if they must be referred to licensed immigration attorneys.

We charge administrative fees in addition to the fees charged by the US Customs and Immigration Service and State Department, to help defray the cost of operations. By law, our fees must be a fraction of what an attorney would charge. As a result, we depend upon contributions from the Diocesan Foundation and the Annual Diocesan Appeal in addition to the fees. Many of our clients are low income, and some are near destitute. Whenever possible, we petition for relief from the federal fees, and when granted, waive our fees. Due to a client's situation, there are times when we waive our fees and pay the federal fees. This may also include the cost of transportation to Des Moines, the Federal examining site. During the fiscal year, we had 13 cases involving fee waivers, and two included the transportation. In one case, the client was a Marine veteran who had experienced hard times. He was so proud to become a US citizen that he invited the staff to his naturalization ceremony so that his celebration could include all those who supported him.

As part of our efforts to assure the highest quality legal services for clients, we have a licensed immigration attorney, Dan Vondra of Cole and Vondra, PC, on retainer to review casework and to advise on particularly difficult cases. During a recent visit Dan related that in the four years he has been assisting the office, he has seen consistently excellent case work and is particularly impressed by our counselor's ability to work with waivers of inadmissibility, exceeds that of many licensed attorneys. He said they also have an excellent track record for thoroughness and integrity in advising clients when they are unable to help and must seek other legal assistance.

We are constantly seeking ways to provide services throughout the 22 counties of the diocese. We have been going to parish offices at different locations each month, however, attendance has been poor and often clients do not keep scheduled appointments. The vast majority of clients work during the day, and time taken off for an appointment becomes a day without pay. Some employers count absences in a point system that can result in dismissal. We have experimented with Saturday hours, and find them very popular. Clients from even Ottumwa or Oskaloosa find it more satisfactory to come to the chancery on a Saturday than to skip a day of work at home, and have asked for more Saturday hours.

The staff of the office consists of the two accredited counselors and a very limited amount of part-time assistance from a volunteer. At present, they do not have even an administrative assistant to handle calls or schedule appointments. As a consequence the Office has become heavily dependent on Lyndsay Maloney at the front desk who has been an outstanding aid in handling the arrival of clients, many calls, and even scheduling appointments. She is practically an extension of the Office.