News



From left: New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, Catholic Charities New York CEO J. Antonio Fernández and New York Archbishop Ronald Hicks help distribute food on Nov. 24 at Catholic Charities New York's annual Thanksgiving food distribution, at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Community Center in Harlem. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)



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Two days before Thanksgiving, New York's Catholic and civic leaders gave out turkeys and other traditional staples for Thanksgiving meals to hundreds of families in the city.

Archbishop Ronald Hicks of New York joined Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Gov. Kathy Hochul and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York CEO J. Antonio Fernández for the organization's annual Thanksgiving food distribution Nov. 24 at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Community Center.

Nearly 600 families were expected to receive a turkey and traditional Thanksgiving staples, including cornbread, cranberry sauce, rice, yams, muffin mix, milk and eggs.

For Hicks, this was a concrete expression of Christian faith and an opportunity to bring people of different religious and social backgrounds together to help their neighbors.

"It's not enough just to preach about loving our neighbors ourselves. You have to put it into action," Hicks said in a brief interview with the National Catholic Reporter before the food distribution. "Today is a great representation and a reflection of how we put that faith into action."



Archbishop Ronald Hicks blesses the food before Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York's annual Thanksgiving food distribution at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Community Center in Harlem, Nov. 24. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)

He said that while Thanksgiving distributions attract public and media attention, Catholic Charities works throughout the year to assist New Yorkers experiencing hardship. "Catholic Charities is here, 52 weeks out of the year doing exactly this, helping those who are most in need," he said during his remarks.

"Let's all look at each other and see the face of God in each other. See each other as true brothers and sisters, because when we treat each other as true brothers and sisters, then this world is a better place," he said.

Speaking separately in Spanish, Hicks also expressed hope in the face of widespread need, emphasizing that hope and helping others can contribute to making the world a better place.

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Mamdani echoed the archbishop's message, describing the food distribution as an opportunity to practice one of Thanksgiving's most important traditions: sharing abundance with others.

The mayor expressed gratitude for New Yorkers who demonstrate solidarity in their everyday lives, from commuters offering their subway seats to others to working families who, despite struggling financially themselves, continue to help those with even less.

"I'm grateful that we can all come together to help make sure that those who call Harlem home will be able to set their Thanksgiving tables without worrying if they can afford both turkey and stuffing," Mamdani said.

Referencing Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison's reflections on Harlem, the mayor connected access to food with the ability of residents to pursue their aspirations and participate fully in the life of the city.

"We hold an obligation to ensure that they have the food they need to live lives of dignity," he said.



Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Gov. State Kathy Hochul take a selfie with a Catholic Charities' beneficiary while distributing food on Nov. 24 at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Community Center in Harlem. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)

Mamdani also recognized Catholic Charities' broader contribution to New York, including its food assistance initiatives and programs helping working residents pay their rent.

"As Scripture tells us again and again, to give to others is to give to God. There are few acts more holy," the mayor said.

Hochul drew on her Catholic upbringing to stress the importance of serving marginalized communities, while addressing the economic challenges confronting families and senior citizens.

"I was raised as a social justice Catholic. We live by the teachings of Jesus Christ," the governor said, emphasizing the responsibility to care for the hungry, homeless, incarcerated, elderly and lonely. "God's church is in the streets. It's in the neighborhoods; it's in the community centers," she said.

Hochul also expressed concern about reductions in federal nutrition assistance, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, recalling efforts by the state government to support vulnerable households amid disruptions to federal funding.

She described New York's universal free school breakfast and lunch initiative as an example of the public commitment to address food insecurity beyond the holiday season.

"No one is at fault because the price of everything went up," Hochul said, adding that household incomes have not kept pace with rising costs.

For Fernández, CEO of Catholic Charities New York, the presence of religious authorities, elected officials, nonprofit organizations and private donors illustrated the importance of collaboration in addressing poverty in one of the world's wealthiest cities.

"The church is universal. We serve everybody, regardless of who they are," Fernández told NCR, explaining that Catholic Charities assists individuals regardless of their religious affiliation or background.

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Beyond providing food, the Harlem initiative brought together community organizations offering assistance with housing insecurity, eviction prevention and other social needs, alongside archdiocesan priests and sisters providing spiritual

support to those standing in line.

"Catholic Charities cannot work alone," Fernández said.

The Harlem distribution forms part of a broader Thanksgiving initiative comprising 11 food distributions over 10 days. Catholic Charities expects to assist more than 3,000 households during the Thanksgiving season, a spokesperson told NCR, while Fernández said the wider distribution effort was reaching approximately 4,000 families.

The organization's holiday initiatives also include providing halal turkeys and traditional accompaniments to 100 households in collaboration with the Bronx Islamic Center, distributing Thanksgiving groceries to 1,200 households across four food pantry locations in Washington Heights and the Bronx, and hosting a luncheon with interfaith partners.

Serving more than 550,000 New Yorkers annually, Catholic Charities provides over 13 million meals through its network of soup kitchens, food pantries, mobile distributions, nutritional assistance programs and meal delivery services for homebound residents.

Its broader operations include assistance for more than 82,000 newly arrived immigrants, 116,500 families experiencing crises and 47,900 children and young people annually, the spokesperson said.

Ahead of Christmas, the organization will continue its holiday outreach through its annual St. Nicholas Project, which is expected to benefit approximately 2,400 families, representing 9,600 individuals, with winter necessities and other essential items.

"This is not just Catholic Charities," Fernández said. "This is everybody together feeding the hungry."

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