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## New Orleans Catholic Charities gets \$15 million

by Peter Finney Jr. by Catholic News Service

**NEW ORLEANS** -- Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of New Orleans has received the largest single grant in its history -- \$15 million from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation -- to oversee a collaborative of nonprofit organizations that will provide direct assistance, counseling and job force training to coastal Louisiana fishing families affected by the 2010 BP oil spill.

The grant, announced Sept. 7, was part of the original \$100 million in funding that BP gave to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in 2010 to establish a fund targeted to help oil rig workers and oil rig supply companies affected by the spill.

But because the demand for that funding was far less than anticipated, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation transferred \$75 million to establish a "Future of the Gulf Fund," which will fund the efforts of local nonprofits to help people, wildlife and the environment in the Gulf Coast area, said John Davies, president and CEO of the foundation.

Altogether, Davies announced \$18 million in grants Sept. 7, with Catholic Charities receiving the lion's share for an 18-month program that will allow the continuation and expansion of its Spirit of Hope Collaborative.

The \$15 million is dedicated for specific purposes, said Gordon Wadge, president and chief executive officer. Spirit of Hope will help oil spill families gain access to mental health and career counseling; offer direct assistance for food, utilities, housing and transportation; and provide job training for fishermen who might want to begin other careers.

The grant will allow Catholic Charities to branch out into the dioceses of Houma-Thibodaux and Lafayette to help people affected by the spill, Wadge said. Case managers will be able to determine what people need and react quickly to help them.

"Really, it's journeying with somebody in life, whether it's educational opportunities that they need or if it's job opportunities or counseling or crisis assistance," Wadge said.

The \$15 million grant is believed to be the largest single donation in Catholic Charities' history, Wadge said.

"I've been here 31 years, and this is probably the biggest single grant we've gotten at one time," he said. "This allows us to amplify the care and really to be the heart and hands of Jesus in reaching out to people."

Shoula Lovera, director of Spirit of Hope, said the \$15 million grant is "a big responsibility" but promised excellent stewardship.

"We're hoping this will really have an impact on the community and let us enhance the programs we have been providing," Lovera said. "We've been working with behavioral health for over a year. Catholic Charities has been doing a lot of work in case management. This will help us partner with other organizations who can help us in areas where we don't have a presence."

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New Orleans Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond said he was humbled that the Baton Rouge Area Foundation chose Catholic Charities to administer such a large and important grant.

"Our mission and our ministry is to turn this money into care and consolation and hope," Archbishop Aymond said. "There are people who are in need and people's lives who have been devastated."

Archbishop Aymond cited statistics from Tulane University researchers who said there are still 1,700 families waiting for any kind of relief from the oil spill. Eighty percent of individuals who have been paid by BP opted to take a flat-rate payment of \$5,000, but "our concern is for people down the line," he said.

Only 38 percent of people in the affected fishing areas have returned to fishing, "and many of them are struggling," Archbishop Aymond said.

Three other local nonprofits received grants from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation:

-- The Audubon Nature Institute: \$2 million to create an animal triage and holding center on the Gulf Coast.

-- Single Stop USA: \$594,000 for a program at Delgado Community College to help workers transition to new careers.

-- Louisiana Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster: \$410,000 to host a disaster-relief conference for nonprofits in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

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