

# The Catholic Voice

VOLUME 63 • ISSUE 2

SUMMER 2025

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# 'A calling'

## WHY MARIO ALIOTO MOVED FROM SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS TO LEADING CATHOLIC CHARITIES EAST BAY BY JAY SORGI



**"I felt like it was 'something I'm supposed to do' after 50 years in baseball."**

**M**ario Alioto did just about everything you could do on the business side of his hometown San Francisco Giants, rubbing elbows with Willie Mays, handing bats as a kid to Willie McCovey, bumping into Barry Bonds in the hallways of Oracle Park, coordinating play-off and World Series games, assuming responsibility for achieving record-breaking attendance at Oracle Park, and developing the first ever bobblehead promotion in professional sports.

Leaving the organization after a 50-year dream career, Alioto wasn't searching for a new vocation for his life. But sometimes you don't need to journey far to find one.

### God finds you

Sometimes, as Alioto describes, God finds you.

"There's someone who said 'God brought you to this' a few times to me, and I've been repeating it over and over," Alioto says about his new role as chief executive officer of Catholic Charities East Bay, a role he began in January.

His "this" is a new life's work for Alioto, 64, combining his sales and marketing acumen, his lifelong Catholic faith and a sense of mission to raise awareness and ultimately more funding that empowers those who infuse God's love into the hardest battles that many East Bay residents face.

"We get to be there to help somebody, for that particular moment in his or her life," Alioto explained. "They're going through a struggle, and we get to be the ones to help them out. That's really what this work is, and it's speaking to the heart in all of us."

That conversation with Alioto's own heart began earlier than his tenure as a Giants bat boy in the 1970s.

"I grew up in San Francisco, went to Catholic grammar school, high school, college," the St. Mary's College of California graduate said.

"When you attend Catholic school, you have a connection to your faith. Sometimes you don't really understand it all until you get a little older and a little wiser, and you start connecting the dots and deciding what's important in life. And maybe as you get older, you start thinking a little bit differently and start putting your faith into action."

Those thoughts of discernment had years to marinate while he dived deep into the world of his other love, baseball by the Bay.

### Baseball by the Bay

"I started when I was 12 years old as a bat boy. I grew up pretty close to Candlestick Park, where the Giants played," he said.

"I started in the clubhouse, but I spent more than 40 years in the front office, working my way up through the organization, ultimately holding the role of Executive Vice President of Business Operations."

What he found in his role running the business side of the Giants is that the millions who flock to their games are moved by the heart, by a love for the experience of the game, a love of a team that

delivered them heroes and won three World Series during his tenure. It brings people back to their childhood. It's very nostalgic.

"People are very emotional about their sports team," Alioto noted.

"I still love that feeling of presenting a great ceremony and knowing that there are people in the stands whose tears are going to rise because they see Willie Mays on the field. There's something about a sports team that brings us back to our childhood," he said.

After graduating as high as he could within the organization, and after his kids graduated from school and moved out, Alioto sensed something new was going to come into his life.

"I have four grown kids, and they're all out of the house. What's the next phase of life? So after the 2023 season, I left the team," he said.

"It was just a wonderful way to end the career. Sometimes your heart is not really quite ready, but your mind is [saying] it's kind of time. So I was off for a year, and had a transition role as advisor to the CEO for the 2024 season. But it was pretty much getting ready for what was next after baseball."



## God's answer to "what's next"

Alioto recognized that he wasn't ready to retire but wasn't necessarily looking for his "next."

I was just ready to see what, you know, what the world would bring me next," he says. "I wasn't looking for this job."

But he was involved at his parish, St. Isidore in Danville. What happened there proves that, just as baseball has no time limit, neither does God's ability to move the mind and heart to a greater calling.

"A friend of mine invited me to a men's ministry that meets every Saturday morning, which is called 'That Man Is You,'" he said.

"On one of the Saturday mornings, I said to everyone, 'When you come next Saturday, sit next to somebody different, because we all sit next to the same guys.'"

A conversation that came from sitting next to that different guy opened the door for God to move Alioto to his new vocation.

"A gentleman sat next to me, and we started talking about the Giants and what I was doing, and how I wanted to get more involved with the church, get more involved in my faith. And he said, 'My wife is on the board of Catholic Charities, and they're looking for a CEO, and I think you'd be perfect,'" he said.

"I thought, 'Oh, my God, I'm not quite sure. I'm not looking.' But someone told me once before, you never say no to something unless you know what you're saying no to. So I said, 'Sure.'"

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MARIO ALIOTO

Alioto had that conversation with the board member and then the recruiter called.

"The next thing you know, here I am," he said. "It was a calling. I felt like it was something I'm supposed to do."

Perhaps his time at the Giants, and his focusing on selling the game to the fan's heart, was God's way of preparing him to focus on reaching the hearts of Catholics and others in the Bay Area to raise the visibility and the funds needed to empower Catholic Charities East Bay's calling to serve those in need.

"Bringing your business experience into a charity can provide a fresh look at operations and results, it can bring the team together and inspire a 'can do' attitude, even a rebranding," Alioto says. "We are the local Catholic Charities for Alameda and Contra Costa counties, and here at home, everyone in need is our neighbor. Over time, the needs change, and our work evolves to reflect that."

"The work here is God's work. If you can touch someone's heart about the work that we do, then I think you can really move mountains."

## Moving mountains

His mountain-moving operation needs funding to make miracles happen for the unhoused, for neighbors seeking citizenship, for the unemployed and underemployed of the East Bay. Alioto recognizes his mission of taking the good works Catholic Charities does and telling the kind of story that moves the human heart.

"What intrigues me here is how to take the work that we do, the passion of our staff, and position it in a way people understand," he says.

He has grown in that understanding himself, simply because he encounters the change-making mission on a daily basis.

"The clients who actually walk in our door looking for help, I can't imagine what that would feel like when you have to go and ask somebody because you're either facing a crisis or you're in need," he said. "It hit me pretty hard to see people coming in."

That movement of the heart motivates him daily, as it does all those who meet people's needs every day. To Alioto, it's a matter of transferring that movement of the heart to new supporters.

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"There's something really special about this kind of work," he says. "It humbles you, for sure."

Just as when a new pope enters the Room of Tears and they feel the overwhelming challenge of their new calling, there are moments when Alioto feels that humility and an even deeper gravity of his role.

"There have been times over the first few weeks [where I've been] thinking, 'Oh God, I hope I'm the right person. Can I do this?' It's nice coming in when you're new and everyone thinks you have the answers. I don't have the answers, but what I do have is the ability to work with the staff to let everyone know that we can do this together," he said.

"If God brought you to this, God will get you through it."

Alioto misses what it's like to be running the business side of the ballpark as the baseball season moves from spring to summer, but his new calling is taking up every part of him – his own relationship with God and all his business skills.

"I always get kind of emotional. I think about it, because it means something to me," he said.

"My life is so much different now, and the idea that I really want to do this work. I want to be successful at doing it. I want to have the staff feel like they're really making a difference in someone's life."

Alioto is perhaps realizing that in the extra innings of your career, God calls you to something new when you're not looking. †





THE JOB AT HAND FOR  
CATHOLIC CHARITIES EAST BAY  
AND ITS NEW CEO:

# Localize, evange love with adap

BY JAY SORGI | PHOTOS BY JOE GOLLING, COURTESY CATHOLIC CHARITIES EAST BAY





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Getty Images | Denim background: ABYKOV

## Catholic Charities’ Mario Alioto’s calling is to remind the East Bay that ‘the work that we do is for the people who you know’

No one charity has the ability to meet all of every region’s needs, especially one with limited revenue. New Catholic Charities East Bay Chief Executive Officer Mario Alioto aims to test that theory. He knows he doesn’t have Jesus’ ability to turn a few fishes and loaves into enough to feed thousands, but he passionately and energetically believes that Catholic Charities can expand its impact.

“I have to make sure that people within our circle, within our parishes, understand what Catholic Charities East Bay [is], who we are, what we do, and why they should care about it,” Alioto said.  
“We’re in your neighborhood.”

He senses his team’s focus involves not just the work itself, but communicating and evangelizing the local impact of all the services within Catholic Charities, and being ready to pivot the work when times and needs change.  
“We can’t provide more services unless we can drive more revenue to provide those services,” he said, and the need is greater than the resources.  
“So from a marketing standpoint, what intrigues me here is how do you take the work that we do, the passion of our staff, and to represent it in a way so people understand the mission and how they can share in that mission,” he explains.







## STAYING LOCAL

While Catholic Charities' own website proclaims its particular areas of focus, the key that Alioto wants to add to that message is how for 90 years, Catholic Charities – and the loving people who share their gifts and talents there – have anchored themselves in the East Bay and have acted as locally centered and as effectively as any group in the East Bay.

"What we do locally is dependent on the needs of that particular community. So, in our case, Catholic

Charities East Bay, we are a very local community-minded agency," he said.

"We're right here in your community. We're not operating on the East Coast. We're operating here in your neighborhood...the need is a need that we see every day when we drive our cars or wherever you're going in the Bay Area."

Alioto says that need flows daily right to Catholic Charities East Bay's very locale. People walk into the Concord, Oakland and Richmond offices on a regular basis seeking

help. Alioto admits that these requests are "greater than the resources we have." These are the resources he and his team aim to expand in collaboration with Catholics and others in the community.

The needs reflect many issues that more and more people in the local community experience on a daily basis.

"People need help because there's a crisis in their life. Things happen all the time. It can vary for a number of reasons, but they may need help paying their utilities for a month or two, or help paying the rent for a little bit, or a security deposit on a new place. We help in those areas," said Alioto.

"We're helping a number of folks in our community who want to become citizens, and they need help with filling out forms or getting a green card. On that path, citizenship is not an easy one, and we help navigate that process. On the counseling/mental health part of our work, we have therapists who work with school-age kids who may have issues at home or just need someone to talk to and to help navigate what they're going through in their lives."

## STAYING AGILE

While this is some of what Catholic Charities East Bay does today, Alioto wants Catholic Charities to stay agile, mobile and adaptable to how societies and communities change and how peoples' needs change.

"We've been around, we've done good work, but how do we shift now to get us prepared for the future?" he asked.

"We're not sure what the need will be tomorrow, and I think one of the legacies of Catholic Charities East Bay is that we recognize where the problem is, fix the problem where we can, and move on to the next problem that may present itself," he explained. "It's important that we talk to the parishes, meet with the priests and see where the need is, and also understand what other agencies are doing, and then find out where the void is."

But Alioto reminds those who think about donating to Catholic Charities East Bay that such organizational flexibility and focus all remains under the simple goal of being Christ's love for the least of these, and in maximizing Catholic







Charities' impact in that pure mission of faith for people we see everyday.

"You either can turn the other way and walk across the street, or you can be the Good Samaritan," he said.

"We want to be an agency that [acts] with a kind heart and with real answers for people. We're on the ground doing the work where the need is, and I think that's pretty special." †

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**You either can turn the other way and walk across the street, or you can be the Good Samaritan.”**

— MARIO ALIOTO, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
CATHOLIC CHARITIES EAST BAY



#### LEARN MORE

To help empower Catholic Charities of East Bay, visit [cceb.org](http://cceb.org).

## Who is our Neighbor?



For 90 years, **Catholic Charities** has been helping our neighbors **right here in the East Bay**. We assist with rent and utility payments, support our youth, and help our neighbors legally on the path to citizenship.

## CATHOLIC CHARITIES EAST BAY

**is asking for your help.**

**Please use the enclosed envelope to make your gift, or use the QR code to give online.**

***Thank you!***

**[cceb.org](http://cceb.org)**



**SCAN  
HERE  
TO  
GIVE**