

ART AGAINST COMPLACENCY

BY JILL RAUH, JUSTICE, PEACE, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STAFF

What happens when, on the one hand, you have young people with gifts and talents to share, and on the other hand, you have CCHD-funded groups diving headfirst into inspiring projects to improve their communities?

Answer: you have a situation ripe for partnership between students and funded groups through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development's Multi-Media Youth Arts Contest and Program.

Take, for example, Clare Hagan, the winner of this year's contest, who was practically born singing. "For as long as I can remember, I've been singing," she explains. "I can't remember when I didn't want to be a professional singer when I grow up."

Last year, Clare's eyes were opened to poverty in the United States when she started to hear stories about the recession. "I heard on the news how everyone was being laid off," she says, "and it isn't just one person being laid off—it's a whole family losing their income."

A story by her seventh-grade teacher, about teaching in an inner-city school that was falling apart and infested with rats, also made an impression. "I could have been born into that situation by the luck of the draw, but I wasn't," Clare remarks.

Then, as part of the Multi-Media Arts Contest and Program, which she entered through her parish, Clare learned about Women in Transition (WIT), a group funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. A grassroots organization run for and by poor people, WIT works on issues of economic human rights, such as affordable housing, minimum wage, classism, and health care. WIT also has a skills-building program in which women pursue GEDs and



Thirteen-year-old Clare Hagan performs her winning song, "Complacency's End."

develop reading skills while they learn about pioneering women in history.

After the visit, Clare was inspired. "They aren't just handing out money. They're showing people how to get skills they need. It's not just a short fix," she says. The community organizing efforts left an impression, as well. "They're also passing fair laws, not bad ones," Clare says.

One story she heard at WIT was about a greedy landlord who was collecting federal funding to provide low-income housing while neglecting the dilapidated buildings. Clare describes her reaction to stories like these: "It made me say 'Wait a second, you aren't supposed to be doing that. Just wait a minute.'"

So she wrote a song, "Complacency's End," this year's winning entry in the Multi-Media Arts Contest

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

“To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity.”

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 7

Dear Friends,

Pope Benedict XVI recently released his third encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*).

His words are inspiring and needed in today’s economic climate, encouraging us to seek justice and practice charity. Today, these inspiring words resound more than ever. As news reports claim economic recovery in the United States, our families continue to suffer. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), in responding to the crisis, is already doing the valuable work the Holy Father calls for in *Caritas in Veritate*.

Caritas in Veritate explains the meaning of justice and its undeniable bond to charity: “charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is ‘mine’ to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is ‘his,’ what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting” (no. 6).

Through solidarity with millions of Catholics, CCHD provides the tools for leadership, the voice to fight injustice, and the foundation for a dignified life outside of poverty. The mission of CCHD truly embodies the message of *Caritas in Veritate* in its quest to work towards the common good through charity. “Only in charity, illumined by the light of reason and faith, is it possible to pursue development goals that possess a more humane and humanizing value” (no. 9).

For almost 40 years, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development has aimed to achieve this ideal. Now more than ever, our work is needed—to help the economic health of our nation to recover, and to lift up those who are working to secure their own futures and the futures of their communities. **The national date for the Collection for CCHD is the weekend of November 21-22, 2009.** Your generosity means so much in this time of economic uncertainty.

Thank you for being a part of this important work. God bless you.



Ralph McCloud
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development



What Is CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the Catholic Campaign has contributed over \$280 million to more than 7,800 low-income-led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so that CCHD’s investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between impoverished and affluent persons.

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and Program, is about not letting unfair things just happen, but instead working together to make things right. Clare’s song says,

We may look small to you now but we’re changing the rules

You don’t have to be scared, but don’t be fooled

We got our hearts set and now we’re gonna change the world.

Because after all, Clare says, “the reason we’re put here is to make the world a better place.”

Since its inception in 2001, the CCHD Multi-Media Youth Arts Contest and Program has undergone a transition. It was first conceived as an opportunity for young Catholics in grades seven through twelve to learn about poverty in the United States and then use their artistic skills to educate others. But in the last few years, the contest organizers realized that the program held potential for much more, and they began to make some changes.

The first change was a new requirement that participants in the contest learn about—and, ideally, interact with—a group or organization that is funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. This experience can be transformative for students and funded groups alike.

Stacy Plummer, from Albany, New York, won the 2008 contest as a senior in high school. She had visited the Albany Community Land Trust Organization, or ACLT, as part of the contest. ACLT works to ensure that affordable housing is available in Albany. Stacy was especially surprised by one characteristic of the organization: “I found it amazing that the people who run ACLT are all people who live in the city of Albany. . . . It truly is run and maintained by the community, and I feel that is what makes it so special.”


In keeping with CCHD’s mission of empowerment of poor and low-income persons, the students who engage in the Arts Contest and Program are often surprised to learn that the organizations are not only run *for* poor persons but are largely run *by* those same persons. The 2008 contest theme, “Empowered People Can Uproot Poverty in Their Communities,” emphasized this aspect of CCHD. Seeing empowered poor and low-income persons lead efforts for change through CCHD-funded groups is a surprising—and powerful—experience for many young people just becoming aware of justice issues.

Another major change in the Arts Contest and Program was to try to engage entire parishes and schools in the contest. To do this, organizers encouraged parishes and schools to use a step-by-step guide that provides lessons and activities for use in youth groups, religious education classes, and schools. The plans interact with various disciplines, such as theology, art, English, social studies, government, and music. Through the lessons and activities, the school or parish learns about topics such as the root causes of poverty, the work of CCHD, Catholic social teaching, and the difference between charitable works and social justice. Only after learning about these important matters do the young people create their art, which can be anything from a drawing or video to an essay or song.

Sr. Maureen Joyce, RSM, who serves as both the CEO of Catholic Charities and the CCHD Diocesan Director in Albany, New York, affirms these program changes. “It has been an invaluable experience for our youth to visit local CCHD-funded projects and connect classroom study of Catholic social teaching to justice initiatives in their own communities,” she says.

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Finally, the last step in the contest is to equip young people to become educators of their peers, their families, and the wider community about what they have learned. This step benefits not only the young people, but CCHD-funded groups and the community as a whole. A few months ago, Clare Hagan was asked to play her song “Complacency’s End” at a WIT gathering—and she wowed the crowd.

“As soon as I heard it, I wanted to adopt it as our theme song,” commented Khalilah Collins, the executive director of WIT. “It’s really refreshing to see a kid who’s only 13 years old with that much insight. . . . She was able to put words to those things she has felt and seen.” Khalilah concluded: “It inspires people to stop taking what they’re dished and stand up. We can’t continue to live not doing anything.” 

TAKING STRIDES TO “BRAKE” THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Charlie Chatterton had a great idea and ran with it—literally. Since September 2006, the university professor has completed 33 of the 38 marathons he is running to call attention to the 37 million Americans who live in poverty.

It all started with a 300-mile bicycle ride. Charlie joined a group of people from St. Bridget’s Parish in Manchester, Connecticut, on the CCHD Brake the Cycle of Poverty tour in 2003. The tour raised awareness about the prevalence of poverty in the United States and the need to promote permanent, just solutions. A core group biked across the country, and local groups, including Charlie’s, met them along the route. The St. Bridget’s contingent pedaled to Baltimore and joined the cross-country group for the ride into Washington, D.C.

“When we finished the trip, we felt that we wanted to do more,” says Charlie. So his parish group now makes regular informational presentations and takes an annual weeklong ride through Connecticut, bringing the message to parishioners and policy makers.

“We ask people to PEDAL with us,” says Charlie. “That’s *participate* in their community, *educate* themselves and others, *donate* their time, talent and treasure, *advocate* for people living in poverty, and do it all with *love*. People don’t have to get on a bike to PEDAL with us.”

But Charlie, an associate professor in the department of health and physical education at Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic, says, “I’m in the field of health and fitness, and I was looking for a way to do more.” He decided to run four marathons to raise awareness, ending up with one in New Orleans, where he and a group of his students worked on a home-building project in that flood-ravaged city.

He tacked on two more marathons and then decided to aim for 38. “The first 37 are each dedicated to one million people living in poverty. The 38th is for those people on the cusp and the people who assist them,” Charlie explains.

He says the marathons empower him to live his faith. “Before Brake the Cycle, the social teaching of the Church didn’t really resonate with me. Now that I’m more involved, I’m more informed, and I’m constantly learning. And I am fortunate to be surrounded by people who are so motivating and reflective of living a life of faith and justice.”

His supporters and motivators include his wife, Carol; their three small children; the pastor of St. Bridget’s, Fr. Stephen Sledesky; fellow cyclists; and the CCHD director for the Archdiocese of Hartford, Cori Thibodeau.

Charlie stresses that his Taking Strides to Brake the Cycle of Poverty marathon initiative and his Brake the Cycle of Poverty bicycling ministry are primarily awareness builders, but he does accept donations for CCHD and other organizations when he runs marathons. “I’m not some big efficient machine chugging out the dollars, but maybe I can increase people’s awareness and challenge them to be advocates,” he says.

Charlie adds, “God willing, I will achieve my goal with marathon 38 in Philadelphia in November 2009.”

One can only imagine his next challenge. ☺



Photo courtesy of Charlie Chatterton

Charlie Chatterton “gears up” for a race.

CORRECTION: In the previous issue of *Helping People Help Themselves* (2009, issue 2), Bev Causer was incorrectly identified. This photo is of Bev Causer. Susan K. Smith of Advent United Church of Christ was misidentified as Bev Causer in the last issue.



Photo courtesy of BREAD

DO YOU HAVE A CCHD SUCCESS STORY or a story of hope and empowerment about people in your community who are coping with the present economic situation? If so, please e-mail us at cchdstories@uscbb.org.