

helping PEOPLE
help
THEMSELVES

break the cycle of poverty

CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CREDIBLE SIGNS OF CHRIST ALIVE

BY JOHN P. HOGAN

“Every year American Catholics give generously to CCHD, the social justice and antipoverty program sponsored by the U.S. Bishops. Often, however, even the generous givers are not aware of the importance of their gifts. They are not aware of the profound impact that CCHD has on the lives of people struggling to find a way out of poverty.”

—Bishop George V. Murry, SJ

Springfield is the population center of Western Massachusetts with over 100,000 people in a metropolitan area of half a million. The city is racially mixed with large neighborhoods of African-Americans, Italians, and Irish. There is also a growing Russian-speaking immigrant community of 25,000 people. High housing prices around the “five college” area push low-income residents into Springfield and Holyoke. Greenfield and its surrounding rural areas are principally white and, like many rural New England communities, lacking employment opportunities.

In this context, [the Anti-Displacement Project (ADP)] takes a very innovative approach linking community organization to economic development. This creative linkage promotes and sustains lasting social, educational, and economic change. ADP’s mission statement clearly sets an agenda which seeks to help the poor empower themselves.

The ADP is a multi-issue membership-based community organization. Our mission is to organize and empower low-income families in Western



Photos courtesy of the Anti-Displacement Project

STRONG LEADERSHIP IS KEY TO COMMUNITY SUCCESS. HERE THE GAVEL IS PASSED TO A NEW ADP LEADER.

Massachusetts in order to build political and economic power, achieve resident control of affordable housing, promote cooperative economic development, and create lasting social and economic change.

The way we accomplish this is to create new institutions controlled by low-income people and then use our combined wealth and assets to benefit our communities.

. . . Current members consist of five tenant-owned housing cooperatives, four tenant associations, one ethnic association, and the newest member, a for-profit worker-owned business. . . . In its own management and operations, ADP follows Catholic Social Teaching’s

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend of CCHD:



In a recent *Poverty Pulse* survey sponsored by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, 96% of Americans said they consider it important to decrease or eliminate poverty in the United States. This is good news, but our well-meaning intentions must be translated into active solidarity in partner-

ship with the nearly 35 million Americans who live below the poverty line and struggle each day to break the cycle of poverty in their families and local communities.

CCHD not only works to raise awareness of the incidence of poverty in the United States but also communicates a message of hope for the future encouraging communities to work together to attack the root causes of poverty. Through your generous support, CCHD has provided seed money to train community leaders for projects that are initiated and led by low-income people themselves. Author John Hogan spent time with several of these projects and their leaders to produce *Credible Signs of Christ Alive*, a book of case studies from CCHD. I hope you enjoy the excerpt presented here.

In the United States of America, we have cultivated a community spirit to tackle serious problems. In the present time, Americans can lend that same community spirit to repair the fabric of our society that is torn apart by recurring cycles of poverty. May the Lord bless you for your solidarity with our low-income sisters and brothers. Be assured of my grateful prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Robert J. Vitillo
Executive Director

Visit our website at www.usccb.org/cchd,
or explore the state of U.S. poverty, made
up of nearly 35 million Americans, at
www.povertyusa.org.

WHAT IS CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 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 more than \$260 million to more than 4,000 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 will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between the poor and non-poor.

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principle of subsidiarity: decisions and responsibilities are, whenever possible, carried out at the level of the local community and local institutions; the larger entity has a role when the common good calls for greater regulation or intervention.

. . . ADP members are multiracial, low-wage workers without job security, often single parents pushed off welfare or senior citizens living on fixed incomes. The organization also serves a growing Russian immigrant population with high language and cultural barriers. Overall, ADP represents over 10,000 families and is led by a core of 300 seasoned leaders.

Training of leaders is a key ingredient in institution building. To date about three hundred leaders have been trained in community organizing. A network of issue-based strategy teams have been set up to work on regional concerns which grow out of one-on-one meetings. The teams are led by representatives from each member organization. They plan research and activities around practical concerns such as jobs, housing, education, and utilities.

[Caroline Murray, ADP's executive director] is adamant, "poor people can figure out how to buy a house and how to run a business" and ADP is a catalyst to help them. Thinking big, confronting power, and local control provide the juice for this movement. The participation and empowerment of poor people in these new institutions is the key. Members are organized, efficient, and in it for the long haul.

Mary Lou, a senior citizen and long-time resident of Greenfield Gardens, told me of the vast difference in her life that ADP has made. She moved into the housing project twenty-seven years ago, thinking she would stay for two years. She is still there and is now the vice-chair of ADP and a very active leader of Greenfield Gardens' Home Savers Council. She spoke of her own past fears of even asking the landlord for normal repairs. When refrigerators gave out after many years, tenants wouldn't ask for replacements. Mary Lou spoke for herself, "As a single mother with a disability, I was afraid of being evicted." What a difference ADP has made. She is long over her fear and now stands up and presents the Greenfield Gardens and ADP case to HUD officials, mayors, bank presidents, and senators. Mary Lou's education came from her involvement and leadership in the



MEMBERS OF THE ANTI-DISPLACEMENT PROJECT UNITE FOR CHANGE.

long process of tenant purchase and rehabilitation of Greenfield Gardens' 202 units. But she is not resting on past victories. "It's worked for me, but it has to happen for others as well." She is now one of the principal leaders involved in ADP's evolution to a multi-issue organization.

In discussion with Caroline . . . and Mary Lou, as well as tenants, young and old, the approach and methods of ADP [with regard to housing issues] are hashed over and refined. The constant interaction of rights and responsibilities, confrontation and reconciliation, self-determination and community, characterizes the forward movement. Caroline readily admits: "In more traditional tenant organizing, we would've been fighting with owners over repairs. Now instead, the tenants of the building control a major asset and make day-to-day decisions about rents and repairs. They're thinking strategically, making sure all bank accounts are in local banks, for example. These tenants are more than tenants; they're major holders in the city."

The family, as the basic cell of society, has a full right to housing adequate to its needs, so that it can develop a genuine domestic communion. The Church recognizes this fundamental right and is aware of her obligation to work together with others in order to ensure that it is recognized in practice.

—Pope John Paul II, 1997 Lenten Message

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. . . The leaders of ADP . . . and many others are not afraid to ask the hard questions. . . . How do their steps relate to our own lives and lifestyles? How do we deal with housing, jobs, and personal and family responsibilities? What do we see as “wisdom” in our own everyday tough decisions? Probably, we would come to the conclusion that we admire people who stand up for themselves and ask the hard questions. We might also find out that we need to reexamine our own ambiguous stance toward power. As ADP illustrates, having power means having responsibility, and responsibility has an obligation to seek the common good. All

of us are called “to speak truth to power” and we know how hard that can be. But ADP is doing just that.

The above is an excerpt from Chapter 5 of *Credible Signs of Christ Alive: Case Studies from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development* by John P. Hogan, Ph.D. reprinted with permission. Order online at www.rowmanlittlefield.com or by phone: toll free 800-462-6420. The author is donating his proceeds from the sale of the book to CCHD.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John P. Hogan, PhD, has worked with Peace Corps and Catholic Relief Services in Africa, Haiti, and South America. He has taught at Catholic University, Loyola College, and SAIS, Johns Hopkins University. He lives in Washington, D.C.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Diocese of Springfield have supported ADP through its stages from organizing to economic development. The accomplishments are apparent—millions of dollars and thousands of housing units in accrued wealth and hundreds of jobs created with the potential for permanent career employment.



WHERE'S MY MONEY GOING?

All CCHD funds received are used solely for the support of CCHD's anti-poverty mission. CCHD abides by the charitable standards set by a leading donor advisory service. Our funds are divided as follows: 87% is assigned to CCHD's core program mission of community empowerment, economic development, and education programs; 8% is allocated to coordinate the annual appeal and communications efforts; 5% is assigned to administrative costs. We thank you for continuing to empower low-income people through your ongoing support for CCHD.

INVEST IN PEOPLE HELPING THEMSELVES

You can donate your time, talent, and treasure to CCHD in many ways. Our annual parish collection is the Sunday before Thanksgiving in most parishes. You can support the work of CCHD with a cash or check donation. You can also support CCHD with a stock donation or a matching gift from your employer. Consider a lasting legacy to help people help themselves—remember CCHD in your estate planning. For more information about CCHD, contact Mary Mencarini Campbell at 202-541-3365/mcampbell@usccb.org.