



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

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1. What is community organizing?

Community organizing involves bringing people and groups (often including churches) together to collectively address issues of common concern, for example, availability of affordable housing, access to services and businesses, decent education, and jobs with living wages, and other issues of economic development and justice.

2. Does CCHD only fund community organizing?

No. CCHD considers community organizing as one (but not the only) tool to give greater voice to the poor and help them to break the cycle of poverty. Community organizing is a means, not an end in and of itself. Used well, community organizing can be an effective way to change the conditions and policies which leave people poor. Community organizing can be an important way for people to defend their own lives and dignity, families and communities.

3. Why has the Catholic Church been supportive of community organizing efforts?

Becoming involved in community organizing efforts is **one** way Catholics can exercise their moral responsibility to participate in public life. "It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1913). The faithful can help addressing systemic injustice in society by voting, legislative advocacy, and public witness. Community organizing can help individuals become more informed voters; participate in advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable; and join with others in public witness of our faith.

Additionally, community organizing puts Catholic social teaching principles into action when such efforts are geared toward protecting the dignity of the human person, ensuring that basic human rights are fulfilled, and inviting individuals and institutions to carry out their duties and responsibilities. Community organizing brings together people of varied socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to work together in solidarity for the common good. It allows people who are poor and people who are not poor to work together to solve problems. When people who are poor take leadership and work to address their own situations, their human dignity is affirmed.

Pope John Paul II recognized the value of CCHD's work when he noted, "The [Catholic] Campaign for Human Development has been a witness to the Church's living presence in the world among the most needy, and to her commitment to continuing the mission of Christ, who was sent 'to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives ... and release to the prisoners' (Luke 4: 18-19). I commend the bishops of the United States for their wisdom and compassion in establishing the [Catholic] Campaign for Human Development ... and I thank the whole Catholic community for the generous support given to this initiative during all these years." (Providence of God Church, Chicago, Illinois, October 1979)

4. What are examples of community organizing efforts that CCHD supports?

With support from CCHD, parishes around the country have been involved in important efforts to address the causes of poverty. For example, 34 churches in Pinellas County, FL are involved in a community organizing group called Faith and Action for Strength Together, or FAST. When many of the church's members began experiencing

displacement because of the rising cost of housing, the churches responded by praying and forming an action plan. They invited public officials to meetings where 2,500 FAST members were gathered to challenge those officials to support policies that benefit poor people. Their efforts resulted in an affordable housing trust fund that directed \$19 million toward housing for low-income persons, and new legislation to guarantee development of 3,000 units over the next three years for families with incomes under \$42,000 a year.

Here are some other examples of community organizing efforts that CCHD has supported:

[Omaha Together One Community](#)

[Statewide Organizing for Community Empowerment](#)

[Massachusetts Senior Action Council](#)

[Boston Workers' Alliance](#)

[Empowering and Strengthening Ohio's People](#)