



Houston-area Spanish-language trainees in discussion with West / Southwest IAF Senior Organizer Elizabeth Valdez.

Recognizing the Stranger —National Strategic Grant Interfaith Education Fund

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Joe Rubio is a senior organizer of the west/southwest region of the Industrial Areas Foundation and a leader of the Interfaith Education Fund (IEF). With a grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), the IEF piloted a program in fall of 2016 called Recognizing the Stranger, a multiyear regional approach to the immigration issue, in seven southwestern dioceses.

The Recognizing the Stranger strategy works with local parishes to identify, train, and mentor immigrant leaders to build connections among themselves and with nonimmigrant allies in their parishes and the broader community,” Joe says. “It’s a collaborative effort among clergy, leaders, and organizers to develop capacity to tackle tough issues.” The Recognizing the Stranger process has three phases, or parts. The first phase employs advanced training, conducted in Spanish, to build immigrant leaders’ abilities to conduct listening campaigns and specialized workshops in their home parishes. Then, the leaders learn how to impact parish, school, and community life through alliances with nonimmigrants.

Finally, the groups develop a regional capacity to inform and expand a pro-immigrant constituency by creating new relationships based on mutual understanding and trust.

“Recognizing the Stranger calls for a compassionate and constructive response to the broken immigration system,” Joe says. It launched in fall 2016 in the Archdioceses of Los Angeles, Galveston-Houston, and San Antonio and the Dioceses of Las Vegas, Tucson, Dallas, and Brownsville.

Joe explains, “We planned to train 350 leaders, but that number doubled and we expanded to 84 parishes because there was such a strong desire among dioceses to help pastors address immigrant issues

MEMBERS OF

Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development/Subcommittee on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Most Reverend David P. Talley, Chairman
BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

Most Reverend Donald Hanchon
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF DETROIT

Most Reverend Robert F. Hennessey
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF BOSTON

Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas
BISHOP EMERITUS OF TUCSON

Most Reverend David O'Connell
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF LOS ANGELES

Most Reverend Jorge Rodríguez
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF DENVER

Most Reverend Jaime Soto
BISHOP OF SACRAMENTO

Most Reverend John Stowe, OFM Conv
BISHOP OF LEXINGTON

Most Reverend Michael Warfel
BISHOP OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

CONSULTANTS

Msgr. Ed Branch
ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA

Mr. Matthew Brower
MONTANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Fr. Ty Hullinger
ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA,
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

Ms. Danise Jones-Dorsey
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

Msgr. Joseph Kerrigan
HOLY NAME PARISH,
ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

Fr. J. Daniel Mindling, OFM Cap
MOUNT ST. MARY'S SEMINARY

Dr. Linda Plitt-Donaldson
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

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 CCHD has contributed over \$300 million to more than 8,000 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 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.

LETTER FROM



THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

The situation for immigrants in the United States has become increasingly complex and perilous in recent years. Dioceses around the country have shared heart-wrenching stories of parishioners caught in no-win situations as they balance their need to support their families here and abroad with their desire to keep their children safe. The Interfaith Education Fund (IEF), which receives grant support from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), has been on the front lines of local battles over changes in federal and state policies and practices toward immigrants.

Immigration reform is still a fragile concept. In the absence of a comprehensive national policy, it is defined and implemented differently from place to place. The seizure, detention, and deportation of noncriminal and longtime law-abiding immigrant parents of citizen children disrupts marriages, causes irreparable damage to families, and shatters the community-law enforcement relationship in poor neighborhoods. In addition, legal challenges to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy have fractured public trust and put the lives of many young adults on hold.

At CCHD, we are committed to seeing the dignity in all people and helping those on the margins to find their voice. Since 2016, we have worked with IEF and other partners in seven southwestern dioceses to develop Recognizing the Stranger, a program to welcome, serve, and integrate Latino Catholics into the life of the Church. The Recognizing the Stranger initiative—described in this issue of *Helping People Help Themselves*—is a parish-centered effort to identify, train, and mentor immigrant and nonimmigrant leaders. The goal is to create local capacity and alliances to help immigrants engage in public life and to offer a compassionate and constructive response to the fractured immigration system.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development has funded diocesan initiatives with similar goals, but we have also looked for

creative ways to expand strong local solutions into programs that address issues that know no diocesan boundaries.

Recognizing the Stranger is funded by the CCHD Strategic National Grant Program, an innovative approach introduced in 2012 that allows CCHD to address issues that are regional or national, or those that require intensive response from the entire Catholic community. The unique design invites wisdom-sharing among nontraditional collaborators to achieve a common goal. Strategic National Grants align with the current priorities of the USCCB, including defending life and the dignity of the human person, evangelizing, strengthening marriage, and promoting cultural diversity within the Church.

Recognizing the Stranger is particularly successful because it captures the connections between what happens at Mass on Sunday morning, how families live their lives throughout the week, and how parishioners interact with members of the broader community. I have been impressed that participants seek true change. In the process, parishes are strengthened, unified, and revitalized.

Thank you for your encouragement, prayers, and support for our important mission.



RALPH McCLOUD, Director
Catholic Campaign for
Human Development



**AN INITIATIVE OF THE
CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

**POVERTYUSA.ORG
POBREZAUSA.ORG**

*More than 46 million
Americans live in poverty.*

“
Building a voice for
immigrants and
their allies requires
developing leaders
locally through
parishes and
dioceses. It’s much
more effective than
national campaigns
and advocacy inside
the Beltway. —JOE RUBIO
”

and assist parishes that struggled with leadership and financial concerns.”

“Each community had different issues, but the training helped all the leaders respond to local parishioners,” he adds. “In Tucson, for example, parish leaders discovered serious concern about the growing substance abuse among their children. Our organizing activity supported statewide legislation to ban synthetic marijuana, known as ‘spice,’ and gave law enforcement a tool to work with the community to curtail its use.”

Recognizing the Stranger is funded by the CCHD Strategic National Grant Program, which was established as a discretionary response to timely opportunities relevant to the current priorities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The priorities include promoting human life and dignity, advancing justice, and addressing the root causes of poverty. The grants are intended to serve as a catalyst to help organizations do their work on a scale significantly larger than the efforts of those community-based organizations that commonly receive CCHD grant support. The national grants, which are renewable for up to five years, fund programs with time-specific goals.



Los Angeles trainees for Recognizing the Stranger strategy, summer 2017.

Recognizing the Stranger builds on the historic role of the parish to welcome new immigrants to the United States, help them establish themselves, and help them participate in their new country. Joe says Spanish-speaking Catholics are often less integrated than others into the life of the parish, especially within leadership. As a parish-based program, Recognizing the Stranger participants study key documents of the Church, including writings of the most recent popes, to examine the scriptural, canonical, and historical mission of parishes.

“The Church has always done well when it recognized its role as a pilgrim Church,” Joe says. “It’s vitally important for parishes to integrate immigrants and live out our understanding of the baptismal commitment to be priest, prophet, and shepherd.”

Joe goes on to ask, “What does parish membership mean? Why do we value parish life and what can we do together to build the parish?” He answers, “Recognizing the Stranger promotes the intentional and ongoing cultivation of trust and fostering of mutual accountability for immigrants and citizens to build the solidarity needed to stand and act together.”

“We have not always recognized that what happens outside the church walls affects the parish. Issues like addiction, community safety, relationships with law enforcement, access to good jobs, and the ability of families to have good

housing are important to the well-being of all parishioners,” Joe says. “This effort assists parishes to protect those who are the most vulnerable and to create the conditions for families to flourish, not just survive.”

In two years, the program has achieved some notable successes. Leadership training participants in Dallas held “house meeting” conversations throughout their neighborhoods and surfaced concerns about local law enforcement. Six months later, 1,500 parish leaders gathered with Bishop Edward J. Burns of Dallas and Bishop Gregory Kelly, his auxiliary, and negotiated an agreement with police departments to engender greater trust between law enforcement and immigrants. Now, immigrants without state identification documents in three north Texas communities are allowed to use parish identification cards during interactions with law enforcement. Not surprisingly, the move resulted in an explosive increase in parish registrations. The change was made even more dramatic because one of the affected towns had gained notoriety just nine years earlier for passing Texas’ first anti-immigrant law. Allowing immigrants to use parish identification cards was a major about-face for that town.

Another success of the program comes in Houston, in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, when IEF partners there won a moratorium on evictions and late-payment penalties imposed on renters displaced by the storm.



As another example, Joe describes a successful effort by Adela Patricio, a community leader in the Diocese of Brownsville. “During the leadership training, she realized that her concerns for the safety of her children were shared with many of the other participants. The youngsters had to walk along a dangerous road to meet the school bus. Parents had been unable to get help from the school authorities,” Joe says.

So Adela used her training to gather neighbors for a house meeting to share stories of their struggles with the bus stop placement. From there she formed a team of people from her parish and nearby apartment buildings, and they met with the school district transportation director. After the director visited the neighborhood, the bus route was changed. The school bus now meets children at the community center adjacent to the apartment.

Meanwhile, Luz and Arturo Robles, longtime parishioners in Tucson, were inspired by their leadership training to engage with their parish’s structure and work to integrate separate Spanish- and English-speaking parish councils into one group to conduct business together. They have drawn others into a core leadership team and met with local police to address the presence of drug dealers in a park behind the church.

Reflecting on the couple’s work, Joe says, “The training emboldened them to engage with the pastor, bishop, police, and city council on issues of concern to them, something they had not previously imagined was possible as a parish.”

Joe explains, “Through the house meetings, parishes learn what the pressures are and how people engage them. They can identify leaders and take action on issues. The newly trained leaders see themselves differently and feel more ownership for the parish.”

While addressing concerns of immigrants, Recognizing the Stranger has also helped revitalize struggling parishes. Joe says that the leadership training promotes a wider sense of ownership of the parish mission, puts people in a closer relationship with fellow parishioners, and has a positive effect on stewardship.

“We have been blessed with the support of bishops and pastors in each of the dioceses in the first phase of this program. Bishops often visit the training sessions, celebrate Mass, and sometimes teach a workshop,” he says. “They also convene their pastors to let them know Recognizing the Stranger is important for parishes. It’s great to hear them say this advocacy role is a direction the Church should be taking.”

CCHD renewed its National Strategic Grant for Recognizing the Stranger. Joe says the next phase envisions an expansion into 12 more dioceses and archdioceses. Seven hundred Spanish- and English-speaking leaders will be trained in the original dioceses and archdioceses, and 600 Spanish-speaking leaders will participate in the multiday training in the 12 new areas. The program will also invite leaders of other faith traditions to participate.



TOP TO BOTTOM

Houston trainees hold up certificates of completion for Recognizing the Stranger multi-day training.

Bishop Jaime Soto, Diocese of Sacramento, stands with Recognizing the Stranger trainees in Solano County after celebrating Mass with the gathering, August 2018.

Bishop Pepe shares with trainees about the importance of Catholic engagement in parish and public life.

Bishop Kelly says Recognizing the Stranger brings people together to share concerns and see they are not isolated: “Members of the community feel joy and empowerment that they can act together to influence things and not just be victimized by an immigration system that leaves them out.”

He recalled one of the forums he attended. “Participants had a sense they could speak without fear and share their concerns in a way that police and other officials were able to hear,” he says. “There are some very gifted leaders in the immigrant community.”

As Recognizing the Stranger moves into the next phase, Bishop Kelly looks forward to cross-cultural conversations that are currently lacking. “People are in their own cubbies, and don’t see the face of others, yet they make judgments,” he says. The expanded program “will bring people from different cultures face-to-face and they will speak to each other directly.”

Joe, the senior organizer, reflects, “Scaling the program to more locations will be challenging, but the appetite to learn and the level of engagement and conversation are very compelling. People are engaging deeply with Catholic teaching and they’re integrating it into their daily life.”

“Light bulbs are going off because there is so much more to the church and to parish life than they thought. They say, ‘This is what we’ve been waiting for and we are ready to embrace it.’” 