



Helping People Help Themselves



breaking the cycle of poverty for over 40 years

Catholic Campaign for Human Development
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THIRTY YEARS OF COURAGEOUS ORGANIZING

BY BETH GRIFFIN

According to an old adage, it takes about twenty years to be an overnight sensation. Perhaps the same could be said of the grassroots organizations funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). Small groups of committed people working hard to achieve a common goal slowly build capacity to effect institutional change. Emboldened by their local victories, they take on systemic issues on a larger scale.

Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN) is a prime example. For more than 30 years, the statewide network of six affiliates in ten cities has helped low-income leaders organize their neighborhoods, hold elected officials accountable, and identify solutions to the root causes of poverty.

MCAN began in 1985 through conversations among religious leaders about social justice and neighborhood issues. Founding Director



MCAN engages younger generations in the importance of community organizing and voting. These four children of leaders in Brockton helped canvass for the 2014 Earned Sick Time Ballot Initiative in Massachusetts.

Low Finfer met with existing faith-based organizations, and the groups worked together to train leaders in community organizing.

And so, leaders from Portuguese, Cape Verdean, Haitian, and Hispanic immigrant communities worked together to find just solutions to the common challenges they shared. By meeting with and supporting one another, they addressed local issues like housing foreclosure, school improvement, and youth violence.

With these local victories, MCAN gained momentum enabling them to tackle larger more systemic issues. Consequently, in 2014, MCAN's leaders identified economic justice as a priority. They partnered with the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition on an ambitious quest to win higher wages and sick leave for low-income workers.

Just as in the early days, these initiatives gained traction by working in conjunction with other members and coalitions. MCAN volunteers fanned out across their communities to collect signatures on a petition to ask the state legislature to raise the minimum wage. The measure required 69,000



Members of the Essex County Community Organization, an MCAN affiliate in the North Shore of MA, join together at Zion Baptist Church in Lynn at a meeting with the Lynn Police Department Chief Coppinger, and participate in a liturgy of justice to ground their work in prayer.

signatures, but MCAN and Raise Up Massachusetts collected more than 360,000. The legislators responded by passing a law increasing the hourly minimum wage from \$8 to \$11.

While they were advocating for the wage hike, MCAN volunteers also gathered signatures for a statewide ballot initiative to require employers to provide earned sick leave. MCAN trained more than 200 people, built 32 congregation- or community-led voter teams, knocked on more than 30,000 doors and conducted 50 events at member congregations. The measure landed on the ballot and was passed by voters in 2015 with 59% voter support.

MCAN estimates these two efforts will impact over one million low-income people.

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From the Director Dear Friends,

“They are passionate in everything they do. They are passionate in their concern for the underdog. They are passionate about leveling the playing field. They are passionate about helping people who

have no voice to find a voice.”

When I heard this description of the people of the Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN), it took on the cadence of a litany. It was a litany of what it takes to grow a handful of local community groups into a successful, well-respected statewide organization that has earned its place at the table. MCAN has received Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) grants from both local and the national offices throughout their existence to help translate the passion of its organizers and members into effective, lasting progress for low-income people throughout Massachusetts.

As you’ll read in this issue, MCAN has strong roots in Catholic parishes and has been a resonant voice for immigrants and low-wage workers. Each of the member organizations has an impressive decades-long record of accomplishment with local grassroots issues. But when they came together, they created energy, momentum, and passion. With months of persistent, patient door-to-door visits and community meetings, MCAN and the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition mobilized support in the state legislature and among voters for two measures that affect more than one million low-income people: an increase in the minimum wage and employer-provided earned sick time.

In recognition of their enthusiasm and unflagging work in support of and in solidarity with oppressed people, MCAN was presented the Sr. Margaret Cafferty Development of People Award. I assure you we were delighted to recognize a longtime funded group that is passionate about holding elected officials accountable and creating solutions to the underlying causes of poverty.

MCAN is not resting on its laurels. It continues its work to reform the justice system and is already gearing up to support a 2018 constitutional initiative that will fund education and transportation with a new tax on people who make more than \$1 million a year.

“They are passionate about everything they do.” What a terrific accolade!

My thoughts are often of the myriad people who step out of their natural comfort zones to work for justice. I have been blessed to meet many people who work for CCHD-funded organizations and consistently put their families and others before themselves as they strive to help the entire community move beyond poverty. And you are integral to their successes. Thank you for helping us to offer training, support, and encouragement to groups like MCAN. I am grateful.

Wishing you every blessing.

Sincerely,

Ralph McCloud
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

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It is through training and consulting for strong local organizing that MCAN helped drive this two-pronged effort to advocate for higher wages and paid sick leave. And these successes were possible because of the ethnically diverse leadership among the faith leaders that comprise MCAN. It's hardly an overnight success but this model of beginning with local challenges and expanding to more systemic issues is familiar to CCHD-funded groups.

Today, MCAN includes six affiliate organizations and more than 30 Catholic parishes. MCAN also works closely with the Massachusetts Catholic Conferences as well as (arch)dioceses throughout the state.

Angela Pape, MCAN's director of development, says, "MCAN has a big base of grassroots leaders from different places. These leaders carried petitions into their local cultural hubs."

She adds that local boards identify issues to address, and other affiliates

decide whether to participate. "We try to balance local issues with the capacity to do bolder statewide campaigns," she says.

Today, MCAN is supporting the Fair Share Tax Amendment to place before voters in 2018. MCAN says the amendment will raise \$1.5 billion for education and transportation through an increased tax on incomes over \$1 million. Angela says the measure will address the challenge of income inequality and bridge the gap between education needs and state and local budgets.

The process begins with collecting signatures. If enough signatures are collected, the issue can be brought to the constitutional convention that will be convened in 2018.

MCAN tries to appeal to the appropriate political decision-makers to improve conditions for its members' families, Angela says. "I remember watching one of our leaders realize the most powerful person for their community was not the mayor but the statewide speaker of the house and senate president."

Criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, and job training

are also among MCAN's justice interests. Its Jobs, Not Jails initiative seeks to raise awareness about racial and cultural bias in law enforcement and enact local and statewide reforms on mandatory minimum sentencing. It also promotes reducing the \$500 driver's license reinstatement fee after a drug-related incarceration.

"Catholic priests and parishioners are the core base in the places we are, and in most of our cities, the active leaders are from Catholic parishes. Our work is so much more robust because of our deep partnership with the Catholic Church," Angela says.

"Pope Francis has provided real inspiration for Catholics and non-Catholics by being really prophetic. In parish study groups and elsewhere, we've taken time to look at his writings, teachings, and challenges around immigration, capitalism, and poverty," she says.

MCAN affiliates mirrored the Holy Father's September 25 visit to a Philadelphia prison with a solidarity event outside a Massachusetts prison. "For us, Pope Francis is talking about big injustices in our world and challenging us to organize in a bold way. He gives us courage and support," Angela concludes.



Members of Essex County Community Organization, an affiliate of MCAN in the North Shore of MA, share stories of racial prejudice and discuss how to build their beloved community in Massachusetts.



MCAN members gather with coalition partners at Raise Up Massachusetts outside the Massachusetts State House to turn in a record-high number of petition signatures to raise the minimum wage.

Massachusetts Communities Action Network

The Sr. Margaret Cafferty Development of People Award is presented annually to a group whose work demonstrates an outstanding witness to gospel values and action on behalf of justice. Sr. Margaret Cafferty was an educator, community organizer, and social justice leader who pioneered new models of building community and addressing poverty.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) was honored this year to present this award to the Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN).

“MCAN’s organizing and leadership development work on social justice issues in Massachusetts over the past thirty years exemplifies the values that Sr. Margaret Cafferty stood for,” Ralph McCloud, CCHD director, stated. “We are pleased to recognize their exemplary work with this award.”



MCAN staff together in their offices in Boston, MA. Here they celebrate after the sick time ballot initiative passed in the legislature.

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, CCHD 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.



An initiative of the
Catholic Campaign for
Human Development

Today, 47 million people in America are living below the poverty line.

That’s more than ever before—and far more than the population of our largest state. Join us and help to break the cycle of poverty.



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