

BOLD FAITH LEADS TO BOLD JUSTICE FOR FLORIDIANS

BY BETH GRIFFIN

In five short years, clergy from 20 congregations in southeast Florida have come together to engage thousands of low- to moderate-income parishioners in successfully changing their communities for the better. They are Broward Organized Leaders Doing Justice, or BOLD Justice, and they are on a roll.

BOLD Justice is organized around the Direct Action and Research Training (DART) model, which brings together religious congregations to work on projects of common interest. The agenda is developed in a series of assemblies and listening sessions throughout the community.

With grant support from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), BOLD Justice has identified and surmounted local resistance to affordable rental housing and bridged administrative gaps that hampered access to unemployment funds.

BOLD Justice lead organizer Andy Lee says the group's success comes from the hard work and involvement of religious leaders, the relationships they build within and among congregations, and the trust they place in God. "The leaders are heavily involved," Andy says. "They work on things that have a direct bearing on their lives and the lives of their friends and co-workers. These are not symbolic gestures."

He describes Broward County as "a big salad bowl of different cultures," where extremes of wealth and poverty are easy to find. Broward includes Ft.



Photo courtesy of BOLD Justice

PASTOR KEITH SPENCER (FRONT) OF TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH INSTALLS THE FIRST EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR BOLD JUSTICE. THE INTERFAITH COMMITTEE INCLUDES REPRESENTATIVES FROM METHODIST, LUTHERAN, EPISCOPAL, AND CATHOLIC CHURCHES.

Lauderdale, Florida's second-largest city, where housing is a unifying problem, Andy says. The area ranks at or near the top of national lists of foreclosures and high housing costs. With large numbers of households paying half their monthly income for rent or mortgage, Andy says many people are only one paycheck away from homelessness.

When they first met in 2007, BOLD Justice's founding congregations voted to concentrate on affordable housing. Andy explains that Broward County had an ambitious plan on the books to end homelessness by creating 50,000 affordable rental units within 10 years. Sadly, the plan was unfunded, so the units were not built.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

The year 2012 was met with joy, jubilation, and resolutions. Many of us resolved to do better: vowing to take better care of ourselves, to exercise more, and to eat less, or perhaps pledging to be more attentive to issues and concerns we may have ignored in the past. Despite our best and most valiant efforts, we may still fall short of the goals we set for ourselves.

Most of us have alternatives, options, or choices, but for 46.2 million Americans, choices to improve their lives are limited. For these families, their choices are trapped in a horrid poverty that jeopardizes their existence and threatens their dignity. Despite what may appear to be overwhelming circumstances, generous supporters like you come to the aid of families throughout the country. Whether urban, suburban, or rural, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), with your help, has soothed the pain of poverty throughout the country. Your help has funded anti-poverty efforts like the one in Broward, Florida, featured in this newsletter. It is one of over 200 CCHD-supported efforts toward empowering people and sustaining families.

The best of efforts and intentions still leave us with much work to do. It is not too late to add a new resolution to your list, a declaration to begin a renewed concern for those in poverty. We need a new response to an old call: to walk among and with those who suffer from desperate poverty. We can commit to add to our prayers those who struggle for their daily existence, those who cannot see bright futures for their children and lie awake at night fearful of their own futures.

For these sisters and brothers, our voices must join their voices; their hopes must become our hopes; and their prayers must become our prayers.



Ralph McCloud
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development



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break the cycle of poverty

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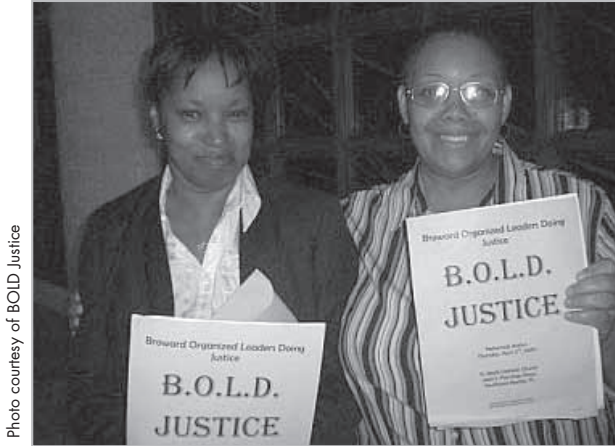


Photo courtesy of BOLD Justice

MEMBERS OF BOLD JUSTICE GATHER FOR A DAY OF COMMUNITY ACTION.

Persistent efforts by BOLD Justice kept the issue alive. County administrators agreed to make rental housing a priority. Over three years, BOLD Justice promoted a variety of strategies, including incentives and outright funding to developers. By the end of January 2012, over 2,000 new rental units were approved, funded, and under construction. Of those, 1,142 units were open to tenants.

In August 2010, in recognition of the upheaval created by the mortgage crisis, BOLD Justice prompted the county to invite a national non-profit group to help homeowners renegotiate their mortgages. Andy says 17,000 people attended the event, and 3,544 were able to get their mortgages adjusted on the spot.

Andy says meetings with elected officials may be tense, but they are always respectful. Officials appreciate that BOLD Justice mobilizes thousands of people to articulate their concerns, he says. "We hold the system accountable for doing what's right and just."

He describes a situation where unemployment benefits were routinely terminated for people who had mistakes on their online or phone applications. BOLD Justice urged that the review process be modified. Broward County officials responded by increasing the number of employees dedicated to resolving mistakes.

BOLD Justice will turn its sights to improving elementary reading programs in 2012, Andy says. Many schools in the area have fewer than half of their students reading at grade level. There is a correlation

among low reading level, high school drop-out rates, and future poverty, he says. "All these things are connected. Addressing the reading problem is the first step in addressing the root causes and giving a generation of kids a better chance."

BOLD Justice is an interfaith, interracial group whose membership consists of religious congregations. Five of the 20 member groups are Catholic parishes. Fr. Roger Holoubek, pastor of St. Maurice Church in Dania Beach, says participation with other Christian groups through BOLD Justice helps his parishioners make a meaningful contribution to righting injustice. "If it was just me and my parishioners, we wouldn't accomplish squat. Through BOLD Justice, we unite in working on these issues and help low-income families," he says.

CCHD has funded BOLD Justice from its beginning. Bonita Anderson, CCHD grants specialist, says, "BOLD Justice is one of the best church-based groups in the state of Florida. Empowerment of low-income folks is their priority, and they are very passionate. Clergy leaders are invested, active participants."


"Without exaggeration, none of the things we've accomplished would have been done without CCHD," Andy says. "CCHD grants allowed us to maintain and expand staff and train 1,500-2,000 people. Our expenses are wrapped up in training leaders to communicate biblical values of justice, research issues, develop local solutions and interact with decision-makers." 



Photo courtesy of BOLD Justice

BOLD JUSTICE MEMBERS FROM ST. STEPHEN CATHOLIC CHURCH GATHER TO DISCUSS AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN BROWARD COUNTY.



Spotlight on Renewal

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS OF CCHD

Continuing the mandate of the Review and Renewal, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is seeking ways to tell the good news of what it does every day as an arm of the Catholic Church in all of our dioceses with better, pro-active communications strategies, including the use of new media.

CCHD recently restructured and reintroduced its Poverty USA campaign to bring attention to the seriousness of domestic poverty. In addition to providing poverty awareness information on the [CCHD website](#), CCHD launched a new [Poverty Awareness Facebook page](#) in December 2011 and released an engaging [animated simulation](#) that gives viewers a sense of how difficult it is live on the budget defined by the official poverty line. A completely revised and dynamic Poverty USA website is also under construction, which will be available this spring.

These new resources inform, motivate, and engage Catholic clergy and laity in the good work of CCHD. They are robust, contemporary tools for educators, advocates, CCHD-funded groups, poor and low-income people, policy analysts, the press, Catholics in the pews, and the general public. John Carr, director of the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, says that the renewed Poverty USA initiatives "will underscore our commitment to protecting human life and dignity, reveal the human consequences of poverty, and communicate the moral imperative as Catholics to care for the poor and vulnerable." Carr summarizes the message of Poverty USA: "Poverty isn't right, and we can do better."



An initiative of the
Catholic Campaign for
Human Development

Today, 46.2 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.

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.