



Helping People Help Themselves



breaking the cycle of poverty for over 40 years

Catholic Campaign for Human Development
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THUNDER VALLEY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Sturdy, attractive, affordable housing is starting to rise on a 34-acre parcel at the geographic center of the huge Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The energy-efficient homes near the second largest intersection in the 3,469-square mile expanse are the solid, tangible result of years of organizing by Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC).

Thunder Valley CDC was established by Oglala Lakota people to build sustainable communities and receives grant funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). Its overall mission is to empower low-income Lakota youth and families to improve the health, culture, and environment of their communities through affordable housing, youth leadership, social enterprise, Lakota language, food sovereignty, workforce development, and to create systemic change through partnerships with a variety of organizations and stakeholders in the region.

“When people think of community organizing, they may picture marches and signs and knocking on doors. Those are all important tactics at key times, but organizing must be connected to solid, tangible results and systemic change,” says Liz Welch, director of advancement at Thunder Valley CDC.

“You can only do planning for so long. To demonstrate progress, you need

movement and a connection to a tangible result,” she explains.

The Pine Ridge Reservation is a hilly, wide-open, strikingly beautiful place in the poorest county in the United States. Unemployment on the reservation is 70-80 percent, and many people live in overcrowded substandard housing.

“We got into housing because there’s such a critical shortage, but more importantly because it’s a tool to create larger systemic change,” Liz says.

The impetus for Thunder Valley CDC grew from a rekindled interest in Lakota culture among young people on the reservation. There was a focus on prayer and connection to one another. “They were young people, young parents who were trying to establish a place for their kids to grow up and flourish here,” Liz says. “There’s lack of job opportunity and businesses and infrastructure. Faced with systemic injustices, they wanted to move beyond everyday programming to create systemic change.”

More than half of the people who work at the reservation’s health, education, and social service jobs do not live there, largely because there is not enough housing. “They come here to work every day but don’t spend money here. We want to create economic development by bringing people and earners back into the community,” she says.

Thunder Valley CDC was established in 2007. After several years of community engagement to develop priorities

and a master plan, the group identified housing for low-income and working people as the starting point. It used federal funds to purchase 34 acres of land in a purposefully visible location. “People drive past every day and can see what we’re doing,” Liz says.

When fully realized, Thunder Valley CDC’s Regenerative Community Development property will include single-family homes, multi-family townhouses, apartments, playgrounds, a skate park, a community house, and retail and



Through Thunder Valley CDC, Lakota children participate in sports and wellness activities that are run by older Lakota youth in the Youth Leadership Development Program.

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From the Director

Dear Friends,

Some of the most intriguing and successful CCHD-funded groups are those that surmount the biggest obstacles. The Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC) in

Porcupine, South Dakota, is one of them.

The group works on the remote Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, a huge expanse that takes two hours to cross in a car. It's no secret that Native Americans have been marginalized and mistreated in the history of our country. Government, church, and private efforts to improve their living conditions and prospects for the future have enjoyed mixed success. To be fair, there have been missteps on all sides, but one of the recurring stumbling blocks has been the attempt by outsiders to determine what the native people need and want.

We were cautiously optimistic when we heard about Thunder Valley CDC, a relatively new group of young people committed to building sustainable communities in the very tough economy of the reservation. Jobs are scarce. Housing is substandard. Infrastructure barely exists. The reservation is in the poorest county in the country. But the people have hope and determination. The Thunder Valley CDC organizers began by talking to their neighbors and ASKING what they needed to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families. Housing and jobs were at the top of the list. They were not asking for charity but the opportunity to create systemic change and achieve self-sufficiency.

Thunder Valley CDC identified land near an important crossroad on the reservation. They purchased it, and with CCHD's help, they are implementing an ambitious master plan that includes infrastructure, home ownership, jobs, education, training, and mentorship.

Thunder Valley CDC takes CCHD's mission to heart: the group is led by the people it serves and the people who participate have a stake in the outcome. By listening carefully and planning meticulously, Thunder Valley CDC is creating tangible, sustainable change in the community. It has become a force for justice in an area that longs for it. CCHD is honored to support the effort.

Congratulations to Norbertine Fr. Graham Golden, winner of the 2016 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award. Fr. Golden's work with grassroots, parish-based anti-poverty initiatives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe reflects his commitment to the most vulnerable people in the rural communities he serves. We are proud that Fr. Golden was a CCHD intern in 2010-2011 in Santa Fe.

As we journey through the blessed season of Lent, please be assured of my appreciation and gratitude for the sacrifices you make to support our work.

Sincerely,

Ralph McCloud
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

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<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/economic-justice-economy/catholic-framework-for-economic-life.cfm>

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office space. A youth shelter will provide short-term safe housing. There will also be a school and space for artists to live and work.

Liz recalls the 2015 ground-breaking for the Regenerative Community Development as a joyful moment that did not look like the traditional hard-hat, gold-shovel photo opportunity. “Four hundred people came together and stood in a line with shovels!”

Liz says they chose Regenerative Community Development as a name because it reflects the group’s belief that, “we’re again creating the vibrant and healthy community that once existed.”

In just the second year of construction, there are already two office buildings, a small warehouse, and an education center in place; road and sewer infrastructure is underway; and single-family homes are rising out of the dirt.

Thunder Valley CDC implements a Workforce Development Program that includes training in sustainable construction methods. People age 18-26 years old join a small 10-month learning cohort where they create individualized success plans that may include education goals, addiction treatment, and nutritional changes. They learn construction skills, gain confidence, and create affordable housing for their neighbors.



These young adults were part of the Workforce Development Through Sustainable Construction Program where they learned construction skills, advanced their education, and developed individual success plans.

“Through community development and sustainable affordable housing, we’ve been able to create an infrastructure that didn’t exist here,” Liz says. “We’re bringing in water, sewer, roads, and electricity in a way that’s planned and affordable and we’re seeing banks, philanthropy, and the federal government invest in Pine Ridge in a way they haven’t before.”

CCHD grants help Thunder Valley CDC sustain and increase its capacity to promote community-driven solutions. The organization is growing rapidly, and CCHD funds help the group control and track the pace of growth, measure its impact, and stay fully engaged with the people it serves.

“It’s exciting to be part of a movement that looks past charity and tries to solve poverty. This is a community that’s ready to create change for itself,” she reflects.

Deacon Marlon Leneagh is the CCHD director for the Diocese of Rapid City. He says Thunder Valley CDC is creating “a regenerative, self-sustaining, and self-sufficient community on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation that will be a model for other places to follow. It strengthens the native people to feel ownership of their homes.”

“Thunder Valley CDC is an initiative by and for the people on the reservation. We need more of this. They’ve turned the tables around by going out into the community and asking people what they need.



Thunder Valley CDC staff raises a wall for the Sustainable Agriculture Education Center where youth and families will be able to learn about healthy local foods.

Others have come and said, ‘Here’s what we’re going to do for you,’ he says.

“When I visit, I see a double shot of pride; there’s pride instilled by home ownership and the pride that comes from helping build their own home and that of their neighbor,” Deacon Leneagh concludes.

With CCHD support, Thunder Valley CDC creates systemic change by giving the people most affected by the systems the ability to alter their futures and improve the quality of their lives. 



Affordable, energy efficient housing at the Regenerative Community Development will provide more opportunities for homeownership on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

2016 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award Recipient

Fr. Graham Golden, O. Praem., was named the 2016 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award winner in November 2016. This award recognizes a young adult for his or her work to combat poverty and injustice in his or her community.

Fr. Golden has been committed to advocating for and working with the poor throughout his priestly formation and during his ministry as a Norbertine priest. Fr. Golden is a member of the Norbertine Community of Santa Maria de la Vid Abbey in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where there is a large immigrant population.

As coordinator of program development at The Catholic Foundation at the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, he is working to facilitate parish engagement through community organizing and policy advocacy while engaging already existing movements and traditions in the community.

In addition to this work, Fr. Golden also gives talks at local high schools, gives retreats to young adults, acts as a consultant for various organizations, and travels for vocations recruitment as director of the Office of Christian Discipleship and Religious Vocation for his community.

Prior to this work in Santa Fe, Rev. Golden spent time in Chicago working on a master of divinity and

a master of arts in social services. While in Chicago, he volunteered as a representative for CCHD, preaching on collection weekends, giving radio interviews, and helping implement training workshops. He also previously served as a CCHD intern for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

Fr. Golden has had a continued commitment to be a voice for those who are marginalized. His solidarity with this community speaks to his dedication to uplifting human dignity and his concern for the most vulnerable among us.

CCHD was honored to present this award to Fr. Golden.



Fr. Graham Golden, O. Praem., with Bishop Jaime Soto, then chairman of the Subcommittee on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, at the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award reception.

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.



An initiative of the
Catholic Campaign for
Human Development

Today, 43.1 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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