



Helping People Help Themselves



breaking the cycle of poverty for over 40 years

Catholic Campaign for Human Development
2017 | Issue Two

OUR BORDER FAMILY: HOPE AT THE BORDER

BY BETH GRIFFIN

“**T**he very nature of our border area is it’s a family. It’s a large community that has had a line drawn through it.”

That’s how Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas, describes the relationship among the people of three adjacent dioceses in the United States and Mexico along the Rio Grande River.

“Our border provides a real counterpoint to the narrative today that sees borders as forbidding places of confrontation, where the ‘us’ people fend off the ‘them’ people, where the people at home fight off the ‘aliens.’ That has no resonance here,” he says.

At the intersection of Catholic social teaching and humanitarian practice, the Hope Border Institute presses for justice at a time when immigration issues dominate news and conversation in both the United States and Mexico. The Hope Border Institute is based in the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, and serves people there and in the Dioceses of Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. It receives funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) through the Strategic National Grant Program.

“Hope Border Institute does good theology in a practical way,” Bishop Seitz says. “I love the idea it seeks to involve all three dioceses that are part of the border region. The Church needs to reflect the truth that she is not divided by borders that humans create.”



During “Hugs Not Walls,” families who live separated by the United States–Mexico border were able to see and embrace each other for a few precious minutes.

The Hope Border Institute (HBI) is an independent grassroots organization that began in 2015 as an initiative of several CCHD-funded groups and local clergy to help organize people in the border communities. It builds on Catholic social teaching and uses an *encuentro* (encounter) model to build relationships, develop consensus, and pursue institutional change in favor of justice.

“Historically, the region has operated under policies imposed on it by people in far-away capitals that had little to do with the reality on the ground or the needs of the people here,” says Dylan Corbett, executive director of

HBI. “Executive orders and the construction of a wall won’t do what they promise, because they don’t address the root causes or the real needs of the people here. They will only militarize the border and further criminalize the migrant.”

“We want to address the systemic poverty and injustice in the border communities through collaboration with existing organizations. This region has a distinct positive cultural identity that can provide binational unity and shape the future of the people who live here,” Dylan says.

The Hope Border Institute hit the ground running with a program it

(continued on p. 3)





From the Director

Dear Friends,

Two important things I have learned during my time with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) are 1) that local people know how to solve local problems and 2) that

the most effective solutions are those decided on and implemented together as a community. In the language of Catholic social teaching, we describe these principles as subsidiarity and collaboration.

People who are enmeshed in a situation often understand its gritty realities in a way that is hidden from those who look on from the outside and offer sage advice. The group featured in this month's newsletter is a great example. The Hope Border Institute is an exciting new grassroots group that is applying Catholic social teaching to poverty, injustice, unjust wages, and security struggles along the Rio Grande River. As Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso points out in the featured story, the border that divides Ciudad Juarez in Mexico from El Paso, Texas, and Las Cruces, New Mexico, is a man-made line that runs through a single community: El Paso–Juárez–Las Cruces. The reality of the people who call this community “home” is starkly different from what is imagined by people promoting and making policies in other parts of the two countries.

The Hope Border Institute (HBI) is unique because it works with Catholic and other faith and civic partners in three dioceses in two countries. As the director, Dylan Corbett, says, “HBI intentionally works across borders of geography, race, and ethnicity, empowering leaders across both the faith community and civil society to witness the power of unity in diversity.” As Pope Francis said in his 2015 message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, “The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture

of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place or disposable.”

CCHD was impressed with HBI's proposal to approach the border situation with a bold model built on Catholic social teaching. We offered Strategic National Grant Program funding, which is reserved for timely opportunities to promote human life and dignity, advance justice, and address the root causes of poverty on a statewide, regional, or national scale.

Already, HBI has broken new grounds of understanding with thoughtful, well-researched, compassionate, and determined actions that benefit individuals and families living at what Pope Francis calls “the periphery.” CCHD and HBI are fortunate to have as partners in this initiative the bishops, clergy, religious, and lay people from three dioceses. They share our commitment to put faith into action on behalf of justice and to train a new generation of young leaders to promote and defend the dignity of our brothers and sisters on the borderlands.

Repeated thanks for your prayers and support.

Sincerely,

Ralph McCloud
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE ON THE CATHOLIC
FRAMEWORK FOR ECONOMIC LIFE:

[http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/
human-life-and-dignity/economic-justice-economy/
catholic-framework-for-economic-life.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/economic-justice-economy/catholic-framework-for-economic-life.cfm)

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

Most Reverend David Talley, Chairman, Bishop of
Alexandria

Most Reverend Donald Hanchon, Bishop of Detroit

Most Reverend David O'Connell, Bishop of Los Angeles

Most Reverend Jaime Soto, Bishop of Sacramento

Most Reverend Michael Warfel, Bishop of Great Falls–
Billings

Most Reverend Jorge Rodriguez, Bishop of Denver

Most Reverend John Stowe, OFM Conv., Bishop of
Lexington

Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas, Bishop of Tucson

Most Reverend Robert F. Hennessey, Bishop of Boston

CONSULTANTS

Fr. J. Daniel Mindling

Matthew Brower, Executive Director, Montana Catholic
Conference

Msgr. Joseph Kerrigan

Fr. Ty Hullinger

Fr. Ed Branch

Linda Plitt-Donaldson

Danise Jones-Dorsey

(continued from p. 1)

developed called *Encuentro Fronterizo*. Through a series of public dialogues, HBI brought together CCHD-funded groups, activists, and grassroots organizations, low-wage workers and migrants, members of the media, young people, academics, church workers, and clergy to share perspectives, explore Catholic social teaching, and see through the eyes of others living in the border communities.

The *encuentros* inspired collaboration with other groups on actions to call attention to the unique issues of the communities. HBI worked with the CCHD-funded Border Network for Human Rights on “Hugs Not Walls,” a rare opportunity for family members separated by immigration policy to share a hug in the middle of the Rio Grande River.

“People from almost 400 families who had not seen one another in years waded into the water from the Juarez and El Paso sides of the river and embraced for a few minutes,” Dylan describes.

When Pope Francis visited Ciudad Juarez in February 2016, HBI helped people on both sides prepare to welcome the pontiff. It organized more than 500 adult and child migrants on the El Paso side of the river to greet the pope as he

approached the border to meet, memorialize, and pray for migrants.

HBI built up to the event by hosting an interdisciplinary symposium on migration to examine the significance of the papal visit, Catholic social teaching, the impact of migration on the border communities, and effective local advocacy, service, and organizing.

After the visit, HBI provided an immersion experience to enable officials from national Catholic organizations to interact with HBI’s local partner organizations as well as parishioners and US consulate staff in Juarez.

The organization uses a “collective impact” model to bring together different groups, Dylan says. “We want to be bridge-builders to pursue our collective goals,” he explains. “HBI intentionally works across borders of geography, race, and ethnicity, empowering leaders across both the faith community and civil society to witness the power of unity in diversity.”

HBI has a focus on leadership development that responds to local needs and culture. HBI’s Border Leaders



Family members separated by the United States–Mexico border share a few minutes in the middle of the Rio Grande River to meet and hug one another.

Academy drew a diverse and enthusiastic group of young participants to its first training weekend.

Marylu Vazquez, a recent college graduate now home in El Paso, attended the program to build on her substantial collegiate involvement in social justice. Although she was born in Juarez, grew up in El Paso, and was steeped in the traditions of her homeland, Marylu felt disconnected from the experiences of asylum-seekers. “When Mexican asylees told their stories at the Leaders Academy, it was a real eye-opener. They described a type of violence and oppression I had never experienced and which I associated with Central America, not Mexico. They challenged my perception of struggle and the basic idea of how I live my faith,” Marylu says.

She is eager to work with the network of young Catholics assembled by HBI. “HBI has concrete tools . . . to carry out successful awareness and advocacy campaigns. It’s something no one ever taught me before, and it’s a new skill set I can bring to social justice work.”

Andres Lopez coordinates a week-long Border Immersion Program to help Catholic groups from different parts of the United States focus on the realities of immigration. He met representatives from HBI during its first *encuentro* and was attracted to the organization’s foundation in Catholic social teaching. He went on to volunteer at a Mass at the border as well as at a Posada procession through El Paso and at the Leaders



Bishop Seitz of El Paso celebrates Mass on the United States–Mexico border.

Academy, all of which “helped me realize we are all here together and have to try to make this world a better place,” he says.

Paulina Rodriguez, another Leaders Academy participant, is an Americorps/Vista volunteer in the Diocese of Las Cruces and also a volunteer with HBI. She was born in Juarez but has lived most of her life in Oregon. After years in the Pacific Northwest, Paulina says her work in the border communities reaffirmed her identity and underscored her personal mission to use her skills and education to empower the marginalized communities of the region. She is organizing events in Las Cruces to call attention to the issues detailed in “Discretion to Deny,” a report by HBI and one of its local partners. The document examines family separation, prolonged detention, and deterrence of asylum-seekers by immigration authorities in the border communities.

Nellie Alvarado is living the nightmare of a denied request for asylum. The El Paso native and high school teacher married her husband, Oscar, in Juarez in June 2015. Several days later, he was shot in the hip, and they approached the border seeking medical treatment and asylum for him. Oscar is a Mexican citizen who was deported from the

United States in 2007. His application for asylum was denied. During his appeal, he was held in detention, where Nellie says he was attacked by a guard and was punished with isolation for defending himself. He has since been moved to a municipal jail in El Paso where conditions are somewhat better and he gained back half of the 45 pounds he lost in the detention center.

“We came to the border seeking help and were hopeful that the gunshot wound would start the process for Oscar to get residency. Now he’s labeled as an extremely violent person because he defended himself and it has turned into a horrible legal issue,” Nellie says. Oscar’s best hope is to plead guilty, get sentenced to time served, and be deported, she says. If that happens, they will likely live with their blended family in Mexico, and Nellie will commute to work in El Paso.

HBI has been supportive and Nellie appreciates the organization’s work to bring about change. “I’ve come to realize people have no clue what goes on at the detention camps. We’re all working to improve conditions for the immigrants in there.”

The CCHD Strategic National Grant Program is a discretionary response to timely opportunities relevant to the priorities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and is intended to serve as a catalyst for organizations to do their work on a significantly larger scale than the community-based organizations that commonly receive CCHD grant support.

Bishop Seitz says, “CCHD came in with both feet here and took a chance on HBI. The timing could not have been better. The role of the Church and its teaching is such an important counterpoint to the uninformed reaction people have had to these border questions.”



Maria de Jesus Alvarado Espinoza gives her testimony to those attending the Interfaith Gathering: El Paso’s Community Witness to Dignity & Solidarity.

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.



www.facebook.com/povertyusa | www.twitter.com/endpovertyusa

www.povertyusa.org
www.pobrezausa.org