



SFA staff bring together farmers and University of Minnesota staff, giving them the opportunity to learn from each other.

From Words to Action: CCHD-Funded Groups Bring *Laudato Si'* to Life

BY BETH GRIFFIN

In his 2015 environmental encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, Pope Francis says that all creation is part of a universal family, and care for the natural world is an integral part of Church teaching on social justice. The pope praises local groups that enrich society by promoting the common good and defending the environment.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) has long championed environmental causes and has invested more than \$6.6 million in 80 grassroots organizations that promote environmental justice in 28 states and 42 dioceses. Since the publication of *Laudato Si'*, CCHD has granted more than \$4.3 million to 39 groups led by low-income people working to address environmental issues in their local communities. These are stories of three of those CCHD-funded groups.

Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota

For more than 30 years, the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) has partnered with family farmers, educators, food advocates, agriculture professionals, and small business owners to protect food-producing resources for future generations.

Executive director Theresa Keaveny says these resources are air, land, water, and people. "Our group is dedicated to the three-legged stool of sustainable agriculture: environmental stewardship, economic resilience, and strong diverse communities," she adds.

Theresa says, "Our North Star, or guiding principle, is 'Agriculture done well heals.'"

SFA promotes regenerative agriculture, which Theresa describes as a constellation of practices that restore nutrients to the soil, protect the water, and ensure safe food production. Decades of large-scale monoculture farming of corn and soybeans caused erosion and stripped nutrients from the soil. Today, regenerative agriculture is focusing on minimizing the soil disturbance caused by tilling, deepening root systems to build soil organically, and encouraging diverse species in the soil to attract birds and natural pollinators, she says.



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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 \$400 million to nearly 12,000 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 their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so 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:

I was delighted when Pope Francis released his environmental encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')* in 2015. His eloquent insistence that we ought to work together to protect our planet reconfirmed the urgency of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development's grants to address the negative impacts of environmental change.

At a recent listening session organized by CCHD grantee Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART), a leader of a member organization in Richmond, Virginia, described a happy childhood living in an apartment complex where children played outdoors on lawns and spacious open areas marked with willow trees. However, the tidy duplex development sat by the city dump. Trucks rolled through on dumping days and deposited trash that left a stench for several days. The speaker developed a hacking cough of unknown origin, later determined to be allergies related to the trash and its odors.

The story is a familiar one. Many low-income families live in housing and neighborhoods where the air or water makes them sick. Hurricanes, floods, and extreme temperatures have a disproportionate effect on marginalized people. This is an injustice that CCHD can address.

CCHD has long championed environmental causes as part of our commitment to marginalized people. Before *Laudato Si'*, we partnered with the Environmental Justice Program of the USCCB to promote CCHD-funded projects related to environmental justice, to advance key policy initiatives, and to educate Catholics and other partners about the importance of Catholic social teaching on the environment. *Laudato Si'* gave us an additional boost and a new opportunity.

We are funding local groups led by low-income people to address concerns that include air and water pollution, extractive industries, disaster relief, sustainable agriculture, and access to healthy foods, among others. In this issue of *Helping People Help Themselves*, we profile three groups that have listened carefully to their members'

concerns about environmental issues and are taking concrete steps to address them. Each takes a different approach and has a slightly different mission, but all see their work as contributing to both the present and the future.

Thank you for your support of CCHD. If I may presume that we have a place in your prayers, please also remember Fr. Graham Golden, about whom you may recall reading in these pages. As a Norbertine seminarian, Fr. Graham was a CCHD intern who later helped with our work in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. He received the CCHD Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award in 2016. Fr. Graham died May 21 after an automobile accident. He was 35. Fr. Graham boldly lived his commitment to the poor and vulnerable. May he rest in peace.

RALPH MCCLLOUD, Director
Catholic Campaign for Human Development



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Theresa says SFA works to empower existing farmers, beginning farmers, emerging farmers, and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. “We want to see diversity in who is producing the food,” she says, “and that entails helping people access farmland and navigate the government agencies that are intended to work with farmers.”

“The days are waning where farms are turned over to the next family member,” she explains. “Some farmers are willing to help get the next generation onto the land to support rural communities, rather than sell their land to the highest bidder for development.” SFA helps to match potential sellers with new and emerging farmers who are trying to get a foothold in the business.

“Farmers learning from farmers is the key to our success in teaching sustainable farm and marketing practices,” Theresa says. She tells the story of a husband and wife who switched from traditional chemical-dependent farming to regenerative soil practices ten years ago. “They recognized they needed to improve their stewardship and find a way to be more economically resilient for their family,” she recalls.

“The neighbors thought they were crazy,” Theresa says, “but people started slowing down as they drove by and watched the farm change. People asked questions of them at the local coffee shop. Now the farm is a classroom for sustainable techniques, and people make pilgrimages there.”

SFA uses CCHD funds for a Rural Organizing and Leadership Development (ROLD) program to build community chapters, expand leadership capacity, and bring together low-income people to confront barriers to economic success. To that end, SFA’s newest chapter is helping its members obtain Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) card readers that consumers can use to shop at local outdoor markets. “They embraced raising and marketing local foods and now want to make them available to people who might not have access to fresh produce,” she says.

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”

The Niibi Center

“Water is life, and if we keep polluting it, the plants and animals will cease to exist,” says Tara Mason. She is the communications coordinator for the Niibi Center, an organization in Minnesota whose name includes the Anishinaabe word for water.

The Niibi Center, established in 2016, is a catalyst for research, advocacy, and activism grounded in Indigenous culture and knowledge. Its programs are based on traditional culture and are designed to stimulate the economy, empower and heal the community, build the sovereignty and resilience of Native nations, and care for the environment.

Tara says the Creator gave the Anishinaabe people the responsibility to care for the environment. “Compassion, love, and responsibility are fundamental to our teachings. How we care for one another is part of the purpose we are here,” she explains.

Anishinaabe values include celebrating family, caring for the poor and the environment, exercising rights and responsibilities

as sovereign nations, encouraging participation for all community members, and acting for the common good.

Tara says the Anishinaabe people lived initially on the East Coast of the present-day United States. They migrated west centuries ago, following a traditional prophecy that directed them to “travel until the food grows on the water.” The food was wild rice, and the travelers found it in the area that is now Minnesota. As a result, wild rice, known as *manoomin*, is both a sacred food and a central feature of Anishinaabe economic life.

Niibi Center executive director Joe LaGarde says his people tend, harvest, and finish wild rice while living in seasonal rice camps along some 200 lakes and streams that support rice beds.

The practice is protected by an 1855 treaty with the U.S. government but is threatened by pollution and lax enforcement of regulations.

The Niibi Center uses CCHD funds to reengage the community in rice-cultivating practices through the Rights of Manoomin project. The effort includes education, outreach, and advocacy for legislation to protect waterways.

Joe describes erecting two billboards along a major road to call attention to the cultural importance of wild rice to the Anishinaabe. “People were pleased and surprised to see them, and several classes organized field trips to visit the billboards,” he says.

Tara says the Niibi Center is realigning community leadership and direction-setting roles with traditional Anishinaabe



SFA’s unique niche in the Minnesota soil health movement is integrating livestock to the landscape and identifying strategies and opportunities for livestock producers, crop farmers, and nonoperating landowners to improve and invest in their farms, regenerate soil, and protect water quality while ensuring a livable net farm income.



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SFA offers programming for specialty crops, such as the Minnesota Premium Garlic Project.

of the changing environment on the lives of DART affiliates. "Organizations will use their annual listening sessions to identify the local impact of environmental change," John says. "They will then build their own capacity to address negative impacts. We will identify common patterns across different regions and then raise the profile of the ways in which environmental changes hurt poor and marginalized communities the most."

"*Laudato Si'* is an important framework for thinking about this crisis. It's a moral struggle," he says. "The encyclical challenges us to think about the purpose of the economic system. Is it to make money for people at the top, or to serve humanity and provide for our common home? What is God's purpose?"

John says DART affiliates are already surfacing local issues. Controlled burning

of sugar beet fields coincides with increased asthma and breathing issues in one region. In another, children dislocated by hurricanes are straining the school systems of the communities where they are relocated. In multiple coastal cities, formerly affordable housing in inland areas is now sought by developers to create luxury apartments for people driven from the coast by erosion and flooding.

"CCHD funding lets us expand the conversations with our affiliates. Toxic events and problems that people encounter on a day-to-day basis are sometimes overlooked because things have always been that way," John says. "But when many small groups begin to identify the same familiar concerns, people put two and two together, recognize a much larger problem, and can work toward a solution." 🌱

matriarchal customs. "We are developing opportunities for women's leadership," she says. "CCHD funds give us the ability to be flexible and responsive to the needs of our people."

Direct Action Research and Training Center

"Poor and marginalized communities pay the highest price for hurricanes, flooding, rising sea levels, and rising temperatures. These environmental changes are only going to get worse over the next several decades," says Rev. John Aeschbury, executive director of Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART).

DART has an ambitious, scalable plan to engage local communities to tackle the problems caused by a changing environment. It is called Caring for Creation.

DART is a national network of 28 congregation-based justice ministry organizations that engage more than 500 diverse religious congregations in 28 metropolitan areas in the southeast United States, Midwest, and Plains states.

On the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, CCHD awarded DART a National Strategic Grant for Caring for Creation, funding a five-year effort to address the impacts

MEMBER PROFILE

Remembering Fr. Graham Golden, OPraem

Norbertine Fr. Graham R. Golden, a former CCHD intern and longtime advocate for the marginalized, died May 21, 2021, following an automobile accident. He was 35. Fr. Graham was raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he graduated from St. Pius X High School. He was also a magna cum laude graduate of the University of New Mexico, with degrees in music and Spanish.

In 2010, while studying to be a priest with the Norbertine Community of Santa Maria de la Vid Abbey, Fr. Graham served as an intern at the CCHD office in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. For a profile in the *Helping People Help Themselves* newsletter, he said he was "doing outreach and making presentations to youth and young adult groups about the systemic nature of poverty, Catholic social teaching, and CCHD."

He continued his involvement with CCHD in the archdiocese as part of his apostolic work experience for the seminary novitiate. Fr. Graham facilitated grant workshops and performed site visits and grant reviews. He later worked with the archdiocesan Catholic Foundation to assess the needs of rural communities.

Fr. Graham was ordained to the priesthood in 2015 and served as pastor of two parishes. He received the CCHD Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award in 2016.

Emily Schumacher-Novak, who coordinates the CCHD intern program, says Fr. Graham "was deeply committed to our call to care for the poor and vulnerable and will be dearly missed." 🌱



Fr. Graham Golden (L) with Bishop Jaime Soto, at the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award reception.



The First 50 Years of the Church's Gospel-Driven Antipoverty Program

In 1969 the bishops of the United States established the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) as a creative, collaborative response to entrenched poverty and social upheaval that threatens communities, institutions, and individuals. In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council invited the Church to engage with contemporary culture to promote peace and justice and to ease the burdens of the marginalized. The bishops identified both great promise and significant problems during a period of upheaval that mirrors the current day: new forms of mass communication and transportation, changes in family and cultural relations, urban strife, rural poverty, racial inequality, voting rights struggles, war, conflict, indifference, and a shift away from religious practice. The bishops envisioned a national antipoverty program, described this way in early documents: "We seek nothing less than the reconstruction of the social order here and abroad, social justice for all, and the renewed commitment of individuals to meet their responsibilities."

As the bishops, their staff, and advisors worked to define the nascent organization's mission and devised a process to make and monitor grants, they recommended that the new entity fund self-help and opportunity-enhancement efforts; look favorably on efforts with ecumenical ties and those that could serve as strategic prototypes to deal with unmet needs; emphasize human enrichment rather than only fighting poverty; look less favorably on projects viewed as "another paternalistic Thanksgiving basket"; and give preference to projects that are cooperative and have a social impact rather than those originating with an individual entrepreneur.

The broad recommendations ultimately evolved into CCHD's identity as the embodiment of Catholic social teaching. CCHD works to break the cycle of poverty by helping low-income people participate in decisions that affect their lives, families, and communities. CCHD offers a hand up, not a handout, and is committed to its central belief that those who are directly affected by unjust systems and structures have the best insight into knowing how to change them.



From the beginning, CCHD has fulfilled a complementary mission of educating the public about poverty and its causes. This education strategy to create justice and help people who are poor to speak and act for themselves reflects the mandate of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. ✚

“Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day. It is not possible to settle for what was achieved in the past and complacently enjoy it, as if we could somehow ignore the fact that many of our brothers and sisters still endure situations of injustice that none of us can ignore.”

—POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS IN SANTIAGO, 2018

Clockwise from top left: Getty Images, Brian Payne, No Boundaries Coalition of Central West Baltimore, Dana Dillehunt and Willa K. Johnson, Opportunity Threads, Sharon Whitten, CCHD archives.

BY THE NUMBERS

From the beginning, the bishops spoke out strongly in support of the CCHD collection and of the need for Catholics to “take the poor seriously.” At their autumn meeting in 1970, mere weeks before the initiative’s first collection was taken up, the bishops issued a resolution calling Catholics to seek “a conversion of heart” and “a growth in compassion” for the poor.



The **first collection in 1970** yielded **\$8.4 million, the largest-ever single collection** in the history of the Church in the United States.

Since that initial collection, CCHD has given over **\$400 million in grants** to more than **12,000 low-income-led, community-based projects.**



These grants **strengthen** families, **create** jobs, **build** affordable housing, **fight** crime, and **improve** schools and neighborhoods.

Today, more than **900** Catholic priests, **1,200** Catholic parishes, **25** Catholic Charities agencies, and **60** religious communities throughout the country receive **CCHD funding.**



CCHD-funded groups are **diverse**; in every part of the country; and helping to raise **leaders** who are members of their **challenged** communities and who therefore **know their neighbors’** concerns as their own.

CCHD requires funded projects to develop community leadership and participation so their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective and so CCHD’s investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty.

In doing so, CCHD is living the vision of friendship and solidarity set out in the recent papal encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Diocesan bishops reflect on how CCHD grants help them shepherd their people:

CCHD came in with both feet and took a chance on the Hope Border Institute. 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.

—Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso

The Circles are a wonderful gift in our parishes and the community at large, helping women to come together around issues of their God-given dignity and to act for the development of all peoples. I have been pleased with this significant partnership between CCHD and the Latina community, especially among those seeking organizing skills to create a better future for them and their families.

—Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, MSPS, auxiliary of Seattle, speaking of the CCHD-funded Women’s Justice Circles in 2012

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.

—Bishop Gregory Kelly, auxiliary of Dallas, describing the CCHD-funded Recognizing the Stranger strategy

We want to make sure that no child, born or unborn, is ever abandoned or alone. We want to make sure that every mother, whether she is in a small rural town or large city, has caring people around her, walking those critical first five years in her child’s life.

—Bishop Joseph J. Tyson of Yakima, speaking about CCHD Strategic National Grant Program-funded organization PREPARES

Leaders of CCHD-funded organizations describe the significance of CCHD grants:

CCHD found a deep authenticity to our story and took a chance on us. It’s one of the only groups willing to fund community economic development. It empowered us.

—Molly Hemstreet, General Manager of Opportunity Threads, North Carolina

Mass incarceration is a crisis. The CCHD grant gave us the capacity to bring an additional component to our leadership development work and enhance the impact we can have to promote fair housing and address other barriers to reentry.

—Paul Graham, National Coordinator for the Vincentian Reentry Organizing Project of the National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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.

—Liz Welch, Director of Advancement at Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, South Dakota

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