



Louis Damani Jones (top row, second from left) and other CCHD interns attend orientation in 2018.

Social Action Leaders for the Future —CCHD Intern Program

BY BETH GRIFFIN

“Interns are like leaven in the dough,” says Emily Schumacher-Novak. She is the coordinator of a nationwide initiative that immerses mostly young Catholics in current social ministry programs and forms social action leaders for the future.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) intern program celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2019. It provides young low-income and middle-income Catholics who are emerging leaders with an opportunity to serve CCHD-funded social ministry and action programs directly, to learn the social teachings of the Church, and to develop valuable leadership skills.

More than 480 interns have served in 50 diocesan CCHD offices and the national CCHD office since the program began as a pilot in 1999.

“It grew out of a desire to engage young Catholics in leadership development and awareness of CCHD with the hope that they would take up the call to action in

their home dioceses and advance the broader social mission of the Church,” says Jill Rauh, director of education and outreach in the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

“There are lots of secular leadership opportunities for young people, but we want to invite Catholics to have a meaningful experience engaging the social concerns of our Church,” Jill says. “We’d also like to prepare them for a career in ministry or work in the Church.”

Intern candidates are recruited through local dioceses and the national CCHD office at the USCCB in Washington, D.C., to serve up to one year. Emily explains,

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LETTER FROM



THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

Twenty years ago, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) established a small pilot program to engage young people in our work. We realized that young people had a deep curiosity about the rich social teachings of our Church and an unmet enthusiasm to put those principles into action. The teachings ran strong in the veins of the social justice veterans at CCHD, but we lacked a platform to introduce them to the next generation. That's why we developed the CCHD intern program.

Now, as we mark the 20th anniversary of the robust intern program described in this newsletter, we can point with pride to more than 480 people who have served internships in 50 diocesan offices and the national CCHD office. I have had the opportunity to meet many of the interns, and their incredible energy and tremendous faith have always struck me. They are a diverse group in every way. They come from different ethnic and academic backgrounds. They are rural and urban and suburban, and they bring amazingly varied experiences to the intern program. Refreshingly, they also see the world through many lenses. Some are cradle Catholics steeped in our shared faith, and others are newly exploring or rediscovering a Christian understanding of the Gospel as a template for a life of service.

I have found that the interns are united by a deep commitment to the poor and a compelling interest in learning more about the Gospel call to justice. And it really is learning by doing! While the interns take on some mundane tasks in the offices where they serve, they also become our feet on the ground. They reach out to parishes and schools to make a connection between Catholic social teaching and CCHD. They also visit CCHD-funded organizations and help identify other local organizations that adhere to our principles and might be candidates for funding. Each (arch)diocese deploys interns

in a way that best utilizes their talents to meet the unique needs of the local office.

The intern program has always aimed to identify and develop emerging leaders. It has evolved to include people at various stages of their careers, so we now have college undergraduates, recent graduates, graduate students, mid-career seekers, and retirees. It also continues to offer the opportunity for interns to serve directly with social ministry and action programs, become conversant in the social teachings of the Church, and engage in social analysis.

Participants in the intern program may or may not choose a career in the Church or social ministry, but the experience is invariably a catalyst for spiritual growth, an opportunity to participate in the life-affirming work of the Church, and a strong foundation from which they can engage in parish or community action.

In these challenging days, I am inspired by the interns. They give me renewed confidence in the future as I witness them embrace their roles as servant leaders.

Please know how grateful I am for your ongoing support of this and other CCHD initiatives.



RALPH McCLOUD, Director
Catholic Campaign for Human Development

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
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POVERTYUSA.ORG
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*More than 40 million
Americans live in poverty.*



CLOCKWISE Current intern Georgia de la Garza (right) and former intern Louis Damani Jones (left) met with Emily Schumacher-Novak [center] at CCHD. Tracy Cerrato's 2001 internship in the Diocese of Baltimore and at the CCHD national office renewed her faith and introduced her to Catholic social teaching. Intern Louis Damani Jones addresses the audience at a panel discussion on diversity at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville.



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"We're looking for people who are dedicated to the mission of CCHD, who want to do the work of ending poverty at a systemic level, who care about human development from beginning to end, and whose faith compels them to action."

Most applicants are college students, graduate school students, or recent graduates with some previous exposure to social justice. "We are intentional about reaching out to emerging leaders in all settings," she says.

Interns begin their experience with an orientation at the national CCHD at the USCCB, where they dive deeply into Catholic social teaching and CCHD and examine the ways CCHD is lived out at the national and local level, Emily says.

"Our initial investment in training and leadership gets leveraged in the dioceses where interns live over the course of their lives," she says.

As a student at Marquette University, Emily was a CCHD intern in Milwaukee and later served on the local CCHD grant committee. "It was a truly transformative experience for me and opened my eyes to the work of the Church and its commitment to those experiencing poverty," she says. Her professional career has followed a through-line related to justice in a faith-based context.

For Louis Damani Jones, the leadership intern program was an answer to prayers.

"For a while, I was not really an engaged Catholic but had returned to Church and was looking for a way to integrate my past experience in community organizing with my faith," he says.

"The internship strengthened my faith 1,000 percent," Louis says. "Whenever you serve the Church, you have a heightened awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in its mission. It has empowered my understanding of my role as a lay Catholic."

Louis worked in the CCHD office at the Diocese of Belleville in Illinois for nine months. He reached out to local parishes, organizations, and young adults to illuminate the connection between Catholic social teaching and CCHD and to identify groups that might qualify for CCHD funding. Louis now works with the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

Thelma Ekeocha was a CCHD intern in the national office in 2015 after she graduated from college. She describes her work as "researching promising practices in different parts of the country where people were coming together to fight poverty and advocate for solutions to difficult issues affecting their communities."

"I didn't know CCHD before my internship," she says. "It helped me connect with groups and individuals living out their faith in their work and in their community. And it was inspiring to see leaders in



communities affected by poverty being part of the solution."

"It instilled in me a greater sense of responsibility to live out the mandate, not to just give alms but be a part of the community that advocates for lasting solutions," Thelma says.

After finishing her CCHD internship, Thelma volunteered with the elderly in Maryland, tutored immigrants, and worked with the USCCB Secretariat of Catholic Education. She now serves in the public affairs unit at the United Nations Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Through her CCHD internship and repeated participation in the annual

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Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, which is sponsored by the USCCB, Thelma says she has seen “the Gospel lived out in every possible sense of the ‘Two Feet of Love in Action’ model.” This model describes using the distinct, complementary tools of social justice (one foot) and charitable works (the other foot) to live the Gospel.

“The intern program helped me connect faces to the poverty statistics and meet people at the forefront of addressing it,” Thelma says.

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Fr. Graham Golden, O Praem, was a novice in his Norbertine community in the summer of 2010 when he served as an intern at the CCHD office in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. He says his work included “doing outreach and making presentations to youth and young adult groups about the systemic nature of poverty, Catholic social teaching, and CCHD—whatever they were open to hear.”

He continued his involvement with CCHD in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe as part of his apostolic work during his formation as a religious. Fr. Graham facilitated grant workshops and performed site visits and grant reviews.

“The experience both strengthened my faith and frustrated me,” he says. “It

helped affirm for me the beauty and truth we carry as Catholics for the value of human dignity and human flourishing.” But he was also disheartened, he says, to learn that many people are unaware of or uninterested in the Church’s work in this area.

His internship also shifted his academic focus from music and liturgy to social welfare program development and evaluation.

The latter interest was rooted in helping the Church and the communities it serves to “determine if what they are doing is effective,” Fr. Graham says.

After ordination, Fr. Graham coordinated program development, evaluation, and research for the archdiocesan Catholic Foundation, with a particular focus on rural communities and areas of social vulnerability. In his current role as a pastor, he supports the parish council’s efforts to establish dialogue and build bridges in the community.

He says the internship exposes participants to the lived social mission of the Church. “CCHD is one of the things we can be most proud of as Catholics because our resources and vision have concretely impacted people in and out of the Church. It is a concrete manifestation of what we preach.”

Tracy Cerrato was educated in Catholic schools through college but did not encounter Catholic social teaching until she did her CCHD internship as a graduate student in 2001. “I had no idea the bishops were doing this work. It renewed my faith in the Catholic Church,” she says.

Tracy served her internship at CCHD headquarters and the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She recalls helping to coordinate technical assistance for grant seekers, establishing an email distribution list of CCHD-funded organizations, and developing a database for evaluations.

“My most meaningful experience was



Thelma Ekeocha’s 2015 internship at the CCHD national office helped her connect with individuals and groups living out their faith through their work and in their community.

working with the Journey to Justice program, which combined the national and local outreach. Taking a parish through the program helped me in my faith,” she says.

“The Journey to Justice curriculum helped clarify that poverty is not a result of personal failure. The cyclic nature of poverty makes it difficult for someone to even get a foot on the ladder to move out of poverty,” Tracy reflects.

After her internship, Tracy served on the archdiocesan CCHD committee in Baltimore and helped organize the local stretch of the 2003 Brake the Cycle of Poverty bicycle ride, a CCHD national awareness event.

“The internship had more of an impact on my faith than the direction of my work life,” Tracy says. She was the first full-time development director at the South Baltimore Learning Center, an adult literacy organization, and is now a grant writer there.

Tracy recommends the internship for people at all points in their faith journey. “It made me so happy to be Catholic, to connect with a group trying to help people break the cycle of poverty,” she says.

For more information or to apply for stipend-provided summer, semester, and year-long internships, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/y4n3h3ey>.

Find information about the Journey to Justice program described by Tracy Cerrato at <https://tinyurl.com/y4dc6qbt>. ➔