

CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA

Catholic Charities USA

*100 Years at the Intersection
of Charity and Justice*

Rev. J. Bryan Hehir
Executive Editor



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Chapter
One



Introduction

Rev. Larry J. Snyder
Catholic Charities USA

Introduction

In the year 1866, the Catholic bishops of the United States made the following statement: “It is a very melancholy fact, and a very humiliating avowal for us to make that a very large portion of the vicious and idle youth of our principal cities are the children of Catholic parents.”¹

In these words we glimpse the fact that Catholic immigrants to this country faced a reality that was hardly the American dream as we have come to define it. It may surprise some to learn that for the majority of its history, the Catholic Church in the United States has been primarily an immigrant church. For most Catholic immigrants, the reality that awaited them here was poverty, the struggles of assimilation, and religious and ethnic prejudice.

Another statement, excerpted from an article in the *Catholic Charities Review* of March 1922, attests that the challenges publicly observed by bishops in 1866 continued to plague new immigrants and the church that attempted to welcome and serve them. Catholic social workers pointed to:

a deplorable percentage of children of Catholic parentage and baptism appearing as delinquents in the courts; to the number of applications by destitute Catholic families to non-Catholic agencies; to the out-of-proportion percentage of Catholic girls in reformatory agencies and institutions; to the figures on illegitimacy; and to the number of Catholic women in the police courts.²

Even though these conditions were reported in 1922, the church in America had long been responding to the needs of the immigrant church. From the arrival of the Ursuline sisters in New Orleans in 1727 through the nascent efforts in each emerging diocese to respond to the issues and needs found in that local church, the response was not temporary or

without vision. The response was systemic in nature and encompassed the areas of education, health care, and social services. Even as communities of religious women and men provided leadership in all three of these areas, local Catholic Charities agencies were established diocese by diocese with spirit and determination.

By 1900, more than 800 Catholic institutions had been organized to provide care for children and for the ill, elderly, and disabled. During the next ten years, a broad consensus formed among the leaders of Catholic charity organizations that a national organization was needed. And so on September 25, 1910, a visionary group gathered on the campus of Catholic University of America to establish a national entity to promote, coordinate, and support these agencies now making a substantial contribution to their local communities and to advocate for the people they serve in the spirit of the Gospel. The new National Conference of Catholic Charities, later named Catholic Charities USA, would eventually become the largest human service network in the United States and the third national organization formed in the world that would eventually help to establish Caritas Internationalis, the international federation of Catholic humanitarian and relief organizations headquartered at the Vatican.

With the impetus of the Second Vatican Council and the social movement that defined the 1960s, Catholic Charities engaged in what became known as the Cadre Study, a process of evaluation and renewal. Adopting the recommendations of the study in 1972, Catholic Charities sought to become an organization that by its mission and mandate would not only serve the poor, but stand with them in seeking economic and social justice. This mission was affirmed by Vision 2000, an initiative of the 1990s to develop a vision for the new millennium, and continues to be the defining vision that focuses the efforts of local Catholic Charities agencies and the national office.

To understand Catholic Charities today, one has to appreciate that since its beginning, it has been defined by two distinct and yet complementary realities. Catholic Charities USA, centered at the national office, first of all functions as a professional trade association, serving the needs of its members through consulting, training, technical assistance, program development, and networking opportunities that allow agencies to share their strength and creativity with others, especially in situations of extreme need or disaster. The national office also acts as a national intermediary for federal grants and coordinates the disaster response efforts of the network throughout the United States and its territories. Participation in this professional trade association is unique to the needs of each member organization.

The second reality that defines Catholic Charities is what I believe truly sets us apart and gives us a clear sense of mission. Throughout its 100-year history, Catholic Charities has been understood as a “movement” committed to social transformation, but a movement also deeply connected to its roots in the Gospel and its Catholic identity and tradition. We find there the clear mandate that we must be of service to our neighbor in need, but in a way that respects the inherent dignity of every human being. The fundamental principles of this movement are found in our seminal documents: the 1910 Charter, the Cadre Study and Vision 2000, as well as in our Code of Ethics, which is based on principles of Catholic social teaching as found in the *Compendium of Catholic Social Thought* and not simply guiding professional principles. Engagement of member agencies at this level is universal.

Professional trade association and movement express the reality of Catholic Charities these 100 years since the founding of Catholic Charities USA. Our history is replete with accounts of heroic service given without consideration for personal gain or recognition. It is filled with champions like Msgr. William Kerby and Msgr. John O’Grady, who championed the cause of “the little ones” in the public forum and put their mark on public policy of their day and beyond.

In this centennial year, 2010, we have, without a doubt, an obligation to look back and recognize those who have preceded us and shown us by word and example that our work is a sacred trust to be discharged faithfully. However, if we look at the strategic directions adopted by Catholic Charities USA for this centennial celebration, we see that our purpose is also to look toward the future. Those strategic directions are:

- **Teach** Americans that poverty is a moral issue destroying the fabric of our communities.
- **Advocate** governmental policy makers to work toward economic justice that empowers all persons to achieve independence, pursue education, access quality health care, safeguard the environment, and enjoy proper nutrition.
- **Record and share** the history of Catholic Charities USA, the national office, supporting the work of local agencies, as it contributes to the social welfare of the country.
- **Celebrate** with liturgy and festivals at the national and local levels the accomplishments of the first 100 years and a commitment to the next century of advocacy and service by Catholic Charities USA and its member agencies.

- ***Develop media presence*** that celebrates positive advances toward the elimination of poverty and invites the public to civil discourse identifying points of commonality that can bring people of divergent opinions to a table of constructive opportunity.
- ***Support*** the development of resources that will empower Catholic Charities USA to attain its new strategic directions.

One of these strategic directions is to record and share our history. This book, edited by Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, former president of Catholic Charities USA, is one of our efforts to do so. The essays in this book, both theological and historical, capture aspects of the history and mission of Catholic Charities over the last 100 years, shaped by changes and forces in the church and in the broader society. Let me introduce them briefly.

David O'Brien, noted historian of the Catholic Church in the United States, provides a brief historical work on Catholic Charities in chapter 2, exploring Catholic Charities' development in the context of the reforms and policies of the progressive era in the early twentieth century, the New Deal in the 1930s, and the Great Society in the 1960s. O'Brien comments on the history of Catholic Charities as a case study of the complex methodology of social action: direct service, advocacy, and institutional reform. He concludes with further commentary on the church-state partnership in American welfare history, the government support of Catholic Charities to meet the vast human need in our country, and the work for charity and justice as both Catholic and American.

In chapter 3, Rev. Hehir looks at three moments in the history of the Catholic Charities movement: the founding of the National Conference of Catholic Charities in 1910, the landmark Cadre Study beginning in the late 1960s and culminating with the final report in 1972, and the present moment—the first decade of the twenty-first century. He explores the state of Catholic social teaching and moral vision at each of these moments and how Catholic Charities developed and is developing its sense of identity, mission, and ministry in response to that teaching and vision.

In chapter 4, Srs. Ann Patrick Conrad and M. Vincentia Joseph of the National Catholic School of Social Service at Catholic University of America look at the factors that led to the professionalization of social work and the impact of this process on the Catholic Charities movement in America. The chapter explores how the training of social workers evolved over time, first from apprenticeships to more formal preparation in training institutes and later colleges and universities, including Catholic institutions. The chapter also explores the development of licensing and

accreditation standards, the shift in agency leadership from religious to laypeople, and the increasing complexity of human needs and social problems as well as the implications of these shifting patterns for ethics leadership, mission engagement, and service delivery.

Addressing a second topic in chapter 5, Srs. Conrad and Joseph provide a historical snapshot of the development of the unique relationship between Catholic Charities and local parish communities in the American Catholic Church. Dating back to the early twentieth century and the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Societies in the local parish—the basic unit of the church—diocesan Catholic Charities emerged to provide coordination and technical/professional assistance and specialized supports as increasingly complex social problems and issues confronted the church and society. Over time, the various diocesan Catholic Charities structures took on a life of their own, apart from the parish, becoming a voice of the church around human needs and social issues. In the 1970s, however, a groundswell of interest in social services at the neighborhood and church/parish level developed, strengthening the links between parish and diocesan social ministries. From that point on, the parish social ministry movement became a major thrust of Catholic Charities agencies.

Chapter 6, authored by Sr. Linda Yankoski, longtime director of Holy Family Institute (HFI) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, explores the partnership between church and state through a case study of HFI. Founded in 1900 by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, HFI was originally an orphanage and an early pioneer in the Catholic social service movement. The agency changed with the needs of the region's population, and its growth is directly tied to its participation in fee-for-service government contracts. Today HFI serves more than 6,000 people annually with services that include alternative and special education, in-home family counseling, and residential care for abused and neglected children. Sr. Yankoski analyzes a century's worth of records from HFI to discover if participation in government contracts affected HFI's Catholic identity and mission, and, if so, how.

In chapter 7, Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo, former head of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and currently a Caritas Internationalis delegate to the United Nations, explores the roots of empowerment within Scripture and Catholic social teaching and examines the often cited but mistaken tensions between charity and justice in accompanying poor and otherwise marginalized or oppressed people in their own empowerment process. Msgr. Vitillo discusses the unique experiences of the church in the United States through such institutions as Catholic Charities, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and Catholic

Relief Services in transforming the socio-pastoral work of the church from pure assistance to empowerment models.

In chapter 8, Rev. Fred Kammer, former president of Catholic Charities USA, discusses the mission and identity of Catholic Charities in the context of the long tradition of Catholic social teaching and its emphasis on human dignity, prophetic social justice, the preferential option for the poor, subsidiarity, and solidarity. He also explores the mission of Catholic Charities USA, looking at the Cadre Study of the 1970s, which set forth the mission of service, advocacy, and convening, and the Vision 2000 process, which updated the work of the Cadre Study, with emphasis on empowering services, societal transformation, strengthened church relationships, and organizational capacity-building. In discussing identity, Rev. Kammer underscores the many diverse ways in which Catholic Charities is Catholic and the power of that identity in service of the mission as exercised by staff and volunteers of many faith traditions in a pluralistic civil society.

Msgr. Kevin Sullivan, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, in chapter 9 addresses four interrelated areas: Catholic Charities as an essential and constitutive element of the Catholic Church; the scope of Catholic Charities mission based upon a more traditional and comprehensive understanding of *caritas* as Christian love that includes both justice and compassion; the human rights tradition of the church, most fundamentally the dignity of the human person, as prescriptive for both the justice and compassionate work of Catholic Charities; and how this essential human rights work of the church is currently reflected in Catholic Charities in the United States.

The book concludes with a chapter from Mary Gautier and Mark Gray of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. They draw on statistical information from Catholic Charities USA Annual Surveys as far back as 1970 to provide an empirical overview of Catholic Charities services and programs over the last four decades, with primary emphasis on the last decade. It gives readers a good understanding of who Catholic Charities agencies serve, what services Catholic Charities agencies provide, and how those services have changed over time.

We hope that this book will not only educate and inform but also inspire deep reflection on the legacy of faith, charity, and justice that the Catholic Charities movement has left to us in its first 100 years.

Catholic Charities is recognized as a critical part of the social safety net in this country and an indispensable part of the fabric of local communities. In whatever manner its contribution and presence is recognized, the greatest measure is the calling to which it aspires. In one of his first visits to this country, Pope John Paul II held a special audience in San Antonio

in 1987 specifically for the Catholic Charities network. His address was titled *The Poor Have a Privileged Place in Christ*, and in it he said:

We have seen how Catholic Charities and all its colleague associations have lent God their own flesh—their hands and feet and hearts—so that his work may be done in our world. For your long and persevering service—creative and courageous, and blind to the distinctions of race or religion—you will certainly hear Jesus’ words of gratitude: “You did it for me.” . . . So gather, transform and serve! . . . By working for a society which fosters the dignity of every human person, not only are you serving the poor, but you are renewing the founding vision of this nation under God! And may God reward you abundantly!³

May God who has begun this good work in us bring it to fruition!