

## Catholic Charities DC Agency History



### Mission and Initial Founding:

Although Catholic Charities was not founded specifically as a response to the Great Depression, it was in fact born and came to fruition within it. Its forerunner, The Catholic Home Bureau, was founded in 1909 by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, a nineteenth-century Catholic charitable association of laymen. Its purpose was “to place Catholic children in private homes who could no longer be cared for in the various Catholic children’s institutions of the district”.

The local diocesan Catholic Charities website describes its mission as follows: “Our mission is to strengthen the lives of those in need by giving help that empowers and hope that lasts.” The vision and values were also described:

- **Vision:** Catholic Charities will be accessible to those in need by creating comprehensive, integrated and culturally competent services. We will be leaders of best practices. We will be recognized as an advocate for social justice. Our staff and volunteers will experience an environment where they can grow, contribute their best and value their investment in our mission.
- **Values:** We believe in the message of Jesus that brings love, hope and redemption.
  - We affirm the sacredness and dignity of all human life.
  - We cherish the racial and cultural diversity of our staff and those we serve.
  - We expect uncompromising integrity in all we do.
  - We pursue excellence.
  - We pledge service to those in need regardless of background, belief or circumstance.

As with every diocese, the local Catholic Charities is responsible for coordinating social services to those in need. The national umbrella organization, Catholic Charities USA, does not provide such assistance. Instead, the national organization functions as a sort of “trade association” for the diocesan Catholic Charities, training and convening members across the country, lobbying

Congress for Social Justice issues, and generally advocating for the poor and marginalized of society.

The website of Catholic Charities USA gives its vision and mission as follows:

- **Vision:** Believing in the presence of God in our midst, we proclaim the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the person by sharing in the mission of Jesus given to the Church. To this end, Catholic Charities works with individuals, families and communities to help them meet their needs, address their issues, eliminate oppression, and build a just and compassionate society.
- **Mission:** The mission of Catholic Charities USA is to exercise leadership in assisting its membership, particularly the diocesan Catholic Charities agencies and supporting group members, in their mission of service, advocacy and convening.

What stands out from the above, as well from the biography of Msgr. John O'Grady (the founder of the national Catholic Charities), is that Catholic Charities at both levels was intended, from its inception, to be a large scale social project, beginning at the diocesan level and extending to the national. Furthermore, advocacy is front and center in both the purpose and the internal structuring of Catholic Charities USA. As Msgr. O'Grady made very clear, advocacy at the level of the federal government by highly educated, degreed social workers was an integral aspect of the overall design of Catholic Charities.

“It was Msgr. O'Grady who conceived of the idea for a national program of social welfare in the American Catholic Church, through the organization and development of diocesan social services.”

Msgr. O'Grady advocated incessantly at the federal level, and organized Catholic Charities conventions, and even inter-denominational conventions, at the national level. His vision seems to have defined Catholic Charities at its inception, and continues to do so. This might be extended to the very notion of faith based charity and social work organizations in general. The professional, non-proselytizing, faith based organization we now see as the norm, was first pioneered, at least among the Catholics, by Msgr. O'Grady.

## Timeline for Catholic Charities USA:

- 1845 Saint Vincent de Paul Society is established in U.S.
- 1900 By the 20<sup>th</sup> Century 827 voluntary Catholic charitable institutions existed nationwide. Major issues for charities in early 1900 were: Child welfare and protecting their faith, immigration, and developing supportive communities.
- 1910 Establishment of National Conference of Catholic Charities: First convening at Catholic University by lay volunteers, religious, and dedicated priests (400 delegates from 24 states and 38 cities).  
Original Statement of purpose: "The National Conference has been created to meet a definite situation. It aims to preserve the organic spiritual character of Catholic charity. It aims to seek out and understand the cause of dependency."
- 1919 Early Charities issues: Immigration still a focus, especially concerning children; Principles of Social Security, Community Chests.
- 1929 Stock market crash and the Depression
- 1931 Msgr. O'Grady publishes his review of the organization in a book.
- 1934 Msgr. O'Grady attempts to shift government away from relief programs and on to work programs, and to obtain its intervention in the field of housing, especially housing for the poor.  
NCCC Bulletin of Diocesan Directors of Charities Agency initiated.  
The School of Social Outreach is founded at a Catholic University in Washington, DC. Msgr. O'Grady is the first dean.
- 1946 Msgr. O'Grady makes congressional testimony on behalf of health care.
- 1949 Msgr. O'Grady won successful battles on behalf of the Social Security Act of 1935 and the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949.
- 1951 The first meeting of the International Conference of Catholic Charities held in Rome. Msgr. O'Grady is on the planning committee for the founding of the Conference.
- 1959-1965 II Vatican Council develops 16 major documents, among them: 1961 "Christianity and Social Progress"; 1967 "The Development of People".
- 1960's Catholic Charities USA takes leadership role in White House Conference on Children and Youth.
- 1960-1965 President Eisenhower attends 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Annual Meeting in New York. Annual Institute on Service for Unmarried Parents, Aging Commission, Catholic

- Disaster Relief Committee, and the Survey on Church and Nonprofit Housing were started.
- 1970's After the Cadre Study was adopted in 1972 issues are brought to the annual "Charities Congress," among them:
- The Status of American Indians (1980)
  - Public Policy and Meeting Human Needs (1982)
  - U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy
  - Feminization of Poverty (1986)
- 1980's Social Services Department establishes Women's Commission.  
Code of Ethics published.  
Pope John Paul II attends Catholic Charities USA Annual Meeting Conference and adopts a policy paper on pluralism.  
Catholic Charities USA takes a leadership role on the White House Conference on Aging.  
Catholic Charities USA gets "CFC" funding (Combined Federal Campaign).  
Catholic Charities USA lobbies from the White House to Capitol Hill for positive Welfare Reform.  
Leadership role in the White House Council on Families.
- 1986 "Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).
- 1990 *Smart Money* and *Money Magazine* name Catholic Charities USA as a top rated social services provider network in the United States.
- 1991 Catholic Charities USA is acknowledged by *Nonprofit Times* to be the largest voluntary social service network in the U.S.  
*Doing Faith Justice; An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought* is published
- 1997 Vision statement for CCUSA issued: "Believing in the presence of God in our midst..." (given above).
- 2001 Disaster Relief Services dispenses \$1,037,032 for victims of 9/11 to Catholic Charities USA.
- 2008 Parish Partners program created.

## **Timeline for the diocesan Catholic Charities in the present study:**

- 1855 By Act of Congress, Sisters of the Holy Cross St. Joseph's Male Orphan Asylum in DC established.
- 1898 Catholic Home Bureau of DC established by the local St. Vincent de Paul Society. This was an early program that developed systematic child placements for dependent children.
- 1922-1935 Central Bureau of Catholic Charities formed, called Associated Catholic Charities. Transients, juveniles, and orphans are the main concerns.
- 1922 First Annual Report of the diocesan Catholic Charities. Less than 10 percent of the cases dealt with insufficient income.
- 1938-1949 Washington DC becomes a separate diocese. The Diocesan Catholic Charities also split.
- 1980s Local bishop emphasizes serving the homeless. Catholic Charities starts 46 new programs. Growth in number of homeless prompts the establishment of 15 emergency and transitional shelters over the next 25 years.  
Healthcare Network Established. 55 programs and services offered. Many Catholic doctors donate time.
- 1984 Legislative Network established. 3,400 volunteers from 125 parishes work to pass legislation on behalf of the poor and vulnerable.
- 1989 Center for needy pregnant women opens.
- 2000 Capital Campaign completed. Catholic Charities Foundation created to raise funds for local Catholic Charities operations.  
Supportive Housing initiated with St. Sebastian Town Homes.
- 2001 Langley Park Outreach Center opens.  
James Cardinal Hickey Center opens.
- 2004 Local umbrella group created, merging the diocesan English and Spanish language Catholic Charities together with several other organizations.  
New Board of Directors elected.  
Food network distributes millionth food package.

### **Agency Financial History:**

Conversations with the CEO of the local diocesan Catholic Charities and the Assistant to the President have indicated that approximately 70% of their present budget comes from federal government contracting. This is consistent with the stated goals of the founder Msgr. O'Grady.

### **Relationship with the Bishop/Diocese:**

The very concept of Catholic Charities, as designed by Msgr. O'Grady, demands a complete identity between the Catholic Church, the hierarchy in particular, with Catholic Charities as an institution. In that sense, from a formal and structural consideration, there have been no changes in the sponsor (the Catholic Church), and the agency (Catholic Charities), and there can be no changes. If the two were to become even mildly attenuated, the very purpose of the agency would come into question. Msgr. O'Grady's "shrewd plan" rests on this foundational concept:

"The Diocese alone was in a position to plan intelligently for the future....the Diocese alone was duly qualified to speak for the Catholic Church as a whole"  
(Msgr. O'Grady)

But Msgr. O'Grady's plan went further, to include a general umbrella structure that became Catholic Charities USA. The full implications of this relationship, and the stated goals of this relationship, with its equal focus on socio-political advocacy, needs to be fully appreciated by this study. How this relationship and its goals play out in terms of establishing and demarcating "faith communities" could be very significant.

### **Observations:**

Note that the creation of "Parish Partners" in 2008 can be seen either as a fulfillment of Msgr. O'Grady's "parish model" for social work at the diocesan and national level, or as a symptom of the problems created by taking charity work out of the hands of the local Catholic parishes and institutionalizing it at the Diocese or even national level. Over the years, link between Catholic Charities and the local parishes has become somewhat diluted. Catholic Charities still struggles to balance the call to engage with the local Catholic community in the parishes and the need to

partner with government in the delivery of services. The national Catholic Charities' political advocacy also necessitates dealing with political opinions and political parties. The question can be asked: How political are Catholic FBO's? The results of the centralization and transformation of charitable work, combined with some social advocacy efforts has created in its wake tensions within the diocesan Catholic Charities that are also felt at the parish level.

For one camp, the essential aspect of Catholic social ministry is that it cultivates Catholics' baptismal call to serve their brothers and sisters in need, within the context of the truths of the Catholic faith. For the other camp, the essential component is the work of social justice, in order to serve the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized as an expression of one's faith. Whereas both may be valid, and even overlap to varying degrees, the emphasis is clearly different. But more important to our investigation, these differences have political connotations as well as religious ones, and out of these differences we can clearly see the emergence of distinctly demarcated faith communities within the Catholic Church here in the US. Some argue that Catholic Charities can no longer call itself "Catholic" because it does not deliberately attempt to spread the Catholic faith in its activities. Others counter that it is important to help those in need as an expression of faith, and to partner with whatever individuals or governmental agencies that will help in this endeavor.

The importance of the Catholic FBO in particular, and all FBO's in general, has also correspondingly risen as a consequence to the increasingly intimate relationships evolving between charity/social welfare organizations, government agencies and policies, and the political forces that are triggered by these relationships. Although there are still many lines of inquiry that need to be followed up, it seems that Catholic FBO's are accommodating different types of faith communities, accommodating different concepts of how faith is expressed, and in the process, helping to influence our political landscape.



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