

Diocese of Davenport Catholic Charities History

We have an incredibly rich tradition of addressing direct needs of people and with peace and justice efforts through the Office of Social Action. Early on, the Diocesan expression of response to direct needs as well as peace and justice was a Catholic Charities. 40 years ago assisted by its national leaders, the United Way of the Quad Cities conducted a study of the human needs and community services in the area which included our diocese. Among its conclusions were that the Catholic Charities was understaffed and attempting to provide too broad an array of services that in some cases duplicated the efforts of other service providers. They recommended that the Charities be dissolved and the services be merged with what is now Family Resources. As Monsignor Mottet recalls, he and Bishop O'Keefe sweated over the study for two years before deciding that they would not be good neighbors unless they cooperated with the study.

Even without Catholic Charities, Monsignor Mottet, in his role as Director of Social Action, continued to be heavily involved in charity and justice issues. Between 1970 and 1978 when he assumed the role as Executive Director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development in Washington D.C., Monsignor created approximately 40 human service agencies. These agencies ranged from legal aid to area agencies on aging, and were spread all across the diocese. The agencies were incubated with diocesan funding and oversight and once they were self-sufficient, were spun off and became free-standing. Many of these agencies, including Legal Aid and CASI remain vibrant, essential providers of community services all these years later.

In the 1980's and 1990's, the Director of Social Action was Dan Ebener. In his office, justice issues were front and center, but included activities and services that were charitable in nature. Most notably, this period saw the creation of SHARE Iowa, a nationally renowned refugee resettlement program, an Immigration Office that is still in operation to this day, and millions of dollars distributed to address needs from natural disasters.

For the past 10 years, there has been a reoccurring theme in the Office of Social Action. It goes something like this: if we use the Two Feet of Social Justice Model that Monsignor Mottet created, where one foot addresses direct service needs and the other is concerned with affecting social change, how do we account for activity of both feet, necessary for movement? This is much the same challenge Bishop Amos posed to me as I first started my in position as Director of Social Action a little over a year ago. People in the parishes do not see an identifiable Catholic service presence in our diocese.

“Spend more time on the future, and less on the past.” These wise words were shared with me by Dan Ebener as I had prepared for an earlier version of this presentation. As much time as I’ve spent reviewing the last 40 years, let me jump now to the very near future and the next few years.

In order to help address service or charity needs now and in the future, effective July 1st, we are re-introducing Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Davenport. Our first offering will be modest in size and scope, but will begin work that can be sustained for many years. Catholic Charities will have these features:

Enhancing services already in place. The Immigration Office will now be part of Catholic Charities. As we strengthen our Immigration Office by returning to staffing capacity where we have two BIA approved Immigration Counselors, we will continue to provide legal paperwork assistance to immigrants on their path towards legal citizenship. We will strive to make visits to satellite locations in the diocese. It is a unique service offering, and we are committed to filling that niche.

Local disaster response will now also be part of Catholic Charities. Our diocese responded to the Flood of 2008 by involvement with local long-term recovery committees in the affected counties. We attended their meetings and distributed monetary donations to the case management process which allowed case managers to combine our funds with funds from other sources and in-kind donations of materials and labor to maximize the benefits to flood victims. Our approach empowered local committees who knew of their community’s unique needs. We have received feedback from a neighboring Catholic Charities that the model we incorporated is the approach they will use now and in the future. Our inclusion of Disaster response within our Catholic Charities reflects the support and assistance we have received from Catholic Charities USA over the years, and parallels the process in dioceses much affected by disasters, such as those in Louisiana and Mississippi .

Working collaboratively with community partners. We will be new to many parts of the charity service delivery community, but we will take advantage of every opportunity to work with others collaboratively. There are already plans in place to pilot a small program with Catholic Charities of the Peoria Diocese to provide counseling services to clients from our diocese, who to this point, have had to cross the river for services. Likewise, in preparing for our introduction, we have learned from Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Dubuque about their new partnerships with external agencies to provide services, such as adoption services. Finally, we have a meeting scheduled with representatives from the University of Illinois who are interested in providing citizenship classes in our diocese.

Supporting and promoting local ministry efforts already in place. Parish Health Ministry efforts are already being undertaken across the diocese. The clergy and laity in individual parishes have put together wellness committees, visited the homebound, maintained prayer lines, and have attended to the physical, mental and spiritual needs of their members. A small number of parishes have also employed parish nurses to assist with this ministry. Catholic Charities can support these ministry efforts already in place by providing information and gatherings to share best ideas. Charities can also promote this ministry to parishes not yet involved by sharing resources and local resident experts as they begin.

As with Parish Health Ministry, Prison or Jail Ministry, is active and alive in parts of our diocese already. There are great leaders in this ministry embedded in our diocese. Catholic Charities can support and promote this ministry as well, by gathering information regarding efforts undertaken, gauging the level of interest in communities not yet actively involved and coordinating information and workshops so that best practices can be shared. Our neighbors in Dubuque have a strong prison ministry program and we are fortunate to have them so close and willing to assist us in our future efforts.

Again, we have an incredibly rich tradition with peace and justice efforts through the Office of Social Action. We also have a strong history of addressing the direct needs across our diocese through the creation of many service agencies. Catholic Charities will build on that history, responding to the needs in our parishes and communities, doing so collaborating and creatively. And in so doing, the people of the Diocese of Davenport will again recognize our justice and charity efforts in our Catholic community.