

CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

BY JILL RAUH, CCHD STAFF

Stephanie Garza is an energetic 25-year-old who is passionate about three things: her faith, the Church's social teachings, and the immigrant parents with whom she works each day. Stephanie runs the Parents as Mentors Program for Southwest Organizing Project, or SWOP, a CCHD-funded group in Chicago. This year, she is the winner of the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award, a prestigious award given annually by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to one faith-filled, Catholic young adult who is working to address the root causes of poverty in his or her community.

The Parents as Mentors Program is an initiative in four Chicago public elementary schools to increase parent involvement. Through the program, parents volunteer 100 hours a semester—two hours on four days each week—to work in a classroom at their child's school, helping those students most in need of assistance. Parents also attend weekly leadership development trainings through which they identify and work toward important goals, such as learning English, earning GEDs, gaining employment, or learning to drive. As parents expand skills and increase confidence, they work with other parents, teachers, and members of the community to develop a collective vision for improving schools and addressing community issues.

The majority of participants in the Parents as Mentors Program are women. Many are immigrant mothers who have never worked outside the home or had access to personal and professional development opportunities.



Photos courtesy of Stephanie Garza

Parents from four Chicago schools, Talman, Marquette, Eberhart, and Morrill, gather for leadership development training.

Stephanie has a special connection to the immigrant community. "My father was an immigrant and my mother a Mexican American," she explains. Her roots and her own experiences mean that this community has a special place in her heart, especially when she thinks about her own life. "I'm always reminded of the Scripture passage that says that from one to whom much is granted, much is expected (see Lk 12:48). I was able to receive a great education, and now I feel compelled to give back."

And give back she has. Since Stephanie helped initiate the Parents as Mentors Program in January 2006, it has expanded from just a handful of parents involved at three schools to 15 to 20 parents involved at each of four schools, with plans to expand. One person who has benefited from Stephanie's efforts is Blanca, an immigrant mother at Marquette Elementary School. When Stephanie first met Blanca, "she was very timid

(continued on page 3)

FROM THE DIRECTOR

—Heartfelt Thanks—

Dear Friends,

In this season of thanksgiving and giving, it seems proper to offer a word of gratitude to all of our generous benefactors who sacrifice so others can survive. As we gather around tables on Thanksgiving, we remember those who don't. As we shop for loved ones, we remember those who can't. For these, our brothers and sisters, we recall our shared humanity.



The work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) continues to remind us of the humanity we share and invites us to share the blessings we hold. This year seems especially difficult, given the reality of our economy. While others can count on huge bailouts, our grantees remain victims of neglect. As we approach the beautiful season of Advent, let us call upon the memory of that first Christmas—the memory of a poor family seeking shelter.

Since CCHD's founding, we have been able to find shelter, to organize immigrants and other low-income people, and to ensure that family needs are met in ways that lift up human dignity—in the ways God intends for us all.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free." (Lk 4:18)*

Advent Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ralph McCloud'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

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 Catholic Campaign has contributed over \$280 million to more than 7,800 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.

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(continued from page 1)

and not comfortable at all with public speaking. She had been a stay-at-home mom for at least 12 years,” Stephanie relates.

As Blanca became more involved in the Parents as Mentors Program, her confidence blossomed, and she accepted a suggestion to run for the local school council at Marquette Elementary. As an elected member, Blanca now works with the other members of the council to strategize about improving educational programs and combating violence in the community.

Blanca, Stephanie says, is an example of how SWOP is “developing leaders to speak and act on their own behalf, so low-income people can bring change to their communities.”

For Stephanie, her work isn’t just a job. “Our efforts to build a better community,” she says, “are connected to the building of God’s Kingdom on earth. It’s about living solidarity. It’s about welcoming the stranger.”

The inspiration of her faith also led Stephanie to become involved in the Archdiocese of Chicago’s work with the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform, or CCIR. When CCIR approached community organizations like SWOP about becoming involved, “I immediately expressed interest, because my work is based in my Catholic faith,” Stephanie says. “For me, my work is an extension of living the Gospel. I jumped at the chance to work on issues related to Catholic social teaching.”

Immigrants’ issues, Stephanie says, lie close to her heart. “When I reflect on the difficult times our country and our families—especially immigrant families—are facing, I think there’s a deeper call for Catholics to evaluate our values and how we are living for others.”

“In these times,” Stephanie says, “there is now a larger opportunity to be more vocal about advocating for and supporting families and communities.”

Stephanie’s interest in community work began in college. During one summer break from Notre Dame, she spent the summer working for a community organization in the Chicago area. After graduating, instead



Stephanie Garza, 2008 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award Winner.


of returning home to her family in Texas, Stephanie decided to enter a post-graduate volunteer program with Amate House, a young adult service program sponsored by the Archdiocese of Chicago. “I tried out organizing—and it worked,” Stephanie says. During her year with Amate House, she came into contact with SWOP. When a position opened up there around the time the volunteer program was ending, Stephanie jumped at the opportunity to apply. “I knew it would be a good fit,” she says.

Clearly, it has been a good fit. But it is not without its challenges. As reward-

ing as the work can be, the issues Stephanie deals with can be heart-wrenching. “Many women are facing difficult decisions regarding immigration status, and a lot of families feel really isolated,” Stephanie says. But, she adds, “It’s in the simple things—helping someone connect to legal help, or talking to a parish and helping an immigrant community understand the rights they have—that I truly see hope.”

Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago, expressed his gratitude for Stephanie’s wonderful example of faith in action. “My hope is that Stephanie’s life and work will be a model to other young people, inspiring them to become involved in supporting the efforts of CCHD-funded groups to empower low-income people to address issues facing their communities.”

“Organizing is about sustainable, long-term change that makes a real difference,” Stephanie says. “But in the day-to-day, the process for finding those solutions is to create relationships. We may feel like isolated individuals or families. But then we come together. We support each other. We are not working alone.” And for Stephanie, for women like Blanca, and for the entire community, the Kingdom of God begins to take root.

For more information about the Bernardin Award and other CCHD education initiatives, contact Jill Rauh at 202-541-3297 or jrauh@uscceb.org. 

IN GOOD COMPANY

The Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award is an honor given annually to a faith-filled young adult who is a model to others in addressing the root causes of poverty and injustice in the United States. The award is given at the annual bishops' meeting each November. Stephanie Garza, the 2008 recipient, joins a strong group of winners, including the following sampling of past recipients:

2007: DAVID GOLEMBOSKI is a student leader in the social justice community of Louisville, Kentucky. With CrossRoads Ministry, an inner-city retreat center that engages young people in peacemaking, David developed CrossWalk, a week-long justice immersion experience that has impacted the lives of hundreds of teens. David also helped the national JustFaith office shape the Justice Walking program for teens while leading his own local J-Walking group.

2005: RAFAEL DURAN is the cofounder of ROC-NY, a New York organization that champions justice for restaurant workers. Rafael is a Mexican immigrant who learned the suffering of restaurant workers first-hand while employed as a dishwasher and cook. With ROC-NY, he successfully lobbied for the passage of a bill that raised the minimum wage for hourly workers and those whose wages are dependent on tips. He also launched a worker-owned restaurant, Colors, in Greenwich Village.

2002: ANGELA LARIVIERE develops self-help and empowerment projects that directly benefit Ohio's 35,000 homeless youth. Once homeless herself, Angela later became coordinator of the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) based in Columbus, Ohio, which addresses the needs of homeless children and youth through youth-run area councils.

2001: JEAN SOUFRANT, who immigrated from Haiti when he was 13, became a youth leader of Miami-Dade County's PACT—People Acting for Community Together. PACT is a coalition of interdenominational Christian churches that identifies concerns among low-income residents, such as transportation and educational opportunities in low-income areas, and works to resolve them. ☺

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can donate your time, talent, and treasure to CCHD in many ways. Consider supporting CCHD with a stock donation or a matching gift from your employer, or remember CCHD in your estate planning. For more information about CCHD, or to discuss ways to support our mission, contact Mary Mencarini Campbell at 202-541-3365 or mcampbell@usccb.org. Visit our Web site at www.usccb.org/cchd, or explore the state of U.S. poverty, made up of nearly 37 million Americans, at www.povertyusa.org.



Because poverty does not respect boundaries of race, national origin, religion, or geography, CCHD has funded projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Over the years, CCHD has provided more than \$280 million in grants, yet there are always more legitimate requests than we can accommodate.

CCHD allocates the majority of the annual Collection to community and economic development projects submitted to the national office for consideration. Individual dioceses retain 25% of the Collection to fund local self-help initiatives.

January is Poverty in America Awareness Month.

Visit www.povertyusa.org to learn more.