

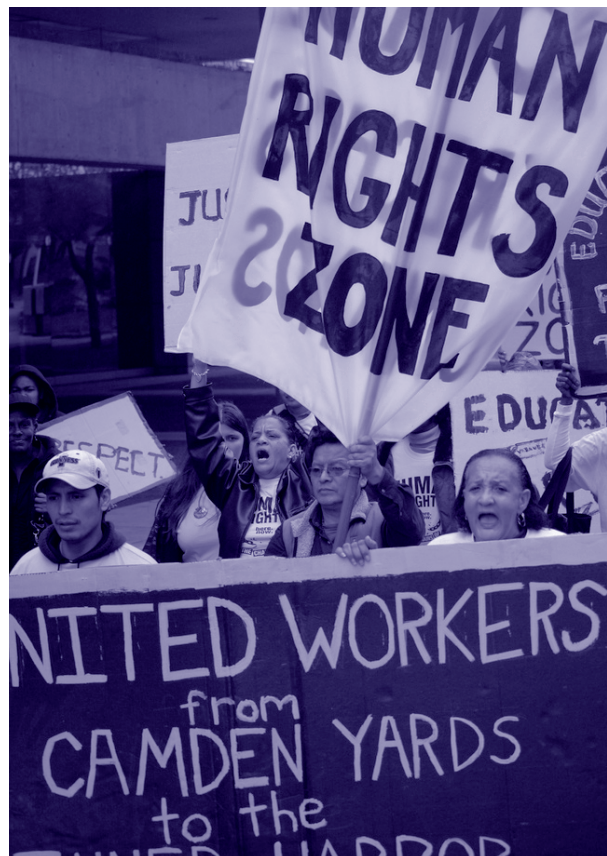
HOME RUN FOR JUSTICE

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Most of the nearly 2.7 million fans who visited Camden Yards, the stadium of baseball's storied Baltimore Orioles, in 2002 probably didn't notice the small army of cleaners who swept and scrubbed before, during, and after every game. The workers were drawn from the ranks of the homeless by an employment agency that offered them \$30 a game. The agency deducted the cost of the cleaning supplies and assessed a \$6 fee for transportation. The workers brought home about \$4.50 for each hour—less than the prevailing minimum wage, significantly less than a living wage, and not nearly enough to buy supper at the concession stand. And the employment agency operated entirely within the law.

Some of the workers began to gather regularly at a west Baltimore homeless shelter. Their weekly discussions about human rights and the root causes of poverty inspired them to form the United Workers Association, an organization that receives funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). Their first goal was to win a living wage for the people whose inconspicuous labors keep Oriole Park at Camden Yards a shiny and attractive destination.

United Workers has received help and support from another CCHD-funded group, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), whose members are men and women who plant, tend, and harvest vegetables and fruit in Florida. (You may remember their story from Issue 3 of this newsletter last year.) United Workers leadership organizer Ashley Hufnagel says, "In the network of poor people's organizations led by low-wage workers, there's a brother-sister relationship between our two groups. We both concentrate on the



Photos courtesy of United Workers Association

Members of the United Workers Association rally for better working conditions at Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

development of leadership. They shared their lessons learned and have celebrated our victories."

A specific lesson that CIW shared was that a workers' organization has more leverage with the group at the upper end of the supply chain, closest to the consumer and the profits, than with the entity directly above the low-wage workers. For CIW, this meant winning an

(continued on page 3)

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

**Stimulus. Bailout. Recession.
Depression. Inflation. Deflation.
Sub-prime mortgages. Bear market.**



The words above are often associated with today's economic crisis; they are linked to the state of the nation's economic condition today. Perhaps a better way to understand the economy is to link the crisis not to words but to people. People like Jesse, Jamaal, Julia, Justin, Janis, Jennifer, and Judy—persons who struggled financially before the current crises and whose struggles are now magnified.

They are among the thousands of people who are losing jobs. They are among the millions without adequate health care. And they are projected to be among the millions who have lost, or will soon lose, their homes. They depend on Catholics and others of good will to respond.

For nearly 40 years, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) has responded with grants to more than 4,000 community organizations that have lifted our brothers and sisters out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. The unselfish generosity of millions of believers has not only freed people from poverty but has educated millions of Catholics on the reality of poverty and the profound significance of Catholic response.

Bishop Roger Morin, CCHD Subcommittee Chair and Bishop of Biloxi, Mississippi, recently said, "The current economic situation is squeezing everyone in our country. For some of us, that means more careful planning when we take the car to do errands, cutting back on restaurant dinners, and postponing discretionary purchases." He added, "For millions of Americans who live on the edge of poverty in the best of times, it means making wrenching choices every month about feeding their families, paying their rent, and getting necessary medical care.

"CCHD helps the working poor and others who are trying to keep their heads above these turbulent waters. In the name of all of the Catholics in the United States, CCHD fights poverty and challenges injustice."

The season of Lent calls us all to deepen our relationship to Jesus through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This season, when so many of our family members will have only prayer for their daily bread, when so many of our sisters and brothers are involuntarily fasting and have no alms to give, let us examine for whom we pray, why we are fasting, and with whom we share our alms.

Have a blessed Lenten season,



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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break the cycle of poverty

(continued from page 1)

increase in tomato prices for harvesters from Taco Bell, rather than from the tomato growers who hired the CIW pickers. With United Workers, the strategy translated to bypassing the employment agency and targeting the government entity responsible for the stadium.

The Camden Yards stadium is a public facility operated under the Maryland Stadium Authority, which reports to the state governor. A loophole in the law allowed contractors to pay workers less than the wage mandated for workers at other publicly owned venues. United Workers lobbied Governor Martin O'Malley to extend the spirit of the living-wage legislation to the stadium workers. After 13 of the cleaners and their allies threatened to stage a hunger strike, the governor announced his support for the workers, and the Maryland Stadium Authority voted to pay the cleaners the state's living wage of \$11.30 an hour.

Veronica Dorsey, a cleaner who is now a leadership organizer, explains, "United Workers creates a human rights framework. It creates space and builds power so the poor can have a voice and build a movement to end poverty. We believe all life is sacred and worthy of dignity."

She describes United Workers as "multi-racial and bilingual. We're men, women, black, white, Latino, fat, skinny, tall, short. The only criteria are to be a human being and to believe we deserve to be free from poverty."

Msgr. William Burke, CCHD director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, says he first encountered United Workers at an annual workshop he runs for groups that hope to apply for CCHD funding. United Workers were a good match for CCHD, he said. "All the makings were there. United Workers is grassroots organizing at its best. It's well intentioned and successful, and the people are kind and down-to-earth.

"United Workers gives [a] voice to people without one. Most people have no idea that people do this kind of work. United Workers visits receptive churches and speaks to groups, not to beg, but to make them aware. They're very respectful, not angry, and have a gentle spirit."

United Workers members speak on college campuses to share their stories and encourage participation and support. "The students have money," says Veronica.

"They don't understand poverty. Once they grasp the concept and you equip them with the facts, they want to help."


"Students organize other students to fight for human rights in solidarity with United Workers," says Ashley. "It's new and burgeoning for them. Our appeal to people based on shared values has been instrumental in helping United Workers develop allies that include students, faith communities, and unions."

United Workers has 1,300 members, and half are actively involved, according to Veronica. Some 500 cleaners were impacted by the living-wage victory and a subsequent contract that allowed them to work directly for the stadium's cleaning contractor instead of an employment agency. Ultimately, they voted to join the union that represents state workers.



Members of the United Workers Association at the 2007 Labor Day prayer breakfast.

Now, United Workers has set its sights on the Inner Harbor, Baltimore's largest tourist destination, where more than 1,000 low-income workers are employed in a variety of restaurants and shops. "After the victory at Camden Yards, we decided to expand to the Inner Harbor," says Veronica. "The stories we heard from workers there sounded just like the stories from the early days at Camden Yards. It was like I was talking to myself."

Veronica says, "It's a larger campaign, but it's winnable. We're developing skills and finding leaders among the poor. All people deserve to be respected and paid a living wage, not just what an employer thinks they're worth." 

A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME

As a young woman, Veronica Dorsey did not aspire to live as a homeless person and day laborer, mopping spilled beer, sweeping hot dog wrappers, and scrubbing stadium toilets. She was raised in a comfortable military family, attended good schools, and was gainfully employed.

Then, she says, “Everything changed. I became disabled. My husband of 12 years walked out and left me with two kids and limited resources. Eventually we were evicted from our home. I made some dumb choices and did dumb stuff with the wrong people at the wrong time.” She was charged as a criminal, and although she never served time in jail, she is labeled as an ex-offender, a designation that makes potential employers wary.

In 2005, she went to work for the employment agency that staffed Camden Yards, reasoning, “My self-esteem was so low. I figured that half a loaf was better than none.”

The indignity of her situation hit hard during the Orioles’ first three-day home stand that season. “I had \$5 in my bag to buy lunch. I was being paid \$7 an hour, bringing my own cleaning supplies and gloves, borrowing bus money, and I couldn’t even afford a hot dog at the concession stand. What did that say about me?”

Veronica heard that United Workers was organizing people around the issue of a living wage and decided to contact them. “I wanted to help myself and others, and United Workers gave me the opportunity to do it.” She participated in the Camden Yards living-wage campaign, recently completed the first year of a three-year



Veronica Dorsey puts into practice the leadership skills she learned through United Workers.

leadership training program, and is also involved in establishing the group’s new green-cleaning cooperative business.

She now has a roof over her head, a living wage, health care, and renewed self-esteem. “I can fulfill my role as a family member now,” she says.

Veronica sees a spiritual element to the work. “I’m in the New Organizers Program and learning to be an organizer. I’m all right with it. Jesus was an organizer, and he didn’t pick and choose.”

Veronica is grateful to CCHD “because they understand how big the poverty problem is and that it requires a long-term investment.”

She says that the long-term, supportive, and ongoing nature of United Workers’ mission was demonstrated to her at a symbolic changing of the guard at the launch of the Inner Harbor campaign. A leader of the Camden Yards project, an African American, presented a flag to a worker at the Inner Harbor, a Latino.

“We were victorious, and we were extending a hand and a promise to work in solidarity,” Veronica explains. “It was one of the most powerful things I have experienced.”

WHERE’S MY MONEY GOING?

All CCHD funds received are used solely for the support of CCHD’s anti-poverty mission. CCHD abides by the charitable standards set by a leading donor advisory service. Our funds are divided as follows: 89% is assigned to CCHD’s core program mission of community empowerment, economic development, education programs, and supporting services; 3% is allocated to coordinate the annual appeal; and 8% is assigned to administrative costs.

We thank you for helping to break the cycle of poverty through your ongoing support for CCHD.

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.