

THE EVOLUTION OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES

IN NEW YORK STATE

1800-PRESENT

Presented by

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Introduction

I begin with two questions.

Have you ever wondered how Catholic Charities came to be providing the program or service in WHICH you are involved and how your agency has come to look like it does today?

And, second, whether this is your first time at this event or whether you have been here often, have you wondered how the State Council of Catholic Charities Directors came into being and exactly what it does?

Over the next twenty or so minutes, I hope to provide you the historical context which will help answer these questions.

I will do so by first providing a description of key developments in the changing presence of the Catholic Church IN NEW YORK in the 1800's, next by describing the development of diocesan Catholic Charities agencies in New York State over the last one hundred years, and finally by describing the creation and evolution of the New York State Catholic Conference and the State Council of Catholic Charities Directors over the last century.

For those who would like a more in-depth treatment of this history, I commend to your attention the six books I have written over the last decade about the history of the State Catholic Conference, and my three volumes about the work of Rochester Diocesan Catholic Charities. All nine books can be downloaded at no cost from my website, www.jackbalinsky.org.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EMERGENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NEW YORK STATE IN THE 1800'S

The evolution of the human services profession in New York State from the time it was founded as New Netherlands in 1609 until 1900 is a fascinating story. Time does not permit description of this evolution. For those interested in a comprehensive overview, I commend to your attention a two volume History of Public Welfare in New York State 1609-1940 written by David Schneider and Alfred Dentsen which I have summarized in the introduction to my book A History of the New York State Catholic Conference 1915-1968. (An interesting aside, the first "social workers" – minor ecclesiastical functionaries called "sieckenroosters" who were sent to visit sickly persons in their homes.)

It is my purpose here to describe four key developments in the evolution of the Catholic Church in New York State in the 1800's which had great impact on the creation of Catholic Charities as we know it today.

To understand these key developments, as Father Tom Harvey, former Director of the National Catholic Charities organization often said, it is important to recall the 1648 treaty of Westphalia. THAT treaty brought settlement to one hundred years of religious warfare in Europe based upon the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose territory, his religion.) this treaty resulted in the creation of ever more religiously homogeneous communities in Europe. In one way, Catholic immigration to the United States can be viewed as a transplantation of Catholic communities from European NEIGHBORHOODS to neighborhoods IN THE UNITED STATES, particularly

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in cities in the Northeast. For the Catholics, shunned as many new immigrants, parishes became an alternate society providing education, employment, health care and social services. Pastors were in many ways the first Catholic social workers in the state.

So, NOW TO DESCRIBE key developments in interaction between this EVOLVING Church and the American civil society:

- The first key moment was the first public policy skirmish between the Catholic community and Protestant dominated civil society. Archbishop John (Dagger) Hughes of New York (the first Diocese in the state, established in 1808) led an unsuccessful fight in debate over the Common Schools Act of 1833 to obtain government funding for Catholic schools. This action led the Archbishop to develop a widespread Catholic school system which became a model for other Dioceses, but also created a battlefield about government funding of Catholic services which was to last over the next century.
- The second key development was the growth of institutions for dependent children. The first Roman Catholic orphan asylum was established in 1817. The mid 1800's saw vast expansion of these institutions. This expansion was made possible by the enormous commitment of communities of religious women (I would be remiss here if I did not emphasize and underscore the enormous contributions of communities of religious women in this country and state over the last two centuries, to service to the poor and to Catholic Charities.) Since the sisters took little or no salary, and other expenses were minimal, these institutions were viewed by government as a cost effective way of caring for children. By 1900, there were 20,000 children in Catholic institutions in New York City. (An interesting note – most children residing in institutions were not orphans but rather children whose parents could not provide adequate care, or who regarded the institutions as a superior alternative to their own domestic situation and to opportunities provided by public schools.
- The third key development was the emergence of Catholic lay service providers. Beginning with the founding of the New York City Council of the St. Vincent DePaul Society in 1857, Catholic laymen responded to those in need on an individual basis. A related development was the emergence of Catholic lay women who, like their Protestant counterparts, became involved in providing services to the poor. In 1902, for example, a group of Catholic lay women established a city-wide federation of volunteers called the Association of Catholic Charities of New York. In a book written by Georgetown professor Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown: The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare, the role of these women was described as follows:

“they worked in unfamiliar territory located somewhere between motherhood and priesthood, and in a fledgling profession that was struggling to establish its identity”

These groups would be instrumental in forging an organizational change in the way the Church provided social services, recognizing that service would be provided more efficiently through centralized organizations and “settlement houses” to work with immigrant communities rather than through parish communities alone.

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- The fourth key development was An intense public policy struggle between the Catholic community and civil society as represented by the emerging Protestant humanitarian reform movement. The depression of 1837-1844 had created a strong organized anti-foreign movement that was hostile to all foreigners, but particularly Catholics, thus intensifying animosity left over from the school funding battle. This conflict came to a head at the 1894 Constitutional Convention. New York Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan once again made aggressive efforts to obtain funding for parochial schools, while Protestant reformers wanted to deny funding to denominational social service programs. The result was a stand-off and continuation of the status quo: parochial schools were not eligible for public funds (the so-called Blaine Amendment) but denominational social services programs, including child care institutions, were eligible, thus establishing a precedent which has been so important to the growth of Catholic Charities organizations in New York State over the last century. Nonetheless, the debate continued about oversight of such sectarian programs as evidenced by the two year long investigation of CATHOLIC child care institutions in New York City from 1914-1916, causing Bishops to have greater concern about the accountability of such organizations.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIOCESAN CATHOLIC CHARITIES ORGANIZATIONS

Hence, in the early 1900's, two sets of circumstances led to the formation of Diocesan Catholic Charities as we know them now. First was a desire of the Bishops to centralize administration and control over their various charitable activities, including child care agencies, health care institutions and institutions serving older persons. Second, as previously written, it became clear that a much more efficient way to deliver community-based social services, rather than doing so on an individual parish basis, was to create what became known as centralized Bureaus of Catholic Charities.

I will describe more fully later the creation of the New York State Catholic Conference of Bishops. One of the first activities of that organization, however, led by Bishop Thomas Hickey of Rochester, was to seek legislation to permit creation of Catholic Charities corporations in each of the seven Dioceses of the state (remember, it wasn't until 1957 that the Diocese of Rockville Centre was separated from the Diocese of Brooklyn). These organizations were to be called Catholic Charities Aid Associations. (An aside, reflective of the difference of the working of the legislature between then and now, this legislation was introduced by Assemblyman John Malone of Rochester on April 2, 1917 and was signed into law by Governor Charles Whitman on April 24, 1917.)

It is interesting to note the objectives of the corporation, as provided for in the law were:

“to aid, support and advise and to conduct by itself, or in cooperation with any other agency, now or hereinafter existing, which shall be affiliated with the corporation, any or all philanthropic work which shall be carried on within the State of New York, or elsewhere”

Most of the activities enumerated were within the realm of social case work agencies. Foreshadowing the adoption of the Cadre Report by the National Conference of Catholic

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Charities in 1972, however, there was listed an activity which fell within the realm of community organization or social action:

“to induce the adoption by the community at large of such measures in the organization and administration of charity as may develop self respect and increase the power of self-support of the poor.”

A fundamental purpose of this legislation was to insure effective separation of Church and state, because the government needed Church programs and government funding of such programs continued to be under attack by political opponents of the Church.

Thus were launched diocesan Catholic Charities agencies. It is helpful here to repeat the mantra often spoken by Father Fred Kammer when he was President of Catholic Charities USA: “When you’ve seen one Catholic Charities agency, you’ve seen one Catholic Charities agency.” While each Diocesan organization grew in its own way, there are some general statements which can be made to describe these agencies over the next fifty years or until about 1960:

- Gradually, larger child care and health care institutions were spun off to governance by their own Boards or religious communities
- Generally, Boards were small, including the Bishop and other priests
- Most if not all staff and clients were Catholic
- Services provided were generally emergency services and family services, especially counseling and adoption

Then came the tumult of the 1960’s both in the country and in the church.

In the country the 1960’s actually began for Catholic Charities and other not-for-profit agencies in 1959 with the introduction of the government purchase of service concept. While Catholic Charities agencies and other not-for-profits had long worked in cooperation with government, this new concept resulted in an explosion of funding for not-for-profits and significant expansion of services. With this impetus, the initiation of the “war on poverty”, and the creation of Medicaid and Medicare, Catholic Charities agencies became involved in everything from drug abuse and housing to the care of mentally ill and developmentally disabled persons, as well as advocacy programs.

Within the Church, among the many outcomes of the Second Vatican Council (whose 50th anniversary we are now celebrating), were a heightened sense of social justice awareness, including preferential option for the poor, a recognition of the role of the laity, and furtherance of the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. the recognition that issues should be addressed at the lowest possible level of social organization.

Given the changes in Catholic Charities services and new thoughts about governance in the Church, within a short period of time, by the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, Bishops and Catholic Charities leaders were asking questions like:

- Not what can we do, but what should we do?
- What is Catholic about Catholic Charities?

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- What has happened to our rootedness in parishes?
- If we accept government funding, can we still maintain our role as advocate with government?
- Should we serve only Catholics or all persons in need?

These questions were answered through the Cadre Report adopted by the National Conference of Catholic Charities in 1972.

The Cadre Report outlined a three-fold mission for Catholic Charities:

- The quality provision of direct services (it's ok to accept government funding) on a non-denominational basis (and to serve more than Catholics)
- Advocacy for public policy priorities that would assist individuals to achieve their full human potential
- A convening function, calling together local faith communities of all denominations and in particular Catholic parishes, to address local issues.

Let me expand a moment on this convening function, also called parish social ministry. Underlying this element of the mission statement is the belief that Catholic Charities should be the "leaven" to call up for individual Catholics and parish communities their responsibility to respond to God's call to love our neighbor. While this parish social ministry function has been carried out differently in different Dioceses, generally it has involved a partnership of staff, parish leaders and volunteers in both direct service and advocacy activities.

Within these parameters, given the presence of local Catholic entities in all 62 counties of our state, the fact that New York State is comparatively very rich in its funding of human services, and the extraordinary leadership of those present in this room as well as our predecessors, Catholic Charities has become and continues to be a major presence in human services delivery in the state.

As indicated in the wonderful brochure describing our work in the state, created through the leadership of Monsignor Sullivan:

- We provide services touching every human need: children and families, disabled and challenged persons, immigrants and refugees, persons in need of housing and persons experiencing emergencies or crises
- Annually, we serve over 1.3 million persons, non-Catholic and Catholics alike
- We employ more than 22,500 individuals
- We utilize the services of more than 18,000 volunteers
- The services we provide annually are valued at more than \$1.7 billion
- We will hear this afternoon about an existing new disaster relief case management program, which is important in itself, but may also lead the way for exciting statewide service opportunities
- Another evolving new development is serving veterans
- And as I will soon describe, we have been are leaders in advocacy for the poor and vulnerable

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In terms of governance and structure carrying out this work, each Diocese differs but there has been much increased lay participation and subsidiarity. Given this dramatic change in approach, the question of Catholic Identity within our agencies is an ongoing challenge. On this topic, I refer you to Monsignor Sullivan's excellent 10 point presentation at last year's convening.

So, to return to my initial question of your possible wonderment of how your service or agency came to be as it is, I hope I have provided a general framework from which you can better answer that question.

THE CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE NEW YORK STATE CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIRECTORS

Some in the larger community and some in our Catholic community question why the Catholic church and Catholic Charities should be involved in politics.

Over the years, to respond to that question, I've used, the following anecdote:

It is an apocryphal story of a primitive village – from where ever and whatever time. Religious in nature and therefore, concerned about helping others, the villagers became alarmed when all of a sudden there appeared a succession of young children floating hopelessly on rafts down the stream which ran through their village. So, they set about rescuing the children one by one, but after a time what had begun as a trickle turned into a torrent – so many children that all couldn't be rescued. Finally, it dawned upon village elders that they should travel upstream to find out why these children were appearing. There, they found “the evil ones” who were launching the children on their way. They then went about the business of confronting the evildoers.

While my presentation will focus primarily on the New York State Catholic Conference and State Council of Catholic charities Directors, to fully understand their work, it is important to recognize the work of their national counterparts: the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, and the national Catholic Charities organization, which was born as the National Conference of Catholic Charities Directors and since 1985 has been known as Catholic Charities USA.

First, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. Actually, bishops in New York State, who had determined to create the State Catholic Conference in 1916, were instrumental in organizing in 1919 the first formal meeting of the Bishops in the country. At that meeting, the Bishops issued a pastoral statement which was basically the blue print for the New Deal, adopted under President Roosevelt in the 1930's, including especially the enactment of Social Security and Aid to Dependent Children programs. Time does not permit a full discussion of the advocacy of this organization over this last century, but I mention here highlights: Pastoral Letters on Affordable Housing and Persons with Disabilities issued in the 1960's, life issues advocacy during the early 1970's relating the Roe v Wade Supreme Court decision, two extraordinary statements in the 1980's: the Peace Pastoral issued in 1983, and the Pastoral Letter on the Economy issued in 1986, as well as Cardinal Bernadin's promotion of the Consistent Life Ethic of Life approach to advocacy at that time. In addition, the National Conference houses the national Catholic Campaign for Human Development focused on empowering the poor and supports Catholic Relief Services through which we attend to our responsibilities of global solidarity.

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We celebrated two and a half years ago in Washington in September, 2010 the 100th anniversary of the formation of the National Conference of Catholic Charities. Coming together in the fall of 1910 were about 50 leaders from around the country, both Diocesan priest Directors of Catholic Charities, as well as the wonderful women volunteers, previously described, particularly from New York City. Again, time does not permit description of the full impact on the country of the work of this national organization, but I mention a few highlights. It is said that for a thirty year period from roughly 1920-1950 no piece of child welfare legislation was passed by the United States Congress without the imprimatur of Monsignor John O'Grady, the Director of the National Conference of Catholic Charities. Some of you may remember the outstanding work of Conference lobbyist Sharon Daly at the time of enactment of federal welfare reform, and know now the work of national director Father Larry Snyder and Candy Hill to promote the Campaign to Reduce Poverty and to advocate against cuts to programs serving poor persons in this time of fiscal austerity.

The New York State Catholic Conference of Bishops was created in 1916 when the Cardinal Archbishop of New York John Farley, with strong backing from Bishop Charles McDonell of Brooklyn and Bishop Tomas Hickey of Rochester, engaged the services of Albany attorney Charles J. Tobin "to keep the Bishops of the New York province informed on pending legislation relative to Catholic Charities and other matters of interest."

First, under the leadership of Bishop Edmund Gibbons of Albany, who became Episcopal Chair of the Conference in 1919 and served for nearly thirty years, and succeeding Bishops of the Diocese of Albany, it was Charles Tobin who provided staff leadership to the conference from 1916-1980.

Yes you heard me right – 1916-1980. That would be Charles Tobin Sr. from 1916-1954, and upon his death, Charles Tobin Jr. from 1954-1980.

Again, time does not permit a full description of the exceptional and influential advocacy of the State Catholic Conference over these nearly 100 years. Again, I mention a few highlights.

- Successful advocacy at the 1938 Constitutional convention for a provision that tax funds could be used for clearance of slums and housing of low income persons
- During the 1967 Constitutional Convention, successful advocacy that the Constitution retain provision for payment of an adequate standard of need for those on public assistance
- In the wake of the Attica prison riot of 1971, through creation of a Criminal Justice Advisory Committee, advocacy for measures to improve conditions within prisons and provide alternatives to incarceration including successful advocacy in 1984 for the Slaughter/Marino classification/alternatives bill
- Beginning in 1995, the creation of Fidelis Care of New York, which now provides health insurance to over 800,000 people across the state

But, now, to turn to the State Council of Catholic Charities Directors.

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In the early years of the State Catholic Conference, representatives from Dioceses were largely Diocesan Charities Directors and attorneys well-versed in the work of Catholic Charities. In the 1940's, 50's and 60's, however, the over-all conference turned much more focus to educational and other issues and the so-called "Standing Committee of Catholic Charities Directors" began meeting from time to time in 1957 to assure continuing attention to human service issues. By November, 1966, under the leadership of Monsignor Frank Mugavero, the Brooklyn Diocesan Catholic Charities Director, the group proposed and the State Bishops accepted the creation of the New York State Council of Catholic Charities Directors, with the understanding that a staff person would be hired within the structure of the State Catholic Conference to support the work of the Council.

My book on the history of the State Council details the evolution and growth of the Council, including the establishment of committees focused on particular areas of concern, and beginning in 1982, the holding of the Catholic Charities Statewide Annual convening answering the question of how you come to be here today.

Again, time permits only a description of the highlights of the successful advocacy of the Council over the past fifty years.

What I am most proud of, and consistent with our fundamental mission, has been our persistent advocacy for economic security for the poorest and most vulnerable. Of many, I cite three examples. It was the Council of Catholic Charities Directors and our staff person Jim Cashen who took the lead in advocacy involving interfaith groups and major New York City organizations through the State Coalition for Fair Public Assistance which succeeded in 1981 in gaining a 15 percent increase in the basic public assistance grant, the first increase in more than a decade. This group then became SENSES which continues more than 30 years later to advocate for the poor and vulnerable.

Second, I had the honor of being among a group of four Bishops and four Charities Directors who were with Senators D'Amato and Moynihan in an office of the Senate floor on September 13, 1995 when the final version of federal welfare was being debated and we were influential in getting the family cap raised. The next Wednesday, September 20th, Senator Moynihan entered into the Congressional Record a statement that the Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities had been the strongest and most consistent voice for the poor in his thirty years in Washington.

Third, it was the State Council, inspired by Sister Donna Franklin and Laura Cassell, who encouraged the State Bishops to issue their Pastoral: Restoring the Covenant with the Poor, which became the inspiration for the CCUSA Campaign to Reduce Poverty

A second area of success relates to the deINSTITUTIONALIZATION of persons with development disabilities. At the very first meeting on the Council I attended in spring 1977, we heard a presentation from then OMRDD Commissioner Jim Introne (now Deputy Secretary to the Governor for Health Care) about the need for Catholic Charities to step up and develop community residences. The iconic Monsignor Tom Cribbin from Brooklyn had as much influence as anyone around developing deinstitutionalization policies. This influence has been continued through the leadership of Paul Pickering from Rochester and Gary Siegel of Albany and many others.

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In affordable housing, the Council was a major player in development of state policy. The Criminal Housing committee, led by John Tynan from Brooklyn and Monsignor Don Sakano of the Archdiocese, was a key player in passing legislation in 1985 to create the State Affordable Housing Program and the Housing Trust Fund program.

In the mid 1980's, the Council Elderly Services Committee, under the leadership of Mary Jo Giambelluca from Buffalo, received an award from the State Office of Aging for its advocacy for and input into development of EISEP (Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program.)

And the list could go on.

Conclusion

I hope you leave this presentation not only with a greater understanding of the work of Catholic Charities, but also with a great pride in being part of this community which has done so much to carry out the Gospel call to serve our neighbor, both directly and through public policy advocacy.

Certainly Pope Francis has already emphasized that our work is at the heart of being Catholic. I hope we can use his vision to reach out and involve a new and younger generation in our work.

I leave you with a final thought about our work. My vision of what we do is that we encounter persons at a particular point on their journey in life, just as we are at a particular point in our journey. In our time together, we learn and gain from each other. Whatever our particular service and however successful we are in gaining outcomes, our main purpose is that our presence is a sign of God's love for and support for the person we are encountering.

While many point to the passage in Matthew 25 as reflecting our Catholic Charities mission, I prefer Luke's rendition, chapter 4, Verses 16-19.

*Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the Synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written,
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people."*

Luke 4:16-19