



**Minnesota Fathers and Families Network  
2013 Annual Summit**

**The Spirit of Fatherhood  
Advancing the Common Good to Improve our Individual and Collective “Father Stories”**

*Key Note Address of Tim Marx, CEO of Catholic Charities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis  
January 29, 2013, Saint Cloud Minnesota<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction**

I am so thankful for the opportunity to be with you today. Coming to St. Cloud is always something of a homecoming for me, as I am a proud and faithful graduate of St. John’s University, and the Benedictine values of “worship, work, and service” formed me and continue to guide me.

Being provided the opportunity to reflect on fatherhood also comes at a special time for me personally and professionally. Personally, in just a few days we will celebrate my own father’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and several weeks later I will celebrate 30 years of being a father myself. Professionally, Catholic Charities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis has just finished a fairly intense strategic planning process. We are now beginning to implement key elements of the resulting plan. How fathers relate to children, and how *both* relate to the community, are among the most critical issues we are confronting.

So my thanks to Morgan Streeter, your Network’s Executive Director, for inviting me and for the background he provided to me on your great work and the goals of this Summit. My thanks as well to Molly Crawford, a Network Board member who reached out to me last spring as the Summit was being planned. And a final and special thanks to my Catholic Charities colleague Nate Rauschendorfer, who is our Parenting Services Program Manager and runs our Dad’s Connection Program.

The role of a CEO often includes getting credit for the great work of your colleagues, something I get to do often, and Nate’s work is a great example. For example, Nate testified before the United States Congress in 2010, just before Father’s Day, on “Responsible Fatherhood Programs.” Nate’s testimony was well received, so well, in fact, that we will be sending him back to provide Congress much needed lessons on responsible legislative programs!

To get back on track, here is how I will proceed—first, with some personal reflections on fatherhood from my perspective as a son and a father, and second, how I utilize and translate my personal values and perspectives into my professional life. Third, and finally, how this all relates to the vision and mission of Catholic Charities, a large and diverse social service agency that is very much a part of the secular world. I hope all of this will add some value for the purposes of this Summit.

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<sup>1</sup> There is the speech “you write, you give, and the one you wish you would have given.” This is a combination of all three as I had some of it prepared, the rest was from an outline, which I have since clarified and made more concise, all consistent with the “spirit” of my actual remarks.

## **Father Stories: I am my Father's Son and my Sons are of their Father**

### *My Father*

My father, Marshall Wayne Marx, will turn 90 on February 17. He graduated from De La Salle High School in Minneapolis in 1941, did not go to college, and worked as a salesman of plumbing and heating supplies for most of his career. I am the fifth of his six children, three boys and three girls. All of us, and I expect this is the case in many families, know and experienced our dad a bit differently as there are nearly 20 years that separate my oldest brother from my youngest sister.

Dad's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday (and being here with you today) caused me to reflect on what experiences with dad "formed me." Here are a few:

- My dad was often on the road very early in the morning and would get home in the afternoon and take a nap before 5:30 supper. It was often my job to wake him up. One time, I was probably 8 or 10, I walked gingerly into his room and approached the bed and he grabbed me, hugged me, rolled me over, and in his hands was a Rosary from which he was praying. Dad always and still goes to Mass regularly, but I don't recall my dad talking to me much about his Faith. But this memory reminds me always of his deep Faith. (It also instilled in me an appreciation of a good nap!)
- My German dad was not much of a "joiner" or a community "do gooder," my Irish mother did more of this. I do, however, remember a family trip to the South in the winter of 1963 when I was in the first grade. Jim Crow was alive and well, and I saw these strange signs for "colored" and "white" bathrooms and drinking fountains and asked my dad why they were there. "So sad, so wrong" with a tinge of anger is how I recall his reply. I also have memories of his regular questions at the dinner table to me, among which were, "What did you do today for the betterment of your community?" I often didn't have a good response, but it implied that I needed one.
- My dad is also fiercely independent and not particularly diplomatic. He would not hesitate to challenge politicians, priests and even the presidents of his own companies for hypocrisies or mendacities. Richard Nixon was a particular target, and dad was never part of his "silent majority."
- An often told story is that when I was born, my dad took my mom to her hospital room window and showed off his new fishing boat and motor, before mom got a chance to show me off to dad. So fishing and fun were important to my dad, and on occasion he would benefit from a reminder on priorities, something my mother was never hesitant to provide.
- When I was in my mid-twenties, my mom and dad went to a retreat, after which my dad gathered all the kids together and told us that he loved us, something I don't think we often or ever heard even if we felt it. As with many families, we felt unconditional love from our mother; but from dad, it was a bit different; we sometimes thought we had to earn it; we had to measure up.
- Finally, my dad lived in a time when a white male with a high school education had plenty of opportunities for jobs with living wages that supported a middle class lifestyle. We were not "rich" by the standards of the day, but we never worried about having a home, three meals, a doctor to call on, or a good and safe school to attend, as well as a neighborhood that kept a watchful eye on its kids.

## *The Father of My Sons*

So I consider my dad's legacy to me, which I have sought to pass on to my sons, to be a foundation in Faith, a passion for justice, and a willingness to swim upstream and challenge the status quo. That legacy also includes a need to be reminded of what should come first and of the benefits of others hearing directly and often of your love for them. And like my father, I too am a white male who has been able to provide my sons economic and other opportunities that were better than either my father or I had, as well as a supportive community that kept a watchful eye on them.

Last Saturday night, my sons, Daniel (29), Ben (27) and I went out to dinner, and I asked them for their perspectives on my fathering as I approach 30-year mark of fatherhood. My mom always told us to "emulate her virtues and forgive her faults" so I asked them what aspects of my being a father to them might they like to emulate for their kids and for what I need forgiveness. Here is *some* of what they had to say, and you should know that I did not pick up the check until they finished.

I learned that I am very much my father's son. A depth of Faith seldom on display, a passion for social justice, or as one termed it "social stewardship," an independence that doesn't allow for easy categorization based on political, religious, or ideological categories, a need to be reminded often about priorities, and an aloofness and distance that can make personal connections challenging. I have more of and sometimes less of each of these as I seek to emulate my father's virtues and I forgive his faults as I know my sons do in response to my fatherhood.

Our fathers are among our first role models. I read an obituary recently in which a son told of the advice his father provided on fatherhood to him: "Kids don't listen; they watch." This is a reminder that we all have our own "father" story, and no matter what it is, it stays with us forever. It forms us, and all of us have to learn from and seek to "re-form" some of it, and we both consciously or unconsciously pass on all or some of it to our kids, and they to theirs. And all of these collective stories have an impact on all of our families and communities.

### **My Father Story and my Professional Work**

Our individual and collective "father stories" are profoundly important to all of us and to the broader communities in which we live. As individuals—both fathers and children—as family members, as members of faith and other community institutions, and as citizens we have a stake in the future of fatherhood and a responsibility to have that story be one of hope, love, opportunity and promise.

As I make the transition, now, from the personal to the professional, permit me to ground us in some Scripture to remind us of our responsibilities as fathers, as children, and as a community. From Ephesians, Chapter 6: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." From Sirach, Chapter 3: "Those who honor their father will have joy in their own children—and those who respect their father will live a long life;" and from Romans 12: "Live in harmony with one another."

All of this has caused me to reflect on the "Grace of God" and for our purposes here the "Spirit of Fatherhood." I am so fortunate and grateful that my "father story" and that of my sons is largely positive. I know that any number of personal decisions and their consequences of and for my father, my sons, or me could have resulted in different and potentially tragic stories. We are all at times saved from ourselves by a combination of family, friends, neighbors, teachers, clergy, official civil institutions, and ultimately God.

God has lots to do, and so our obligation, and my professional obligation, is to be God's partner or instrument in creating father stories that are filled with hope and love for children, fathers, and the entire community. The following was attributed to St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel always; when necessary use words." In a secular society people know and experience God differently or may not recognize God at all, but I think we all appreciate that there is a spiritual element in all of us and in our communities that needs to be nurtured.

## **The Spirit and Work of Catholic Charities: Tradition, Practice, and Response to Today's Challenges**

### *Catholic Social Teaching*

At Catholic Charities, our Spirit is based on Catholic Social Teaching, which has its origins in scripture and centuries of social thought. It shares common elements with all major religious traditions and is embedded in much of our secular creed as well, in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Here are some of the major tenets of Catholic Social Teaching:

- Human dignity—the fundamental belief in the dignity of each human person.
- An option for the poor and vulnerable—they are entitled to priority in all that we as individuals and as a community do.
- Rights and responsibilities—we all have rights based on our human dignity, but responsibilities as well to each other, our families and our communities.
- Community and the common good—we are social beings whose dignity exists in community and the common good—how we organize our laws, our politics, and our economy affect the capacity of individuals to thrive as part of a community.
- Solidarity as a human family—human dignity is to be protected and promoted notwithstanding differences in race, sex, wealth, and national origin. We are one.

This can be pretty radical stuff. Just as a prophet comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable, in Catholic Social Teaching you can find both comfort and challenge regardless of your political or social leanings.

### *The Teachings in Practice*

Our Catholic Social Teachings guide our customer and client work:

- Based on the option for the poor, we serve those most in need. This means we take on challenges others won't. This is why I reached out to Catholic Charities so often when I was in government—to take on our toughest challenges.
- Based on human dignity and solidarity, we serve people no matter where they are in their life's journey, no matter what challenges they are confronting, regardless of faith or background. We don't ask people whether they are Catholic; we ask what they *need*—be it food, shelter, help in finding a job, or a listening ear. And we do this because Catholic Tradition and Teachings are foundational to us.
- Based on the community and common good and rights and responsibilities, we ask each customer/client to do what they can, but we also work in the context of the entire family, and recognize as well the importance of a supportive community.

*The Teachings and Practice: What is Necessary for Today and Tomorrow*

Catholic Charities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis is the largest comprehensive social service agency in the Twin Cities. Annually, we serve 30,000-35,000 in direct service each year: Shelter, housing, emergency services to the homeless, pre-natal care, day care, early childhood education, counseling to kids and their parents—and other services to children in need—services to keep older adults in their homes, and services and assistance to allow refugees and immigrants to achieve independence.

We have 580 hard working and dedicated staff and revenue of over \$40 million thanks to collaborative partnerships with government and over 20,000 generous donors. Each day we are saving and improving lives as well as strengthening communities. But when I am often asked how it's going at Catholic Charities, I say with a hue of chagrin that “business is too good,” that we are in a “growth industry.” Once this sinks in, people appreciate the irony of this; that it is not good news for our clients and customers or the broader community. Some facts:

- According to U.S. Census data, since before the great recession (2007) to now (2011) poverty in Minnesota and the Twin Cities has increased within the overall 7 county Metro by 25%-35%.
- Almost 25% of the residents of the core cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul are living in poverty, including about one-third of the children. The racial disparities are stark and disturbing, with rates for non-whites *triple* that of whites in the state of Minnesota. Further, there are communities in which poverty is concentrated—such as North Minneapolis—where there are intergenerational cycles of poverty, poor health, educational failure, and violence.
- Similarly, homelessness increased by 25% from 2006-2009 according to Wilder Research. The largest percent increase, nearly 50%, was among youth.

These trends have a profound and disturbing impact on many “father stories” and our collective “father story” as well. Too many are trapped in poverty and without economic opportunity. Too many work very hard for too little, making trade-offs between medicine, rent, time in the car or on the bus, and spending time with kids. These are trade-offs neither my father nor I ever had to confront.

Over the last year Catholic Charities undertook an intense “positioning process” to determine how to respond to these trends. Our response, in part, will be as follows:

- We will continue to serve those most in need—this is a core competency and value of Catholic Charities.
- We have concluded that Catholic Charities and the broader community cannot “serve our way out of poverty.” More fundamental change is required. We will advance a vision of a community in which there is “poverty for no one and opportunity for everyone.”
- Advancing this vision for the fathers and children we serve means working increasingly in the context of the communities that help shape their lives and opportunities. Young men trapped in communities without social and economic opportunity confront greater barriers to being good fathers. Quite simply, if we want to create better “father stories” we need to do a much better job at solving poverty and creating opportunity.
- We have learned that a critical element of solving poverty and creating opportunity is housing stability—a place to call home. Homelessness affects educational outcomes, worker productivity; mental and physical health and of course, the ability to be a responsible father. If you don't have a home not much else can go well in your life. So we will focus on the housing stability of all those we serve.

- This year we will give special attention to homeless youth, again the fastest growing portion of the homeless population. The Minnesota Homeless Youth Act, adopted in 2006, has never been adequately funded—about \$250,000 when at least \$8 million is needed to have significant impact. Catholic Charities is proud to be a leading partner in a diverse coalition working to secure this funding and we hope you will join us in this work.

### **Conclusion: Hope in the Spirit of Fatherhood**

Working in the “growth industry” of poverty and homelessness can be challenging. Hope is an essential ingredient for staying committed to ending it, and in keeping our spirits up. But hope is there, and it comes from the knowledge that we are having a positive influence on individual fathers and their children. For example, the young father with whom Nate and my colleagues at Catholic Charities worked—the mother’s rights to her daughter were terminated, the father had limited contact with his daughter and turned to us to make a fresh start. With patience and tenacity from all involved (the father, his daughter’s guardian, and Catholic Charities staff), the father was able to stabilize himself and his own home environment and was eventually awarded custody. Based on our latest information, father and daughter are still doing well.

Hope comes as well from a faith in the future. As Martin Luther King (whose legacy we celebrated earlier this month) said, “The arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.” So as we confront, also in Dr. King’s words “the fierce urgency of now” in so many ways, we can look to the ancient words of the prophet Malachi to have confidence that the arc of our collective father story bends steadfastly toward love: “Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day; He will turn the heart of fathers to their sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers.” (Malachi 3:23-24).

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today.