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## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Catholic Charities New American Services

By Marie Schuetze, Case Aide

Catholic Charities New American Services (NAS) helps refugees work toward independence by reuniting families and providing assistance as they settle into the community. My work focuses on family reunification cases—where family members in a refugee resettlement camp join family members who have already arrived in the United States. We refer to the family members who are already in the United States as **the “U.S. tie.”**

The first step in the resettlement process is to call the U.S. tie. They are waiting for partners, children, parents, and extended family. Many U.S. ties tell us that their refugee family members are living in unsafe situations and do not have adequate medical care. We ask questions to find out how much support the U.S. tie can provide once

the refugees arrive. Can they help with transportation or interpretation? Can their family live with them?

When we receive a notification in our **system detailing the family’s arrival, we** begin to make housing arrangements. Upon arrival, we connect the family with health insurance, school registration, employment counseling, English classes, and a multitude of other services.

When the Executive Order in January banned refugees from coming to the United States for four months, decreasing the number of refugees the United States would accept from 110,000 to 50,000 from October 2016 to October 2017, the staff at NAS had to communicate with many people awaiting refugee family members. This was a difficult task.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## PARISH SPOTLIGHT: St. Olaf Catholic Church

*This column features social justice work by parishes in our community.*

By **Bill Keatts, a member of St. Olaf’s Charity and Justice Committee**

Discussions that Encounter (DTE) was founded as a grassroots effort by Rev. Arthur Agnew, the pastor of our neighboring congregation, Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church, over 12 years ago. At the time I was chairing a discussion group at St. Olaf that started as part of the former Evangelization Project in this diocese. Through a housing

non-profit (MICAH) that both of us were involved with, we met and decided to bring the groups together.

For the past 12 years we have been holding discussions on race, racism, privilege, and related topics every 2nd and 4th Thursday. We now have four organizers/facilitators and gather at St. Olaf once a month and Phillips Community Center once a month. There are over 1,200 people on our distribution list, and we have convened

*(Continued on page 7)*

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

## The Work of Working for Social Justice



To say that the first quarter of this year has been busy would be an understatement! From the Sowers Assembly on January 31 to our legislative efforts at the capitol, the Advocacy Team at the Office for Social Justice is working hard to elevate the voices of those most in need. You will read about some

of our efforts in this issue of *Seeds*.

This is an interesting time to be working for social justice. In some ways, our country could not feel more polarized on issues critical to our everyday experiences. Interestingly enough though, there seems to be greater recognition of how far into our own niche worlds we have burrowed. Our policy team has seen this in meetings with legislators—many of whom have signed on in support of social issues this session in **ways they haven't in the past. And, we find comfort** in the understanding that our sweet spot is bridging life experiences among people of faith.

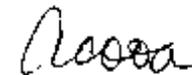
What I hope comes across in this issue of *Seeds* is the amount of energy, thought, and sheer talent each member of this team contributes toward the Catholic Charities mission of solving poverty, creating opportunity, and advocating for justice in the community. One recent example of this is the creation of a family homelessness learning tool by Community Education

Advocate Mike Rios. This role-playing tool, which is based on our youth homelessness tool, takes participants on three separate journeys from homelessness to stable housing. Mike spent many hours sitting with families and staff at our Family Service Center, capturing their stories in a way that honored their dignity and was true to their experience. There was also considerable research involved to make sure we accurately conveyed the complex systems that families experiencing homelessness must navigate. As we **fine-tune this tool, we'll make it available for broader use** and distribution on the Catholic Charities website.

One of the goals of our office is to broaden the reach of our advocacy efforts, and I was happy to share more about the work of Catholic Charities in an interview with David Gillette on the [Feb. 8 episode](#) of Twin Cities **Public Television's *Almanac at the Capitol*** about rural diversity in Minnesota, the racial disparity gap, and equity issues.

I truly appreciate those of you who have taken a moment to fill out a survey, send a note, or respond to an action alert. Our team is inspired by your feedback **and suggestions. Keep 'em coming.**

Peace and Blessings,



Acooa Ellis

Director of Social Justice Advocacy



Over 700 people rallied for affordable housing at the March 14 Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless Day on the Hill. Middle: the hearing for **the Homes for All appropriation bill (HF874). Right: Catholic Charities' employees Melea Blanchard and Acooa Ellis.**

## *(New Americans, continued from page 1)*

Before the Executive Order, NAS was committed to accepting 300 of the 110,000 refugees. The ban has cut our acceptance number from 300 to 150. Twenty-four refugees were expected to resettle to Minnesota through Catholic Charities before the end of February 2017. These men, women, and children—who have already been through an intensive, two-year security review—have had their travel to the U.S. cancelled and are unable to join their families here. Most are fleeing violence in their home countries and will have to stay in refugee camps until the ban on refugee resettlement is lifted.

For more information about Catholic Charities New American Services, visit [www.cctwincities.org/locations/refugee-reception-placement/](http://www.cctwincities.org/locations/refugee-reception-placement/)

### What You Can Do

While the impact and scope of the Executive Order signed by President Trump remain unclear, here are some actions you can take to advocate for refugees:

- Please contact your elected officials and tell them that the United States has a responsibility to provide safety to refugees who are fleeing persecution. Any legislation that discriminates based on nationality or religion contradicts our longstanding tradition of freedom and justice.
- Sign up for action alerts from Justice for Immigrants, a network established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that is committed to immigration reform: [justiceforimmigrants.org/category/action-alerts/](http://justiceforimmigrants.org/category/action-alerts/)
- The United States has a rigorous vetting process that screens refugees before they are resettled. You can learn more here: [refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/USCPNG.png](http://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/USCPNG.png)
- Learn more about our Muslim neighbors by using this study guide prepared by our colleagues at Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota: [www.lssmn.org/refugeeservices/study/](http://www.lssmn.org/refugeeservices/study/)

## DID YOU KNOW? IMMIGRATION FACTS AND FIGURES

- Minnesota has proportionally fewer immigrants than the U.S. as a whole (8% compared with 13% **nationally**), but the state's foreign-born population is increasing faster than the national average—in Minnesota, it has tripled since 1990, but only doubled nationally.
- **Among our state's youngest children (0-4)**, nearly 1 in every 5 is a child of an immigrant.
- By country of origin, the 10 largest groups of foreign-born residents in Minnesota are (in descending order): Mexico, India, Laos, Somalia, Vietnam, Thailand (including Hmong), China, Korea, Ethiopia, and Liberia.
- **Seventy-two percent of Minnesota's foreign-born adults** are working, close to the employment rate among native-born adults (at 77%).
- Since 2000, more than 41,000 refugees have arrived in Minnesota as their first destination in the United States. In addition, Minnesota is the top state for refugees who relocate from another state, usually within three months of arrival to the U.S.
- Worldwide, there were approximately 21.3 million refugees in 2016. The U.S. resettles half of 1% of them. The President, in consultation with Congress, determines the number. This year that number is 50,000, effective 1/27/2017.
- Minnesota is home to six local resettlement organizations: Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis (CCSPM), Catholic Charities of Winona, Lutheran Social Services, the MN Council of Churches, the International Institute, and Arrive Ministries.
- Refugee resettlement at CCSPM is through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which is one of nine national resettlement agencies.
- As consumers, immigrants in Minnesota have an estimated \$659 billion in lifetime earnings and annual purchasing power of \$5 billion. Immigrants pay an estimated \$793 million in state and local taxes annually.

Data sources: [mncompass.org/immigration/overview](http://mncompass.org/immigration/overview) and “Refugee Facts and Figures” from Lutheran Social Services. The website of the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](http://UnitedStatesConferenceofCatholicBishops.org) also has information about immigration.

# 2017 SOWERS ASSEMBLY

## A Community Discussion about Poverty and Mass Incarceration

By Vanjelis Ngwa, Community Education and Engagement Manager

*"In many ways, the American dialogue about poverty remains the same as it was in the early 1960s, when poverty was first 'discovered' as a national problem. Liberals want the government to do more for the poor — through expanded social programs or raising the minimum wage — while conservatives emphasize self-reliance over government assistance. Both sides seem to agree that there is an intergenerational 'cycle of poverty,' leading children born in poverty into lifetimes of economic difficulty, and that ways must be found to interrupt this cycle.*

*"But many things have changed in the last 50 years, some of them so recently as to have gone largely unnoticed by pundits and policy makers. The poor, and especially poor people of color, have long been over-represented in the prison population. This used to be attributed to the fact that the poor are more likely to be tempted by criminal activities such as theft and drug dealing. Just in the last ten years, however, it has become apparent that being poor is in itself a crime in many cities and counties, and that it is a crime punished by further impoverishment." Barbara Ehrenreich in her foreword to ["The Poor Get Prison: The Alarming Spread of the Criminalization of Poverty"](#) by Karen Dolan with Jodi L. Carr (2015)*

This year's Sowers Assembly provided an opportunity to consider the links between mass incarceration and intergenerational poverty. Dr. Artika Tyner, Associate Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of St. Thomas, was the keynote speaker and moderated the ensuing panel discussion with Brandt Williams of Minnesota Public Radio and Butch Blauert from the Minneapolis Police Department.

Approximately 120 people attended the Assembly at St. Olaf Catholic Church in downtown Minneapolis on **January 31**. St Olaf's Father Kennedy opened the Assembly with a prayer, and was followed by OSJ's Acooa Ellis, who introduced Dr. Artika Tyner. Dr. Tyner spoke about the current state of criminal justice in Minnesota and the nation and proposed eight strategies that advocates can use to address mass incarceration. Dr. Tyner then moderated a panel discussion between Brandt Williams Butch Blauert.

Officer Blauert, along with other members of the Minneapolis Police Procedural Justice Team, spoke about the work their team is doing to educate law enforcement officers and community members in Minneapolis about implicit bias. Blauert underscored the impact that strong, positive relationships between law enforcement and community members can have on some of the issues that lead to mass incarceration.

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

Brandt Williams, a journalist who has reported on race-related issues for over twenty years, provided several accounts of how race disproportionately affects incarceration rates. He agreed with Officer Blauert that better training and communication between law enforcement and the community could impact the **cycle of mass incarceration**. He also pointed to media's role in how crimes are reported, and how a skewed narrative of crime reinforces the implicit bias of many community members. Providing access for people of color to the journalism profession, he said, could help **balance the media's narrative on crime**.

After the panel discussion, audience members had the opportunity to dialogue in small groups and then to pose questions to the keynote speaker and panelists. The evening ended with a call to action to work together to promote greater justice within our society.

Left to right: Attendees Leigh Benvenuti (Catholic Charities), Najocia Elmore, Carlos Gonzalez, and Meredith Beeson.





Left to right: Officer Butch Blauert, journalist Brandt Williams, and Dr. Artika Tyner.

## Dr. Tyner's Strategies for Responding to Mass Incarceration

### Strategy #1: A Call to Leadership

Embrace leadership opportunities to help address issues related to poverty and mass incarceration.

Examples: Lend your gifts (time/talent/treasure) to organizations committed to ending poverty or mass incarceration. Participate on a civilian review board.

### Strategy #2: Create Jobs

A significant number of Minnesota residents of color still suffer from poverty and homelessness. Support initiatives that create chances for upward mobility and develop post-release employment opportunities.

Examples: Work with technical/vocational training programs to identify opportunities for internships or apprenticeships at your workplace. Contact your legislator to voice support for the Saint Paul Opportunity Center and Dorothy Day Residence.

### Strategy #3: Promote Educational Opportunities

Champion efforts to increase reading proficiency levels and educational opportunities for all children in our region.

Example: Support collaborations of community partners like the Northside Achievement Zone and the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, which work to create a network of support around students and families to improve academic outcomes.

### Strategy #4: Disrupt the School to Prison Pipeline

Incarceration as a child is one of the biggest predictors of future incarceration.

Examples: Support initiatives that provide culturally-relevant alternatives to detention for youth. Ask your school board member and superintendent what steps they are taking to ensure equitable standards for disciplinary action.

### Strategy #5: Address Implicit Bias

Join efforts with organizations that provide trainings to address implicit bias.

Examples: Consult the [Minnesota Racial Equity Resource Directory](#) for a listing of organizations and trainings compiled by Minnesota Compass.

### Strategy #6: Engage in Policy Reform

[Become a Sower of Justice!](#)

### Strategy #7: Take a Comprehensive Approach

Adopt a multi-faceted approach—such as promoting job creation, addressing issues related to mental health, building kinship networks, and preventing gang violence.

Examples: Sponsor an intern from Right Track or Step Up.

### Strategy #8: Build Restorative Communities

Restorative justice draws upon principles of community building, reconciliation, and peacemaking.

Examples: Join your district council or neighborhood group. Participate in youth mentorship.

# CAPITOL PATHWAYS INTERN

## New Voices in Advocacy

Q&A with Brenda Marquez Ramos, who is interning at OSJ through the Capitol Pathways Program. Brenda currently studies community development at Minneapolis Community and Technical College.

**What is Capitol Pathways and what interested you about participating in the program?**

Capitol Pathways is an internship program through the Citizens League. Its purpose is to provide internship opportunities for college students of color who are interested in public policy. This way we can work towards bringing diversity into the Capitol so that there is accurate representation in our communities.

I have always been interested in policy work and how government works. Unfortunately my involvement is limited because I am undocumented and unable to **vote. However, I don't want my inability to vote to prevent me from getting involved, and Capitol Pathways was a perfect opportunity for me to be able to work and learn about public policy.**

**What are some of the most important things you have learned so far about advocacy?**

During my time at Catholic Charities I have learned the importance of people advocating for the policy work that they want to see get passed. I think something that many people forget is that we all have a voice and that our voice is very powerful. Our legislators work for us and our voices are the ones that determine what policies are heard and passed.

**What do you think stops young people from getting more involved with the political process?**

I believe many young people are not involved in the political process because it can be intimidating. Understanding how the government works, especially the election process, can be confusing. The complication and confusion can lead people to believe that their vote and voice do not matter.

**What advice do you have for young people who want to be more involved in shaping our democracy?**

I would encourage young people to push themselves out of their comfort zone and get involved. What people need to remember is that legislators are also just people from the community who want to be involved in shaping our democracy. There are many different ways that you can be involved, starting with the most basic one, voting if you are able to vote. There are so many people who are unfortunately unable to vote, undocumented people, and in many cases people with criminal records. Get out and vote because it is a privilege that not everyone has.

**How might your internship shape or contribute to your future career goals and plans?**

Now more than ever I realize the importance of getting involved and how vital it is that we have diversity in government so we have policy makers who understand their communities and can therefore represent them accurately.

*For more information about the Capitol Pathways Program and to learn about this year's cohort of interns, visit [citizensleague.org/minnesota-capitol-pathways](http://citizensleague.org/minnesota-capitol-pathways)*

Policy Advocate Kaying Thao with Representative Ilhan Omar and intern Brenda Marquez Ramos.



# AT THE CAPITOL

## Our Advocacy Priorities

Each year, Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice conducts a series of listening sessions with program staff members and leaders to gather their insights about the challenges facing our clients. The listening sessions this year identified three critical areas of focus to improve client outcomes: access to affordable housing, resources to support economic mobility, and racial equity.

### Our Leading Policy Issues

- Secure \$12 million in General Obligation bond financing for the Saint Paul Opportunity Center, the second phase of [Dorothy Day Place](#).
- Advance legislation establishing the creation of a state interagency taskforce to review the efficacy of major federal and state programs in assisting families with low income to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce the **number of families living in poverty (“cliff effect”)**.
- Ensure state program conformity to federal requirements and an increase in funding for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).
- Promote investment in housing resources critical to Catholic Charities priorities—primarily through Housing

Infrastructure bonds and the Family Homelessness Prevention Program (FHPAP).

- Identify and develop strategies to reduce barriers to stable housing, particularly for individuals with criminal histories or negative/no rental history.

### Current Political Context

A shifting political landscape calls for the ability to be nimble. While our proactive focus will be on measures that support broad economic mobility and growth, we are prepared to defend programs on which our clients rely. In particular, we are closely watching legislative discussions regarding the following:

- Immigration and refugee resettlement
- Funding to support health and human services, such as:
  - Group residential housing
  - Community-based care coordination
  - Medicaid

For a fuller description of policies supported by Catholic Charities, visit [www.cctwincities.org/advocate/policy-framework](http://www.cctwincities.org/advocate/policy-framework)

### *(St. Olaf, continued from page 1)*

discussions at churches, synagogues, schools, prisons, and other venues.

Our objective is to bring people of all walks of life together to learn about and to talk openly about race, with people who are of different races and life experiences. Our action is to educate and create awareness using presentations and videos, then build relationships through open and respectful dialogue. By creating an environment where transformation of hearts can occur, we have witnessed individuals change in meaningful ways and actions taken in various forms that spread change in the community.

Our goal is to change hearts concerning the barriers that living in a racialized society present to all of us, and to inspire action that will go beyond individual change to societal change. Our strategy is to reach out to as many as we can, in every walk of life and continue our own journey along with others.

***What led you to focus on this work in particular?*** I went through a personal and spiritual transformation which led me to understand that “Love your neighbor”

meant I was called to love all people—especially those who were not or could not be my neighbors. I needed to act on this belief in a new (to me) and substantial way. Then it was just doing what God placed before me.

***What challenges, if any, have you faced in bringing people together around this issue?*** Many people that we try to reach do not seem to be receptive about changing their racial beliefs, and fear even getting involved in a discussion about race. This seems especially true for many who would benefit greatly as people of faith or humanitarians. Breaking through personal resistance to change and realizing that all of us have a critical need to become aware of what divides us as humans and the horrific impact this division has on society, are clearly the greatest challenges.

***What advice or wisdom do you have for parishioners or community members interested in starting a social justice group?*** Just do it! Find a few interested and committed people and build from there! It helps enormously to have the leadership and strong and visible/vocal backing of the pastor or community leader.

*To share your parish social justice work, contact OSJ.*



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To conserve resources, we send paper copies of *Seeds of Justice* only to people for whom we do not have an email address. To provide your email address, write to [osj@cctwincities.org](mailto:osj@cctwincities.org).

*Seeds of Justice* is published four times a year: September, December, March, and June.

Previous issues can be found at [cctwincities.org/our-organization/news/seeds-newsletter](http://cctwincities.org/our-organization/news/seeds-newsletter)



## EVENTS

Please join us for **Journey to Justice**, an immersion experience **that explores poverty and justice in an experiential “justice banquet” involving groups funded this year by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development**. This event is sponsored by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Saturday, April 1, 2017  
8:00 AM–2:00 PM (lunch will be served)  
Basilica School, 1622 Laurel Avenue West, Minneapolis 55403

For more information, please contact Vanjelis Ngwa, Community Engagement and Leadership Manager, at Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice: [vanjelis.ngwa@cctwincities.org](mailto:vanjelis.ngwa@cctwincities.org) or (651) 647-2584. Space is limited. Registration is required. Cost is \$25.