



CATHOLIC CHARITIES  
Office for Social Justice

# SEEDS of JUSTICE

CHANGING HEARTS AND CHANGING STRUCTURES ON BEHALF OF SOCIAL JUSTICE | DEC 2016



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Building Relationships	1
Amplify Your Voice	1
Letter from Acooa Ellis	2
Barriers to Stable Housing	3
The Role of Faith in Navigating Politics	4
The New Dorothy Day Place	6



**Contact Us:**  
60 Plato Blvd E, Suite 230  
Saint Paul, MN 55107  
(651) 647-2588

## Building Effective Relationships with Elected Officials

By Kaying Thao  
Public Policy Advocate

Lawmakers actively depend on feedback from their constituents in order to successfully craft and pass legislation, so it is important to educate those who craft policy on the real-life impact of proposed laws and policies.

Building relationships with lawmakers and their staff may seem intimidating and confusing. However, they are there to represent you, and you have access to them. I worked in the Minnesota Legislature for over three years and saw firsthand how in-person visits with elected officials are actually desired and welcomed. As a matter of fact, ensuring that your elected officials know you by name and face is quite powerful. You are a voter, and they rely heavily on your support.

Your representatives will especially pay attention to your input if you call, email,

write, and visit them at least once a year. Once you have an established relationship and they see that you're active, your voice will be more influential than you might expect.

Here are some simple ways to build relationships with your elected officials.

### Know your elected representatives.

Learn about the person you're trying to influence. What are their interests and goals while in office? What is their education/career/background? What committees do they serve on? Can you find a common interest?

### Be active in your community.

Become knowledgeable about major issues affecting your local community or district. Know the issues that your elected leaders might be working on. Has your representative passed legislation on specific projects? Develop relationships and participate with key

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Amplify Your Voice: Serve on a State Board, Committee, or Council

If you are part of our advocacy network, you receive occasional legislative Action Alerts via email about a timely legislative issue that you can weigh in on by contacting your elected officials.

But contacting elected officials is just one way of being an advocate. Another way to be involved is to serve on a Min-

nesota state board, council, or committee. It's a great way to get involved in your local community, learn more about issues you care about, and engage in meaningful public service. An "Open Appointments Notice of Vacancies" is posted on the website of the Minnesota Secretary of State every month. You can

*(Continued on page 2)*

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

## A More Just Community



When I used to travel more frequently, my nephew often accompanied my sister to pick me up from the airport. A lover of geography, he was always interested in learning about the places I visited. One day during a quiet moment between the two of us, he asked how I was able to visit all of the places I did. I told

him that I worked hard and did well in school. Because of my hard work, I was able to secure a job that allowed me to travel and earn enough to take trips for fun with my friends. He was quiet, and I contemplated if I had answered his question in a way that would serve him well. In that silence, however, I felt convicted.

While it was true that I worked hard and did okay in school, it was not the complete truth. I had to tell him that there are millions of people in our country who work hard every single day and still struggle to make ends meet. The truth was that I had been blessed with people all along my journey who believed in me and, in a multitude of ways, invested in my well-being. In that moment, I realized that my initial response had ignored all of the ways God had blessed my life. In that moment, I was perpetuating the myth of meritocracy.

The myth of meritocracy leads us to believe that there is a very simple relationship between individual effort and life outcomes—that a person's trajectory is limited only by their merit. This notion is essential to the

American Dream; however, the truth is anything but simple. As people of faith, we know that God blesses us in spite of our shortcomings and that we are called to use our own blessings to bless others. That said, our individual privileges can hinder our ability to see or understand the many ways our current systems limit opportunities among our brothers and sisters most in need.

Humility is essential to understanding our privilege and thus dispelling the myth of meritocracy that prevents action toward systemic change. In July of this year, the advocacy team at the Office for Social Justice started the annual process to arrive at next year's policy and advocacy agenda by listening to Catholic Charities direct service staff, who see the effects of an unjust society every day. Their perspectives are a critical part of our advocacy. Yours is too. In the coming year, the Office for Social Justice will work to increase stability for families and individuals experiencing poverty and homelessness as well as to dismantle policies that perpetuate disparate access to economic mobility along racial lines. We will also invite you to engage in discussions that deepen our collective learning along the journey to a more just community. I look forward to learning with and from you.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Acooa".

**Acooa Ellis**  
**Director of Social Justice Advocacy**

### *(Amplify Your Voice, continued from page 1)*

even subscribe to receive the monthly notice of vacancies by email.

Not all vacancies are open to the public but many are. Some of them meet monthly; others meet several times a year. Some of them have designated term lengths. All of them seek qualified candidates who share an affinity with or are uniquely qualified to understand the aim or objective of the board, council, or committee.

For example, the Board of Teaching, which establishes rules governing the education, licensing, and relicensing of Minnesota teachers, recently sought a school

administrator, school board member, and classroom teacher to serve as members.

As another example, the Rural Health Advisory Committee, which advises the state health commissioner and various state agencies on rural health issues, sought members who, in addition to residing outside the seven-county metro area, also possess some specialized knowledge or experience of rural health care needs.

Every month there are a wide range of new opportunities. You can find more information, including the full list of vacancies and the sign-up to receive monthly updates, at <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/boards-commissions/current-vacancies/>.

# REMOVE BARRIERS TO STABLE HOUSING

## Second Chances for Renters

By Nicole Lindemyer  
Policy & Public Affairs Manager

If you've owned your own home for a long while, you may not know that renting an apartment isn't as easy as it once was.

Nowadays, housing providers (i.e., "landlords") commonly charge an application fee of more than \$20 and use that fee to run extensive background checks on rental applicants. Background checks typically search for all available data within three categories: 1) rental history, including any history of being evicted; 2) criminal history, including any arrests, charges, and convictions; and 3) credit history.

The results of the background checks then serve as the basis for giving people (or more commonly denying them) the opportunity to rent the property.

From a landlord's perspective, background checks may seem like an effective way to identify prospective



renters who may not be suitable tenants. However, background checks reveal only past behavior at best, often long-ago or onetime offenses that

had more to do with poverty and lack of resources than with irresponsibility. Using a person's past behavior to

judge how he or she may act in the future also raises the question: can we as a society show the mercy required to truly allow people second chances?

The Twin Cities rental housing market is currently one of the tightest markets in the country, with a vacancy rate as low as two percent and average rent skyrocketing to more than \$1,000 per month.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, second chances are hard to come by.

In fairness, the choice to rent to a tenant with an adverse history may incur risk. The Minnesota Legislature recently enacted a program to help mitigate that risk through a guaranty pool of funds to reimburse housing providers who incur monetary losses in excess of the security deposit when renting to those with adverse histories. This program provides the practical, financial cushion to allow housing providers to recognize what we know already—that we are human, we make mistakes, and we learn from those mistakes. Each of us deserves the opportunity to demonstrate that learning.

If you are a housing provider and would like more information about renting to someone in need of a second chance, please contact the Office for Social Justice and we can help facilitate an introduction to our housing stability staff, who work to identify stable homes for families and adults.

<sup>1</sup>Minnesota Housing Partnership, "Sold Out: Analysis of Apartment Property Sales in the Twin Cities Region, 2006-2015," available at [mhponline.org/publications/sold-out](http://mhponline.org/publications/sold-out)

### *(Building Relationships, continued from page 1)*

stakeholders, neighborhood organizations, district councils, etc.

**Communicate frequently.** Email, write, call, and meet with all your elected officials at least once a year. It is important to establish a relationship with your legislator and remind them that you are present, paying attention, and persistent. Knowledge about how issues affect your community is very persuasive.

**Be personal.** Research, data, and statistics can only go so far in helping someone understand an issue. Do

you have a personal story that can speak to how a law could impact you, your family, friends, or community? Share it.

**Make a specific request.** All successful advocacy efforts contain some measure of accountability for the lawmaker. It can be authoring or co-authoring a bill, sponsoring a letter of support, or agreeing to attend an event. Make sure you ask them if they are doing those things and hold them accountable.

# SOCIAL JUSTICE MEET-UPS

## The Role of Faith in Navigating Politics

By Mike Rios  
Community Education Advocate

In October, the Office for Social Justice held social justice meet-ups at three parishes to discuss “Values & Voting: The Role of Our Faith in Navigating the Current Political Landscape.” The goal of the presentation was to connect the values that inform our lives as people of faith to the realm of politics and policy.

I began the evening with a discussion about the discernment of values. Often, identifying our values—care for the poor, human dignity, hard work—is not the difficult part. We know our values can guide us. But to move forward into action we still have to discern which action is best. How do we move from values to action?

With the guidance of Nicole Lindemyer, OSJ’s Policy and Public Affairs Manager, we then considered the interplay between politics and policy. When we talk about politics, we often mean political parties and elected officials. Policy, on the other hand, transcends individual people and parties, and in its specificity offers us a way to process political information in the context of our values.

We discussed the challenge of this—that it requires us to know more about policy and politics. The quest to know more requires us to consider how a specific policy

*“The presentation challenged me to be more informed and conscientious.” –Participant*

will play out in reality—who is being served by it, and who is being hurt? Who is included, and

who is left out? There is no political slogan that can reveal this information.

As an example we used the question of poverty. If poverty is the problem, is there one solution? People experiencing poverty are often told to get jobs, work harder, and live within their means. While hard work might be a value that all of us can appreciate, as a solution it fails to take into account the wide array of factors that characterize social ills. We considered some of the real-life barriers faced by people experiencing poverty:

- What if no one will hire me because I have a criminal record?
- What if I have a full-time job but I can’t afford housing AND childcare?

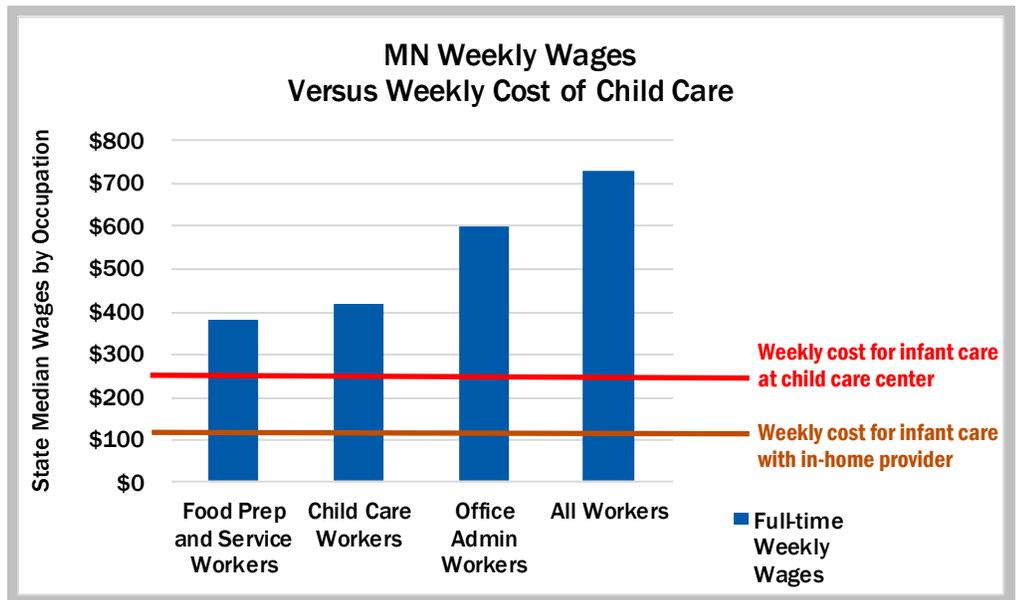


Policy and Public Affairs Manager Nicole Lindemyer presents at St. Thomas Becket in Eagan on Oct. 27

- What if I experience mental illness or any kind of disability and need help to live?
- What if I qualify for subsidized housing but the wait list is three years long?

We looked at one common scenario in greater depth. A single mother with two children has a full-time job but is still unable to afford childcare. She qualifies for Minnesota basic sliding fee child care assistance. But here's the catch: she can't use it, because she has been placed on a waiting list with over 6,500 other Minnesota families, and the waiting list exists because there aren't enough state funds.

Participants agreed that one policy solution is to increase funding to CCAP to meet the need for affordable child care. This concrete example raises yet more questions. Do we know where our elected officials stand on the question of increasing funding to CCAP? For most of us, the answer is no because we haven't



asked them where they stand. By participating in the civic dialogue about policies that affect our communities, we create opportunity for the most vulnerable in our society; we amplify the voices of those who are not being heard.

To conclude the evening, we discussed what steps each of us can take to move from our values to action. Some examples were to learn what policies address these issues. Discover more about the Minnesota Legislature (<https://www.leg.state.mn.us/>) and how you can be involved. Read legislative committee meeting minutes to follow bills as they move through the legislature and know how your elected officials vote. Contact your legislator and ask them questions. Tell them what you value and why it matters.

Data in the table and chart is from the Minnesota Budget Project and Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) has two ways to help low-income families pay for the cost of child care: 1) MN Family Investment Program (MFIP) and 2) basic sliding fee.

**FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015**

A monthly average of 15,328 children from 7,588 families received MFIP-based CCAP.

A monthly average of 15,267 children from 8,121 families received sliding-fee CCAP.

As of June 2016, 6,561 MN families were on the waiting list for CCAP basic sliding fee child care. Of those, 4,219 are in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

**CATHOLIC CHARITIES VOTER REGISTRATION**

Working with volunteers from St. Frances Cabrini and St. Olaf Catholic churches, we provided voter registration assistance to nearly 300 Catholic Charities guests at six program sites in advance of Election Day. Thank you to these generous volunteers. In total, they volunteered 63 hours of their time. At right, a volunteer works with a guest at Catholic Charities' Opportunity Center in Minneapolis.



# THE NEW DOROTHY DAY PLACE

## A Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Dorothy Day Place, a two-building solution to prevent and end homelessness, represents the largest public-private social services partnership in state history, leveraging \$60 million in city, county, and state investments in addition to a \$40 million private capital campaign.

This transformative project has received broad public support and state funding, including \$17 million in housing infrastructure bonds and \$6 million in general obligation bonds to fund Higher Ground Saint Paul (Phase I), which opens later this month.

You are a key element of our success to date. In 2016, \$12 million for the St. Paul Opportunity Center (Phase II) was included in the state bonding bill, which, in the last hour of the last day of the 2016 legislative session, did not pass. When the 2017 legislative session opens in January, we will focus our advocacy efforts to urge early passage of a bonding bill that includes funds to complete the Saint Paul Opportunity Center and Dorothy Day Residence.

Phase I and II together are called Dorothy Day Place. Designed to prevent and end homelessness, it is much more than emergency shelter. By providing one-stop access to resources and housing for our most vulnera-

ble neighbors, the new Dorothy Day Place will be an environment of hope with clear pathways out of poverty.

Higher Ground Saint Paul, scheduled to open this Christmas, includes shelter and supportive housing in one building.

- I. Emergency shelter: Separate dignified shelters with semi-private bunk beds for men and women. Each bunk bed will include electrical outlets, space for personal belongings, and bed linens.
- II. Pay-for-stay shelter for men: In this model, based on Higher Ground Minneapolis, guests (60% of whom are employed) pay minimal fees for a reserved bunk and locker, held for the guest's later use as a rental deposit or first month's rent.
- III. Permanent housing: Higher Ground Residence will provide permanent housing for 193 formerly homeless individuals, including supportive housing options such as a medical respite wing, a wing for late stage alcoholic women, and preference for veterans.

Adjacent to Higher Ground St. Paul, the Saint Paul Opportunity Center and Dorothy Day Residence will provide an integrated, one-stop center that connects peo-

**The Dorothy Day Center** in downtown St. Paul was built in 1981 as a daytime drop-in center for meals. In the beginning, it served 30-50 people a day. Over time, as the state saw increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness, the center became an overnight emergency shelter—a use it was not designed or intended for. More than 6000 individuals from across the state now rely on the Dorothy Day Center each year.

**Below left: Guests sleeping on the floor at the Dorothy Day Center. The center will close in December 2016 when Higher Ground St. Paul opens. Below right: guests awaiting dinner outside of Dorothy Day Center.**





**Dorothy Day Place, with Higher Ground St. Paul (1) on the left, and the Opportunity Center (2) and Dorothy Day Residence (3) on the right. Higher Ground St. Paul is scheduled to open later in December 2016. The original Dorothy Day Center presently stands at (4).**

ple to services in order to prevent and end long-term homelessness in addition to much-needed affordable housing.

Service delivery at the St. Paul Opportunity Center will feature partner organizations from the community, including Ramsey County, the Veterans Administration, and community health care providers. Key Opportunity Center services include:

- Physical, mental, and chemical health care services
- Employment training programs and job search assistance
- Housing search and placement services
- Veterans Resource Hub, providing access to veterans’ benefits; food and nutrition benefits; Medical Assistance; and other supports
- Financial and legal support services
- Nutritious meals, showers, laundry, and storage

The Dorothy Day Residence, above the Opportunity Center, will provide an additional 171 units of much-needed affordable housing, including dedicated housing for young adults and veterans.

When completed, Catholic Charities’ Dorothy Day Place will have a profound impact on thousands of lives and will be a key milestone for advancing Minne-

sota’s statewide plan to prevent and end homelessness.

### CRITICAL TIME FOR ADVOCACY

The November elections saw a significant turnover of elected officials in our state Senate and House of Representatives. They may or may not know their constituents’ commitment to ending homelessness. We need to let them know. Legislators consistently tell us that hearing directly from their constituents makes a difference to them. Consider contacting your elected officials through a visit, letter, email, or phone call. Urge them to pass a 2017 bonding bill that will help fund and complete the new Dorothy Day Place and provide supportive housing for thousands across Minnesota.

Learn more at [DorothyDayCampaign.org](http://DorothyDayCampaign.org) or contact Bev Turner at [bev.turner@cctwincities.org](mailto:bev.turner@cctwincities.org).

**“We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community.”**  
**Dorothy Day, 1897-1980**





CATHOLIC  
CHARITIES  
*Office for Social Justice*

Office for Social Justice  
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis  
60 Plato Boulevard East, Suite 230  
Saint Paul, MN 55107

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
TWIN CITIES MN  
Permit No. 1215



**If you want  
peace,  
work for  
justice.**  
POPE PAUL VI

Paper or  
digital?

**Mailing Preference:**

In an effort to conserve re-  
sources, we are sending paper  
copies of the newsletter only to  
people for whom we do not have  
an email address. If you prefer to  
receive a paper copy, please  
write us at [osj@cctwincities.org](mailto:osj@cctwincities.org).

SEEDS will be published four  
times a year: September,  
December, March, and June.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**Sowers' Assembly**  
**January 31, 2017**

**St Olaf Catholic Church**  
**215 S. 8th Street**  
**Minneapolis, MN 55402**

