



## 2017 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE AND MORE



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

Every legislative session is significant to Catholic Charities. While we work to proactively move

policies that further support families and individuals in great need, we must also remain vigilant in the fight to preserve that which already exists.

### DOROTHY DAY PLACE

This session, however, was especially important. 2017 marked the completion of our private capital campaign for \$40 million to fund Dorothy Day Place, a transformational project designed to end and prevent homelessness. At \$100 million, this project represents the largest public-private housing and social services partnership in state history! The final piece—the remaining public dollars necessary to close the deal—hung in the balance with negotiations between legislators and Governor Dayton on the state budget and a capital investment (bonding) bill.

After a gridlocked legislative session, a bonding bill was passed in special session and signed by Governor Dayton on Tuesday, May 30. The bonding bill includes two critical state investments necessary to complete the second phase of the Dorothy Day Place project and address critical housing needs throughout Minnesota:

- o \$12 million in General Obligation (GO) bonds to fund the Saint Paul Opportunity Center, and

- o \$55 million in Housing Infrastructure Bonds (HIB) to the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) for affordable housing statewide; Catholic Charities will submit an application to MHFA for a portion of the HIBs to support approximately 170 units of permanent housing on the upper floors of the Saint Paul Opportunity Center.

We are deeply grateful for the collective efforts that have brought us this far—generous philanthropic gifts to the private capital campaign, volunteerism, and passionate advocacy. By far the most memorable aspect of this entire session was the time I got to spend in parishes across the metro, collecting postcards in support of the Dorothy Day Place Project over the month of May. The excitement that filled each vestibule after Mass was energizing amidst a pretty contentious session.

### CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

While Dorothy Day Place was undoubtedly our highest profile campaign, we were able to score additional wins to support economic mobility and housing stability—most notably in services for the wellbeing of children and families.

In partnership with the [Kids Can't Wait](#) coalition, we worked to pass legislation to improve the state Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which supports parents who are striving toward full employment, and to ensure that the program more closely conformed to federal requirements.

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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR, CONTINUED

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Federal conformity included provisions to better **facilitate families' stability and transition to higher wages.**

I am happy to report that families who receive help through CCAP now have a full year of eligibility instead of just six months. This means that they are far less **likely to fall off a "benefit cliff," or experience a sudden loss of benefits to their household greater than gains made through higher wages.** A full year of **eligibility also prevents disruption to a child's learning environment,** key to sustaining the benefits of early childhood education.

## HOUSING STABILITY

We do a good deal of our legislative advocacy in coalition with other organizations across the metro area and state. With the [Homes for All](#) coalition, we advanced legislation to increase public investment in programs that prevent homelessness and support housing for all. I mentioned the incredible win related to Housing Infrastructure Bonds earlier in this article.

The coalition additionally succeeded at securing:

- o \$2 million for the Homework Starts with Home initiative (a one-time appropriation), of which:
  - \$250,000 will go toward the Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program (FHPAP), and
  - \$1,750,000 will supplement the Housing Trust Fund Rental Assistance Program.
- o \$2.5 million for the Housing Needs Fund (a one-time appropriation), which includes:
  - \$750,000 for long-term homelessness support services,
  - \$1,150,000 for housing for adults with mental illness,
  - \$400,000 for transitional housing, and
  - \$200,000 for emergency shelter.

With the 2017 legislative session behind us, the Advocacy Team has the opportunity to shift our focus to the issues within our 2017 Policy and Advocacy Framework that align with other bodies of government. For instance, look for updates in the second half of the year related to our work on the following:

- o Metro Transit fare increases;
- o **City of St. Paul's Legislative Action Committee on Poverty;** and
- o issues related to criminal justice.

We will also take stock of performance against last **year's goals, with an eye toward the impact we'd like to make together in the year to come.** I am particularly **excited about the changes we've made to our website** and the foundation they provide for greater engagement with advocates. Throughout this issue, we have embedded links to content on our website at [cctwincities.org/advocacy](http://cctwincities.org/advocacy).

I hope you will spend a few minutes acquainting yourself with the site and share with colleagues, family, and friends. Here are a few of my favorite aspects of the website:

- o **We've improved wayfinding to printable documents** (i.e., advocacy materials, Catholic Social Teaching tools, our Homeless Youth activity), with more coming soon.
- o Research produced by our Policy Analysis, Performance Evaluation and Research (PAPER) Team is featured on the Social Justice Resources page. You can find their recent Housing Stability literature review (which is an awesome primer for someone looking to better understand the connection between housing/housing policy and poverty), along with the recently-released Coordinated Access to Housing and Shelter (CAHS) 2016 Annual Report.
- o You can now find earlier editions of our *Seeds of Justice* newsletter on the Advocacy page.

I end this message sending you hope for a relaxing and ever-sunny summer. And as always, thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Peace and Blessings,  
**Acooa Ellis**  
Director of Social Justice Advocacy



Catholic Charities Policy Staff and Legislative Coordinator (l-r: Kaying Thao, Acooa Ellis, Bev Turner) with President and CEO, Tim Marx, at the May 3, 2017 Capital Investment Committee hearing. Marx testified in support of a bonding bill that included funding for affordable housing and Dorothy Day Place.

# GRASSROOTS ACTION: The Dorothy Day Place Campaign

By Mike Rios, Community Education Advocate

In a daily homily Pope Francis said, “A good Catholic meddles in politics.” As faithful citizens committed to the common good, it is our job to make sure systems in society are working to serve those most in need. Our success in fully funding Dorothy Day Place could not have happened without the help of thousands of advocates who did exactly that.

In the final few weeks of the 2017 Minnesota legislative session, 12 parishes throughout the metro area—from Brooklyn Park to Cottage Grove—hosted tables after masses for parishioners to sign postcards urging their legislators to pass a bonding bill that



voices to be the change they wished to see in their community. I heard pastors speak to the importance of political engagement in caring for the poor, and I saw families spending their Mother’s Day volunteering to help make legislative advocacy easier for others.

We are grateful to all of you who lifted your voice in support of this project, and to these parishes in particular: Assumption (St. Paul), Basilica of St. Mary, Corpus Christi, Lumen Christi Catholic Community, Our Lady of Grace, St. Ambrose of Woodbury, St. Gerard Majella, St. John Neumann, St. Joseph the Worker, St. Patrick (Inver Grove Heights), St. Peter (Mendota Heights), St. Rita, and St. Thomas Becket. Thank you.

These actions will have real rewards that will affect real people in need, and I believe what I witnessed in those spaces was truly a faith that does justice.



would include the remaining public funds for Dorothy Day Place. Three parishes hosted letter writing campaigns and hundreds of constituents pledged to call their legislators. After three weekends we delivered 2,410 postcards and 172 hand-written letters to 76 different legislators during a most critical time in the legislative session.

During that time I witnessed Catholics coming together to lift their

Top: Signed postcards arranged by zip code and legislative district. Middle: Letter writing at Assumption Catholic Church in St. Paul, May 7. Below: Postcard writing at St. Thomas Becket, May 6.



# PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: The Family Service Center

*This column highlights the social service programming of Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.*

**By Alanna Hinz, Program Manager**

The Family Service Center (FSC) in Maplewood is an emergency shelter for families experiencing **homelessness in Ramsey County. With 65 beds, it's** the largest family shelter in Ramsey County, providing 62% of the county shelter beds for families. It provides a safe and supportive place to stay for families **navigating a housing crisis. We're a temporary home** for families on their journey to stable housing—the place their children come home to after school, and where parents receive the support they may need to find housing and address related challenges.

The vast majority of families at FSC are young single mothers with children between the ages of 1 and 12. We also serve a small percentage of single fathers with kids as well as grandparents raising grandchildren. 55% of parents are between the ages of 18-30.

Many parents at FSC work, but low wages and underemployment put many housing options out of reach. Parents at FSC face challenges with childcare costs and the need for evening, weekend, and overnight childcare.

Mental health challenges are also barriers to stability. 36% of the adults we served last year reported experiencing a disability of long duration, and the majority reported this was a mental health condition that impacted daily living.

Families enter FSC through the Coordinated Access to Housing and Shelter<sup>1</sup> (CAHS) program. The waitlist is typically 2-3 weeks long. Most families report that **before entering FSC they “couch-hopped” with friends** or family. Some report staying in places unfit for human habitation, like cars, buses, and abandoned buildings.

Families can stay at FSC for up to 120 days; the average stay is about 70 days. Last year 73% of families exiting the shelter moved into their own housing (had a lease in their own name), while others

went to stay with friends and family. A small number remained homeless. We have housed 169 families over the last 2 years.

There are far more shelter resources in Minnesota for single people experiencing homelessness than there are for families. The cost to buy or rent in the metro area coupled with a low vacancy rate make it extremely challenging—especially for the most vulnerable families—to find affordable and safe housing.

The FSC staff assists families in different ways based on the unique needs and challenges they face. Our client advocate team and resident services representative assist clients with housing and employment searches as well as day-to-day needs. They provide referrals to community providers such as mental health services, employment services, and clothing resources.

**Our children's program specialist assists families with** arranging school transportation; makes referrals to community providers such as daycare providers and **children's medical and mental health providers; works**

with the schools to ensure **children's educational needs are** met; and coordinates on-site programming for children in the shelter (such as tutoring, early childhood programming, art groups, and recreation activities). Our cooks provide our guest families with three healthy meals a day.

Volunteers have an impactful role at FSC. They serve meals in our kitchen and participate in

activities with the children through art projects, reading, tutoring, and playing games. We also need volunteers in our computer lab to help clients with housing and employment searches and at our front desk helping clients with day-to-day needs. Some of our greatest material needs are baby wipes, baby bottles, and items for young children. Hygiene supplies, laundry soap, and full size blankets are also always needed.

There are many things everyone can do to prevent and end family homelessness. Become advocates for

*(Continued on next page)*



**The children's learning center at FSC**

# Vonda's Story

By Jessica Foster, Writer and Multimedia Specialist

For Vonda and her children, homelessness started on a wet Louisiana evening in 2015.

**“My mom threw us out when it was raining at night—threw our things out on the grass,” Vonda recalls, her memories of that fateful night as clear as her motivation to not let family history repeat itself.**

She headed north to put distance between herself and a life of struggles. She has an aunt in Minnesota, so it seemed a good place to start.

**“I didn’t think I’d amount to anything if I stayed there,” she said. Despite the pain of leaving, she says it worked for the best. “It pushed me harder to find stability on my own,” she said. “I want a better environment for my kids. I want positive vibes.”**

After coming to Catholic Charities’ Family Service Center, Vonda became a student at St. Paul College, starting her educational journey to become a clinical psychologist.

Her son Jaden thrived in his first grade class, though **he didn’t like to tell other kids he stayed in a shelter.** He looked forward to having a home so he could invite friends over to play with him.

Kaison went to daycare and celebrated his first birthday at Family Service Center. Vonda was thankful cake was served in his honor, but it was hard to not be **able to bake a cake and buy gifts for her son’s birthday.**

**“Family Service Center gave me a stable home so I could go to school and take care of my kids,” she said.**

**“My ultimate goal is to own a home so my kids never have to be on the streets ever again. I just want them**



Kaison, Vonda, and Jaden at the Family Service Center in 2016

**to be happy,” she said. “My life was not good at all. Kaison won’t remember being in a shelter, and I’m thankful for that. Jaden will remember, but he will know he has a strong mother. It’s going to teach him to never give up because it always gets better.”**

Vonda is committed to staying on her education plan. Taking semesters off in times of crisis is not a luxury she has.

**“I can’t afford to lose time. I don’t have anybody to help me. It’s just me and I want to be able to provide for my children,” she said. “I want to be able to live without assistance. I’m really appreciative of the help I’m getting, but I want to be able to live without it.”**

While staying at Family Service Center, staff helped Vonda connect with community resources, and she worked with the YWCA to find an apartment. Last year, her family was couch hopping. This year, she has the **“safe and homey place” she once thought was out of reach.**

*(Family Service Center, continued)*

affordable housing, child care assistance expansion, and increased financial support for families. Learn about early childhood programs that support the development of children, especially children who live in poverty.

The families we serve are resilient, hardworking, and determined to find stability for themselves and their children. Our staff is determined and passionate about helping families to achieve stability. Our work is very challenging, but the dedication to working together as a team has proven to be successful and is highlighted by the successes of our program.

**<sup>1</sup>Coordinated Access to Housing and Shelter (CAHS)** is a collaborative project between Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Ramsey County, United Way, and Woodland Hills Church. For more information about the program and its success, we invite you to read the [CAHS 2016 Annual Report](#).

# PARISH SPOTLIGHT: St. Peter Claver Church

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

**By Everlyn Wentzlauff, Chair of St. Peter Claver's Social Justice Committee**

At St. Peter Claver Church in St. Paul, we've had a social justice committee for some 19 years. We meet once a month or as needed. Our objective is to bring people and parishes in Rondo and the surrounding communities together to learn about, participate in, and address issues around racism and social justice. Our goal is to be a welcoming church community that represents a strong foundation for parish and community involvement.

Our focus right now is on mass incarceration. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. It's estimated that about 53 percent of men and 61 percent of women in the U.S. prison population are parents of minor children. African Americans together with Hispanics comprise 58 percent of all prisoners, even though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately one quarter of the U.S. population.

Another area of focus is homelessness. Partnering with [Project Home](#), we have provided overnight emergency shelter for Ramsey County families for over 18 years. Members of the St. Peter Claver community also

prepare and serve a meal at [The Family Place](#) every other month.

Our goal is to address policies that reflect injustice of any kind and to help the church equip its members to address political/social justice questions by helping them develop well-informed consciences. As stated in **the Catechism of the Catholic Church**, "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. [Every person] is obliged to follow faithfully what he/she knows to be right and just."

We encourage other parishes to get involved no matter how small or large the involvement. Find a few interested and committed people and build from there. For example, start with small [talking circles](#), talking and sharing issues/stories that are important to your parish around social justice.

I am inspired in my work by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: "Everyone can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love" and "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

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

## IN THE NEWS: Medicaid

In February, the U.S. House of Representatives signed a bill to drastically reduce Medicaid funding to states as part of its effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (the alternative to the ACA is known as the American Health Care Act, or AHCA). The bill is now being considered by the Senate; President Trump has suggested yet another version of changes.

**Created in 1965 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty**, Medicaid (called Medical Assistance or MA in Minnesota) is a government health services program for individuals and families with low incomes who meet other eligibility requirements. In Minnesota it serves over 1 million people. While oversight of the program is federal, each state establishes its own eligibility standards, scope of services, and rates of payment. **Minnesota's spending is matched 1:1 by federal spending.**

If the American Health Care Act as written becomes law, the 1:1 match ends, converting Medicaid to **per capita caps** or **block grants**, and the federal

contribution would drop dramatically; Minnesota would lose \$2 billion in the first 18 months. To cover this deficit, Minnesota could draw funds from other state priorities, pay for less service, or cover fewer people.

Medicaid—not to be confused with Medicare—provides more services to a broader group of people than many realize. Minnesotans of all ages with physical and mental disabilities, as well as the elderly, children, and low-incomes adults, receive life-giving support and health care through Medicaid. Services include home accessibility modifications, adult day care, Meals on Wheels, durable medical equipment, skilled nursing, home health aides, and transportation assistance.

#ThisIsMedicaid

"**This Is Medicaid**" is a coalition of hospitals, care providers, and social service agencies that serve Medicaid clients; it has the goal of shedding light on who is impacted by changes to Medicaid and equipping

*(Continued on next page)*

# TAKE ACTION: Building a Social Justice Committee

*Fraternal relations between people, and cooperation in building a more just society—these are not an idealistic dream, but the fruit of a concerted effort on the part of all, in service of the common good. I encourage you in this commitment to the common good, a commitment which demands of everyone wisdom, prudence and generosity.*

—Pope Francis, [Meeting with Brazil's Leaders of Society, 7/27/13](#)

Many of us volunteer our time to help provide shelter, food, counseling, and education to those in need. Such works of charity are crucial. No less important is addressing the underlying structures that give rise to systemic injustices. Indeed, [Catholic social teaching](#) calls us to do so. A social justice committee—whether in your parish or neighborhood, or among any group of concerned people—is a way to amplify our individual voices. When we make a concerted effort to cooperate as a group of people with shared values and a vision for social justice, we find ways of being effective that complement and often transcend our individual efforts.

Many good resources are readily available for anyone interested in building a social justice committee or invigorating an existing one.

- You can download and share the [Building a Social Justice Committee document](#) on Catholic Charities [Social Justice Resources page](#).
- Everlyn Wentzlaff of St. Peter Claver suggests using a [talking circle](#) to surface (or narrow) issues for your group to work on. Examples include mass incarceration and racial equity, living wages, affordable housing, and environmental stewardship—but your area of focus and how you narrow it to be most effective will reflect your groups' unique membership.
- **Metro public libraries have many books about the topic. Search on terms such as 'community organizing' and 'grassroots activism.'**
- Attend an OSJ social justice meet-up to network with social justice advocates from parishes around the metro area. Bookmark our [events page](#) to stay up to date. We also send a monthly Social Justice News and Events email. **If we don't have your email address, you can contact us at [osj@cctwincities.org](mailto:osj@cctwincities.org).**

*(Medicaid, continued)*

our community with information and tools to act in support of this critical resource.

**Three “This Is Medicaid” community meetings**—in Bloomington, St. Cloud, and Northfield—convened on May 31 to explore the impact of proposed changes to Medicaid. Presentations by Susie Schatz, Director of Advocacy and Volunteer Services at Lutheran Social Services, and a panel of local doctors were followed by community feedback and questions.

Presenters encouraged attendees to take to social media to spread the word about the importance of Medicaid. Share your Medicaid story on Twitter with the hashtag [#ThisIsMedicaid](#), and follow the hashtag to stay up to date on legislative actions.



**Over 100 people attended the “This Is Medicaid” community meeting at St. Luke’s Lutheran Church in Bloomington on May 31.**

Individual stories are powerful! Your story can help **raise awareness about Medicaid’s role and the impact of proposed changes.**



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Read current and past issues at [www.cctwincities.org/education-advocacy/seeds-newsletter/](http://www.cctwincities.org/education-advocacy/seeds-newsletter/)

## EVENTS

Monday, June 12, 2017, 7-8:30 PM  
In the Shadows: [Youth Homelessness in Minnesota](#)  
St. John Neumann Catholic Church  
4030 Pilot Knob Rd  
Eagan, MN 55122

The population of youth (ages 16-22) experiencing homelessness in Minnesota is growing. How does a young person get to school, eat, and pay for transportation to get to a part-time job when they do not have a permanent place to stay? How did they find themselves in this situation? Where do they find support? Please join us for an interactive experience to learn about the realities and challenges of youth homelessness. We will be joined by [The Link](#), which serves youth experiencing homelessness in Dakota County. For more information, please contact Mike Rios at [michael.rios@cctwincities.org](mailto:michael.rios@cctwincities.org) or 651-647-2579.

