

The Witness

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ARCHDIOCESE OF DUBUQUE, IOWA

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2010 • Vol. 90, No. 37 • www.dbqarch.org/Witness

Catholic Charities reflects on history of service

By Tracy Morrison
Executive Director, Catholic Charities

DUBUQUE — I am writing with a fresh memory of fellowship, enthusiasm and love for neighbor as my colleagues and I return from the centennial celebration of Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) in Washington, D.C., with over a thousand other Catholic Charities leaders throughout the country.

Through a grant from CCUSA, four members of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Dubuque attended meetings, experienced opportunities for networking and liturgy, celebrating our past and charting a course for our future in the fight to reduce poverty.

In 2006, Catholic Charities USA launched an aggressive campaign aimed at reducing poverty in half by 2020. In light of U.S. Census Bureau data released recently, our challenge is enormous.

Forty-three million Americans now live in poverty — the largest number in the 51 years that poverty figures have been published. That's one in seven Americans.

How is Iowa faring?

One in 10 of our brothers and sisters is living in poverty. As you leave your home today, notice the first 10 people you come in contact with; one of these individuals is struggling to put food on the table to feed his or her family, to make the mortgage or rent payment and to feel dignified as a person.

Why do we care about individuals living in poverty? Working and providing for themselves or a family is a choice, right?

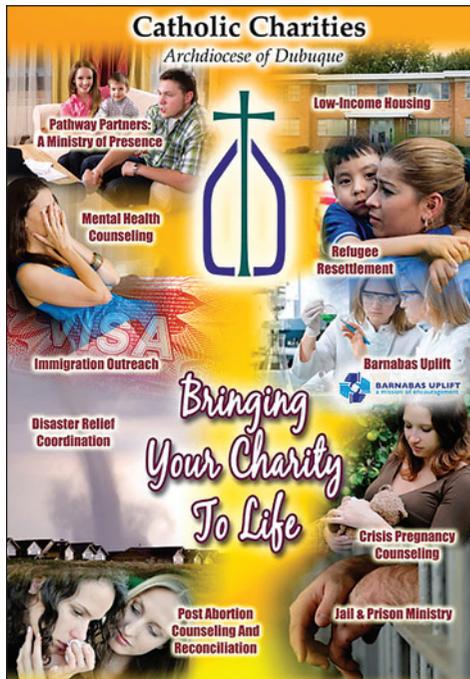
We recognize that of the more than 300,000 Iowans living in poverty, there are some whom the government will support.

However, the vast majority of these individuals are actively seeking economic

stability and self-sufficiency. However, our state and federal programs focus too heavily on financial assistance alone, often trapping individuals in a cycle of dependency. To truly help individuals lift themselves out of poverty, we must treat them holistically and tend to all their needs, not just financial ones. Many individuals struggle with mental illness, unemployment, relationship or social difficulties and other challenges.

It is time to think and act anew ... the mantra from the CCUSA gathering is timely for Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Dubuque as we celebrate our 79th year of service.

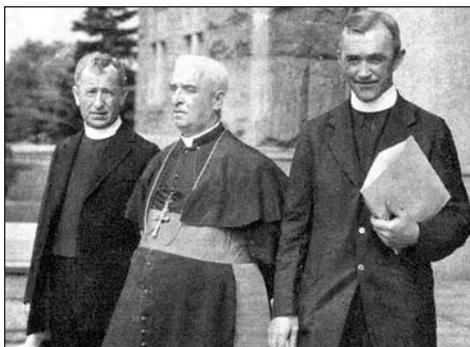
Throughout our years of service, Catholic Charities has been thinking and acting anew, assessing community need, creating collaborative partnerships and ultimately developing innovative programs to address unmet needs within our communities.



Catholic Charities (Con't. from p. 1)

History

Catholic Charities originally provided care for infants through institutional programs like St. Mary's Orphan Home and St. Theresa's Babyfold. In the 1950s, social services shifted away from institutional care and focused on placing children in adoptive and foster homes. Throughout the 1960s, services expanded into additional communities as we partnered with other social service providers to develop local solutions to address local needs such as an adolescent residential treatment facility, a maternity home and Catholic day nursery. As America's affordable housing crisis deepened in the 1960-70s, Catholic Charities responded by building low-income housing projects in Dubuque and Waterloo that still operate today. During the 1980s, services focused on ministry to separated and divorced and a group home for mentally disabled individuals. By the mid-80s, outreach was extended to families during the Farm Crisis.



Msgr. William J. Kerby, left, served as a priest of the Archdiocese of Dubuque. He was involved in graduate studies from 1893-1897 and taught at Catholic University from 1897-1936. He was one of three leaders who founded the National Conference of Catholic Charities (later renamed Catholic Charities USA) in 1910. He served as the first executive secretary of the conference. The founding members' vision is still alive today – to provide help and create hope to the poor and vulnerable. (Contributed photo)

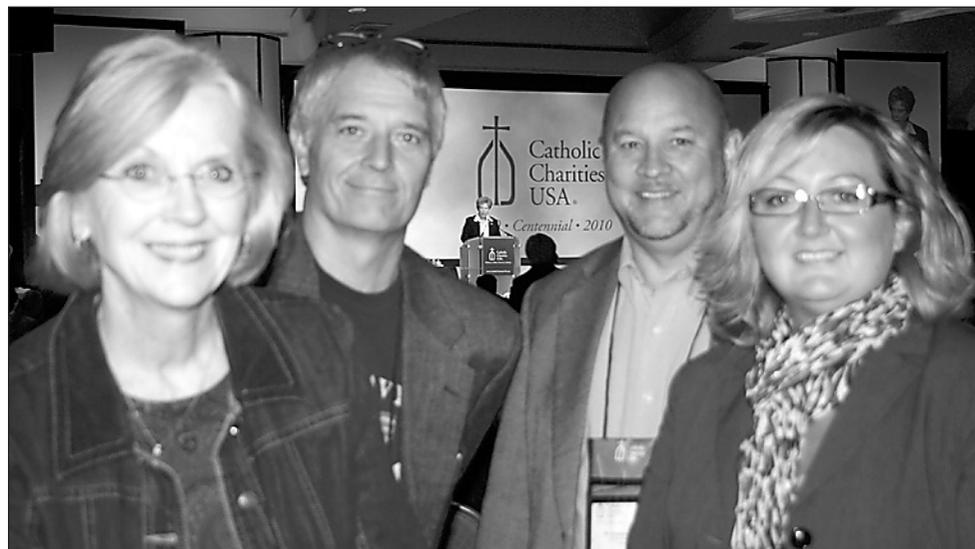
The next decade saw a move away from outreach and focus on professional mental health counseling services provided by licensed counselors and social workers. As social service needs grew, Catholic Charities added new programs, including Immigration Outreach, Disaster Relief Coordination and Jail and Prison Ministry.

Vision for the future

Our focus is on getting back to the basics of outreach. In the social service world, there is often competing agendas between providing professional services that ask clients to come to us and reaching out as Jesus did to find those in need. We achieve our mission of providing services to those in need through a holistic case advocacy model of service delivery that is responsive to the entire person, not just material needs. Research consistently shows the most effective way to assist individuals lift themselves out of poverty is through the establishment of a relationship with a mentor or friend, someone to walk along side of them.

Action ideas for parishes

1. *Support the Unemployed in Your Parish.* Recognizing the economic and emotional stress the economic downturn has had, consider creating a faith-sharing group for unemployed people.
2. *Serve as You Like to Be Served.* Open your parish doors to low-income residents in the community and wait on them. Serve a meal restaurant style for the residents of a local homeless shelter.
3. *Home for the Holidays.* Sponsor a Home for the Holidays postcard campaign to advocate for affordable housing and raise awareness of the reality of homelessness in your community.
4. *Experience Poverty.* Give fellow parishioners a sense of what it feels like to experience poverty by sponsoring a poverty simulation or a hunger banquet.
5. *Be Creative with Your Drives.* Consider a toiletry drive or a sheet, towel and blanket drive.



Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Dubuque staff members who attended the CCUSA celebration are pictured above. Left to right: Mary Jo Pfeifer-Wulf, clinical director/counselor; Steve Jacobs, housing director; Steve Schmitz, program director; and Tracy Morrison, executive director. (Contributed photo)

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Dubuque timeline

Years	Themes	Developments
1931-1950s	Filled gaps in community needs	Bureau of Catholic Charities founded, St. Mary's Home Orphanage, Refugee Resettlement, Adoption/Foster Homes, Juvenile Court Casework, Salvage Bureau Store, Counseling
1960s	Empowerment model	Cedar Rapids Satellite Office, Waterloo Satellite Office, Adolescent Residential Treatment Facility in Dubuque, Catholic Day Nursery in Dubuque and Waterloo, Maternity Home in Cedar Rapids, Counseling/Parochial Schools, Community Youth Center in Waterloo
1970s	Decentralization	Low-income Housing in Dubuque and Waterloo, Mason City Satellite Office, Marshalltown and Decorah Satellite Offices, Tri-County Alcoholism Project, Girls Group Home, Case Management Services, Ames Satellite Office
1980s	Community outreach	Separated and Divorced Ministry, Parish-based Social Services, Group Home for Mentally Disabled, Farm Crisis, Post-abortion Counseling and Reconciliation
1990s	Centralized professional services	Emergency Financial Assistance, Clinical Counseling, Consultation/Education Services, Disaster Relief Coordination
2000s	Addition of new programs	Immigration Outreach, Barnabas Uplift, Jail and Prison Ministry
	The future	Holistic Case Advocacy Services, Community Outreach, Disaster Preparedness