

MIDDLE-SCHOOL STUDENT PUTS FOCUS ON THE CROSS OF POVERTY

BY JILL RAUH, UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STAFF



Photo by Michael Harker, Diocese of Orlando

GRAND PRIZE WINNER HARLEY JUNE SMITH WITH BISHOP JOHN NOONAN AND LORIANNE ROTZ, PRINCIPAL OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN.

When Harley June Smith slid into her seat on the first day of seventh-grade religion class last spring, she didn't expect to learn about the stark realities of poverty in the United States—or that she would soon win a national contest to help Catholic youth work to end it. Until then, Harley had seldom had the opportunity to think about poverty or its causes. “I saw homeless people in Orlando when my family went downtown,” Harley said. “I always felt sad and would tear up. But I didn't know about what caused poverty.”

That changed when Harley's school, St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School in Altamonte Springs, Florida, participated in the 2012 Multi-Media Youth Contest sponsored by the Catholic Campaign for Human

Development (CCHD). Harley's religion teacher, Gilda Brink, received contest materials from the diocese, which included suggested activities and resources to teach about poverty and a DVD about the Church's work to address it. The diocese also arranged for a visiting speaker from Federation of Congregations United to Serve (FOCUS), a community organization that receives funding from CCHD. FOCUS is made up of 15 member congregations—most of them Catholic—in low-income neighborhoods of Orlando.

“FOCUS taught us about how when you're in poverty, you can be empowered to work to get yourself out of it,” Harley said. Her class learned that FOCUS trains and develops low- and moderate-income leaders to impact long-term systemic change and improve quality of life for families by addressing issues like public education and safety, youth violence, and affordable health care.

Over the last five years FOCUS has developed an after-school program; enrolled 43,000 kids in Florida's KidCare health insurance program; advocated for public safety improvements in East and South Orlando; and created parks and recreation programs. FOCUS is currently training leaders to help reduce deportations, increase voter participation, and address incarceration and re-entry issues.

“[Before the contest,] I didn't know about home ownership or how immigrants are treated unfairly,”

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends in Christ,

"Poverty in this country is historically high and growing. Currently over 46 million Americans live in poverty; over 16 million of them are children. In America today, the younger a person is, the more likely they are to live in poverty" (Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, California).



The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), with the assistance of thousands of generous donors, assists anti-poverty efforts across the country. Nearly 250 organizations receive aid and encouragement with grants to support this work in improving their plight and the plight of their families. A mandate of CCHD is to educate, inform, and inspire people to become personally and communally involved in answering an important Gospel call—a call to both prevent and address poverty. This is done in parishes with youth group and faith formation group members, and others who wish to dig deeper into this call, to provide avenues that offer relief.

Recent reports tell of the national disgrace that, in a land of plenty, millions of people have difficulty with daily survival. Whether they are fighting the floods of the Northeast, the fires of the West, or the torrid temperatures of the South, people are struggling in unprecedented ways. This requires an unprecedented response, unprecedented compassion, and unprecedented awareness.

As a means of raising awareness, young people are invited to participate in a CCHD program that allows them to showcase their artistic abilities to educate others about poverty and its implications. This issue highlights just a couple of the dozens of young people who have shared their talent and their commitment to CCHD's mission.

In these projects, which can be viewed on the CCHD website, youth are asked to share their understanding of the causes of poverty. Their creativity has inspired them to conduct interviews, take photographs, paint pictures, share statistics—all with the purpose of piquing curiosity and inspiring action. Many of them speak of how they are changed when they go outside of that which is familiar and interact with persons who experience poverty, discovering a wonderful shared humanity.

Be blessed!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ralph'.

Ralph McCloud
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

For more information on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, visit www.usccb.org (search "Faithful Citizenship").

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Photo by Valeta Orlando, Diocese of Orlando

"THE CROSS OF POVERTY," BY HARLEY JUNE SMITH, A SEVENTH-GRADER IN THE DIOCESE OF ORLANDO. HARLEY WON THE GRAND PRIZE IN THE 2012 CCHD MULTI-MEDIA YOUTH CONTEST.

Harley said. "I learned that FOCUS tries to get great schools for everyone, tries to help protect home ownership, have access to health care, and assistance for immigrants." Not only did Harley learn about these important poverty-related issues, she also discovered the importance of the role of low-income people in creating solutions to their problems.

"What I learned is that if you're poor, you need to feel like you can help yourself. Being poor can be draining," she said. But groups like FOCUS foster hope, and they empower children in impoverished schools to stand up and ask leaders for what they need to succeed in school. Empowerment is something that Harley thinks she and her classmates can relate to. "Even though I'm not below the poverty line, I think

about how I could make changes too, and ask the principal for something we need in our own school."

Inspired by FOCUS's work to address poverty, Harley decided to make FOCUS the theme of her artwork for the Multi-Media Youth Contest. She created an interactive sculpture, which includes paper "Poverty Weeds" at its base, with instructions to "select a Poverty Weed from [the] sculpture to read about one of the many root causes of poverty in the U.S.," such as unsafe schools and neighborhoods, risk of foreclosure, lack of access to a good education, and prejudice against immigrants. Viewers then follow the instructions to "select the Flower with the same color as the Poverty Weed to see one way that a local group called FOCUS is helping to address poverty." The flowers describe how FOCUS empowers and trains leaders to promote student safety, foreclosure reform, funding for after-school programs, and immigrant justice.

The sculpture also includes Scripture quotes and Church teachings that Harley learned in her religion class. Reflecting on Luke 21:1-4, one of the quotes she used in her sculpture, Harley noted, "In this story, a poor widow donates all she has to the collection plate.

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TELL SCHOOLS AND PARISHES IN YOUR DIOCESE ABOUT THE 2013 CONTEST!

The annual Multi-Media Youth Contest is organized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). It is a tool for schools and parishes to engage Catholics in grades 7 through 12 in learning about the causes of U.S. poverty and the Church's response, especially through CCHD. The 2013 contest materials, including packets, fliers, and FAQs in English and Spanish are available at www.usccb.org/youthcontest. Creative works in any form (e.g., video, song, painting, drama, poetry, etc.) are welcome.

Catholics Care, Catholics Vote

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.” These words are from the U.S. Catholic bishops in their statement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.

Especially during an election year, people of faith working to fight poverty through CCHD offer an important witness of responsible citizenship. Their year-round efforts to advocate for solutions to poverty, often by holding elected officials accountable to the common good, are an inspiring example of participation in our country’s democratic system.

During this election season, visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org to access resources to help all Catholics respond to our call to political participation.



Forming Consciences for
Faithful Citizenship

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This reminds me how the poor are empowered to help the poor.”

Harley’s sculpture, “The Cross of Poverty,” won the diocesan competition for her age group among entries from other schools in the diocese. Then her entry was sent to the national contest, where she competed against other diocesan winners. Harley’s sculpture received the grand prize at the national level.

As the grand prize winner of the contest, Harley will be honored at the National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCYM) this fall and will receive a \$500 prize and a matching grant for FOCUS. Her

winning sculpture—as well as the second, third, and fourth prize and honorable mentions for each grade level—will be exhibited during the conference. The Diocese of Orlando has already honored Harley’s work at an awards reception. “It was cool to see how even the adults were impacted by the facts and sayings [on the sculpture],” Harley said.

“Through this contest, I learned that poverty in the U.S.A. is a bigger problem than most people would ever imagine,” Harley said. “I hope that people will think about that and also that they can help. We all need to work together to do this.” ☪

What Is CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the Catholic Campaign has contributed over \$280 million to more than 7,800 low-income-led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership

and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so that CCHD’s investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between impoverished and affluent persons.