



Left: Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio joins a house meeting of Recognizing the Stranger leaders from throughout the West/Southwest IAF as they reflect upon their experiences of parish leadership formation. Right: IAF national co-director Joe Rubio reminds convocation participants that “Baptism doesn’t stop at the border. We are all part of the same body.”

Solidarity and Success: Five Years of “Recognizing the Stranger”

BY RHINA GUIDOS

They come from the ranks of the poor, migrants, and dispossessed, and they have learned to help those like themselves. Even a pandemic did not stop Recognizing the Stranger. This national program, now in its fifth year, emerged from a partnership between the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) and community organizers from the West/Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF).

In those five short years, including 2020 and 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted so many lives and caused incalculable physical, emotional, and economic hardship, IAF’s work of listening to and building up leaders from marginalized communities facing hurdles

has overcome challenges and achieved great success. Through its work of training leaders, building closer relationships between Spanish-speaking immigrants and English speakers at the parish level, and breaking down walls of distrust between immigrants and local government and law

enforcement officials, the Recognizing the Stranger program has reached thousands of people on society’s margins and given them voice.

West/Southwest IAF co-director Joe Rubio says, “With Recognizing the Stranger in this partnership with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development over the past five years, we have worked with over 350 parishes and 20 dioceses and trained 4,000 leaders.”

The program began in 2019, supported by funds from CCHD’s Strategic National Grant Program. Many Spanish-speaking Hispanics/Latinos lived in an atmosphere of fear, in part due to the local laws targeting anyone in the country without documentation. Recognizing the Stranger includes many Catholics as well as people from other faith traditions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the program began with listening sessions with various communities that are dealing with challenging situations, including fear of law enforcement officers, the emergence of synthetic drugs, and lack of valid US citizenship documentation.

Just as the program started to make progress, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down much of the world in early 2020. But the work of Recognizing the Stranger continued.

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across the country help poor and low-income
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housing, fight crime, and improve schools and
neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects
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and effective, and so 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
impovertised and affluent persons.

LETTER FROM



THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

In 2019, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development was overjoyed to help the West/Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation with its work on an innovative national program called Recognizing the Stranger, which you will read about in this newsletter.

The program began as a parish-centered effort to invite Spanish-speaking Hispanic/Latino immigrants to listen to one another's challenges. The goal was to pull immigrants together to solve problems.

By adapting skills from community organizing, they not only found solutions—which included developing better relationships with law enforcement and restoring trust with local authorities—they also received training and mentoring to rally their communities and collectively talk to local authorities about pressing needs, such as the increased availability of synthetic drugs in their communities, officials' recognition of parish cards as identification in some localities, and assistance with housing and employment challenges they faced during the early COVID-19 pandemic.

In the end, that problem-solving gave them not only a better sense of security but also a sense of community in parishes and localities that did not initially feel like home. Their new sense of belonging is a great blessing for our Church and our country.

Recognizing the Stranger was so successful that nonimmigrants asked to participate. The program's work transitioned to creating encounters between nonimmigrants and the migrants who participated in the initial effort. This expanded effort has cultivated understanding and appreciation between two groups that are often portrayed as being at odds with one another. In one another, they found not strangers but friends, as well as collaborators who have helped them improve their communities. They offer us an example of our country at its best, as they put into practice the Church's teaching of welcoming the stranger.

Last year, Recognizing the Stranger participants shared the fruits of their efforts with Pope Francis during a meeting at the Vatican. We could not have been more thrilled when the pope personally thanked CCHD and the US bishops who support the program. But even more thrilling is seeing what the program—which began as a cluster of seven southwestern dioceses—has become: a national effort that

has produced 4,000 leaders around the country and has expanded into 20 dioceses.

"It gives me joy to see pastors, priests, laity, leaders in their communities, along with civic organizations meet to discuss the best ways to overcome serious situations of injustice suffered by the excluded," the pope said in a video message for participants at a March convocation to mark the program's five years.

At CCHD, it gives us joy to have played a part in this effort, started by the West/Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation. This organization has helped a community that once felt voiceless to find its voice. It has given newcomers a sense of home in a new land and a community of brothers and sisters ready to help them find the lives of dignity that we know exist.

In this newsletter, we also welcome Bishop Timothy C. Senior as chairman of the CCHD subcommittee and congratulate him on his June 21, 2023, installation as the 12th bishop of the Diocese of Harrisburg. We also mourn the loss of CCHD subcommittee member Fernand J. Cheri, OFM, the auxiliary bishop of New Orleans, who was called home to the Lord on March 21, 2023. We are grateful for his tireless efforts in speaking out against systemic racism. Thank you for all the prayers we have received, and please continue to pray for us so that we can continue to carry out his mission in our work.

RALPH McCLOUD, Director
Catholic Campaign for Human Development

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“We had to go online for a couple of years,” Joe says. Participants had no choice but to continue their work, which became even more important as the pandemic spread. Some people lost their jobs. Family members died or became severely ill. Children began faltering in online school lessons. Affordable housing became scarce, as did the health-care benefits essential workers needed to work during a worldwide emergency. Although Recognizing the Stranger’s work migrated online, it kept going just as it had when program leaders and participants could meet in person. They kept promoting their mission to listen to one another.

Recognizing the Stranger’s activities were held exclusively in Spanish for its first two years, to build community and identify solutions to the challenges facing many Spanish-speaking immigrants.

“Then we began to make this more of a bilingual effort, particularly because fellow parishioners who spoke English saw the richness of the curriculum and development and said, ‘We’d like to join that, too,’” recalls Joe. “And so it really became a way to build solidarity and relationship between immigrants and nonimmigrants in the same parishes.”

In some dioceses, Recognizing the Stranger brought migrants and others closer together, Joe says, which dispelled stereotypes about one another and helped them understand one another’s worlds.

Once COVID-19 infections began to subside and some restrictions were lifted, groups began meeting in person once again. The groups’ listening sessions and communication methods helped train those who were preparing for the Synod on Synodality, a three-year process of listening and discernment that Pope Francis launched starting in 2021.

Those involved in the successful Recognizing the Stranger program began to assist with the synodal process that took place at parishes throughout the United States. They set up listening sessions much like those they had been

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holding for Recognizing the Stranger. This solidarity between Recognizing the Stranger participants and the Church was fully realized in October 2022, when Joe and 20 other IAF organizers and members met in an audience with Pope Francis.

As Joe reported in the January 13, 2023, issue of *America* magazine, “We shared stories of organizing to bring running water and basic services to over a million people along the southern border, about working to combat human trafficking, of creating efforts to move poor families into living-wage career paths, and of helping to develop leadership among the immigrant community in our parishes.”

While this papal visit was the most notable encounter between the group of mothers and fathers, other concerned people of faith, and Church leaders, it is not the only one. From the end of February into March 2023, the Foundation’s work was highlighted and celebrated with a convocation in San Antonio, Texas. Pope Francis, via video, joined those who praised the group’s work.

He told them he was impressed by their efforts to form migrant and nonmigrant leaders. He applauded them for learning to “listen to the fatigues and hopes of the men and women of each community”



Fr. John Taosen—pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston—of The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) speaks with Norma Quiñones of San Antonio’s COPS/Metro Alliance. They were part of the two-day Recognizing the Stranger Convocation in February 2023 sponsored by West/Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation.



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in concrete ways, while seeking unity in diversity.

The pope was not the only one who praised their work. Other Church leaders have held up the Foundation's efforts as examples of a Church on the move: the "field hospital" that Pope Francis longs for and hopes will spring from among those in the pews. Several US bishops—including El Paso's Bishop Mark J. Seitz, San Antonio's Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, and Galveston-Houston's Cardinal Daniel DiNardo—attended the gathering along with 300 leaders from participating dioceses.

"We all came together and reflected upon what we had done and what we've learned, and made a commitment to go even broader into this," Joe says.

The gathering spent time reflecting on the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Baptism, and on the obligations involved in those sacraments. Their reflections led to discussions about why it is important to care for neighbors and to develop relationships with people who are different, Joe says.

"That just brought a whole different conversation to the parish level about who we're responsible for," he adds. "And particularly with the undocumented, . . . their legal status does not prohibit them from being members in good standing with the parish. Baptism does not stop at the border, and that helps many in the immigrant and the undocumented community understand that they, too, have a stake and a responsibility for the well-being of parish life." 🕊



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Remembering Auxiliary Bishop Fernand Cheri, OFM



We mourn the loss of one of our CCHD subcommittee members, Auxiliary Bishop Fernand Cheri, OFM, of New Orleans. A great friend of the poor, Bishop Cheri passed away on March 21, 2023, at age 71, following complications from blood and kidney disease.

Bishop Cheri incarnated the charism of the Franciscan order he entered into in 1992, by serving society's outcasts in prisons and on the streets, much in the fashion of St. Francis. He was an ardent speaker against systemic racism and spoke against the killing of black men and women in 2021, calling it a pro-life issue. He proudly represented CCHD at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in early 2022 in Washington, DC, which featured prominent Black Catholic speakers and administrators.

Bishop Cheri became auxiliary in his hometown diocese of New Orleans in 2015. At his funeral Mass at St. Louis Cathedral on April 1, he was remembered for his love of gospel music.

We kindly ask for prayers for his friends and family who mourn his loss but carry the beautiful song he created with his vocation.

Welcoming Bishop Timothy C. Senior



We joyously welcome Bishop Timothy C. Senior as the chairman of the CCHD subcommittee. Bishop Senior is not just our incoming chairman; he was installed on June 21 as the 12th bishop of the Diocese of Harrisburg in Pennsylvania. So it is a busy year of many firsts for him. We congratulate him on his new post.

Luckily, he is in familiar surroundings. He was born in 1960 in North Wales, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. He attended local Catholic schools and studied at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Overbrook, Pennsylvania, where he earned his bachelor of philosophy degree in 1981. He was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 1985.

Among his many studies, he earned master's degrees in social work and business administration at Boston College. He has experience overseeing Catholic health-care and social services ministries sponsored by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, where he served as auxiliary bishop from 2009 until being named bishop of Harrisburg. In addition to his duties in Philadelphia, he was chaplain at Divine Providence Village, an intermediate care facility for persons with intellectual disabilities. He says that his ministry there had a "huge impact" on him.

In a 2019 homily for people with intellectual disabilities in Philadelphia, Bishop Senior said love can be carried out "in the little things in our lives" and can change the world. We look forward to working with him on many "little things" at CCHD and to walking together to improve the lives of our marginalized brothers and sisters.