

# CCHD turns 50, started in Archdiocese of Chicago

By Michelle Martin | *Chicago Catholic*  
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*(Karen Callaway/Chicago Catholic)*

When Catholics across the United States reach into their pocketbooks to support the annual Catholic Campaign for Human Development collection the weekend of Nov. 21-22, they will be participating in an effort that began half a century ago in Chicago.

“Chicago was the main cornerstone in the founding of CCHD 50 years ago,” said Ralph McCloud, who directs the national Catholic Campaign for Human Development. “Dedicated men and women joined with others to visualize better lives for people around the country. Thousands of lives and communities have been improved in Chicago and around the country because of Chicago’s tremendous generosity.”

Organizers hope Catholics make a special effort to participate this year, as COVID-19 has put more pressure on impoverished communities and limited church attendance, which means fewer people will be in the pews for the traditional second collection.

Leaders are promoting the campaign on social media and will accept online donations through December, said Elena Segura, assistant director of the archdiocese’s Office of Human Dignity and Solidarity. To donate, visit [CCHDChicago.org](http://CCHDChicago.org).

“That’s my prayer, that we have a decent collection. It’s a challenging time for everybody, but especially for the vulnerable,” Segura said.

The campaign aims to eliminate the structural, root causes of poverty by funding community groups that are led by the people they help. It was the brainchild of Auxiliary Bishop Michael Dempsey of Chicago, who served as a pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish on Chicago’s West Side and was coordinator of the Inner-City Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

He listened to his parishioners and members of the community, who told him they needed skills and support to advocate for themselves.

The plan for a national collection that would funnel money to fund projects planned by community groups came in response to both social unrest in the United States in the 1960s and Pope Paul VI’s “*Populorum Progressio*,” in which he said, “For if the new name for peace is development, who would not wish to labor for it with all his powers?” (No. 87).

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It was against that backdrop that the U.S. bishops in 1969 voted to create what they called the National Catholic Crusade Against Poverty, naming Bishop Dempsey as the first director, according to “CCHD: Rooted in Our Catholic Identity,” published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2017.

A hallmark of the campaign would be local control: To be eligible for grants, community groups must be led by members of the communities they serve, and a portion of the money collected in each diocese remains in that diocese to fund projects chosen by diocesan leaders.

At the same time, a portion of the money collected is used to educate people who are not poor about the reality of poverty in the United States.

Since the campaign’s inception, the Archdiocese of Chicago has been among the biggest contributors to and recipients of CCHD funding, Segura said.

Last year, people in the Archdiocese of Chicago donated nearly \$575,000 to CCHD, and more than two dozen organizations in the archdiocese received a total of \$782,000 in grants.

The groups work in areas including:

- Creating economic opportunities in marginalized communities
- Increasing access to affordable housing
- Advocating for the rights of seniors, workers, immigrants and people with disabilities
- Building communities working for racial equity and justice
- Preventing violence and promoting reconciliation
- Responding to the injustices and hardships exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic

Segura said that after 50 years, poverty is still a problem in many communities.

“We still have it, with new people, the immigrant communities, and in the African American community that Bishop Dempsey served,” she said. “It’s still there, but so is CCHD. It’s beautiful, the spirit of what Bishop Dempsey started.”

Bishop Dempsey, who had been a bishop for only two years when CCHD began, died in 1974 at age 55, but the campaign lived on, especially in the archdiocese where it was born.

Over the last five years, McCloud said, “the good people of Chicago have contributed nearly \$1.5 million to the cause of low-income community development.”

“I call Chicago the mecca of organizing,” Segura said. “Every single cardinal, including Cardinal Cody, supported it. It shows that the voice of the priests were very, very influential in creating this.” □