

CATHOLIC FAMILY & COMMUNITY SERVICES

TRACING OUR ROOTS (A HISTORY OF CFCS)

Revised June 2016

In 1833 in Paris, a French layman, Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853), founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society for the alleviation of the poor and marginalized. Ozanam, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II in August 1997 at World Youth Day, saw the Society as a means of addressing the ills brought on by the growing industrialization of society with personal charity.

Just four years after Ozanam's death, the first St. Vincent de Paul Society in New Jersey was organized in Jersey City to assist poor families and orphans. With the encouragement of Newark's first Bishop, James Roosevelt Bayley, the Society rapidly spread to many parishes in the State. These Parish Societies represent the earliest organized effort at charity work under Catholic auspices in New Jersey.

In Paterson, Dean William McNulty, during his long tenure at St. John's Parish (1863-1922), greatly enhanced the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society with a spate of charitable institutions which both extended and professionalized Catholic charity. The list of charitable institutions of the McNulty era included: St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum in Totowa (1867), St. Joseph's Hospital (1867), St. Frances Home for Working Girls (1897), St. Joseph's Home for the Aged (1901), and Mount St. Joseph's Home for Boys (1911).

With the dawn of the twentieth century, Bishop John J. O'Connor of Newark sought a greater coordination of the social welfare efforts in the Newark Diocese. The St. Vincent de Paul Societies were organized into a central council in 1902. The following year the Catholic Children's Aid Association was founded and began placing children in foster homes for care and possible adoption. In 1925 Bishop O'Connor reorganized the Diocese's charitable efforts, establishing Associated Catholic Charities. Under this new Agency, the old CCAA was absorbed as the Children's Department, and a Family Department was created to provide counseling for families in trouble.

On December 9, 1937, Pope Pius XI separated the three northwestern New Jersey Counties from the Newark Diocese, and created the Diocese of Paterson with Newark Auxiliary Bishop Thomas H. McLaughlin as the first Bishop. Shortly after his installation in Paterson in April, 1938, Bishop McLaughlin established Associated Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paterson on April 29, 1938. Father John T. Merrick, Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes, Paterson, was named Executive Director, and Father John J. Shanley, Curate at St. Joseph's, Paterson, was named Assistant Director. Father Merrick (1901-1944) had been active in community affairs and had served as a member of the Local Assistance Board during the Depression. Father Shanley (1901-1987) had begun his priestly career serving the African American community at Queen of Angels Parish, Newark. He went to Fordham University for a M.S.W. degree in 1934, and returned for a Ph.D. in 1940.

On October 1, 1938, the newly formed Agency was ready to begin work, and on that day the Newark Associated Catholic Charities transferred the Paterson cases (193 children and 60 families) to the new Agency. Miss Helen J. Reed began working in the Agency the next day and was to remain for more than a quarter century, the first of a long line of dedicated professionals who would serve Catholic Charities. The Agency's first full Report in 1940 revealed 140 families, 242 children, and 35 unwed mothers under its care. Although the Agency had just two divisions, Catholic Charities was in fact multi-functional, striving to meet the varied social needs of the Diocese as they arose. In 1947 the Agency was certified by the State to handle adoption cases on its own, apart from Newark.

Father Merrick's practical experience and contacts complemented Father Shanley's professional background, but the partnership was abruptly cut short with the sudden death of Fr. Merrick on March 18, 1944. Two weeks later Fr. Shanley was named Executive Director, a post he was to hold for the next twenty-five years. In 1947 the Agency became a separately incorporated, not-for-profit corporation in New Jersey. That same year the Agency was approved by the State as an adoption and child placement agency. The Agency moved in 1948 from the Chancery Office on DeGrasse Street, to new offices at 12 Jackson Street.

During this time, the Agency saw an increase not only in the numbers served, but in the variety of programs offered. Thus as needs arose, Associated Catholic Charities worked with displaced persons after World War II, refugees after the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, and Cuban children and families after the Castro takeover in that island nation.

In 1969 Paterson's fifth Bishop, Lawrence B. Casey, accepted Monsignor Shanley's resignation and appointed his associate Father Joseph A. Ciampaglio as third Director of Catholic Charities. Msgr. Ciampaglio oversaw the renaming of the Agency as Catholic Family and Community Services and expanded its programs to include mental health services, refugee resettlement and crisis intervention at various sites in all three Counties. Ciampaglio was succeeded by Father Robert Vitillo (1979), Mr. Michael Maiello (1983) and Mr. Joseph F. Duffy (1997).

The children and family units of 1938 have given way to a full gamut of social service offerings, including Aging Services, Family Services, Day Care and After School Programs for Children, Mount St. Joseph Children's Center, the Multi-Lingual Center/Club De Padres, Disaster Assistance, Migrant Ministry, the Partnership for Social Services Family Center, Emergency Assistance, Legal Services, Counseling, Meals on Wheels, Senior Day Care, Senior Transportation. Since Father Vitillo's tenure, the Executive Director of CFCS also served as Executive Secretary of the Diocesan Catholic Charities Secretariat which coordinates the activities of all the Catholic Charities Agencies, including CFCS, the Department for Persons with Disabilities, the Father English Multi-Purpose Community Center, the Hispanic Information Center, Hope House, Straight and Narrow, Inc., Migrant Ministry, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

In 2010 Bishop Arthur Serratelli, recognizing the increased workload, and desirous of better organizing service delivery and oversight, separated the dual position of Executive Secretary for Catholic Charities and Executor Director for Catholic Family & Community Services into two full-time positions. Bishop Serratelli appointed Joe Duffy as President of Catholic Charities and Diane Silbernagel as Executive Director of Catholic Family & Community Services.

The Adoption Service closed on June 30, 2012. In July of 2012 Catholic Family & Community Services acquired through merger the former Hispanic Information Center of Passaic (HIC), The Father English Community Center (FECC), and Hope House (HH). These three agencies now are divisions of Catholic Family & Community Services.

On March 25, 2016 Tom Barrett was appointed as Acting Executive Director of CFCS replacing Diane Silbernagel.

Bishop Serratelli appointed Christine Barton as Executive Director of CFCS on June 9, 2016.

On June 15, 2016 Mount Saint Joseph's Children's Center closed.

Prepared by Rev. Msgr. Raymond Kupke September 20, 1997

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