

Campaign improves lives of many

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Edward Love, a resident of the neighborhood around Rochester's Holy Family Church, wants his grandson to grow up in a safe, peaceful area. So about a year ago he joined Interfaith Action, a federation of churches and organizations working to revitalize the Flower City's west side.

"It's trying to help restore the neighborhood, to put God back into things," Love said of the federation, which has its headquarters at St. Augustine Parish on Chili Ave. St. Augustine is one of several Catholic parishes that belong to Interfaith Action.

Love lives with his wife and grandson on Jay Street, not far from Holy Family. Although he is not a Catholic, he has joined Holy Family parishioners and other Interfaith Action members in efforts to revitalize the area. For example, Interfaith Action members have lobbied city officials to keep the area zoned residential, and worked this year on preventing a local nightclub from operating past 11 p.m. They have also lobbied city officials to ensure landlords keep their properties up to code.

Love has helped Interfaith Action by distributing in his neighborhood fliers publicizing the organization's meetings. He's also called the police on a few occasions, asking them to take a look at abandoned houses in his neighborhood he said are used as "chop shops" by car thieves. His motivation for working with Interfaith Action is simple, he said.

"We've got a lot of kids around here growing up."

Interfaith Action is one of numerous beneficiaries of the national Catholic Campaign for Human Development, from which IA recently received \$39,000 in funding for the next two years. Since 1969, CCHD, a project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has distributed funds to organizations like Interfaith Action that seek to empower neighborhoods and communities to break the cycle of poverty and its ill effects.

ANNUAL EFFORT

Parishes in the Diocese of Rochester and throughout the United States have been asked to take up collections in support of CCHD the weekend of Nov. 23-24. Information on CCHD can be found at www.usccb.org/cchd on the Internet.

Seventy-five percent of the funds collected go to CCHD's national col-



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Kathy Murty, a member of Interfaith Action, stands in front of the mural at the peace garden on Rochester's Chili Avenue Oct 31. Murty weeds and grooms the garden twice a week.

lection, and 25 percent remains with the diocese to be distributed to projects here.

CCHD's grant to Interfaith Action, which comes out of the national portion of the collection, will be used to finance its "Raise A Roof!" campaign, which began in March 2001. IA has also received a \$4,000 grant from the local CCHD collection. With the support of city officials, private groups, banks and such organizations as Diocesan Catholic Charities and the affiliated Providence Housing Development Corp., Raise A Roof is targeting eight areas of the city's west side, where IA has organized street clean-ups; garnered demolitions of dilapidated properties; spurred hundreds of thousands of dollars in property purchases and improvements; and increased cooperation between police and city residents.

Joe Simeone, chairman of the parish council at St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Rochester, said the church's neighbors have noticed a definite improvement in the quality of life around their area since the parish joined Interfaith Action. Prostitution and drug-related activity in the neighborhood has diminished, he said, noting Interfaith Action engineered the formation of a local landlords' association and brought investment into the area.

"They've found that the neighborhood has never been so quiet," Simeone said of the area residents. "They don't see the aberrant behavior they've seen in the past."

Interfaith Action's successes are what the U.S. bishops had in mind when they began CCHD, according to information from campaign offi-

cial. The nation's bishops began the campaign with two purposes in mind: to support "organized groups of white and minority poor to develop economic strength and political power," and to "educate the People of God to a new knowledge of today's problems ... that can lead to some new approaches that promote a greater sense of solidarity."

Since its inception, CCHD has funded more than 4,000 self-help projects developed by grassroots groups, distributing funds to an average of 300 groups a year. Additionally, hundreds of smaller projects receive grants from the portion of the collection reserved for individual dioceses.

CCHD is also conducting a three-year campaign begun in 2001 called "PovertyUSA," which seeks to educate the nation about the fact that 32 million Americans live in poverty. This year's campaign has focused on the plight of impoverished children. Information can be found on the Web at www.povertyusa.org.

MIGRANT DREAMS

Another CCHD-funded organization working in the Diocese of Rochester is the Centro De Trabajadores Agricolas, known in English as The Independent Farmworker Center. Founded downstate during the early 1990s to advocate on behalf of migrant farm workers, the organization soon plans to relocate its headquarters from downstate to Brockport, according to its director, Aspacio Alcantara.

The *Catholic Courier* interviewed Alcantara, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, along with CITA organizer Salvador Solis, a Mex-

ican immigrant, in the Western New York office of Rural and Migrant Ministry, located in St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Brockport. Rural and Migrant Ministry is an interfaith organization supported by the Diocese of Rochester. It works with the diocese's own office of Hispanic Migrant Ministry, itself located just down the road in Brockport at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish. Bill Abom, coordinator of the Rural and Migrant Ministry office, translated for the interview.

CITA has successfully garnered contracts for groups of migrant workers at a small number of farms in New York state, Alcantara said, noting that farm workers have no guaranteed right to collectively bargain under state law. For example, he said, CITA helped farm workers at a Brockport-area farm get a pay raise from \$10 to \$12 per crate for picking apples and from \$9 to \$12 a crate for picking onions.

Alcantara and Solis said CITA has also helped farm workers around the state get Sundays off; end verbal abuse by owners and crew leaders; increase the number of breaks they receive; get regular lunch periods; and improve their housing conditions.

"We try to resolve issues through dialogue and good faith," Alcantara said. He noted, however, that CITA also has worked with other farmworker advocates to obtain growers' compliance with laws that guarantee good housing and proper sanitation for farm workers. CITA would not be able to even consider expanding its efforts in western New York without the help of CCHD, the two men said.

CITA wants to train more organizers, Alcantara said, acknowledging that this is a long and difficult task due to several factors: the transient nature of farm workers; their fear of losing their jobs if they make any demands; and the fact that the law does not protect their right to collectively bargain.

"I often ask myself, 'Why am I into this?'" Alcantara said. "But I feel it's a mission for justice."

On that note, Alcantara might find comfort in Pope John Paul II's comment about CCHD during the pontiff's 1979 visit to Chicago.

"The projects assisted by the campaign have helped to create a more human and just social order, and they enable many people to achieve an increased measure of rightful self-reliance," the pope said. "They remain in the life of the church a witness to the love and concern of our Lord Jesus Christ."