



Community

Partnerships between Catholic Charities and Catholic Healthcare Organizations

Like other healthcare organizations in the United States, Catholic healthcare facilities are developing new relationships with a wide array of partners to extend their ministry and to improve efficiency, coordination, and quality of care.

In forming these partnerships, Catholic-sponsored organizations may have an advantage over others. Through Catholic Charities and other social service programs, the Catholic Church in the United States is the largest provider of human services. In addition, the church's network of almost 20,000 parishes enables healthcare organizations to reach into communities where little infrastructure exists. The current movement toward integration of community-based health and social services creates opportunities for church-sponsored organizations to work together as never before.

Health Progress publishes an ongoing series of case studies of such partnerships, hoping they might serve as models for those creating integrated systems of care. These case studies of Catholic Charities agencies and Catholic health organizations were prepared by the Catholic Health Association as part of *New Covenant*, an initiative designed to promote collaborative efforts of the Catholic health ministry at the national and regional levels.

Here is another case study. *Health Progress* will present others in future issues.

If your healthcare organization is collaborating with a Catholic Charities agency in your area, we would like to know about it. Please contact Julie Trocchio by phone at 202-296-3993 or by e-mail at jtrocch@chausa.org.

Networks

The Hopkins Park–Pembroke Township Partnership

Kankakee, IL

Organizational Structure

The project—founded by the Kankakee County Economic Development Council, Provena Health, and the governments of Hopkins Park and Pembroke Township—is not a membership organization. Some 250 organizations and individuals, including Catholic Charities, participate.

Goals of Affiliation

The partnership hopes to improve the community's health, broadly defined.

The Project

The project began in 1996 when representatives of Provena Health and the county economic development council happened to visit Pembroke Township, a mostly African-American section of Kankakee County.

They were appalled by what they found there. The township, which has a population of about 3,300, had a per capita income that is among the lowest in the nation. It was, as one observer said later, "a scarred community in need of healing."

The visitors decided that their visit had been providential. With members of the township's government (and that of Hopkins Park, a township village) they organized a series of meetings in which area residents discussed ways they might improve their standard of living, including the community's health status.

The result was the Hopkins Park–Pembroke Township Partnership, an informal alliance guided by the wishes of the community. One early goal was the creation of a local garbage collection system (a waste management firm has since donated a garbage truck to the partnership). Other goals were jobs for area residents, decent roads, and natural gas pipelines for the heating of area homes.

Many different organizations have become partners. The Lutheran Brotherhood, for instance, coordinated the renovation of a house as a shelter for troubled families. Catholic Charities sponsored a program in which more able-bodied elderly residents do shopping and light housework for those who are infirm. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) helped local farmers start a co-op. The USDA and National City Bank funded a year's stay in the community for a Peace Corps fellow. Two sisters of the Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary, one of the congregations that sponsor Provena Health, continue a long-standing mission at Sacred Heart Church in Hopkins Park.

Other partners perform other tasks. All are needed. Although the partnership may appear ambitious, it is in fact helping township residents acquire basic services that most U.S. communities take for granted.

Governance Structure

A formal organization, the Unified Community Development Corporation, handles grant money received for the gas pipeline and road improvement; it has a board composed of area residents, representatives of the village and township governments, and others.

The partnership itself is informal.

Staffing

Except for those involving the Peace Corps fellow, the partnership's projects are staffed by volunteers.

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Practical Advice

Be inclusive. Allow people and groups to enter and exit—and reenter—the process. Be sure to listen carefully to the folks who actually live there. Remember that it's their community. Be sure to get input early and often.