



*Working to Reduce Poverty in America.*

## **Speech:**

Candy S. Hill, Vice President, Social Policy and Government Affairs, Catholic Charities USA  
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Thank you. Normally, I come to give you a series of updates on the important work we are doing in Washington, DC, on behalf of our member agencies. This work goes on and its importance remains vital but I am NOT going to give you a legislative update this afternoon - I'm going to give you a challenge.

As Fr. Larry stated, we stand at a unique moment in history, possibly on the brink of transformative social change. This moment is the result of many factors; economic crisis, a new president committed to change, more serious challenges facing families; growing poverty rates - to name a few. Bottom line: crisis breeds innovation and opportunity and we cannot miss the chance for real change

Some get distracted with the numbers and the scope of the problem and turn away. Today I want to ask you to do the opposite - my challenge to all of you is to engage now in a way you have never envisioned before!

No major social movement in the history of mankind started from think tanks or statistical analysis. All started from the passionate and committed work of individuals. Let me name a few: Jesus, Ben Franklin, Mahatma Gandhi, Cory Aquino, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, and Fr. O'Grady.... The list can go on. They were the individuals who brought us transformative social change in the last 100 years. We are the individuals that must bring the change for the next 100 years.

My point is simply this: In the next century of this work, you are the leaders. From this day forward you must be the beginning of the new history -- one of innovation and change.

Like most of you, I have spent many years of my life working in nonprofit charitable organizations, and I hope you agree, right now it feels like it is not enough to preserve and protect the safety net - it is time to untangle the safety net and provide a trampoline. The safety net feels more like something that traps and holds things rather than a chance for personal freedom, dignity and opportunity.

I'm here today enthusiastically committed to creating the 21st century solutions to the problems that have plagued us for too long. My legislative update is that our legislative thinking and strategizing needs significant updating! There is a growing sense that this is the generational moment when it can happen and I'm compelled to be ready for it.

So what do 21st century solutions look like?

They look like YOU and the work you are doing. I'm sure we all share occasional frustrations and ask ourselves the difficult questions on the ride home from work:

- Are we making a difference?
- Does this work matter?
- Why do we do it this way versus other ways that may work better?

These are the questions of innovators and leaders in the 21st century movement to solve poverty more systemically. Keep asking them!

What are the goals of our new innovation? Let me try some ideas:

Imagine: A social policy structure that actually starts by understanding the holistic nature of people, family, and community. Wouldn't it be nice for all our social safety net programs to be linked --so services to an individual is seen as a whole person and not "clients and codes" - how cold and impersonal. Segmenting individuals for care and support is bizarre - how do we treat the mind when the belly is empty and the fever is high. Where does a person develop skills when the objective of the day is to find shelter? Our modern social services system has been developed over 60 years and is a mishmash of well intentioned but unconnected services that pulls the human being it hopes to serve into indistinguishable pieces such that the whole person, family or community no longer exists. This must be confronted and redesigned.

How about? US corporate and tax structures the judge boards on governance standards like workplace safety and equal opportunity. Let's challenge shareholders and Wall Street to make investment decisions on a company's adherence to environmental standards and minimal corporate contributions to charity and the community. We can't change the economy that creates the poverty we see today without changing the engines that drive it.

What if? We had a new national poverty standard that updates the 1960's standard we have today that simplistically evaluated a family's food budget as the barometer for poverty? The new standard of 21st century poverty in America must recognize that a family of four in the United States of America is poor when food and housing and transportation and health care coverage are all lacking. If we define poverty in old and outdated criteria is it any wonder why the programs that serve the poor look similarly outdated and unsuccessful.

In this centennial year, made possible by those before us, we are challenged to rise to this occasion. If they created the safety net - we must make it unnecessary. If they created poverty standards for their time - we must revise for our times. If they lacked the power or tools to create a more moral culture that abhors poverty - then we must use the tools of technology and communications to do so. If they lacked the capacity to engage corporate America in a more balanced partnership for social responsibility - we must build just that capacity and demand its adoption.

These are not ideas they are organizing principles that require action and engagement. We can no longer leave our halls of government unaccountable for our lack of progress or bolder vision.

From the City Council to the State House to Congress and the White House we must demand that all are entitled to a life of dignity and respect from conception to natural death the opportunities to reach their full potential and to live a life of sustainable independence.

The time is now-the responsibility is ours.

Jesus did not call us in our baptism to think about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked our housing the homeless He called on us to - AS NIKE SAYS: "just do it" we have thought about it much in this country and when we did not think about it enough we had think takes do it for us-all of you know that in your work you are not just incredible thinkers but you are the does

We have not time to waste-there is opportunity and appetite in Washington for change-lets roll up our sleeves put our heads together and bring our story and the story of the 2000 years of our response to our faith to decision makers. These decision makers are not strangers and they are not wizards... they are us.... Really us: The Speaker of the House is a Catholic; The Senate Whip is a Catholic; The Vice President is a Catholic. If we just start with our own and make a personal commitment to be the change we're all looking for it seems our goals are nearer at hand and our purpose more urgent.

The story is simple. Recently CCUSA convened the first national consumer advisory council made up of men and women who either currently or have received services from a Catholic Charities agency-none of this individuals knew each other before meeting in our offices. When asked to talk about their experience in coming to Catholic Charities-this story emerged and while I think we all know this story it is not something that we talk about in a public way-the one thing that had changed their life was the first encounter they had with a CC staff member-it was not the food they received, the housing that they got or the counseling they received-while important and needed-it was the way they were treated by all of you-each of them described in their own words the dignity and respect they were given; the fact that someone actually listened to them and did not talk at them-be coming to CC agency their dignity was restored-and that made the difference in their lives-to not just land in the safety net but each of them were lifted up to places and experiences and achievements beyond their imagination-that is the story-the story that this centennial moment will provide in our work to change the nation-it is your story every day-it is our story collectively and it is the story that can and will change a nation.

This story is happening all over America. It is our job at CCUSA to move across America over this centennial year to listen and learn. To find the innovation and the inspiration in the work you do every day. But that's just one part of the strategy - once we've found you, learned from you and are inspired by you we will ask you to join us. Join us in creating the movement of committed passion advocates for those who cannot always advocate for themselves. We'll ask you to bring the promise of democracy loudly into the issue of poverty. America requires the political will to change and we must be the loudest of the voices demanding this change and offering the best solutions that we know will work.

Join me.... The time is NOW and the answer is YOU!