



Good afternoon. My name is Heather Reynolds and I am the CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth. Thank you for allowing me to be with you today.

I ask that you put yourself in the moment when you last had to fill out a form and provide your emergency contact. When was it? Hospital visit? Child's school form? And, did you really pause to think about who you would put, or was it an easy decision like your spouse, parent, or good friend?

A few months ago, I attended a funeral service. It was for 6 people with 6 different stories. There was a crowd of mourners. There were flowers. There were pictures. And, there was a camping tent set up in the front.

One of those pictures was of a man everyone referred to as Pops. A man who lived in a tent in Sylvania Park for 5 years.

Everyone who knew Pops loved his energy. They loved his jokes. He was the kind of neighbor everyone wanted—kept an eye out for others, welcomed the new ones—even if his “neighbors” lived on the street, like him.

2 years of getting Pops to trust us. Regular visits to the tent he called home. A man who's only refuge from life was a vodka bottle. A man who caught the hope-filled energy of Catholic Charities staff, and started to think life could be different.

We moved him into an apartment. We took him to treatment. We supported him in the coming months. But, this story didn't end well.

Pops? Well, one day Pops was found by apartment maintenance, dead in his home. And, who was called? His emergency contact. His Catholic Charities case manager.

There is something deeply sad that our case manager was his emergency contact. And, there is a lot to be said about how CCFW serves people by who Pops scribbled down on his housing application when he made his emergency contact decision.

We sat at our funeral service for 6 of our homeless clients who died this year—some had died violent deaths. One woman, well, her body just gave out from living a hard life on the streets. One died at home, in his camp near our Downtown Fort Worth. Two were found by our staff. None were mourned, none celebrated, until our team pulled together a funeral to honor the lives of these 6 individuals. The simplest of services—a vase of 6 roses, a camping tent to symbolize these clients, and a crowd full of Catholic Charities staff who sat in solidarity, crying softly, and holding steadfast to the belief that these lives deserved not to be forgotten.

How do we serve at Catholic Charities? With undeniable compassion. Whether it achieves the level of success we wish it would or not.

And, why do we serve? It is our moral obligation. We are Catholic. And while people who know the Catholic Church understand clearly that we are a pro-life church, it is so much more than just an anti-abortion church. It is a church that believes in the dignity of every person we encounter and

supports life throughout its many stages. We believe that people deserve more than getting lost in a broken system. One where they make too much to qualify for any sort of help. One that only puts a band-aid on their problems, then criticizes them for coming back through the doors. We believe in the common good--that our community will only be as great as the weakest member. We believe in utterly destroying poverty. We believe that poverty is the enemy—it destroys dignity, destroys families, and destroys life. It is our job to fight back. We want poverty to end. And, we hold tightly to the belief that it can.

With the Porter family, it did. Mr. Porter had worked in the oil industry and was laid off 6 months before finding us. The family was days away from being evicted. Just days away from joining Pops on the streets. We started our hope-serving ways with assistance. And continued with intensive coaching to help him find a well-paying job, develop a budget, reduce their debt, and develop a plan to save once employed. After a few months of help, the family succeeded. The Porters arrived for their financial coaching appointment one day with the good news that Mr. Porter had been offered a job. Our staff crowded around them in the lobby to congratulate them. With shining eyes, Mrs. Porter, one-by-one, enveloped each of our staff in a giant warm hug, whispering her thanks - that they helped, and that they cared.

Mr. Porter's work with us resulted in a job paying \$47,000 a year. The Porter family is saving. They are secure. They are continuing their work with us until they cross the finish line of being able to withstand any setbacks that may come their way.

How do we serve? With undeniable compassion. Why do we serve? Because we believe in eradicating poverty. And the

Porter family is proof among thousands of other similar stories that we can, and we do.

Who do we serve? People. People who are no different than you and I. People who want to go home tonight and have a roof over their heads, people who want to work hard and earn a living for their family, people who want the same things for their children as you and I. The veteran. The homeless. The broken family. The working poor. The child who is with us as a result of a war-torn world. The Catholic Charities story is the story of the 100,000 faces we help every year.

But, what do we do? Simply put--We say yes. And here is how.

A client walks in our doors—or we find them some other way—and we first ensure their encounter with us is one of hope and compassion. That builds trust. It sets us apart. We then assist. With whatever they need be it a car repair, housing help, or utility payments. Not to band-aid an issue, but if you are bleeding, you first need a band-aid. And then, we pull and yank with all of our might to move people into case management where we can serve them comprehensively to put them on a path out of poverty.

To us, out of poverty is much different from how it is typically defined, and this is important. Because the federal poverty line is such an outdated measure, leaving many families in the gap between welfare and self-sufficiency, we came up with our own definition. We consider a family to be out of poverty when they have achieved four things. **One** - when they are living independently of government assistance. **Two** - when they are earning a **living wage**, one which is sufficient to meet their basic needs, based on their family make-up and geographic area. **Three** - when they have three months' worth of savings in

the bank. And **four** - when they've eliminated all inappropriate debt.

Let me share two recent illustrations of programs we are running aimed at getting folks back into the workforce and out of poverty.

We currently are underway with two important research studies. For both of these projects we are partnering with the University of Notre Dame's Lab for Economic Opportunities to study the data. Through rigorous impact evaluations, this lab aims to identify the innovative, effective, and scalable programs that help people move out of poverty.

One of our pilots being evaluated, Stay the Course, was born out of the reality that only about 10% of people who enter community college in our nation ever graduate. With education directly correlating with good employment at a living wage, we've got to figure out why so many students don't make it to the finish line.

We have studied our local market and understand where our economy is growing and where labor is needed. We understand what training that folks need to get into the labor market. And, we overlay what jobs will actually pay a living wage when folks cross the finish line of having that certain skill be it nursing, aviation mechanics, or accounting.

Then, we enroll people in community college. We career coach them but also do whatever it takes to get them to finish their certificate or degree program. Our case managers act as

coaches, mentors, accountability partners, and cheerleaders, all in one.

In the pilot's year one results, students receiving services from Catholic Charities averaged over five more credit hours than the treatment group. But what is most impressive is that 30% more students persisted in their education when a part of Catholic Charities services. Case management was the difference.

Our second project is our Padua Poverty Pilot, which we launched this past April, and we plan to serve 200 families over the course of the next few years.

Padua is comprised of two distinctive elements that - together - will get our families, their children, and their children's children out of poverty: **12 asset areas** that we believe are essential for every person to succeed and super-charged case managers.

First, the 12 assets. We developed these because we know it's important to serve people holistically. Yes, poverty and money are inextricably linked, and it's important for the people we serve to reach financial stability and self-sufficiency. But they don't get there overnight, and there are a whole lot of factors that play into their ability to have enough money to meet their needs. That's why we work with each family to determine their strengths - which they can build upon and leverage in order to do the work necessary to develop in the asset areas they are struggling with, and ultimately move closer and closer to out of poverty.

Working with each family across the spectrum of all 12 assets is the key to ensuring **we are not just treating one or two symptoms of poverty - squashing one only to have another**

pop up - but are actually getting to the root causes. This approach also empowers families by identifying and celebrating their strengths - a strong support system, good computer skills, the ability to ask for and receive help, church involvement - that will fuel their success and growth. Our belief is that if we build these assets with families, they will grow to meet our “out of poverty” definition. Our research will tell us if this is correct.

The second major aspect of Padua is our super-charged case managers. They guide and support the families they work with, to help them manage their own situations. They work alongside our families, help them tailor their service plans, and basically do whatever it takes to move our families out of poverty for the rest of their lives - even if this process takes several years. We know that this intensive, holistic service gets lasting results, not only for our neighbors today, but for generations to come. Padua gives us the answers to make a stronger investment in those in poverty, and in the well-being of our country as a whole.

What do we do? We say yes. And we say yes to test what we are doing in order to ensure we are providing services that actually give families a way out. To families like the Porters and to people like Pops. In truth--some we catch early, some we catch too late. But we are there, to catch them and walk with them on their journey OUT OF POVERTY.

So, before I close, I want to take you back to that funeral service. I take you back to the thoughts rolling in my head at that moment of the “what could have beens” and “what should have beens.” I take you to my staff with shaky voices, bowed heads, and tear stained faces. And, with all that top of my mind and all over my heart, I ask you this—PUSH. US.

FORWARD. Be a voice for the poor. Advocate for change. Do something. It is up to all of us.

There are many reasons why people are in poverty. There are many faces to poverty. And there many problems that need to be solved for. But our one goal remains-to utterly destroy poverty. And with one family at a time, I believe we can.

Thank you.