

Catholic Charities of Portland

By Paul Senz

Catholic Charities of Oregon, a member agency of the Catholic Charities Network, describes its work as “partnering with the most vulnerable, regardless of faith, to achieve lasting solutions to poverty and injustice.” By 2000, the organization had twenty-five programs and was serving over a hundred thousand people annually.

The first office of Catholic Charities in Oregon opened in 1933, after a review of Catholic social work in the Archdiocese of Portland, which includes all of western Oregon. Father Lucien Lauerman was head of the office, and he and his staff acted as case managers and represented Catholic Charities in Oregon in court cases. In 1945, Catholic Charities of Oregon assisted in efforts to receive and help settle refugees who arrived in Oregon as a result of World War II. This initiative has expanded to include refugees from all over the world, including Nigeria, Iraq, Syria, and China. In 1946, the Catholic Charities in Oregon founded the Catholic Youth Organization sports program, which provides organized sports, summer camps, and other activities to young people of all religious backgrounds.

One of Catholic Charities’ most prominent and widely used programs was founded in 1952. Mr. and Mrs. E.B. Horton donated 160 acres of wooded land on Cougar Mountain near Corbett for summer sports and camp programs for Catholic youth in the area. Two years later, an additional 80 acres was purchased for the camp, named Camp Howard. At its first summer of operations in 1953, the camp served 378 children.

In 1987, Archbishop William Levada of Portland commissioned a study to determine the state of the Catholic social services in the archdiocese and assess how well it was living up to its mandate of service. The review resulted in a new board of directors and a restructuring of the Catholic Charities in Oregon, including administration, outreach, needs assessment, and program planning, as well as fundraising and public relations.

Catholic Community Services of Portland merged with Catholic Charities in Oregon in 1994. The outreach of Catholic Charities further expanded into Project Rachel (1994), Immigration Legal Services (1996), Housing Initiatives (1999), and Housing Transitions (2006). In 2010, the organization opened a new building in Portland on the east side to centralize many of its public service programs. The Clark Family Center, named after major supporters Maybelle Clark Macdonald and her family, includes a daycare, transition housing for women, basic living and school supplies for refugees and low-income families, and counseling space.

Over the years, Catholic Charities in Oregon has split into multiple branches. Catholic Charities of Lane County was established in 1952, and Catholic Community Services of Southern Oregon was established in 1990 (renamed Catholic Charities of Southern Oregon in 2006).

Sources

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