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CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN for  
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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# HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY BABIES, BETTER COMMUNITIES

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Prenatal care is essential for healthy mothers and their babies, but low-income, uninsured women in many areas have no access to this critical service. Until recently, pregnant women in central Iowa's Story County had to travel 45 miles to Marshalltown or Des Moines for affordable prenatal healthcare. Without transportation or paid leave time, countless expectant mothers simply could not access the services they needed.

Thanks to A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy (AMOS), an ecumenical community organization that receives funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), women and babies are now served by a fully equipped and professionally staffed mobile obstetric clinic that pulls into a church parking lot in Ames twice a month. Ames, a city of 59,000, is the largest in Story County.

The mobile clinic is the happy result of a five-year effort by AMOS to meet a need often identified by AMOS's 29 member organizations, including Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Dubuque and the Diocese of Des Moines. AMOS lead organizer Paul Turner says the clinic, like all the group's projects, started with people telling their stories at "house meetings," where individuals from different backgrounds come together, identify the pressures they face, and form an alternative



COMMUNITY LEADERS AND AMOS MEMBERS CUT THE RIBBON TO LAUNCH THE NEW MOBILE CLINIC.

Photo courtesy of AMOS

vision for their community. "The house meetings cross the lines that tend to divide people and create the possibility of hope," says Turner.

In fact, he says, the integrity of the AMOS agenda flows from the house meeting process. They look for solutions for people like Michelle Hernandez, a mother of three, who spoke at one of the house meetings. She described driving an hour to the hospital in Marshalltown while she was in hard labor, only to be turned away because her labor had not progressed enough to deliver the baby. She timed her contractions in the parking lot until she was admitted to the hospital.

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For the mobile clinic, Turner says AMOS brought together the goodwill and resources of Catholic, public health, and educational institutions, which share a common respect for life. Interns at a county hospital needed experience in obstetrics; Des Moines University had a clinic vehicle; the local Lutheran church had an accommodating parking area; and parishioners from St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Ames worked as bridge builders with AMOS to make it all happen.

He says the mobile clinic looks like a doctor's office on wheels, with exam rooms and an ultrasound machine. Six to ten women are served each time the huge vehicle comes to town, and doctors estimate that as many as 60 women a year will seek prenatal care there because of its proximity and affordability. The clinic does not offer abortions or contraceptives.

Turner says AMOS's efforts also helped influence charity care policies of the major health care systems in Iowa and Catholic hospitals across the country. "People with the least ability to pay were being billed at the highest, undiscounted rates. We helped negotiate a deal with large hospitals to apply a discount to the uninsured, too," he says. "It was the first voluntary agreement of its kind in the United States."

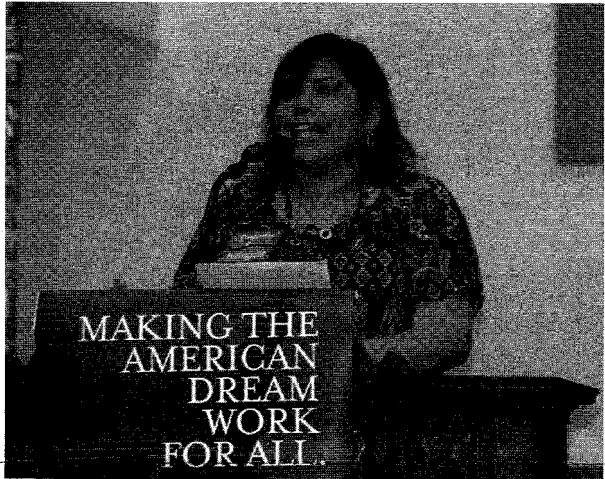


Photo courtesy of AMOS

AMOS LEADER AND BOARD MEMBER DORA CAMARGO FROM OUR LADY OF THE AMERICAS CATHOLIC CHURCH IN DES MOINES SPEAKS AT THE ISSUES ASSEMBLY.

Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines says, "In following the work of AMOS, I can detect the hard work in identifying issues, doing the required research, and recommending steps for achieving social justice. AMOS's efforts serve to provide a voice to the voiceless and underrepresented."

Danelda Allen, a member of the Social Justice Committee at St. Thomas Aquinas, says AMOS helps her parish respond to "the least, the last, and the lost—and to remember why we're here."

She explains, "As a parish, we are very good with acts of mercy, but we struggle with acts of justice. AMOS dovetails with Catholic social teaching by addressing systemic injustice issues."

AMOS has received local and national grants from CCHD for its community organizing work. "CCHD support is absolutely critical to the success of AMOS," Turner says. "The local and national grants mean a great deal. They keep the lights on, pay the staff, and underwrite the costs of our organizing efforts."

Archbishop Jerome Hanus of Dubuque lauds AMOS's work as "difficult, but most important," and necessary to fulfill the gospel call to provide service to those in need. "As chief shepherd for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, I am pleased that our Ames parishes are actively involved in the work of AMOS," he says. ☪



Photo courtesy of AMOS

DOCTORS AND VOLUNTEERS OF THE MOBILE CLINIC PLAN TOGETHER.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Dear Friends,*

He is risen!

Alleluia!

Alleluia!


Like the apostles, we encounter Christ on the way to Pentecost—on the road, in the breaking of bread, and in those who are hurting or wounded.

The Passion and agony of Jesus is still fresh in our minds, and Easter joy can be short lived as we look around and see abject poverty, community desolation, and despair. Christ calls us to be a resurrection people, a people concerned about the hurting, the vulnerable, the child yet to be born—and in that concern to be a people who act to protect and defend life.

A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy (AMOS) saves lives by making sure that pregnant mothers have proper prenatal care. AMOS unites communities by bringing together Catholics, health and education advocates, and low-income communities in the hope of raising awareness of birth issues, prenatal health needs, and maternal and child well-being.

Thanks to you and your generous contributions to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the work of AMOS and some 240 other groups throughout the country lifts low-income families out of poverty and despair. Your actions are indeed a powerful witness to the saving power of God's love.

Blessings to you and yours,



Ralph McCloud  
Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development



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