

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Foundation's Efforts Already Bearing Much Fruit

By Denis Grasska

SAN DIEGO — The Catholic Community Foundation of San Diego was established to serve as a one-stop resource for charitable giving.

It was envisioned as a way of streamlining the process of local Catholic philanthropy, acting as a bridge between generous donors with causes and ministries that are near and dear to their hearts with nonprofits whose missions reflect those donors' Catholic values. About two and a half years since its incorporation as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the foundation's efforts are already proving successful.

The foundation, which is independent of the Diocese of San Diego, and has its own board of trustees, recently appeared on the "Top Nonprofit Agencies List of 2017" compiled by the *San Diego Business Journal*.

Since its inception, the number of funds it supports — both short-term donor-advised funds and long-term permanent endowments — has increased to 112 funds and it has already awarded \$3.4 million in grants, including support for Catholic parishes, Catholic elementary and high schools, vocations, retired priests and religious, campus ministries at local public universities, and locally-based Catholic and non-Catholic social service charities. Its net assets under management now exceed \$50 million.

As impressive as these early successes might be, Executive Director Gary Rectenwald still sees much untapped potential in a diocese that includes almost 1.4 million Catholics spread across two counties.

"I've learned that there are more than a hundred Catholic ministries in our community

that few people know about," he said, including those that have limited marketing budgets and struggle to get the word out. "We want to be a central resource where people can come and learn about all of these ministries and service organizations, and to give those individuals with a charitable heart and intent, a new and easy way to support them from our centralized Web site."

Msgr. Steven Callahan, who chairs the foundation's board of trustees, said the original plan had been to establish a foundation dedicated exclusively to supporting Catholic education. But those plans ultimately evolved into the present-day foundation. He said that one of the greatest benefits of the foundation is that, by giving individuals a new way to establish funds, the foundation has really helped "to develop a culture of Catholic philanthropy" throughout the diocese.

A minimum of \$5,000 is required to create a fund, but donations of any size will be accepted as contributions to an existing fund. An anonymous donor has pledged to match the first \$5,000 for any newly established endowment benefiting Catholic parishes and K-8 schools; some 34 funds have been matched to date.

For both donors and beneficiaries, Rectenwald said, the foundation is taking the guesswork out of philanthropy.

For instance, he said, funds set up for various local parishes and schools mean that pastors and principals can be more comfortable accepting complicated financial gifts, such as real estate, appreciated securities, life insurance and annuities, knowing that the foundation has the expertise to administer them.

Msgr. Callahan, who is also the pastor of St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach, has seen firsthand how the foundation is benefiting parishes.

St. Brigid has an endowment fund that provides tuition assistance to parishioners who want to send their children to a Catholic elementary or high school. Previously on deposit with the diocese, Msgr. Callahan said, those funds were transferred into the foundation shortly after its inception, and the result has been a much higher rate of return on the principal. Unlike other local community foundations, the earnings, interest and dividends earned by each fund remain in the fund to increase its value for its donor advisors.

A recently-launched online portal, DonorCentral, provides donors with immediate access to information about their funds and enables them to make online grant requests.

Brian Caster, whose family operates its own charitable foundation, knows how hard it is for those without such an apparatus in place to vet potential charitable organizations and, after donating, to scramble at the end of the year to gather all of the necessary tax information.

“The Catholic Community Foundation does all of that for you,” said Caster, one of many Catholics who have established a family donor-advised fund to serve as a single source for their Catholic (and non-Catholic) philanthropy. He added that the funds can be managed online where “everything is visible.”

He said that those who want to support a charity or cause, but aren’t sure where to give their money, can peruse the long list of funds already established through the foundation and essentially “shop” for a cause that is meaningful to them and that they want to support.

“It’s inspiring,” he said. “When you look at it and you see all these different organizations, it’s really neat to see that our Church and Foundation are doing so much good out there in the world.”

Donors can be secure in the knowledge that their funds will never be invested in

anything contrary to Catholic values, including companies that support abortion, child labor, human trafficking, tobacco or instruments of war, said Rectenwald. And, in the case of permanent endowments, they can take pride in the fact that their funds will continue to support the work of the Church for many generations beyond their own lifetimes.

“It’s not just about supporting our grandchildren; it’s about supporting our grandchildren’s grandchildren,” he said. With today’s endowments, Catholics “plant the seeds for new trees the shade of which ... future generations of Catholics in San Diego will be able to enjoy.”

After reading an article in the September 2016 issue of *The Southern Cross*, John Coughlin decided to create a new endowment to serve the homeless and needy in Oceanside. This includes a soup kitchen based at his parish, St. Mary Star of the Sea.

“I created the fund in honor of my [deceased] wife, Pat, who volunteered at the soup kitchen for many years. It meant a lot to her,” said Coughlin, 91. “While I am alive, I intend to make annual contributions to grow the endowment. When God decides it’s my time to come home, I intend to leave a portion of my estate to further support this fund at the parish. My hope is that others will also contribute to this fund.”

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