

A call to help others

Catholic Activism Shapes Life of Advocacy

Ask Dr. Kathleen Shapley-Quinn to cite the roots of her passion for ending poverty and hunger, and she's quick to name two: Father Bill Cunningham and the Sisters of Mercy.

Cunningham, a priest at the Detroit Catholic church where Shapley-Quinn and her family worshipped, devoted his time to making the inner city a vibrant place to live after the city's devastating 1967 riots. One of the first significant actions the organization he founded—called Focus: HOPE—took was a consumer survey on the disparity of food and prescription drug prices between inner-city Detroit and the surrounding suburbs.

The group provided food for mothers, children, and seniors, and offered a job readiness program designed to revitalize Detroit. "Father Cunningham made a huge impression on me," she says.

So did the Sisters of Mercy. This international order of Roman Catholic women religious helps people—especially women and children—who suffer from poverty, sickness, and lack of education.

Shapley-Quinn first heard about Bread for the World during her time at Mercy High School, and after graduating served a brief internship in Bread's New York office. "I was impressed to witness firsthand this group of people working and praying together toward an amazing mission," she remembers.

She was such an advocate for Bread that her parents became involved. And when she met and married her husband, Todd, he added his support for Bread's mission.



Courtesy of Kathleen Shapley-Quinn

"The Shapley-Quinns are two extraordinary people, demonstrating sacrificial giving," says Bread board member Peter England. "The passion they bring to their support for Bread and for everything they do is an inspiration."

Why is Bread important to them? "Most of the big changes come through legislation. That's where Bread comes in," Todd says. "I'd be wild about Bread for the World even without its Christian foundation. The Christian tone makes it even better."

Kathleen says all of us need to find ways to advocate for the changes we want in addition to helping others in more direct, charitable ways. She calls Bread "one of my main avenues to advocacy. Bread raises up those who are the least empowered. When we do this, we will be the best we can be."

For his part, her father, Glenn, appreciates being encouraged to comment on legislative matters. Bread, he says, gives context and background to hunger issues, and provides a great way to help. "I try to put myself in the place of someone who has to struggle for a yam or a potato," he says. "I like to eat. And I want to know that others can eat, too."

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Today, Kathleen and Todd, both physicians, live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where Kathleen is medical director for neighboring Alamance County. The two also volunteer—Todd provides medical help at a local homeless shelter, and Kathleen sits on the board for an organization that gives women incarcerated for nonviolent crimes a place to live with their children.