



Catholic
Charities
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Heather Reynolds, President/CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth Accepts Position at the University of Notre Dame

Heather Reynolds, President/CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW), is leaving the organization effective at the end of the year to become Managing Director of the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame.

For the last 17 years, Reynolds has overseen the strategic direction for the Fort Worth-based, \$45 million non-profit. With nearly 400 employees and four locations throughout the 28 counties that make up the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, CCFW serves tens of thousands of people each year through its diverse services, poverty solutions, and income-generating social enterprises. Reynolds began her professional career at 22 as an intern in the clinical counseling department at CCFW, then progressed to full-time employment in fundraising. Reynolds took the helm as CEO at only 25 years old, following the passing of the previous executive director, Karen Spicer, with a budget of \$8 million and 150 employees.

Reynolds has spearheaded the agency's vision to end poverty, one family at a time. In going after the impossible of ending poverty, she has become the driving force behind some of the most spectacular changes in the agency's 108-year history. She pioneered the agency's first-ever strategy map, with a focus on impact, not outputs. She has led the agency to say "yes" to the needs of the community by adding to its robust portfolio of services, including an International Foster Care program, homeless services, a transportation department and the launching of a research and evaluation department.

Reynolds introduced for-profit business ventures to the portfolio of CCFW services, including the Translation and Interpretation Network (TIN) that generates over half a million dollars in revenue annually. And as a woman who never stops seeking fresh solutions, Reynolds originally partnered with Catholic Charities USA and LEO to launch two pilots: Padua and Stay the Course. Padua is a bold research initiative aimed at demystifying assumptions about poverty and rigorously evaluating the effectiveness of poverty-ending practices, and Stay the

Course is a community college persistence project studying the efficacy of case management in college completion.

In times of crisis, Reynolds lead the organization to step up to welcome children removed from the FLDS compounds in San Angelo, TX, aided thousands of families after Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Harvey, expanded shelter beds during the 2014 unaccompanied minors border crisis, and worked tirelessly to house and care for children separated from their parents at the border in 2018. Recently, she supported getting the community LVTRise project off the ground.

“Serving with the incredible team at CCFW over the last almost 17 years has been one of the greatest joys of my life,” says Reynolds. “To be a part of something that matters and matters to so many—to investors who give, to staff and volunteers who serve, to community members who support, and to clients who allow us to walk this journey with them—has been a privilege. My love of CCFW and my love for this mission is unwavering. And I have no doubt that the incredible team at CCFW will continue to do amazing things to carry forward our focus on creating evidence-backed solutions to poverty, eradicating the poverty families experience, and transforming the way poverty is being addressed. I will be your biggest cheerleader from the sidelines!”

In 2014, Reynolds was invited to Capitol Hill by Congressman Paul Ryan to provide congressional testimony on poverty reform before the House Budget Committee. Congressman Ryan later cited Reynolds in his white paper about how to reform welfare in America and used the CCFW model as the example to follow for effective anti-poverty practices. In 2018, Congressman Ryan visited CCFW to see the work firsthand. Reynolds’ advocacy in D.C. and Austin has always pushed to end the benefits cliff and look at better ways to use the money we allocate to poverty reform for a true way out for those suffering in poverty.

Reynolds acts as the National Advisor to the USCCB’s Committee on Migration and serves on the Catholic Charities USA Executive Council of Diocesan Directors. In 2012, she was honored as the Center for Nonprofit Management’s Nonprofit CEO of the Year. In 2011, Reynolds was awarded the Benemerenti Medal from Pope Benedict XVI, which is the highest honor a layperson can receive in the Catholic Church.

CCFW is governed by a 16-member board, which is chaired by Donna Springer. Springer expressed sadness that Reynolds is leaving, but excitement that she is taking her poverty-fighting expertise to the national level.

“I’m not alone in saying we’re so sad to see her go,” says Springer. “She has grown and positioned this organization in such a manner that the future of ending poverty is ever clearer, and we will have big shoes to fill.” Springer said a CCFW search committee is launching a nationwide search for a new president/CEO who will be recommended for appointment to Bishop Michael Olson. She said the committee is searching for a leader who will continue the mission of eradicating poverty, with a focus on evidence, sharing our best practices, and transforming the conversation about poverty while advocating for change to the way poverty is addressed.

Bishop Olson thanked Reynolds for her 17 years of ministry and devotion to eradicating poverty among those in need and in assisting the migrant who is fleeing economic hardship, violence or terror. "Heather Reynolds' servant leadership at CCFW has helped to foster an authentically Catholic vision among the people of our diocese and within the broader community who live in the 28 counties that comprise the Diocese of Fort Worth," he said. "She has helped us to address intelligently and compassionately the evil of oppressive poverty at its roots with the priority of placing the poor first. I thank her, and I will miss her and her family."

The partnership between CCFW and LEO will be a bright spot for the future of both organizations. LEO was founded in 2012 to identify innovative, effective, and scalable programs to help people move out of poverty. LEO's research is conducted by faculty from the University of Notre Dame as well as scholars from across the country with expertise in designing and evaluating the impact of domestic anti-poverty programs. This has included evaluations of CCFW's Padua and Stay the Course programs over the past five years.

"LEO would not be where it is as an organization without our wonderful partnership with Catholic Charities Fort Worth," says Bill Evans, Keough-Hesburgh Professor of Economics and co-founder of the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities. "Our partnership has been championed from the start by Heather. We feel blessed that Heather will be leading our lab as we move forward. She is a passionate, inventive and effective leader in the fight against poverty. She is the perfect person to help us advance our mission of improving lives through evidenced-based policy and research."

Reynolds will be with CCFW through December 14th. Upon her departure, current Chief Operating Officer Paul Boyd will serve as interim CEO until a new CEO is named.

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