

# Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

November 2009

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## Restoring Health Care A Must for Minnesota

There are moments in our quest for social change where everything comes into focus, when this work transcends questions of budgets and becomes a stark question of who we are as a people. We are living in one of those moments as we figure out how to restore healthcare coverage to 35,000 Minnesotans.

General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) is Minnesota’s public health program for extremely low-income adults. This program is set to be eliminated on or before March 1<sup>st</sup>. We know that the elimination of this program will have far reaching consequences in terms of cost shifting, job losses and the closing of key services in regional hospitals.

However, the most significant cost will be to the individuals, with annual incomes under \$7800, who will lose health care access. Health and Human Services Commissioner, Cal Ludeman described them as the “poorest of the poor and sickest of the sick.” These are the people who will lose diabetic care, mental health care and prescription drug coverage.

As people of faith, who value the dignity of the human person, we are being challenged to take charge of the conversation. We are being called to

defend a population that has little political clout and is easily dismissed.

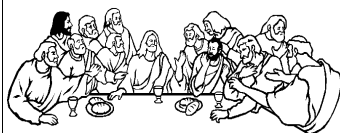
I am reminded of the encounters I have had that made me see with new eyes. In my earlier work life, I was employed by a charity that offered both a family shelter and a drop-in center for single homeless adults. While my background and passion centered on working with families, I was also charged with staffing the service line at the drop-in center every morning.

To be honest, I didn’t want to face these people eye to eye at first because I did not understand where they were coming from or how they had come to be in this situation. I, like many, struggled to feel empathy for grown men and women who couldn’t seem to support themselves.

Over time, I began to understand. I learned that life is complicated, and that everyone has a story. I began to hear their stories. I could see that there was no single path that brought them to turn to us for the basics of food and shelter. I learned that many of their lives looked a lot like mine had as a kid, until tragedy or circumstance took over.

Some had faced turmoil their entire lives. Others fell upon hard times

*(Continued on page 2)*



later in life. The death of a spouse, emerging mental health issues, post traumatic stress disorder from military combat, addiction to drugs and alcohol, loss of a job, divorce, chronic pain, loneliness—any number of life’s events can trigger a negative domino effect.

It was in that line that I learned that everyone really does have inherent dignity and that there are no throwaway people. My parents and my faith had both taught me that all people are equal in God’s eyes – but it was only then that I truly recognized what it meant to be a child of God.

This week, I was talking to a man enrolled in GAMC. This man had slept outside the night before and the night before that. He told me that he only comes to the drop-in center to see his friends now and again, but he never uses the services. He “wants to be sure that help will be available for those who really need it.”

He has family in town that he can go and see most days. While he sleeps outside on a bench at night, he still sees others as being worse off. He heard about the coming elimination of GAMC, and has hurried to set appointments to see his doctor for some chronic pain issues and a dentist for some serious oral health problems. He is moving quickly, because soon he’ll be left totally out in the cold.

As the man walked away, I overheard him mumble “I just can’t believe they’re cutting our health care - what are people going to do?”

I don’t know. But what I do know is that tonight, he will sleep outside. I also know that in a few months, he and over thirty thousand other Minnesotans will lose their health coverage – unless we act.

With the legislative session beginning on February 4<sup>th</sup>, it is our charge to build the political will to save health care for this population and raise the necessary revenue to continue this essential service.

Catholic Charities is taking leadership in this cause and seeks advocates who will raise a ruckus. OSJ can provide the support and tools you need.

Our tool kit includes postcards for your parish “Save GAMC” events, tips for planning a group meeting with your state representative and resources that will help you connect your elected officials to those who will be directly affected by these cuts. We hope you encourage your pastor to give a homily on the issue.

We are asking you to be bold and creative, and we are asking you to get started today. Please contact our office to connect and join us for our next Sowers Assembly on December 7<sup>th</sup> from 6:30-8:00 at the Hayden Center in St. Paul. GAMC will be the focus of this event.

Now is the time to stand up and be counted!

**Patrick Ness**  
*Public Policy Manager*

## **GAMC** **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How Many People are on the Program?**

In 2008, more than 77,000 Minnesotans used the program with an average of 35,000 at any given time.

### **Who Uses the Program?**

Minnesota’s poorest and most vulnerable adults. They live on \$7,800 a year or less and do not have minor children in the household. Most are men (60%) , most struggle with mental illness (70%) and/or chemical dependency, and may have chronic physical disabilities (40%).

### RENEWING OUR IMMIGRATION REFORM EFFORTS

Like a bouncing ball, the stock market, and the hills of Duluth, issues have their ups and downs. The issue of Comprehensive Immigration Reform could be in an UP moment soon! That means it is now time to look at this issue again and consider the lens that Catholic social teaching offers us.

President Obama spoke during his campaign of introducing some kind of reform to respond to the reality of immigrants and citizens alike.

We know this is a controversial issue for many people. As a result we need to prepare for the discussion that will take place, and determine how we can be part of the solution that brings justice to all involved.

Successful immigration reform will take awareness, understanding, and advocacy.

One thing we should be aware of is that in 2006-07 when the issue of immigration was being debated in Congress, the number of communications from people who were anti-immigrant far outweighed the communication from people asking for reform by 10 to 1 or maybe even 20 to 1.

Therefore, we need to get organized by knowing the issue and participating in the public conversation about immigration.

Secondly, we should understand that even in our own Catholic parishes, there was a strong anti-immigrant feeling, a mean-spirited attitude, even downright hate, expressed

towards immigrants living in our country.

Fortunately, there are resources available to assist us in having a civil conversation in our parishes.

Catholics across the state are organizing under the banner of *Justice for Immigrants – Minnesota*. Part of this organization involves bringing together resources for parishes and groups so that the issue of immigration can be clarified and discussed.

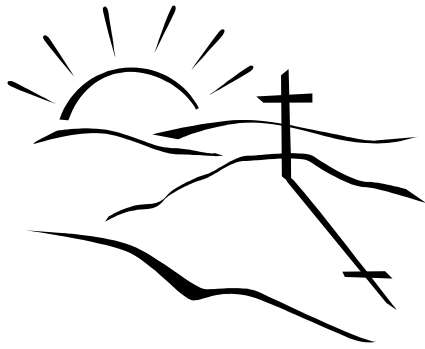
A website has been created that offers tools for parishes to use. There are fact sheets, DVDs and discussion guides, prayers for groups and parish communities, and contact information so that immigrants can share their story.

The toolkit also includes homily suggestions, prayer cards, and the Bishops' statement on comprehensive immigration reform.

Now it is up to the parish to develop a plan that will engage Catholics in an informed discussion. We want to be competent and thus confident about advocating for justice.

We know that our immigrant brothers and sisters are people and not problems; are more like us than not like us; and are seeking the same kind of security, self-sufficiency, and happiness that we are.

See the website; *Justice for Immigrants – Minnesota* and is found at [www.jfimmn.org](http://www.jfimmn.org).



**"If you don't like the way  
the world is,  
you change it.  
You have an obligation to  
change it.  
You just do it one step at  
a time."**

**-Marian Wright Edelman**

**Sr. Kerry O'Reilly**  
Parish Organizer

## Skills

### SAVING GAMC WILL TAKE YOUR VOICE, BUT ALSO YOUR CREATIVITY

At the end of the 2009 session of the Minnesota legislature, Governor Pawlenty vetoed funding for the General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) program. Members of the legislature tried and failed to override the Governor's veto, which means that soon, 35,000 Minnesotans who once relied on this program will no longer have health care access.

Certainly, Minnesota is in tough economic times. But there is no reason that the poorest and sickest amongst us must bear the brunt of the cuts to balance the budget.

It's incumbent upon us as people who are concerned for those who live in poverty and crisis to raise our voices and call for justice. Put simply, you must contact your legislators.

Your message should be simple and to the point. You can make a phone call, write a letter, or send an email. Tell your elected officials that people living in poverty need to be protected from dangerous budget cuts and that GAMC enrollees need to have access to essential health care services, medications, and other life-sustaining care.

It's critical that we expand our collective voice if we are going to win on this issue. To do that, you'll need to reach out to your friends, family, and community members, and use your creativity to talk to people

who can be brought into the conversation.

For example: Do you volunteer somewhere in the community? Speak to your fellow volunteers at the food shelf, the homeless shelter, or community clinic. Are you a member of a community organization or on boards of directors for an organization? Ask your board members and fellow community leaders to call, write, or email their legislators.

The people who are living in poverty we serve by our charitable work are often the very same people who will be impacted by the elimination of GAMC.

Many members of the legislature, from both parties, are running to become governor in 2010. At candidate forums, community events, and other public events, you should ask them about their plans to protect GAMC enrollees.

Of course, it is important to talk about this in your parish, too. Spread the word, ask your friends, and let's work together to save GAMC!

Do you have great ideas about how to do this advocacy? We'd love to hear them.

You can find resources for talking about the elimination of GAMC and advocating for GAMC enrollees by visiting [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org) or by calling the Office for Social Justice at 651-291-4477.

**Adam Robinson**  
Public Policy Organizer

**“The obligation to provide justice for all means that the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation”**

**-Economic Justice for All #86**

## Parishes at Work

### ST. JOAN OF ARC HELPING TO SAVE GAMC.

Writing notes to our legislators about General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) has become a pastime for Sowers of Justice. (See lead article) Let's do like **St. Joan of Arc Parish** in Minneapolis did, writing postcards to legislators, more than 600 of them! OSJ has the cards, join this new pastime.

**Sr. Kerry O'Reilly**  
*Parish Organizer*

"I am only one,  
But still I am one.  
I cannot do everything,  
But still I can do something.  
And because I cannot  
do everything,  
I will not refuse to do  
The something that  
I can do"

-Edward Everett Hale  
Pastor

### TRANSFIGURATION— OAKDALE

Two years ago, a group of parishioners at **Transfiguration in Oakdale** formed the Tranny Creation Care Team to answer the call to be stewards of God's creation and a pillar of Catholic Social Teaching. Look at the results:

- *Recycling bins all over campus*, thanks to a gift of 60 bins for free from the Recycling Association of Minnesota. Their retail value is over \$900! They recycle paper, plastic, aluminum, glass, and cardboard.
- *A Community POWER Grant by the Metro Counties' Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board*. The grant is for educating the parish and community about solid waste issues. The team began implementing the grant at the Fall Festival with a well attended info booth, a compost bin giveaway, and

over 70 parishioners taking the Creation Care pledge.

- *The school is now using metal flatware donated by parishioners instead of plastic*, sending hundreds of pounds of waste a week to hogs for food, instead of to landfills, and improving paper recycling.
- *A highly successful Fall Festival recycling system* was instituted resulting in 465 pounds of recycled plastic beer cups and bottles, aluminum and steel food cans, glass, and cardboard boxes. The Knights of Columbus also helped by sending waste food to hogs.

For more information, contact Deacon Glenn Skuta at 651/470-7572 or e-mail at [gskuta@q.com](mailto:gskuta@q.com).

**Cheryl Peterson**  
*Parish Social Justice Manager*

### CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (CCHD)

In most Catholic parishes, the **CCHD collection is the week-end of November 21 and 22<sup>nd</sup>**. Please give generously! Make it a priority to help low-income led organizations address poverty! Be an ambassador in your parish! Make a phone call to your parish pastor to encourage him to promote the collection! Questions? Contact Cheryl Peterson, diocesan coordinator at 651-291-4490.

**Cheryl Peterson**  
*Parish Social Justice Manager*

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Parishes at Work

*(Continued from page 5)*

### HEALTH CARE REFORM

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Over 100 Catholics from throughout the Twin Cities gathered to hear noted theologian, Fr. Bryan Hehir from Harvard University, speak on Health Care Reform from a Catholic ethical perspective.

**Cheryl Peterson**

*Parish Social Justice Manager*

### GAMC AND ST. PATRICK'S IN EDINA

We all know that social change work is more art than science. Credit must go to parishes that have discovered exactly how to bridge the gap between the principles of Catholic social teaching and effective advocacy. Many parishes have developed some very practical concrete steps that bring the Catholic voice into the struggle for economic justice. As we fight to reinstate General Assistance Medical Care, we need to look no further than St. Patrick's Church in Edina as a powerful example of advocating for, and with, the poor.

GAMC was eliminated at the end of May. Within a month, St. Patrick's hosted a community forum with city, county and state elected officials, along with a hospital administrator, a nurse and others personally affected by the pending loss of GAMC. Over 150 Edina residents attended, thanks to extensive outreach efforts by the St. Patrick's justice committee and

other community partners. It was impressive.

In August, Edina residents from St. Patrick's and other area parishes once again gathered to meet with their state representative and senator. They communicated their values, discussed the moral and fiscal need to save the program, and secured a public commitment from each legislator that they would sit down and visit enrollees of GAMC before the end of October.

On October 30th, Representative Keith Downey, who voted to uphold the line item veto of GAMC, visited St. Stephen's shelter to hear directly from those who rely on GAMC for their very survival.

St. Patrick's has set the bar high, and has emerged as a statewide leader in the fight to save GAMC. They will continue to raise this issue in their parish over the coming months from the pulpit, in the pew, at coffee and donuts, and over the phone.

We are hopeful that other parishes across the state will find creative responses that work for their community. For instance, St. Joan of Arc recently collected over 600 hand written 'Save GAMC' postcards that were delivered to the Capitol.

Each parish and community is unique - but each has something important to offer to help secure continued health coverage for 35,000 Minnesotans. We need all hands on deck - especially yours!

**Patrick Ness**

*Public Policy Manager*

**“People say, ‘What is the sense of our small effort?’ They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time.”**

**- Dorothy Day**



**LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD FRIENDS  
TO HELP OSJ FIGHT POVERTY:**

We Are In Need of Office Volunteers!

Volunteers will offer support to Operations Team in the Office for Social Justice.

A few hours a week would be great! So many issues, so little time....

Examples of specific tasks and duties include, but are not limited to:

- Prepare large mailings including our bi-monthly SEEDS newsletter
- Data entry
- Filing
- Putting together new membership packets
- Other projects available based on interest and aptitude

Monday – Friday 8:30 –4:30 but day and times are very flexible for most tasks/ duties. We welcome a conversation about the possibilities with you!

Please contact our office at 651-291-4477 or via email at [osj@archspm.org](mailto:osj@archspm.org) if you are interested!

## Resources and Events

### On Our Lenten Journey Becoming an Easter People...

A five part lectionary-based reflection series that connects our faith, spirituality and commitment to ending poverty.

Each reflection includes:

- Opening prayer
- Gospel reading and reflection
- Solutions toward ending poverty
- Video and/or relevant reading
- Opportunity for conversation
- Closing Prayer

To order materials, please request them from [OSJ@archspm.org](mailto:OSJ@archspm.org)

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### Sower Membership Drive

In July we sent an invitation asking you to join OSJ's Sowers of Justice Network or to continue your past membership by sending in the \$25.00 membership fee. Thank you to those who have had an opportunity to join or renew. It's not too late for those who have not. Just call our office if you have questions.

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### Resources for Your Parish:

**Homeless Youth: Finding Home** is a documentary with accompanying discussion guide developed by Wilder. Find out more at <http://www.wilder.org/homelessyouth.0.html>

St. Stephen's Human Services offers **A Day In the Life**, an experiential learning program that gives participants an opportunity to learn directly from people experiencing homelessness. Contact St. Stephen's Human Services at 612-874-0311 to get more information.

#### **When You're Mentally Ill, No one Brings You a Casserole.**

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability Council on Mental Illness and National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) Faithnet websites offer a variety of resources to raise awareness of the issues of mental illness, from bulletin articles to videos with discussion guides. Find out more at: <http://www.ncpd.org/ministries-programs/specific/mentalillness/resources> or [www.nami.org/namifaithnet](http://www.nami.org/namifaithnet)

In order to create opportunities for individuals to talk about racism, the St. Paul Foundation has developed the ***New Conversations About Race and Racism***<sup>™</sup> discussion tool. You can get involved by hosting a conversation. More information is available at <http://www.facingrace.org/page25133.cfm>



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**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**

*Sow for yourselves justice,  
 reap the fruit of faithful  
 love;*

*Break up for yourselves  
 a new field, for it is  
 time to seek the Lord,  
 until the Lord comes  
 and rains down justice  
 upon you.*

Hosea, 10:12



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## Mark your Calendars

### Comprehensive Immigration Reform: A Journey of Hope:

November 7 10:00 am –12:00 p.m.  
 Hayden Center—St. Paul

### CCHD Parish Collection Weekend

November 21 & 22, 2009

### Sowers Assembly

**Focus: Strategies to Reinstate GAMC**  
 December 7 6:30 –8:00 p.m.  
 Hayden Center—St. Paul

### Immigration Sunday

January 10  
 All Parishes are Invited  
 Visit [www.mncc.org](http://www.mncc.org) for more information

### Parish Leadership Institute

January 13, 2010  
 January 20, 2010 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.  
 January 27, 2010  
 Hayden Center—St. Paul

### Journey to Justice—Workshop for JustFaith Participants

January 30 8:30-4:00 p.m.  
 St. Patrick's—Edina  
 \*Fee required.

### JRLC's Day on the Hill

March 25  
 RiverCentre and Capitol —Saint Paul  
 Visit [www.jrlc.org](http://www.jrlc.org) for more information

*Some events require pre-registration.  
 All events are free unless noted.*

*Please visit our website or call for more  
 information  
[www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org) or  
 call 651-291-4477*