



Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JUNE, 2006

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THE COMMON GOOD: BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONE AND BORDERS

The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us of what it meant to be “neighbor” at a time when the world was relatively simple. But in today’s world, being a Good Samaritan is a whole lot more complicated and involved.

Who is my neighbor? How do I act as a neighbor? These are the hard questions we are challenged to answer as citizens and people of faith living in a global society.

In his document, **Reviving the Common Good**, the late Archbishop John Roach recalls the “faces of good and generous people”. He talks about the contributions that working men and women, business entrepreneurs and farmers and others have made to Minnesota’s economy. In them he saw strong family values, a dedication to a good quality of life and community leaders with a strong sense of cooperation and social concern.

But Archbishop Roach also reminded us of the many faces that reflected pain and suffering, the growing number of children living in poverty and the daily pain that many face because of racism.

“Far too often the faces I see are empty, without a sense of purpose, they are faces of people, both rich and poor who are longing for a deeper moral vision and a sense of meaning that goes beyond material goods and individual gratification.”

Bridging the gap between the rich and those living in poverty is important in terms of economic need, but it is also a means toward sharing a deeper moral vision that enhances the common good and allows people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. We need to hold our public institutions accountable for bringing people together in a way that contributes to the common good.

Today the “common good” is big. It can no longer be defined by the limits of our metropolitan borders or by the limits of our national borders. In this era of globalization, the common good has to include the whole world. Let’s face it, in this information age, we know more now about the various peoples of the world than we ever have.

Today the “common good” is big. It can no longer be defined by the limits of our metropolitan borders or by the limits of our national borders.

This is the challenge of Catholic social teaching: to embrace dear neighbors without distinction wherever they are

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instead of shrinking from them.

Loving our neighbor and doing justice cannot be separated because our relationship to our neighbor (hood) is bound up with our relationship with God.

What God asks us to do is to create a world where the human condition is right before God and within society.

Yes, there are situations of oppression all around us. Right here in the Twin Cities and in Darfur. Right here in Minnesota and in Mexico. Right here in the urban core and in rural Worthington. It is clear that people are being cut out of participating in the decisions that affect their lives. These situations keep humanity from realizing its God given dignity.

The Gospel calls us to rise above the indifference, oblivion or neglect that keeps people down. The Gospel calls us to “bring good news to the poor, bind up hearts that are broken and proclaim liberty to captives.” (Isaiah 61)

This is the freedom that we hunger for and that gives our life together meaning. This is the vision we must pursue.

If this is our moral vision, what is required of us as we face the next election? I believe that it will be important for us to come together for a very crucial conversation on the quality of life that we seek for Minnesota and beyond.

People from various economic, educational, racial and religious backgrounds need to carefully reflect and respectfully discuss what kind of society we want and what kind of political leaders will help us get there.

In a perfect world, I would like this diverse group to reflect together on

the following questions:

- ◆ What do you consider to be critical in creating a quality of life for you and your family?
- ◆ How do these qualities relate to the values that you hold?
- ◆ In what ways are the qualities that you personally value related to the quality of life in our state as a whole?

The important thing about this conversation is the disposition of the people who walk in the room. Too often, we come to debate the point of view we are convinced is right and fail to listen to or learn from anyone else’s experience or point of view. But if the conversation is to have meaning, we can’t walk in the room with our bags packed full of our own experience and fail to look closely at the suitcases filled with the experiences of the other folks in the room.

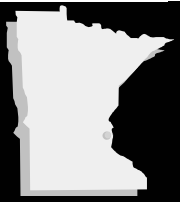
The older our society gets, the more we should realize how much we have to learn from each other. If our opinions are well formed at 30, let’s say, we could go another 70—80 years without ever changing our minds. Wouldn’t that be a waste of living?

Finding greater common ground on what makes up the common good, then, means that we must embrace the dear neighbor without distinction: rich and poor, young and old, black and brown, PhDs and GEDs—we all have something to bring to the conversation. If it was held honestly and openly, our humanity would be ever so much more dignified.

Kathleen Tomlin
Director

...it is not only appropriate, but essential that Catholics be involved in working for social, political and economic justice. This is not an optional or peripheral part of our faith. Nor is it new. It is at the heart of our faith, and it is deeply rooted in the Gospel. As Christians we are, by definition, a community of people who have a mission to transform the world on behalf of justice and human dignity.

Archbishop John Roach
“Reviving the Common Good”



LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY 2006

As many expected, the 2006 session featured little new legislation to significantly address issues of economic justice. Even so, OSJ weighed-in on a multitude of bills. I'm happy to report no major setbacks, and a few noteworthy victories.

Housing:

A great success for low-income people was the allotment of \$17.5 million for supportive housing and \$2 million for transitional housing in the 2006 bonding bill. While significantly less than our pre-session goal, this is still a major investment in housing programs for the homeless. OSJ's "Housing Action Team" made a great contribution, holding homelessness forums in important districts and generating numerous calls to legislators throughout the session.

A proposal to raise the deed tax and dedicate the revenue to housing programs was new in 2006. It moved further through both the House and Senate than either supporters or opponents predicted. Watch for this to resurface in 2007.

Child Care:

In its supplemental budget bill, the legislature allocated badly-needed funds for child care and early childhood education programs. Included was \$11.5 million for the Basic Sliding Fee waiting list, which provides childcare for families transitioning out of Minnesota's welfare-to-work program. In addition, the freeze on reimbursement rates for providers in the Child Care Assistance Program was lifted.

Health Care:

Significant new health care policies, many of which require significant new funding, were not going to gain much traction in 2006. Most of our health care priorities were pronounced dead early on. Despite the lack of a highly visible legislative "hook," OSJ's Health Care Action Team sponsored a number of successful forums to highlight the shortcomings of our health care system. This is part of their work to build a base of Catholics advocating for incremental steps to universal health care in Minnesota.

Immigration:

Sadly, the DREAM Act to allow undocumented students to attend MN colleges at in-state tuition rates was defeated again this year. Like last year, the DREAM Act progressed deep into the process before being derailed near the end. Also losing steam was the effort to outlaw city "sanctuary" ordinances stipulating that it is not the responsibility of city employees to be agents of federal immigration enforcement. Despite the frenzied activity of both pro—and anti—immigrant forces, no immigration-related legislation was passed this year. OSJ was proud to work hard in supporting the dignity of Minnesota's immigrant communities (see *Seeds*, March 2006).

Commission to End Poverty by 2020:

Finally, the session ended with a welcome surprise: approval of the "Commission to End Poverty by 2020." This commission stems directly from recent anti-poverty efforts of Archbishop Harry Flynn and Bishop Peter Rogness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The commission will analyze the state's responses to poverty and make specific recommendations for improving them. A similar effort yielded several innovations that assisted thousands of low-income people over the past two decades.

Matt Rezac
Public Policy Manager

PEOPLE AND PARISHES AT WORK

Quality of Life for Minnesotans

As we look ahead to the election next fall, we can anticipate a lot of debate on some very important issues. In 2006, all the legislators and state officials are up for election. It provides a moment when we can bring our concerns about people in poverty to candidates and challenge them to include them in the policy choices that they will be promoting. Core to this conversation is a renewed focus on our values and on the meaning of a quality of life.

OSJ has developed one tool to start this conversation, *Reading the Signs of the Times: Creating a Quality of Life for Minnesotans*. This booklet provides:

- ◆ Prayer
- ◆ Process
- ◆ Facilitator Guide
- ◆ Relevant Excerpts from Catholic social teaching.

Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Maplewood used this tool. In talking with Jim Saumweber of Presentation, he indicated that the group found the discussion challenging as they came from a number of different perspectives. He thought the initial conversation comparing the various elements of decision making provided ground for applying the same questions to specific issues.

Jane Kennedy facilitated the conversation and also found it a useful tool. Parishioners shared their values, experiences, beliefs, and understanding of the facts. It was important for them to see how all of these relate to decisions that may or may not constructively impact the common good.

You can download the booklet from the OSJ web site:
www.osjspm.org

Leadership Development

Every year is a good year to do some work in the area of justice. Many parishes did just that during this last 2005—2006 year.

Leadership Development involves study and looking at parish resources and developing a plan for integrating justice into parish life. A number of parishes have been and are in this process: **Holy Name**, Medina; **Divine Mercy**, Faribault; **Most Holy Trinity**, St. Louis Park; **St. Margaret Mary**, Golden Valley; **St. William**, Fridley; **Nativity**, St. Paul; **St. Mary of the Lake**, White Bear Lake; **St. Bartholomew**, Wayzata; **Presentation**, Maplewood; **Nativity**, Bloomington.

Others are developing plans that grow out of previous plans: **St. Ambrose of Woodbury**; **Transfiguration**, Oakdale; **St. Joseph**, Lino Lakes; **Incar-nation**, Minneapolis; **St. Mary of the Lake**, Plymouth; **Cathedral of St. Paul** and **St. Joseph**, Red Wing.

Sister Kerry O'Reilly
Parish Organizing

Immigration with Dignity

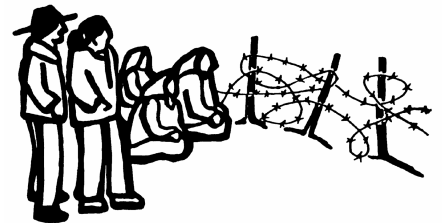
Immigrants and their allies gathered on April 9th in a historic display of solidarity in support of comprehensive immigration reform. Forty-thousand Minnesotans, arms linked, filled the half-mile between the State Capitol and our historic St. Paul Cathedral. Never before was the connection between faith and politics so clear and so inspiring.

The Catholic Church has played a leading national role throughout these times. Locally, the Office for Social Justice served as the coordinating organization within AFFIRM, the coalition that sponsored the march.

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Catholic social teaching more than anything else insists that we are one family; it calls us to overcome barriers of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, economic status and nationality. We are all one in Christ Jesus (cf. Gal3:28) beyond our differences and boundaries.

Communities of Salt and Light, 10.



PARISHES AT WORK (continued)

The so-called “illegals” are not so because they wish to defy the law; but, because the law does not provide them with any channels to regularize their status in our country—which needs their labor; they are not breaking the law, the law is breaking them.

-Most Reverend Thomas Wenski, Bishop of Orlando

Members of OSJ’s Immigration Action Team showed up to volunteer and lend their voices. Catholics from across the Archdiocese turned out in the thousands.

Archbishop Harry Flynn spoke from the podium outside the Cathedral, with interfaith leaders at his side:

“I have heard those without documents described as ‘illegal’. Yes, holding one another accountable to the law is important, but there is also a higher law that forms the basis of our legal justice system and many of our religious traditions. Our higher law is based on the values of human dignity, community, and solidarity. And we not only hold one another accountable to these values—we must act on them.”

The “MN March for Immigration with Dignity” allowed all Minnesotans to transcend fear, racism and politics to see that immigration is about faith, family and basic human dignity. We will continue to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform rooted in our social teaching tradition.

Patrick Ness
Issue and Advocacy

Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development funds work that breaks the cycle of poverty, one community at a time. These projects dig to the root of injustice, recognizing that true change must come from those most affected by poverty and a lack of opportunity.

CCHD-funded work includes seniors with disabilities organizing to save their homes, student leaders fighting for equitable educational opportunities, and inner-city kids learning about business and self-sufficiency through urban gardening programs.

Through community organizing, leadership training, and economic development, our neighborhoods are strengthened and the common good reinforced.

Nearly all CCHD funds are donated by Catholics through an annual parish collection. Unfortunately, our Archdiocese has seen over a 25% decrease in funding over the past three years. This has taken a toll on the systemic change work being carried out by CCHD funded organizations. Together, we must do better. We hope to double our collection over the next five years, from \$200,000 to \$400,000.

We are asking each parish to assign a “Parish Liaison” to help bring the mission of CCHD into the parish. This volunteer position requires a minimum of 15 hours per year for the training date and collection weekend.

Qualifications: The primary qualification is a passion for social justice. It is important to be familiar with the Church’s teaching through *JustFaith* training or other educational activities. This is the basis for our justice response to poverty. Leadership and communications skills are also important.

If you are interested or want more information, please contact Patrick Ness at 651-291-4484 or at nessp@archspm.org

Patrick Ness
CCHD Coordinator

RECLAIMING OUR CITIZENSHIP

Democracy is defined as “government by the people”. A democracy is measured by the quantity and quality of people’s participation. Voter turnout rates evaluate the quantity, and Minnesota typically ranks among the nation’s best. Unfortunately, “quality” participation is not so abundant.

The mechanisms through which public choices are made have, by and large, been delegated to career professionals. These include tracking bills, using legislative procedural rules to advance proposals, developing relationships with legislators, and testifying before legislative committees. Most of this work happens with very few “everyday” citizens in sight.

This is a grave concern at OSJ. In their document *Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Bishops call Catholics to “see civic and political responsibilities through the eyes of faith and to bring our moral convictions to public life.” The Bishops suggest that active citizenship is a moral obligation.

Some might say that the public forfeits its will by not getting involved. This may be true. My concern is that, when the majority of decisions are made without public involvement, is it still fair to call the process democratic? What values are reflected in state policy when legislators hear mainly from professional lobbyists? What is lost when the life experiences of most citizens are not part of the equation?

As a faith community, we have a unique advantage in the public arena: we transcend social, economic and political boundaries.

Often, legislators assume that poverty only concerns the inner cities. Some suburban legislators have said that “there’s no constituency for homelessness (or child care, or welfare, etc.) in my district.”

But people of faith are in every district. By working to combat poverty, we spurn conventional wisdom and gain a powerful edge. With it, we can bring a stronger voice on poverty to the suburbs and hold urban legislators accountable to the convictions they claim. We can put the “common good” at the forefront of public policy.

Take some time this summer to evaluate your own level of civic involvement. Resolve to be a “faithful citizen” in new ways. Visit your neighborhood community council office. Attend hearings at your city council. Invite your county commissioner to have coffee. Arrange a meeting with legislators and people from your parish. Help with get-out-the-vote efforts. (OSJ’s “issue action teams” will be doing voter registration in low-income neighborhoods.) Find an organization you care about and ask to be involved as they strategize for the 2007 session.

Think of yourself as a “public lobbyist”, and schedule time for your efforts. Figure out how to get good at it. OSJ can help you get started, or point you to people who best match your interests.

What happens if more of us get involved in government? The process would change, and so would the results. We might reclaim the word “democracy” along the way.

Matt Rezac
Public Policy Manager

If change is to come, it will come through the margins...It was the desert, not the temple, that gave us the prophets.

- Wendell Berry



Resources and Events

An Exhibit on Race And Racism at the Science Museum of Minnesota

In collaboration with the American Anthropological Association, the Science Museum of Minnesota is developing an exhibit on Race and Human Variation, to open January 2007. The exhibit will examine race from scientific, historical and contemporary cultural perspectives. It will allow this often uncomfortable topic to be explored in a safe and open environment. Visitors will be encouraged to share their own thoughts and experiences of race in the exhibit, or as a part of a facilitated group discussion in the "Talking Circle" room.

For more information, call 651-265-9816, or write to John Gordon at jgordon@smm.org, Isadora Collins at icollins@smm.org or Giovanni Ramos at gioramos@smm.org Or, contact the Community Relations Manager, Paul Mohrbacher at mohrbacher@smm.org 651-221-4745.

Resource on the Common Good:

Peace Coffee

Fair trade, shade grown organic coffee that is purchased directly from small farmer cooperatives at prices that ensure a just income for coffee growers.
www.peacecoffee.com

Minnesota Food Association

Support local farmers and build community by purchasing your food directly. Their website links to many local co-ops and local farmers in Minnesota:
www.mnfoodassociation.org/buy

Mental Illness Ministry

St. Joan of Arc parish has initiated Mental Illness Ministry (MIM) to provide support and acceptance to anyone in the faith community whose life is affected by mental illness. Their mission is to decrease the stigma of mental illness through education, support, and resources. Consumers have chosen the name Pursuers of Wellness.

MIM has joined an Interfaith Coalition on Mental Health and the Education Network on Mental Health, both of which focus on sharing resources. We invite you to join with us to find ways that we can all work together to reach out to people affected by mental illness.

For further information, contact:

Mary Paradis, Co-Chair, Mental Illness Ministry
claudemaryparadis@comcast.net 763-560-0856

Roseann Rogers, Director of Ministries, St. Joan of Arc Church
rrogers@stjoan 612-823-8205

Girls International Forum International Girls Summit

Girls International Forum (GIF) is a worldwide collaboration of girls and women working to inspire, educate, and empower the global leaders of tomorrow. GIF is hosting an **International Girls Summit at Macalaster College in St. Paul from July 8—16, 2006**. The Summit will be attended by eight teams (six girls ages 12—18 and two women mentors) from Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Indonesia, Israel, China, India and the United States. The primary aims of the summit are to call attention to the global issues of health, education, human rights, economic empowerment and violence facing girls and women; develop community-based action projects to address them, and create bonds among the attendees.

During the summit, GIF will hold a *Global Girls Day* to provide an opportunity for 200 additional girls from Minnesota to come together, interact with the international teams, and participate in workshops to learn skills they need to take action to reach their goals.

For more information about Global Girls Day or for details about how to volunteer please go to www.girlsforum.org or telephone 651-645-3636.



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*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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NEW STAFF AT OSJ



With every season, a change...

The staff of the Office for Social Justice is sad to announce the departure of Deb O'Brien. Deb shared her wisdom and energy with many of us over the last several years. She is already greatly missed.

Not missing a beat, however, we have hired Cheryl Peterson as the new Coordinator of Parish Social Ministry. Cheryl has been busy working with Kerry and participating in a couple of different training sessions. She brings a rich background and is anxious to get out and about meeting you.

We thank Deb and are grateful for Cheryl's arrival.

In addition, Kathy Mantaj has left the office after 15 years of dedicated service. She was the institutional memory and super staff, helping all of us look good in the public arena.

Fortunately, Patty Krech will be the new Communications Coordinator as she brings her skills to a new office.

And so now we are in the midst of interviewing for a secretary/receptionist. Wish us luck!

Patty did a great job in that position. We can only hope for someone as good!