

# Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JANUARY, 2004

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## FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP: THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION AND BEYOND

### Faithful Citizens, Informed Citizens

2004 means another state legislative session and another tumultuous election year. In the midst of all of this political frenzy, we are called to be faithful citizens. That call is never more important than in a time that features a presidential race at the federal level and a race for every seat in the House of Representatives at the state level. If we hope to be faithful citizens when we cast our votes in November, we must also become informed citizens in the months leading up to the election.

Becoming an informed citizen means obtaining two different kinds of knowledge: all of us need the facts, the figures, and the frame. That is, we need to know some of the raw data that relates to issues we care about, and we need to be able to tell a story about that data in such a way that we appeal to a wide variety of citizens across political lines to take meaningful action.

Facts, figures, and frames are not enough, however. We also need what Ed Chambers calls “social knowledge”. That is, we need to learn about politics through participation. We need to share our facts, figures, and frames with decision makers in real dialogue, and then reflect on the experience. Are they really listening to us, or are they simply playing the politics of accommodation, agreeing with us only as long as we’re in the same room?

What would make them more likely to listen and take meaningful action? Do we really have the power to make a change on this issue? Answering these questions can only occur through interaction—that is, action, reaction, and reflection that leads to further action.

Developing both kinds of knowledge through active participation in this year’s legislative efforts will truly deepen our capacity to act as faithful citizens. Building our knowledge can begin with this overview, but it cannot end here if we hope to build God’s kingdom.

### Real Cuts Continue to Cause Real Pain for Real People

Any discussion of the 2004 legislative session has to begin with a focus on the last legislative session. Here are some of the stories we’re hearing about the effects of last year’s budget cuts:

- ◆ Two years ago, the St. Jude of the Lake food shelf in Mahtomedi served 10 families a week. Currently, they are serving 40 and are being forced to turn families away as declining donations fail to meet increasing need.
- ◆ Since DHS implemented a series of cuts to the Minnesota Health Care Programs in October, the Health Care Call Center has seen the number of calls nearly double. Callers report that the changes in coverage will cause them to discontinue taking medications or force them to visit emergency rooms as a last resort because they cannot afford more cost effective early intervention.

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These are two of many stories. The message is simple: many people are feeling the effects of the cuts.

Because the cuts are being phased in, it is difficult to assess the full extent of the damage done. As these and other stories demonstrate, however, real cuts continue to cause real pain for real people in our state. In this and future legislative sessions, faithful citizens need to heal that pain through organizing and action.

As we undertake the work of faithful citizenship, it's important to take a look at the signs of the times and to get a sense of what's important as legislators return to St. Paul.

### **What's Important to Democrats? *Winning Back the House***

As we organize and take action, it is more clear than ever that Catholics are politically homeless, and that we have important work to do on both sides of the aisle to move our agenda.

The strongest factor driving DFL legislators this session will be the 2004 election. Specifically, legislators will try to do everything they can to win back the House of Representatives and bolster their majority in the Senate.

A recent meeting with a DFL Senator revealed what this might mean for issues important to the Catholic community. When asked about the emphasis the Senate majority caucus would put on housing, the legislator said that no significant discussions had taken place in his caucus about the issue. In other words, housing is not, at the moment, a priority for the Senate majority caucus. The legislator made it clear that housing was not necessarily an issue that appealed to voters in his

district, or in others where the DFL hopes to be successful.

The conclusion is clear: Electoral self-interest will rule the day. To win control of the legislature, DFL legislators will try to appeal to voters in the suburbs, focusing on issues like education, health care, and transportation. They may work on some issues that are key to making the economy work for low-income people (like health care and perhaps the minimum wage) but they will also give short shrift to other issues that are vitally important (like housing) because those issues do not help them advance an electoral agenda.

### **What's Important to Republicans? *Softening the Image and Consolidating Last Year's Gains.***

The Governor and the House majority caucus exerted a tremendous amount of power in the last legislative session. They successfully scaled back a number of social programs that they saw as excessive and won major victories on social issues as well.

As the 2004 election approaches, Republican legislators will try to distance themselves from the pain caused by cuts made during the 2003 session. The Governor's overtures on the environment and initiatives like the "super-teacher" proposal are an effort to make the party look more moderate than the spending cuts might otherwise imply.

At the same time, Republicans will also try to consolidate the gains they made during the last legislative session. The so-called "taxpayers bill of rights" is the most highly visible effort to build on last year's success. If it passes, it could effectively render last year's budget cuts permanent.



## JRLC Day on the Hill

Thursday, March 11, 2004

RiverCentre and the State Capitol  
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Be part of the largest annual interfaith advocacy day when we demonstrate that the faith community in Minnesota is united in reclaiming the quality of life in Minnesota. Day on the Hill will help you sustain and deepen justice work within your congregation.

- ♦ Learn about issues and how to be a citizen-lobbyist.
- ♦ Meet with lawmakers.
- ♦ Influence Minnesota policy.

### Registration begins mid-January.

To sign up, call JRLC at 612-870-3670, visit JRLC's web site at [www.jrlc.org](http://www.jrlc.org), or email Jody at [Jody@jrlc.org](mailto:Jody@jrlc.org)

*JRLC Day on the Hill is presented by the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition.*

## FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP (continued from page 2)

### A Bonding Year— But Not Just a Bonding Year

The 2003 session dealt almost entirely with setting a budget for 2004 and 2005. The 2004 session is a bonding session, meaning that legislators will focus primarily on borrowing money to build various public works projects.

However, there will be much more at stake than bonding. Along with debates about how much we should borrow to make capital improvements throughout the state, there will be substantive debates on a number of issues unrelated to bonding.

The so-called “taxpayers bill of rights” will put a debate about the role of taxes in our society front and center in this legislative session. There will be as many as six proposals from legislators and advocacy groups focused on health care. Educational standards will provide fodder for substantive debate as well.

Given all this, it seems unlikely that the legislature will finish prior to Passover and Easter celebrations, which come this year in the first full week of April. That is the goal of the Governor's office, but a short session may not be in the best interests of Minnesota's citizens.

There are real, substantive issues before us which legislators and citizens need time and space to discuss and deliberate about. There will be plenty of time for campaigning in June. Until then, legislators should take all the time they need to adequately and thoroughly address key issues.

### What's Important to Us? *OSJ's Legislative Agenda*

Given all of these factors, what follows is an overview of our legislative priorities for the year:

#### Toward Health Care For All:

- ♦ *Reinstate coverage for low-income Minnesotans:* Last session, the legislature made cuts that resulted in 38,000 people losing health care coverage. We will support any legislation that restores health security for low-income Minnesotans.
- ♦ *Provide universal health care coverage for every child in Minnesota.* A coalition of advocacy groups will put forward a proposal to provide health care for all children in Minnesota, regardless of income. The proposal would cost less than our current efforts to cover children but would require additional revenue from the legislature.
- ♦ *Contain health care costs for all Minnesotans.* Legislators will propose several ways to reduce health care costs in the coming session. We will support legislation that addresses cost reduction in the most comprehensive way.
- ♦ *Make it easier for underemployed immigrant workers to obtain licensure to practice nursing.* Currently, qualified nurses from other countries face unnecessary barriers as they seek certification from the State. Cutting through the red tape these Minnesota nurses must face would help the state address labor shortages in the nursing profession. These shortages constitute a significant source of increased health care costs

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## PEOPLE AND PARISHES AT WORK

### Choosing Leadership

Over the past several months, staff of OSJ has been meeting with individuals and groups from parishes throughout the archdiocese to discuss how to increase their parishes' commitment to the social mission of the Church. In our conversations we asked and were asked tough questions. Questions like: How does a parish fully integrate justice into its day-to-day life? What will it take to compel parish members to take a stand for their faith values in the public arena? How do we communicate about Catholic social teaching in a way that invites people into meaningful conversation? And in every discussion, in every parish there was consensus: **To make a difference, we need leaders.**

Our parishes need people who are willing to step-up to the incredible challenge of working for change. Change in their parish, their communities, and change in the world. We need leaders in our parishes to take a stand for what they believe and then work to bring that belief into reality. Many people shy away from describing themselves as leaders, but leadership is a quality all of us can attain because it flows from our experience.

To help nurture and develop leadership, the Office for Social Justice has created a substantive, but reflective leadership development process that honors the individual's experience and worldview. This process starts this month with the Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute is a four-part series designed specifically for parish teams committed to justice education

and to furthering the integration of justice into the life of their parish.

Parish leadership teams will be meeting on the four Tuesday nights in January. A commitment of four Tuesdays in January is pretty significant...especially in a Minnesota winter! So what motivates people to choose leadership? When we asked that question of the leadership team at the Church of St. Patrick in Inver Grove Heights, here is what they told us:

- ◆ "Because it's time for me to get active and live my faith. And I know I can't make the change that is needed by myself, I need a supportive community to work with."
- ◆ "Justice has always been important to me. I've been a single parent for 23 years. I remember how hard it was to find affordable housing. I feel strongly that housing should be available for everyone. I also learned early the power of advocacy. My son is disabled and I've been advocating for him all my life. I believe I need to help our parish grow in justice."
- ◆ "I've got a good life and I feel I deserve it, and so does every other person. I don't think people think of their local parish as a place to go to work for justice. We seem to be very good at giving money to charity and we need to develop our involvement in justice. I think this is a wonderful opportunity for our parish."

St. Patrick's leadership team includes Judy and Larry Solarz, Larry Ryan, Deane Illk, Judy Eiden and Pat Williams. As we journey through this leadership development process over the next 18 months, we will share more leadership stories in future issues of *Seeds*.

Deb O'Brien, Parish Organizing

### PARISHES AT WORK

#### Journey to Justice Retreat

Understanding the social mission means recognizing that the essential message is about people. It is not an abstract thought about how God loves and how we should love. Rather it is about seeing and hearing the people of the local community, it is about their hopes and fears and the distress they experience in attempting to be part of our community.

That is what the **Journey to Justice Retreat** is about. A day for 300 participants of the 25 JustFaith groups to come together and find strength in their numbers and inspiration in what they will experience. This day is about meeting people of the community who will tell their stories. We will learn how they are organizing themselves in order to realize stability in their lives and learn how they can make contributions to the community. Groups such as Centro Campesino, a group of migrant farm workers, and Family and Children Services, low wage earners organizing themselves for jobs and affordable housing, will put a face on the church's social mission.

Centered in prayer and reflections about social sin and grace, this day allows JF participants to learn about the profound Catholic social principle of solidarity. This retreat day is February 7, 2004. Pray for and with all those involved.

Sister Kerry O'Reilly  
Parish Organizing

#### People on the Move

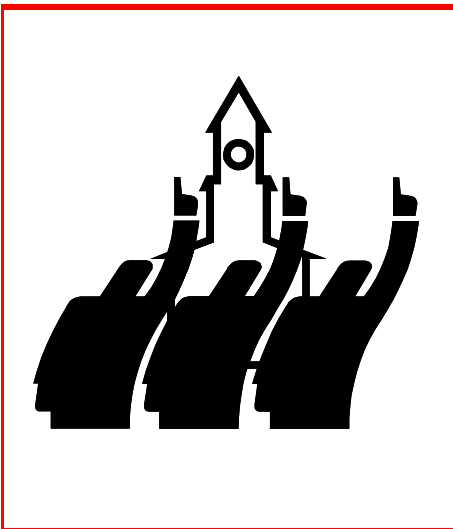
Social change is about two things – education and action.

**St. Mary of the Lake** in Plymouth is considering how to emphasize the first through a “blitz”. During the Lenten season this parish is organizing a week of intense reflection on the social mission through the homilies of the Eucharist, a longer presentation on Catholic social teaching and, finally, reflections by pastor Father Curt Lybarger. This intense look will be followed by opportunities for follow up in small groups, using the discussion tool, *Signs of the Times*, developed by OSJ. This small group reflection will continue in the Fall.  
***Creative planning!***

**Nativity Parish** in Bloomington moved into action in relation to the funding of Southside Services. Alerted to the fact that these services for the physically challenged and mentally ill were being eliminated from the Hennepin County budget Sowers from Nativity wrote letters to Commissioner Randy Johnson. They were joined by other churches and concerned people in Bloomington and succeeded in keeping Southside Services in the budget.

***Congratulations on a successful collective action!***

Sister Kerry O'Reilly  
Parish Organizing



## FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP (continued from page 3)

### Re-establish Basic Economic Security and Human Dignity for the Most Vulnerable Families in Our State:

- ◆ *Repeal the so-called "family cap", which denies additional cash assistance to families participating in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) who have additional children after enrolling in the program.*
- ◆ *Reinstate income to MFIP households with one or more members receiving Supplemental Security Insurance. Last session, legislators cut cash grants available to these households by \$125/person on SSI.*
- ◆ *Reinstate income to MFIP households currently living in public housing. Last session, legislators cut cash grants available to these households by \$50.*

### Maintain Fairness, Flexibility and Accountability in Minnesota's System of Taxation:

- ◆ *Oppose the taxpayers bill of rights. Effectively, this legislation would cap government spending and place limits on the revenue the state could collect from citizens. Essentially, spending, and thus revenue collection, could only increase with increases in inflation and/or population. Any other spending increase above that amount would have to be approved by voters. Because spending would be capped at levels set in 2003 for the 2004-2005 biennium, the spending cuts enacted in a moment of alleged fiscal crisis will become virtually permanent.*

This bill of rights would essentially rob our political leaders of the tools they may need to govern effectively.

### Support and Reward Low-Wage Workers:

- ◆ *Reinstate funding for child care programs cut during the last legislative session.*
- ◆ *Raise the minimum wage in Minnesota in such a way that the state's wage floor sustains the basic needs of individuals and families.*

### Secure Safe, Decent, Affordable Housing for All Minnesotans:

- ◆ *Promote substantial investment in affordable housing through state general obligation bonds.*
- ◆ *Provide an affordable housing tax credit to establish an incentive to contribute land, money, or in-kind contributions for the production of affordable housing.*
- ◆ *Cap the mortgage interest tax deduction benefit available to Minnesotans with homes valued at more than \$500,000. These homeowners would still receive the full federal benefit, and up to a \$25,000 benefit on their Minnesota state income tax, but would forego any additional benefit in order to provide more funding for affordable housing.*
- ◆ *Seek an increase in base level spending to make up for the loss of \$2.7 million in one-time funds for Emergency Services and Transitional Housing Programs.*

Matt Gladue, Public Policy

**"This dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in the United States. Faithful citizenship calls us to seek "a place at the table" of life for all God's children in the elections of 2004 and beyond."**

*Faithful Citizenship—2004*  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

**For a copy of  
OSJ's Legislative Agenda  
see our web page  
[www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org)**

## Strangers BECOMING Friends

A FORUM ON IMMIGRATION

Come and learn about the contributions and the struggles of undocumented immigrants in our community.

**Sunday, February 15, 2004**

2:00—5:00 p.m.

### St. Richard Catholic Church

7540 Penn Avenue South  
Richfield, Minnesota

#### AGENDA:

- 1:45 Gathering
- 2:15 Welcome and Introductions
- 2:20 Keynote: Maria Elena Duruzo
- 2:35 Economic Impact
- 3:30 Impact on Families and Neighborhoods
- 4:00 Find Out What You Can Do to Make Change in a Broken Immigration System
- 4:50 Call to Action

Sponsored by Alliance for Fair Federal Immigration Reform (AFFIRM) and chaired by the Office for Social Justice (OSJ).

FMI or a registration form contact the Office for Social Justice at 651-291-4477. **RSVP's due by January 20, 2004.**

## Resources and Events

### Holy Week in Ciudad Juarez—El Paso

**April 7—11, 2004**

You are invited to “expand your horizons and deepen your faith!” Join others on a journey that crosses the boundaries which divide us, whether these boundaries be geographical, cultural or personal. Touch and be touched by the lives and struggles of people of another country. Witness firsthand this unique border reality, the only place in the world where the First World and the Third World meet.

Ciudad Juarez and El Paso are twin cities, a single community in many respects—divided by an international border. With over 2,000,000 people sharing the same valley, this is the largest community on any international border in the world.

A visit to the border will include:

- ♦ visiting the “colonias”, economically poor communities on both sides of the border;
- ♦ visiting health clinics providing care on both sides of the border;
- ♦ conversations with Maryknoll and other church workers on both sides of the border;
- ♦ presentations by local professionals on the history, demographics and other aspects of the border reality;
- ♦ participation in Holy Week celebrations, and
- ♦ group prayer, reflection, debriefing.

FMI contact Stever Hicken, Maryknoll—Friends Across Borders, 16300 Foothill Blvd., San Leandro, CA 94578. Phone 510-276-7765 or Fax: 801-881-2985  
email: mmafsf@sbcglobal.net or website: [www.friendsacrossborders.org](http://www.friendsacrossborders.org)

### Third Annual Building Racially Inclusive Communities Conference

**May 6-8, 2004 — Holiday Inn in Fargo, North Dakota**

Hosted by The Upper Midwest Regional Network of Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations.

**Conference Topics:** Anti-Racism Training & Assessment Tools; Human Rights & Racial Justice; Outreach to Immigrant & Refugee Communities; Regional “Best Practices” in anti-Racism Work; Youth-led Anti-Racism Projects; Art as a Tool for Anti-Racism Efforts; Faith-Based Anti-Racism Initiatives

**Registration:** Contact: Char Voight—Phone 612-626-9496; Fax 612-625-3513; Email [cvoight@hhh.umn.edu](mailto:cvoight@hhh.umn.edu)

### Frontiers of Justice

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) sponsors *Frontiers of Justice* Program. In the summer of 2004 Frontiers of Justice participants will visit India between July 11 and July 31. As schools will be in session at this time, the trip will focus particular attention on school visits, meeting teachers and students, and sharing experiences. Each participant's sponsoring institution (e.g. school, diocese or religious community) will be expected to cover \$500 towards the cost of the trip the remainder of the expenses will be paid by Catholic Relief Services.

**Deadline for application is February 1, 2004.**

Approximately six participants, representative of the diversity of Catholic high schools in the United States will be selected for the trip from a nationwide pool.

Contact Patty Krech in the Office for Social Justice for an application, 651-291-4477.





**Sowers of Justice**  
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St. Paul, MN 55102

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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

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

### Office for Social Justice Events — 2004

#### *Sowers of Justice Institutes, 2004*

- ◆ **Tuesday, January 6, 13, 20, 27** 6:30 — 9:00 pm  
Our Lady of Grace  
5071 Eden Avenue, Edina  
(952-929-3317)

#### *Journey to Justice—JustFaith Retreat, 2004*

- ◆ **Saturday, February 7** 8:30 am-3:30 pm.  
St. Patrick  
6820 Saint Patrick's Lane, Edina  
952-941-3164

#### *Leadership Development Workshop, 2004*

- ◆ **Friday evening, March 5 and  
Saturday, March 6**  
St. Patrick  
3535 72nd Street East, Inver Grove Heights  
(651-455-6624)

#### *Legislative Briefings, 2004*

- ◆ **Tuesday, February 10** 7—9:00 p.m.  
St. William  
6120 5th Street NE, Fridley  
(763-571-5600)
- ◆ **Thursday, February 12** 7—9:00 p.m.  
Christ the King  
5029 Zenith Avenue South, Mpls.  
(612-920-5030)
- ◆ **Tuesday, February 17** 7—9:00 p.m.  
St. Mark  
2001 Dayton Avenue, St. Paul  
(651-645-5717)
- ◆ **Thursday, February 26** 7—9:00 p.m.  
St. John Neumann  
4030 Pilot Knob Road, Eagan  
(651-454-2079)

**FMI on any of the OSJ events call us at 651-291-4477.**