

Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JUNE, 2002



Inside this Issue

VIEW FROM THE UNDERSIDE.....1

PUBLIC POLICY
Legislative Summary—2002.....3

ACTING FOR JUSTICE
People and Parishes at Work.....4-5
JustFaith.....4
Sowers Challenge.....5

SKILLS FOR PUBLIC LIFE
Moving On...To Elections 2002.....6

BIDDING FAREWELL.....7

RESOURCES.....7

COMMENTS.....7

VIEW FROM THE UNDERSIDE

In the last two weeks I have participated in two of the latest organizing activities of the Sowers of Justice Network. Sowers from Anoka and Hennepin counties met with me in their county working groups while the Sowers of Ramsey and Washington counties met with Matt Gladue. Each event was a gathering to plan strategy and action on housing and welfare issues.

Reflecting on this gathering of Christians I recalled similar meetings in Brazil. In the barrio where I lived there were many high hills and each one had a small Christian community organized among the residents. I often climbed the hills to visit these communities nestled just a step below a panoramic mountain-top display of such great beauty it took your breath away. When I walked down to meet with the community, however, the view was very different. Their reality was not that distant beauty. It was the underside view, shortened and explicit in details, like that from the valley. In my visits with the community, the people shared their experiences of poverty and oppression along with their communal reflection on gospel values. In these meetings they recognized that the liberation and hope presented in the gospel was not reflected in the social and economic conditions of their own lives. That judgment led them to understand the need for change in the social order and to act to create those changes.

As I recalled this experience from Brazil I reflected on the 2002 legislative session that has just ended. The American political process calls for some elected citizens to represent others, to stand, if you will, at the top of the mountain and make judgments about the general needs of the state. They often rely on special interest groups and political parties to help them see the needs that should become a priority. They find themselves the objects of great lobbying campaigns as citizen groups sharpen their skills of political persuasion. But if our legislators only listen to some special interests on the one hand or are blinded by the general panoramic view, on the other, they will not always make decisions that are in the best interests of the state of Minnesota. They may too readily compromise and, in the end, leave some people and their important concerns behind.

These thoughts brought me once again to County Working Groups. As Sowers

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

of Justice we have a unique view in our role as advocates for justice. We look at issues, the concrete problems of our reality, and ask the question "how does this affect the poor and vulnerable?" Our experience, for the most part, is not that of the underside, but our desire for justice leads us to look at how people's lives are affected. There are many who are "living the issue" and cannot articulate that experience and thus are unable to be agents for change. Their reality gives evidence, however, to the need for change and as Sowers of Justice we advocate for that change.

In the democratic process one view cannot dominate, just as one political philosophy cannot dominate. If the process is to be effective than many views must be available for consideration. The view from the underside is vital for our social structures to be responsive to human need. The panoramic view must include this underside in order for social structures to be as inclusive as possible. It is the responsibility and obligation then for Sowers of Justice to help give voice to the often silent and still yearnings of those living in poverty.

Formation as Sowers is an ongoing process that begins with reflection on the church's social mission. Through ongoing training, we become citizen advocates with the power to change social systems. The county working groups provide another opportunity for us to enter this ongoing educational process. The steering committees from Washington, Anoka, Ramsey and Hennepin



counties have met to begin the process of planning for the 2003 legislative session. The issues of welfare reform and affordable housing are the focus of the action because of the way these issues affect the daily lives of the people involved.

The first meeting of the counties organized research visits in local communities to find allies who will support the agenda of moving people out of poverty and creating affordable housing for every family. The second meeting is to organize for interaction with the candidates who will be seeking election for the state offices next fall. A plan to educate and communicate with elected officials is the agenda for the third meeting so that legislators become aware of the valley's view and how people's lives are affected in these issues. The fourth meeting is planned to create specific action strategies that will encourage legislators to make decisions that respond to the needs of all Minnesotans.

You are invited to participate in any of the Sowers of Justice county working groups. If you are interested, contact the Office for Social Justice (651-291-4477) or any member of the steering committees listed in this issue under Parishes at Work.

As advocates we see the experience of others with some understanding, as Christians we observe this experience through the lens of the gospel, and as Sowers of Justice we put this reflection into action that promotes right relationships.

Sister Kerry O'Reilly
Parish Organizing

Legislative Summary—2002

by Kathleen Tomlin



I was actually tempted to leave this column blank because, in fact, the legislative accomplishments of this session were quite minimal. Most of our success was largely defensive in nature. While this is not a surprise given the budget shortfall, it is still disappointing to come away with so little. For people of faith who believe that state policies and budgets are moral documents reflective of the values of a society, it was an especially gut wrenching session.

While the legislature preserved many programs that support low income families, its handling of the budget deficit was fiscally irresponsible. The current year fiscal crisis was only averted through accounting machinations and administrative cuts that will significantly affect the state's ability to deliver the programs that were left in tact. The legislature's failure to seriously consider increasing taxes means that those who will be elected to serve in 2003 will have to revisit a \$1 billion annual budget deficit.

This entire session calls into question how Minnesotans value the common good. Legislative leaders whose major focus should be on the health of the commonwealth failed to squarely deal with the priority needs of the state's communities. Concerned about the next election, they chose instead to cut spending and spend the reserves as a way of temporarily avoiding the pain of tax increases. While transportation, stadium proposals and bonding projects received significant attention in the final days of the session, many of the other needs of the state were largely ignored.

Members of the Sowers network could look upon the results of this session with disdain and become discouraged—the temptation to do so is certainly understandable. But as people of hope, we must look beyond this session, and challenge the candidates of 2002 to be the legislators we need in 2003.

Here is a snapshot comparison of the Sower's of Justice agenda with the 2002 results:

Sowers of Justice Legislative Agenda	2002 Legislative Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect housing programs from cuts. • Establish an inclusionary housing policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal program cuts; plus, \$16.2 million in the bonding bill for the construction of housing for homeless veterans. • Voluntary inclusionary housing policy that allows cities to negotiate incentives with developers that include affordable housing in their developments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three year moratorium on MFIP 60 month time lime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moratorium did not pass; technical changes allowing for extensions in cases of domestic violence and for those waiting for SSI determination did pass.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect basic health and cash assistance safety net programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Assistance and General Assistance Medical Care were left in tact.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Minnesota's Campaign Finance Reform laws. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not pass.

People and Parishes at Work

Congratulations to the Sowers of Justice of **Christ the King Parish**, Minneapolis. Each year the non-profit organization, CommonBond, gives the Archbishop John R. Roach award to a group that has promoted and actively worked for affordable housing.

Christ the King Sowers received the award this year for their work on *The Boulevard*, a project for affordable housing in Southwest Minneapolis. They were commended especially for their coalition building, describing it as “work to coalesce the influence of a wide variety of community members toward justice for all persons...” These Sowers continue to be involved through the coalition that was formed and is still growing called SWING and through the activities of the Hennepin County Working Group.

Anoka County is now offering a dynamic new group called Anoka County Justice Action Group. Leaders and Sowers from **St. William Parish** in Fridley and **St. Joseph Parish** in Lino Lakes met to begin a process of strategic planning that will carry them into the 2003 legislative session. This Action Group offered two different meeting times, one a Saturday morning and the other a Thursday evening, to Sowers and anyone interested in joining in their action for justice. Being the only two Sowers parishes in Anoka County the members of the steering committee made contact with other parishes to encourage their involvement. Commitments were made by the 20 interested people who participated to make more than 30 visits to leaders of the community looking for allies to work with the group. The next meeting of the action group is scheduled for July 10,

7:00 p.m. at St. William Parish in Fridley. If interested contact any member of the steering committee:

Ellen Raeker	763-574-1811
Donna Beecroft	763-574-1780
Ina Lilhedahl	651-784-7140
Janet Lilleberg	763-780-1047
Deb O'Brien	763-780-2350

The Hennepin County Working Group met on May 14 with 56 people participating. The steering committee with representatives from **St. Bonaventure**, Bloomington, **St. John the Baptist**, Excelsior, **Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, Bloomington, **St. Albert the Great**, Minneapolis, **Christ the King**, Minneapolis, **St. Joseph the Worker**, Maple Grove and **St. Frances Cabrini**, Minneapolis organized a two hour session to explore the issues and outline a strategy to organize commitments for research visits within the community. Nearly 100 commitments were made by this group to find allies who support our goals and can help tell the story to decision makers. The group welcomes anyone who would like to join them as they organize through the remainder of 2002 and prepare for the 2003 legislative session. The next meeting is June 18, 7:00 p.m. at Christ the King Parish in Minneapolis. Feel free to contact any member of the steering committee:

Roz Bailey	952-835-6898
Julie Lasota	952-884-6624
Ken Kipka	952-881-9286
Adele Della Torre	612-920-9717
Mary Jane Mitchell	612-824-8296
John Deharpporte	651-699-4517
Lee/Kon Wurm	952-474-6612
Phil/Judy Bartscheller	952-474-7670
Tom Orne	763-420-4231

JustFaith

Nearly 100 people from 14 parishes gathered May 4 at St. John Neumann to learn more about *JustFaith*, an extended justice education/formation process sponsored by Catholic Charities USA. This 6-9 month process involves study, reflection, discussion and action and parallels a similar format used in parish RCIA processes.

Presenter Jack Jezreel first introduced this process in 1989 while working in a parish in Kentucky. For the last several years he has helped train parishes around the country. The Office for Social Justice will work with parishes interested in committing to the *JustFaith* process by helping with materials and action opportunities.

Michael Griffin, Issue and Advocacy

Parishes at work (continued)

Sowers Challenge

Delegates to the Sowers Delegate Assembly wrapped up the year with a productive session evaluating the past year and looking ahead to next year. Delegates expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to come together and learn from each other. They value the sense of support and connection in creating the Sowers network.

Delegates challenged themselves and each other to make a strong showing at next year's Sowers membership assembly and county working groups. The evening finished with a "grand toast" for the work already done and the challenges of the future.

Michael Griffin, Issue and Advocacy

Nobody's taking the summer off in Ramsey County! Ramsey County Sowers of Justice met on May 16 at the Church of St. Peter Claver. Over 30 parishioners from the **Cathedral of Saint Paul, Nativity of Our Lord, the Church of Saint Jerome, the Church of St. Cecilia, the Church of Saint Mark, Corpus Christi, and the Church of St. Peter Claver**, attended.

Participants learned more about the affordable housing and welfare reform issues. They also learned how to do community research visits, action in the public arena aimed at identifying new allies and bringing new voices to bear at the state legislature. The parishes involved committed to doing nearly 40 research visits with potential allies throughout Ramsey County.

In addition to doing research visits, some Ramsey County Sowers members want to get more suburban churches in the county involved in the housing and welfare reform campaign. They will visit with representatives from these parishes in the summer and early fall.

Members of the Steering Committee include:

- Lisa Hambidge, Nativity of Our Lord
- Peter Butler, Nativity of Our Lord
- Bill Richtman, Nativity of Our Lord
- Joanne Mason, St. Mark
- Joe and Jeanette Clements, St. Mark
- Jim Kielkopf, St. Mark
- Carrie Buysee, Cathedral
- Carrie Schmitz, Cathedral
- Nonnie and Jim Andre, Corpus Christi
- Joan and Gene Genarro, Corpus Christi
- Allison Williams, St. Peter Claver

Washington County Sowers of Justice continue their focus on affordable housing in the city of Woodbury. After a successful Housing Action Forum, the steering committee doubled, leaping from 8 members to 18 members. In a very exciting planning meeting, the steering committee developed a comprehensive housing platform for the city of Woodbury.

They called on the city to do four things:

- build affordable housing in every new development
- build housing aimed at families making 60% of Area Median Income
- increase a local tax levy that currently funds affordable housing
- waive fees developers pay to connect to utilities—these fees are among the most expensive for developers

The group now plans to build a broader coalition of faith communities and other groups interested in urging the city to make this platform a reality. They have assembled an educational presentation, and have plans to meet with members of other area congregations in the near future.

In the meantime, Washington County Sowers continue to lobby for specific affordable housing projects in Woodbury as a way of maintaining their presence.

Matt Gladue
Parish Organizing

Moving On...To Elections 2002

Just because this legislative session is complete doesn't mean that Minnesotans can be complacent. On the contrary, it is time to meet the candidates on the campaign trail. This is an important opportunity for faithful citizens and the church to give voice to the values and issues they expect to be part of the debate and deliberation of the 2002 election. While both church and citizens have a role to play during an election time, their roles are distinctly different.

The Church, of course, is interested in politics because the political process helps transform social institutions so that they more fully embody the social and moral values of the Gospel. Activity in the political order, therefore, should not be optional or marginal or accidental. It is at the heart of what it means to be faithful to the mission of the church. To quote John Carr, staff of the Bishop's Conference, "the challenge of the church is to be principled without being ideological, to be political without being partisan, to be civil without being soft, to be involved without being used."

Clearly, the church or representatives of the church should never be involved in partisan politics. The role of the church is guided by two important principles during elections:

- Church institutions and parishes do not take positions for or against particular parties or individuals.
- The church instructs Catholic voters to examine the positions of the candidates on the full range of issues as well as the candidates' integrity, philosophy and performance.

Citizens are then responsible for using the information they glean

during the campaign to justify a vote for or against a certain candidate. Catholics who agree on moral principles can and do disagree on what candidate can best get the job done. But we have to do our homework.

Faithful citizens must become fully informed on the issues and candidates before they enter the voting booth.

2002 is an incredibly important year for citizen input. The turnover at the legislature may be unprecedented. Many current office holders are giving up or giving in or giving out or just giving someone else a chance. Let's face it, public service is hard work. Public service in a vacuum is impossible work.

This election will challenge the public to get to know many newcomers to the political arena. First time candidates are happy to have support in learning the issues; they want to know what their potential constituents think. As a result, citizens have the opportunity to influence and educate candidates even before they begin any official tenure.

And so, click on to web sites, call the candidates, find out where they are speaking, take the time to ask some questions and to let the candidates know how you read the signs of the times. Go to the town forum, the house meeting, the neighborhood barbeque, the county and state fairs. Ask a friend, a neighbor, a spouse, a child to accompany you in your mission to find out who you feel will best represent your values and your vision for Minnesota in the next two/four years.

Kathleen Tomlin
Public Policy



Bidding Farewell...

**It is with regret
that we announce
that Michael Griffin is
leaving the Office for
Social Justice.**

**Michael has taken a full
time position in a parish.
We wish him well, but
will miss his passion
for justice and sense of
humor here at OSJ.**

Good Luck, Michael!

Catholic Social Teaching 1891-- Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis

Charles E. Curran, (Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2002)

If you are generally familiar with Catholic social teaching and want to go a step further in exploring its meaning and methodology, then this new book is a must read. In the words of Richard P. McBrien, this is "the best one-volume exposition and analysis of Catholic social teaching in our time." Curran studies the methodology and content of the teaching and provides a broad sweeping analysis of the historical development of Catholic social thought from the perspective of ethics and theology. An exceptional work by an exceptional ethicist.

Charles E. Curran and Leslie Griffin, The Catholic Church, Morality and Politics.

New York: Paulist Press, 2001.

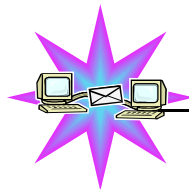
This collection of over 30 essays on faith and politics includes works by some of the best Catholic experts in this field. The book is divided into four parts:

- 1) The Legacy of John Courtney Murray
- 2) Public Theology and Public Square
- 3) The Church's Public Role: U.S. Bishops and Commentators
- 4) Particular Issues: Capitalism in the Welfare State, Abortion, Gay and Lesbian Rights, Religious Language and Public Square.

This is an excellent collection of essays which collectively cover the topic of morality and politics in a very thorough way.



Comments



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Now is your time to give us your comments and suggestions. We welcome your input and would appreciate hearing from you. Let us know what you like about SEEDS—what would you like to see added to the SEEDS newsletter?

Send your email updates and SEEDS comments to
mantajk@archspm.org



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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

SOWERS of JUSTICE

MEMBERSHIP ASSEMBLY 2002

St. Bonaventure Parish, Bloomington

- 5:45 p.m. Gathering/Registration
6:00 p.m. Prayer and Dinner
6:45 p.m. Keynote: BISHOP PATES
Catholic Citizens: Shapers of History

