

# Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JUNE, 2003

## Inside this Issue

REPAIRERS...  
OF THE BREACH.....1

PUBLIC POLICY  
*Legislative  
Summary 2003*.....3



ACTING FOR JUSTICE  
*People and Parishes  
at Work*.....6

MARK YOUR  
CALENDARS.....8

## REPAIRERS.....OF THE BREACH

War, famine, poverty, homelessness, small nuclear bombs, conceal and carry, a shrinking safety net: we are experiencing a siege on the vision and values that support the common good. In the midst of it all, the challenge of Isaiah 58:12 keeps haunting me. I believe we are being called “to be the repairers of the breach, restorers of the streets to dwell in.” It is in our power to do everything we can to challenge the breach makers when the political choices they make fail to represent the values we hold dear. I can only speak for myself, but these choices are not being made in my name.

The breaches of which I speak are not small cracks or simple breaks but gigantic ruptures in the fabric of the common good. Take the following foreign policy examples:

- 4 The war in Iraq has opened up gaping holes in U.S. foreign policy. The reasons for going to war in the first place shifted on a daily basis. Was it to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction? Was it to find and destroy Saddam Hussein? Was it in response to the events of 9-11 or a larger effort related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Or was it the first step in a long line of military operations designed to rid the world of any regime that doesn't share the U.S. world view?
- 4 This war also signaled a change in U.S. policy about the use of nuclear weapons. The concept of nuclear weapons as a deterrent has given way to a first strike nuclear policy.

President Bush not only clearly stated that the United States was willing to engage in a preemptive war but was also willing to use nuclear weapons to rid ourselves of the enemy. Requests for funding a new line of small nuclear bombs that will penetrate underground caverns is in the pipeline.

- 4 The United States initiates proposals for international cooperation and collaboration but only on its own terms. Failing to get U.N. consensus on the war in Iraq, the U.S. decided to go it alone save for the British and a small number of troops from a few other nations. In retaliation for the lack of U.N. support, the U.S. has decided not to let the U.N. have a role in the governing structures of post war Iraq.
- 4 In the wake of the war, the civilian populations in both Afghanistan and Iraq are in chaos while various religious factions and tribal warlords seek to fill the void left by a destroyed infrastructure. The United States quickly provided water to protect the oil wells of Iraq, but was unable to provide potable water for the Iraqis. Hunger, thirst, bombed out cities and chaos are a recipe for continued disaster.

Now let's examine the ways in which our national and state policies undermine a broader social commitment to the good of the whole society:

(Continued on page 2)

- 4 Spending for war and homeland security coupled with huge tax cuts is creating just the fiscal crisis needed to dismantle the 70 year old federal social safety net that protects poor and working class families. Spending for human services is under attack including programs like Medicaid.

The tax cut package that just passed the Congress benefits the wealthiest the most and does nothing for the poorest families. Six million taxpayers earning under \$30,000 will receive no tax cut. Tax payers earning over \$1 million will receive an average \$93,000 tax cut.

- 4 The fiscal crisis at the federal level is not unlike what we have just experienced in Minnesota. Under the guise of debt reduction, our leaders have decided to radically change the role of government in protecting and promoting the health of those in need of its protection. More specifically, they have decided that it is not in Minnesota's interest to have the government support struggling working poor families. The tradition of government as a full partner in enhancing and protecting the common good has shifted to "bystander" at best.

- 4 Legislators in Minnesota are still arguing over whether this session signifies "a ruthless dismantling of the safety net" or whether it represents "the long-overdue reforms that this economic crisis helped us make." Governor Pawlenty said that these decisions "are for the long-term good of our state, our people and our quality of life." Let's be clear, real people with real needs will experience real cuts.

[See the legislative summary on page 3 for more details.]

What do all of these changes say about our fidelity to the common good? How can we participate in repairing the breach and restoring our streets? For some practical responses may I suggest the following:

- 4 Invite more people from your parish to learn about Catholic social teaching and its application in these pressing times.
- 4 Take some time with a group of people in your parish to examine the values and vision that you want to guide our participatory democracy. Prayerfully reflect on what you care about and why? What issues are most critical for you and why? What does the "common good" mean to you?
- 4 Connect with those living in poverty so that you more fully understand the problems people encounter as a result of the political choices that have been made. Connect with social service agencies, food shelves, etc., so that you can more fully appreciate how the demand for services is growing. Help get the stories out.
- 4 Meet with your representatives and senators and hold them accountable for the decisions that have been made at the state and federal levels of government.

The work ahead of us is about restoring right relationships. Solidarity with the poor requires a careful examination of the choices we are making. Deliberation not silence, real discussion not a facade of participation are required. Intense partisanship must give way to a recommitment to the common good.

Kathleen Tomlin

The ancient ruins  
shall be rebuilt  
for your sake,  
and the foundations  
from ages past  
you shall raise up;  
"Repairer of the breach,"  
they shall call you,  
"Restorer of ruined  
streets."

Isaiah 58:12

# Legislative Summary 2003

Submitted by Matt Gladue

Conventional wisdom tells us that Governors get 60-70% of what they want in the budget plans they issue at the beginning of the legislative session. This year, Governor Pawlenty got 95% of what he wanted. People in poverty got nothing. In fact, they got less than nothing. At a moment of great economic uncertainty, in a circumstance where people are losing their jobs and facing double digit increases in health care and other expenses, the Governor proposed massive cuts to the social safety net that Catholics committed to economic justice helped to build over the past thirteen years.

In the end, there were no real reforms in a number of important areas during this legislative session. There were only cuts. Health care is the best example. Real reform might have included working with private health care providers in the state to reduce costs, talking with private employers who hire low-income workers about providing private health care benefits, or the benefits of a single payer health care system. None of those measures, which would have saved the state money, came up for discussion.

**O**ur biggest “victories” involved preventing the worst from happening. We kept General Assistance Medical Care. Also the Minnesota Family Investment

Program (MFIP) was spared. Participants in MFIP will still be able to pursue education and training for up to two years.

But those victories were completely offset by the losses. Basic Sliding Fee Child Care was cut by more than 50%. Thousands of Minnesotans will lose health care coverage. The list goes on and on.

**We** did not go down without a fight. Sowers of Justice members were more engaged than they have ever been in this legislative session. We went to “Budget Blitz” meetings to learn more about the proposed cuts. We helped to double the number of people who participated in JRLC’s “Day on the Hill.” We wrote, called, and visited with legislators in large numbers. And in the last week of the regular session, we joined thousands of others in the “Minnesota is Watching” campaign, where we kept constant vigil as legislators did their work.

Our work cannot stop now. We struggled to prevent the worst cuts from happening. Now we need to do at least three things: hold our legislators accountable, document cuts, and increase the numbers of people who yearn to protect human dignity and human rights.



## BUDGET DEFICIT:

### Sowers of Justice Legislative Agenda

- 4 Preserve funding for essential safety net services.
- 4 Ensure sufficient revenues available to protect the common good and a quality of life that assures healthy communities.

### 2003 Minnesota Legislative Results

Many essential safety net services took significant cuts. See sections on affordable housing, medical care, and welfare reform for further details.

All of the players in the budget debate acknowledged a need to increase revenues.

- 4 The Governor raised fees significantly in his budget and used aid from the federal government to shore up health care cuts.
- 4 The House proposed raising \$100 million through the Racino project.
- 4 The Senate leadership put forward a plan to raise the cigarette tax, and some income taxes for wealthier Minnesotans.



# Legislative Summary 2003 (contd.)



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

### *Sowers of Justice Legislative Agenda*

- 4 Pass state legislation that makes predatory lending illegal and extends protections to victims of this practice.
- 4 Protect funding for affordable housing programs.

### *2003 Minnesota Legislative Results*

- 4 Predatory lending legislation was introduced in the Senate, but not in the House this year, for lack of support from the House majority.
- 4 12% base cut to Minnesota Housing Finance Agency programs proposed by the governor passed.
- 4 \$300,000 added to Family Homelessness Prevention program to account for loss of one time money.
- 4 Emergency services funded at its base, with no additional dollars to account for loss of one time money.
- 4 Transitional housing programs funded at its base plus \$2 million to account for the loss of a portion of one time money.



## CHILD CARE:

### *Sowers of Justice Legislative Agenda*

- 4 Protect eligibility and existing parent co-payments for subsidized child care.
- 4 Maintain funding for Transitional Year child care programs.

### *2003 Minnesota Legislative Results*

Overall, there were almost \$90 million cut from child care programs.

- 4 Eligibility for Basic Sliding Fee child care shrunk to include only families making 175% of federal poverty guideline or less, though

families who enter may stay on the program until they reach 250% of federal poverty guideline. Minnesota went from #4 in the country to #30 in the country in terms of eligibility with this change. Mississippi and West Virginia both make child care more widely available.

- 4 Parent co-pays also increased. For example, a family making 150% of the federal poverty guideline (or \$22,890 a year) will pay 62% more for child care.
- 4 Transitional year child care was increased by \$4.1 million. Social services child care increased by \$3.1 million. Given the larger cuts in child care, this constitutes a pittance.



## HEALTH CARE:

### *Sowers of Justice Legislative Agenda*

- 4 Increase public awareness of available public and private health care coverage.
- 4 Simplify eligibility and enrollment for public programs.
- 4 Reduce cultural barriers to health care coverage and preventative health care services.
- 4 Maintain funding for publicly funded health care programs.

### *2003 Minnesota Legislative Results*

- 4 Health care funding was cut dramatically. One estimate claims that 38,000 people will lose health care coverage as a result.
- 4 Moreover, co-payments and premiums will increase dramatically for those still eligible to participate.
- 4 The Governor originally proposed much more dramatic cuts than those in the final bill. Only an unexpected influx of \$195 million in federal funds attached to the federal tax cut bill prevented the worst from happening.

(Continued on page 5)

# Legislative Summary 2003 (contd.)

## 2003 Minnesota Legislative Results (contd.)

### Changes include:

- 4 Participants in the state's Medical Assistance and General Assistance Medical Care programs will have to start making co-payments for various medical services, including office visits, emergency room visits, some dental care, and prescription drugs.
- 4 Funding for General Assistance Medical Care has been cut \$104 million dollars.
- 4 Many will no longer be eligible for GAMC because their income will be more than \$6735 a year. This will be true even if an individual's medical expenses reduce their income below this threshold.
- 4 These individuals will be eligible for MNCare, but there could be as much as a four month delay. Under MNCare, they will also pay monthly premiums for their care.
- 4 Individuals on GAMC who make between 75% and 175% of federal poverty guidelines will only have access to inpatient care.
- 4 Retroactive coverage for GAMC has been eliminated.
- 4 Monthly premiums for MNCare will increase by as much as \$75 per adult participant per month. For a 2-adult household, that would mean a \$150 per month increase.
- 4 Participants in MNCare will receive a reduced set of benefits. The state will only agree to pay up to \$2000 in health care expenses per year and \$10,000 in hospital expenses per year.
- 4 Undocumented immigrants will no longer be eligible for basic healthcare services, though they can still receive some emergency medical care. (Prenatal care will still be provided for undocumented women who are pregnant.)

- 4 Keep sanctions at their current level.
- 4 Repeal the \$100 Housing Penalty.
- 4 Maintain educational provisions in MFIP.
- 4 Maintain Emergency Assistance.
- 4 Maintain funding for legal immigrants
- 4 Oppose a family cap that prevents an increase in a participant's cash grant when a new child is born.

## 2003 Minnesota Legislative Results

- 4 Significant rule changes were made, including: the creation of a diversionary work program that requires applicants to look for work for four months before receiving any cash benefits.
- 4 Exit level changed to 115% of federal poverty guideline. (A family of 3 makes \$18,312 a year at 120% of federal poverty guideline; they make \$17,434 at 115%.)
- 4 Sanctions policy changed to include 100% sanction for individuals after six incidences of non-compliance.
- 4 MFIP recipients in subsidized housing will lose \$50 of their cash grant each month instead of \$100.
- 4 Participants will continue to be able to pursue two years of education or training, but will have to work 20 hours per week in addition to the training they pursue.
- 4 Emergency Assistance funding cut and consolidated with other kinds of social service funding into a block grant for counties.
- 4 Funding for legal immigrants permanently guaranteed.
- 4 Family cap included in new legislation.



### WELFARE REFORM:

## Sowers of Justice Legislative Agenda

- 4 Maintain current MFIP rules that support the work that is expected of participants.
- 4 Maintain the current exit level at 120% of federal poverty guideline.



## People and Parishes at Work

### **Making a difference... what's the buzz?**

Can you feel it? Do you hear it? There is energy in the air! Is it the warm weather? Is it the end of the school year? Is it that summer is right around the corner? Well, yes, it is all of these things *and* for those of us involved in parish social justice organizing, it is the buzz of Sowers parish leadership teams doing the essential work of planning, educating, organizing and recruiting.

The loudest hum is coming from parishes working their plan and parishes in the midst of planning. These leadership teams have done and are doing the hard work necessary to engage more Catholics in social change. No two parishes are the same and as a result, each team's plan is uniquely relevant to the needs of their parish.

- ✓ For some, education is the essential first step in creating a culture and climate for justice.
- ✓ For others, organizing and taking action around issues is most effective.
- ✓ Still others have identified personal conversations with folks in the parish as the way to create understanding that leads to action in the public arena.
- ✓ Some parishes have held successful membership drives this spring.
- ✓ Some are planning membership drives for this fall.
- ✓ Some teams are partnering with parish staff and pastors to find ways to deliver the message of justice.
- ✓ Participation in county working groups is proving beneficial for some parishes looking to have influence on a broader scale.

- ✓ In a couple of instances, suburban and urban parishes are teaming up to collaborate and learn from each other on specific issues.

There is a buzz in the air. Can you feel it? There is a hum of deepening insight and commitment to the work of justice. It is an exciting time.

Deb O'Brien

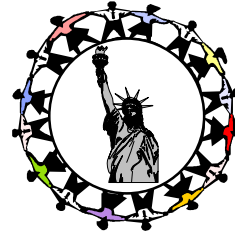


Do you know what JF is? Many more people are coming to know that JF refers to JustFaith, a program for parishes interested in expanding social ministry. On May 3 Jack Jezreel from Catholic Charities USA and founder of the JustFaith program was in town to give his pep talk and introduction to the program. About 120 of us came together from all directions, 35 different parishes from 4 different dioceses including some Protestant congregations.

OSJ co-sponsored this event with ISAIAH to allow representatives of parishes to consider the JF program as a tool for a long and serious look at justice and its place in the parish community. Justice is an essential element of Christian commitment. This program is designed to look at that statement, its biblical roots and today's challenges. It offers a life-altering change of perspective. A small group of 10-15 participants share this experience over several months and become a source of parish wide energy.

Sound interesting? Contact Sister Kerry at the Office for Social Justice, 651-291-4482, and get more info.

Sister Kerry O'Reilly



## Freedom Ride

The **Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride (IWFR)** is a national effort aimed at challenging current U.S. immigration policy and calling for a path to citizenship, family reunification, and workers' rights for undocumented immigrants. On Sunday, September 28, 2003, two buses full of immigrants and advocates will depart from Minneapolis and drive to Washington, D.C., and then to New York, for a series of national events to demand an end to the exploitation and oppression of immigrant workers and their families. The IWFR is inspired by the Freedom Rides of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement—today's immigrant freedom riders share the same dreams of racial equality and economic justice that the 1960's freedom riders fought for. The IWFR seeks to mobilize immigrants and advocates as part of a national movement to bring justice to the millions of immigrants who contribute to our economy and communities.

If you or someone you know would like to participate in the IWFR or contribute financially, contact Kathleen Tomlin, Office for Social Justice at 651-291-4537.

Submitted by Denae White

## Parishes at work (continued)

### *Catholic Campaign for Human Development Needs Your Help!*

OSJ welcomes

## Deb O'Brien

as the new manager  
for our Parish  
Social Justice Program.

Deb joins Kerry – we finally  
have two extraverts  
on the same team and is  
Kerry glad to have her.

Deb is married and has four  
children, two boys and two  
girls ages 5 to 18.

Deb's interest in  
social justice carried her to  
St. Joseph's parish in  
Lino Lakes where she  
served as part time staff.

Deb brings the skills of the  
business world with her,  
including management  
and leadership development  
as well as marketing and  
business development.

We are very glad  
to have her on our team.



We're all too familiar with the numbers:

- 4 1 in 6 children in the United States live in poverty;
- 4 1 of 10 families is poor;
- 4 33 million Americans live below the poverty line.

We also know that charity alone cannot address the root causes of poverty. The hard work of justice is required if we want to make a lasting difference in the lives of the poor. Still, when it comes time to volunteering or donating our money, we quite often look to charity-based activities.

We seldom take the opportunity to support social change organizations like the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. CCHD funds groups that meet two unique criteria: low-income control and institutional change.

- 4 **Low-income control** means that the primary beneficiaries of an organization's work must meet low-income guidelines, and that low income persons have a dominant voice in making decisions for the organization. This empowers low-income community members to be leaders in working for social change.
- 4 The **institutional change** criterion requires that an organization work for the permanent

restructuring of society. This includes changes in the legislation and administrative policies that affect the lives of the poor. This requirement discourages the common "feed a person for a day" mentality that will never break the cycle of poverty.

Historically, CCHD in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has received some of the strongest support in the country. Today we need your help! A decline in the CCHD collection required us to turn away a number of qualified grant applicants this year. If you're looking to make a **monetary donation** toward the work of justice, please consider CCHD.

**We** also need **volunteers** to join the CCHD advisory board, which helps promote the program, review applications, and make funding decisions for the Archdiocese. This is a wonderful opportunity to interact with a diverse set of social justice organizations whose work is truly outstanding. If you can help with either time or money, please call Matt Rezac at 651-291-4536. Thank you!

Matt Rezac



*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**

**Sowers of Justice**  
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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

### People of Faith Peacemakers Breakfast Meetings

St. Martins Table  
2001 Riverside Avenue, Mpls. 55454

#### 4 The Sabbath as a Reflective Time

Wednesday, June 11, 2003 (8:00—9:30 a.m.)

Gain strength through contemplation and thoughtful living, with Carol Masters. *Sabbath*, by Wayne Muller is a source for this meeting. This book is described as offering a “surprising direction for healing to anyone who has ever glimpsed emptiness at the heart of a busy and productive life.”

#### 4 Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives

*Presenter: Joanne Klinnert, resident at Sabbath House*

Wednesday, June 25, 2003 (8:00—9:30 a.m.)

The Sabbath House is a Day Care and Retreat Center that offers time and resources for meditation, rest, and renewal. It is owned and directed by Franciscan Sisters.

FMI on these breakfast meetings call Eleanor Yackel at 763-784-5177.

### Sowers Events — 2003

August 26:	JustFaith Facilitators Meeting
September 18:	Delegate Assembly
October 2:	Immigration Forum
October 30:	Membership Dinner
November 11:	Rights in the Workplace
November 15-16:	CCHD Appeal Weekend
November 22-23:	CCHD Collection Weekend

### Sowers Events — 2004

January 5, 12, 19, 26:	Social Justice Institute
January 8:	Delegate Assembly
January 25:	Journey to Justice Retreat— <i>JustFaith</i>
February 12, 16, 17, 19:	Legislative Briefings
March 9, 16:	Skills for Collective Action
April 22	Delegate Assembly