

Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JUNE, 2001



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SUMMER: A TIME TO BUILD

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit"—John 20:21-22

Over the course of the past nine months, we have been sent out into the world. We have been sent to the state legislature to seek more affordable housing and a more humane welfare system. We have been sent to engage parishioners in broader efforts to build the common good. We have been sent to meet with leaders from other parishes and congregations who are committed to the work of justice.

As we have been sent, the Holy Spirit has been present. The Spirit transformed us and gave us the courage to do things we have never done before. The Spirit moved before us, preparing the way for us to take effective action. The Spirit moved with us, compelling us to take risks. The Spirit moved behind us, urging us to work harder. If you participated in the Sowers of Justice network this year, you know that we were being sent in a new way, that a new spirit had been breathed upon us.

This year, Pentecost compels those of us building this network to ask: What do you do when you have been sent? What do you do when a new spirit has been breathed into you? Is it a time to rest or a time to take action? Is it a time to reflect on the past, or a time to imagine and build for the future?

For the disciples, Pentecost was a new beginning, a time when they accepted the responsibility of building a new Church and a new society. It was not a time to rest after three years of working alongside Jesus. It was not a time to reflect on Christ's death and resurrection. It was a time to act. It was a time to go two by two into the world to bring new people into the life of the church.

Summer is upon us. And if we think about summer in the world's terms, it's a time to relax. Or, perhaps more appropriately, it is time to busy ourselves with different things. We may be less busy at work or at school and more busy planning a vacation or running from day camp to baseball games.

The work of building this network does not stop, however. Summer may be a time when we are less busy at the legislature, less busy attending meetings of the Sowers Delegate Assembly, and less busy attending diocesan trainings.

We want to challenge Sowers of Justice members in each parish to gather together this summer to do something that will make the network stronger at the parish level.

(Continued on page 2)

It is also a time when we could choose to build the network in our own parishes. We want to challenge Sowers of Justice members in each parish to gather together this summer to do something that will make the network stronger at the parish level. What might that be? Here are some suggestions:

Celebrate and Evaluate: At Guardian Angels, Sowers of Justice members gathered toward the end of the legislative session to celebrate the work they did and to measure their success. They also took the opportunity to ask each other what they did well and what they might do better as they continue the work.

Build Relationships and Recruit New Members: Our relationships are what bring us together, more so than any one issue. They give us a basis for collectively imagining a more just world and then acting to make that a reality. They give us hope when we encounter barriers and strength when we are afraid.

Use your convening time to build relationships among existing Sowers members, or plan a strategy for building new relationships and recruit new members.

With existing Sowers members, you might break into small groups or provide an opportunity to talk one-to-one. To build new relationships and recruit new members, consider these questions:

- ◆ Which parishioners do you want to invite?
- ◆ What strategy will you use?
- ◆ Who will meet face-to-face with parishioners?

Hold State Legislators Accountable: Now that the session is over, invite your legislator to the parish. How did they vote? Why did they vote that way? How do you feel about the way they voted? How did they get into public life? What do they like best about the job? What was the most difficult moment of the last session for them? This is a chance to continue the relationship with your legislator.

Do Research on a Local Issue: How are the issues you worked on at the state legislature affecting your community? What could local decision makers do to address that issue? Who are the key players you might need to talk to? What could local decision makers do to affect state legislators? Use your time to convene to think strategically and put together a plan for doing research actions.

Over the next few weeks, we will work closely with parish leaders to help them plan a convening and to talk with them about a turnout strategy for the event. If you want help planning a convening, call OSJ at 651-291-4477 and ask to speak with Matt Gladue, Michael Griffin, or Kerry O'Reilly.

Matt Gladue



**The Spirit
transformed us
and gave us
the courage
to do things
we have never
done before.**

Sharing your joy, Sharing your grief

Reflection Pool

Did your legislator know that you had an opinion on any of these issues?

Did you encourage others to express their opposition or support for various legislative bills?

Did the issues have urgency because you knew someone who would be directly affected?

Do you feel that your activity makes a difference or not?

Being a public servant is hard in this day and age. There is a lot of cynicism about politics and often a distrust of politicians. On the other hand, politicians often don't have a clue about what the public really wants or what his or her constituents think is important. They often make decisions in a void because all they have to go on is silence. But it doesn't have to be this way, does it?

Sowers of Justice members have been encouraged over the past couple of years to really work on developing a relationship with their legislative representatives and senators as well as with their more locally elected officials. This past fall, many Sowers members were involved in issue forums and candidate forums at the time of the election. After the election, many members met with their elected officials to discuss their concerns, give voice to their values and give direction to their representatives on issues like housing, child care and welfare reform.

As of this writing, the session is drawing to a cantankerous close. The outcome is not clear. But we do know that all of the issues that were a part of the Sowers' legislative agenda were debated at some length: Housing, prescription drugs, welfare reform, immigrant families and campaign finance reform were on the agenda of both houses.

Perhaps it is time to do a little personal inventory about your Participation—please see the reflection pool in the sidebar of this page. Having done this reflection, it would be a really good time to

organize a meeting with your representatives (Senate and House members). Each member should be met with individually so that you can discuss the outcome of the session. This could easily become a district activity or a parish activity. Holding our public officials accountable is important for a host of reasons.

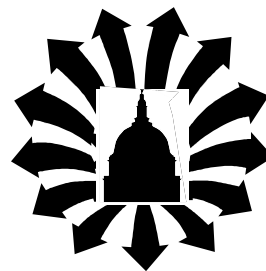
First of all, public officials need to know that public citizens are thinkers and have a right to press for certain values and principles. Public officials have a responsibility to explain their positions and votes and to be held accountable by constituents. Hiding behind a caucus position, a party position, rookie status or other excuse is not acceptable.

It is also important to find out why our public officials have made the sacrifice to be in public service. At a time when government service is in question, why have these individuals made the decision to seek

public office. Answers to this question are often very revealing.

So before the summer is totally shot, organize a group, set up some appoint-

ments and thank your reps for their public service. Give them credit when it is due and challenge them when appropriate. It is important to share our joys about the accomplishments of the session and to share our grief over what could have been. If you need assistance in this endeavor, call Kathy Tomlin or Michael Griffin at 651-291-4477.



Kathleen Tomlin

People and Parishes at Work

Over 2,600 postcards were generated from Sower's parishes to Governor Ventura on the issue of affordable housing. And this number was just from the parishes that reported back! These cards joined others in a coordinated, state-wide campaign. Parish leaders also reported strong support from several pastors who used the card campaign as the basis for their homily. Feedback from parishioners was also very positive. This kind of campaign is a good way to introduce the broader parish community to available advocacy opportunities. It is a beginning step that often leads to greater participation as more people recognize their responsibility to act in the public arena.

The **Church of St. William** in Fridley continues to provide leadership for a growing coalition of faith communities, government officials (elected and staff) and other interested parties on the issue of community development. They hosted an event in April with over 100 people in attendance.

Sowers participants in the West Metro Faith Communities in Action Campaign provided leadership and support as the campaign decided to extend itself beyond the original 16 month effort. This interfaith campaign, organized in the western suburbs of the Twin Cities has members from **St. Bartholomew, St. Mary of the Lake, St. Therese, St. George, Holy Name, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Our Lady of the Lake, St. John the Baptist.** A celebration event kicking off the next phase will be held on June 20 at St. Bart's in Wayzata.

Washington County Sowers members are hard at work on the affordable housing issue. Parishioners from **Guardian Angels, Transfiguration, and St. Thomas Aquinas** have made commitments to visit with local decision makers to get a sense of how individual cities and the county might respond to the affordable housing crisis. They have also made commitments to do internal organizing within their parishes to identify Sowers members who might also want to participate in these research interviews with local officials. Meetings are currently being set with members of the Washington County Board of Commissioners and the Woodbury City Council. The group will meet on Wednesday, June 13 at 7:00 p.m. at Guardian Angels parish to evaluate their progress and determine next steps. For more information, call Matt Gladue at 651-291-4484.

St. Rita's in Cottage Grove has been working for some time on the affordable housing front. They helped create a housing task force that includes local officials from the city, the county, and from area businesses. Many of the early efforts of the group included education about the housing issue. Now the group is preparing to propose some concrete actions the city might take to address the affordable housing needs of seniors.

The **Sowers Delegate Assembly** marking the first year anniversary got high marks from participants as the group gathered in late April.



Parish Job Opening:

Director of Social Justice

The Church of St. Luke
1079 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55105

Contact Person:

Anne Marie Swayze
651-227-7669 ext. 302

Closing Date: July 1, 2001

Parishes at work (continued)

“The Church teaches that social justice is an integral part of evangelization, a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel, and an essential part of the Church’s mission”

*Communities of Salt and Light
U.S. Catholic Bishops*

Representatives from most of the Sowers parish members were present to evaluate the past year and make plans for the coming year. Especially important is the summer convening of members in each Sowers parish. Delegates said they valued coming together to learn about what’s happening in other parishes and to give feedback to OSJ. They also discussed the tentative schedule of events (see page 7) and look forward to increasing the number of Sowers members in their parishes.

Some Sowers parishes have started to use **phone trees** to make follow up calls to their members to remind them about action alerts, meetings and events. Successful recruitment efforts have brought an increase in the number of members and necessitates new, more effective ways of communicating. Other parishes have started to use a **coffee clutch** as an informal way to convene Sowers members between regular meetings and events. A local coffee shop serves as the meeting place with a specified day and time (often weekly). It is also a great way to bring someone new along to check out Sowers.

As many parishes prepare for summer activities like a Habitat for Humanity commitment, Sowers members invite Habitat participants to join our efforts to change Minnesota’s housing policy. For every direct service/charity activity parishes do, there is almost always a corresponding public policy needing attention. OSJ staff can help you assess this in your parish and make plans for advocacy activities.

Michael Griffin



BARB PROKOP
Guardian Angels Parish

Who or what got you motivated to work for social justice?

My family and my growing up on the south side of Chicago during the civil rights movement. My parents were active leaders in their faith community and in the civic community. As the south side went from being all white to being integrated, my parents were very vocal about abuses and prejudices that were apparent. This was going on at the same time that nuns were shedding their habits for street clothes. It was Vatican II time and our parish was attuned to that, and that helped my parents be more vocal. We participated in several civil rights marches—it was turbulent—they stood very bravely.

What’s the best part of being a member of Sowers?

It is being connected with other people who have a shared vision of justice and the Church’s role in pursuing justice. I’ve always felt isolated in my views and that most people don’t know Catholic social teaching. Sowers allows for this connection.

What is your hope for the Sowers of Justice network?

It’s two-fold. My hope is that we become more effective at the state legislative level where we see changes we can attribute to our own advocacy. I also hope we can create a stronger identity that allows us to be witnesses of action within our own faith communities. I hope we’ll become better leaders in our faith communities.

What is your favorite ice cream?

Bryer’s vanilla ice cream—black cherry. It all depends on my mood!

Christian Sharing Fund 2001-2002 Recipients

The following groups have been awarded funding from the Christian Sharing Fund (CSF). This fund follows the same criteria as the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) national grants—institutional change, low-income control and leadership development. 25% of the CCHD collection is allocated to local groups by the local board in the Archdiocese. Sowers of Justice will continue to look for ways to partner with these funded groups who are working for social change.

Gateway Interfaith Table (GIFT)
for Affordable Housing
St. Paul, MN

GIFT was spearheaded by Jewish Community Action to organize members of the faith community and other persons concerned about affordable housing in the Shepard-Davern area of St. Paul. This area of the city reflects a growing diversity. Residents include African-Americans, as well as immigrants from Africa, the former Soviet Union and several Spanish-speaking countries. The main goal of this project is leadership development among low-income, disenfranchised people for the purpose of community organizing aimed at expanding the supply of affordable housing.

Immigrants: Partners in School Change
St. Paul, MN

Immigrants: Partners in School Change is an effort of the Jane Addams School for Democracy (JAS) to create a process through which Hmong and Latino immigrants living in St. Paul's West Side gain voice and influence at several decision-making levels of the St. Paul School System. This project will help develop leaders and build the skills necessary to organize the community for change. Collaborators in JAS include the University of Minnesota and the College of St. Catherine.

Latino Immigrant Workers Center
Minneapolis, MN

Sponsored by the Resource Center of the Americas, *Centro de Derechos Laborales (Workers Rights Center)* is designed to build capacity within the Latino immigrant labor force. Education and training will focus on worker rights, their role as workers in the local and global economies, advocacy for safe and just work environments, and supporting the participation of a vibrant local workforce. Catholic parishes have been the site of many of the organizing efforts in the early stages of this project.

Remembering with Dignity
St. Paul, MN

Remembering with Dignity is a coalition of disability rights and advocacy organizations founded in 1994 to honor people who have lived and died in Minnesota's state institutions. Supported by Advocating Change Together (ACT), this project is part of a campaign to organize people with disabilities to ensure full integration into community life and prevent a return to institutionalization. Unmarked graves of those who died in state institutions is used as a vehicle for raising public awareness. This project supports people with disabilities as they work to make society more accessible to and inclusive of them.

*Never doubt that
a small group of
thoughtful, committed
citizens can change
the world.*

*Indeed it's the only
thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead

For more information about CCHD/CSF please call Michael Griffin at 651-291-4490.

2001-2002 Events and Trainings

With an ever-increasing number of individual and parish members, the Office for Social Justice is providing for the educational and training needs of the Sowers of Justice network. Helping Catholics “change hearts and change structures on behalf of the social justice mission of the Church” is the on-going goal of these offerings.

Details of each offering will be made available closer to the scheduled date. For now, **save the dates**, and invite others to join you. If you are interested in helping with any of these events, please call the Office for Social Justice at 651-291-4477.

Sowers of Justice Annual Assembly (Tues) Oct. 16, 2001, evening

This annual assembly of Sowers members features dinner, prayer, a keynote address given by **Marty Haugen**, updates on the network, and an open forum where Sowers members can sound off about important issues and opportunities for this growing social action network.

Sowers of Justice Delegate Assembly (Thur) Sep. 20, 2001, 6:30-9 p.m.
(Thur) Dec. 6, 2001, 6:30-9 p.m.
(Thur) Apr. 25, 2002, 6:30-9 p.m.

For a second year, delegates from Sowers parish members gather three times to help determine the Sowers issues agenda, identify training needs, and provide an exchange of information, ideas and challenges in the promotion and growth of the Sowers network.

Sowers of Justice Issue Forums (Thur) Nov. 8, 15, 29, 2001, 6:30-9 p.m.

This series is presented in response to requests to provide greater depth to the issues Sowers deals with on a regular basis. Topics will include economic justice, labor and religion, poverty, and spirituality in public advocacy.

Sowers Advanced Leadership Training (Tues) Jan. 8, 15, 22, 2002, 6:30-9 p.m.

Participants in the Sowers Institute for Social Justice requested more skills training to help strengthen their leadership and effectiveness in parish organizing and public policy advocacy efforts. This series will feature more advance skill development.

Sowers Institute for Social Justice (Mon) Jan. 28, 2002, 6:30-9 p.m.
(Mon) Feb. 11, 2002, 6:30-9 p.m.
(Mon) Mar. 4, 2002, 6:30-9 p.m.
(Mon) Mar. 18, 2002, 6:30-9 p.m.

Back by popular demand, this institute is designed in particular for those new to the work of social action. Participants will engage in discussion about Catholic social teaching, faith and politics, leadership development, and the essential skills to be effective. Parish teams/groups are encouraged to attend together.

Sowers Legislative Briefings (Mon) Feb. 4, 2002, 7-9 p.m.
(Tues) Feb. 5, 2002, 7-9 p.m.
(Thur) Feb. 21, 2002, 7-9 p.m.

For many years these important briefings have served as the launching point for effective Sowers legislative action. Overviews of the issue agenda and advocacy skills training, combined with the valuable experience of coming together with others passionate about the work of social justice, make these briefings essential for Sowers advocates.

JUST HOT OFF THE PRESS



The Cost of Living in Minnesota

This report details the cost of basic needs for Minnesota families in 1999-2000. To order contact JOBS NOW Coalition at 651-290-0240.

Report cost: \$15.00—includes shipping and MN sales tax.

FMI contact JOBS NOW on their web site—www.jobsnowcoalition.org



*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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Welcome—

We are pleased to announce that Sr. Kerry O'Reilly, O.S.B. has joined our staff as a Parish Organizer. Kerry recently returned from Brazil, where she spent fifteen years helping to build lay leadership both at the parish level and in small Christian communities. Prior to that, she worked in a number of Catholic schools in the Twin Cities as a teacher and administrator.

Kerry spent the winter and early Spring working in the office as an intern, so she knows what she's getting herself into (for the most part!) We are excited about her commitment to good leadership development, her desire to create a network that is more diverse racially and economically, and her sense of humor. She will be working with a number of Sowers parishes, recruiting new Sowers parishes and members, and serving as the staff person for the Association for Social Justice Staff (ASJS). Please help us welcome Kerry.

May he rest in peace...

As this edition of *Seeds* goes to press, the Office for Social Justice has learned of the death of Monsignor Jack Egan, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, and long time advocate for the poor and disenfranchised. He was 84 years old.

His leadership and passion both challenged and inspired many others to work for social justice. From civil rights to workers rights, he was a constant force for change both inside and outside the Church.

Last year the Office for Social Justice received an award bearing his name from the National Pastoral Life Center. Monsignor Egan was in attendance and left a lasting impression on all with stories from the trenches of social justice work.

Memorial contributions may be made to Depaul University for the Egan Hope Scholars Program, 1 E. Jackson, Chicago, IL 60604.

