



# Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

MARCH, 2005

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## IT'S TIME TO ACTIVATE OUR CIVIC MUSCLES

How would you describe the condition of your civic muscle? Is it strong? Have you been working out lately? Or has your civic muscle atrophied? This is an important question for us to explore as citizens of the great state of Minnesota, a state known for its civic engagement.

We are living in a state made famous for its profound integration of civic imagination and broad based political consensus. This integration led us, as a society, to enthusiastically invest in the public goods that resulted in a top notch quality of life for many people.

However, according to a study being done by the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, there has been a significant break down in all three: our civic muscles are quieter, there is little consensus on how to continue Minnesota's quality of life and there has been an increasing disinvestment in public goods.

**S**o where do you stand? Who are you waiting on to inspire you to action? It has been clear to me over the last twenty years that it is easy for people to sponge up information or experience and excuse themselves from the next logical action steps. For example:

How can we attend legislative briefings that describe budget proposals that suggest we solve our state budget

deficit, in part, by cutting health care for low wage working parents and childless adults and not respond?

How can we attend Journey to Justice workshops where immigrants graphically explain how our immigration laws are broken and inhumane and not do anything?

How can we know by virtue of the number of auto accidents that an intersection is unsafe and fail to demand that the city rectifies the situation?

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***Jesus asks us to go down the mountain and to act in his name. We are all anointed, and we know who the poor, the broken hearted and the captives are. Let us be about the work of letting them know the Lord's favor.***

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How can we stand by in the city of Minneapolis when alleys are left unplowed for days as car after car of elderly get stuck in the snow and an exit to the streets is all but impossible?

*(Continued on page 2)*

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How? It's easy. It doesn't take anyone of us long to convince ourselves that the other guy or gal, the neighbor next door, or the family on the corner will take care of it. After all, we are very busy people.

We are concerned about kids and church and parents and my forty hour job now extended to sixty hours, thanks to technology. Many people in their twenties and thirties, just starting out, are getting families started. A good number of folks in their thirties and forties are on a fast paced career path. Those in their fifties feel sandwiched between the needs of their parents and the needs of their kids. And those in their sixties and seventies wonder where everybody is.

Those of us who claim to believe in this country's democratic traditions need to encourage each other to stay engaged or get engaged if we aren't. It is precisely because we care about kids and parents and grandparents and jobs and security that we must act.

Unlike others, our concerns grow beyond our immediate families, friends and neighbors and become the whole community. When you think about it, we have a power base that could really flex its muscle. As Catholic citizens we are members of a parish community that could serve as a mediating institution in the search for justice. Each of us is in a position to inspire others to act with us on behalf of the more vulnerable members of our community.

I recommend the following: see, judge and act. Not too hard! We've got to know through education and experience what's going on. We then use the lens of Catholic social teaching to judge whether we are

headed in the right direction or not. And we act to promote or negate certain directions.

All it takes for us to be a well of optimism and a spark toward action in our own parishes is a little faith, some hope and a lot of passion.

We only need to look at Jesus for the fire that will get us going as he recounted the words of the prophet, Isaiah, Chapter 61:

**“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me, He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor.”**

Knowing and experiencing this message of good news we could decide, like Peter at the Transfiguration, to put up our tents and just bask in the joy of such a loving God. But that isn't the message. Jesus asks us to go down the mountain and to act in his name. We are all anointed, and we know who the poor, the broken hearted and the captives are. Let us be about the work of letting them know the Lord's favor.

Kathy Tomlin



## NO NEW TAXES: *FORCING BAD CHOICES!*



**Many will face  
a steep climb  
trying to survive  
proposed budget cuts.**

Scott sat before the Senate Health and Human Services committee last week, and told them that his medication was working. He had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and had racked up thousands of dollars in health care costs, until he found out that he qualified for the state's MinnesotaCare program.

A woman described the severity of her diabetes. She's already filed bankruptcy once because of health care costs. She's worried that if she loses coverage under MinnesotaCare, it could happen again. She was followed by an elderly woman who drove for an hour to tell Senators that proposed health care cuts made her feel like she was less than human.

These are just some of the stories being told by the estimated 30,000 people who would lose health care coverage if Governor Pawlenty's proposed cuts to the MinnesotaCare program are put into law.

The Governor proposes to cut funding for every single adult without children in the program. That would mean cutting off health care for those who earn between about \$7000 and \$14,000.

But the cuts don't stop there. The administration also recommends cutting health care for parents in families that make more than 190% of the federal poverty guideline. Right now, a family of 3 can earn \$43,000 and still retain MinnesotaCare coverage. If the Governor's cuts become law, the children in that family of 3 would retain coverage. But the single mother raising them would lose her coverage unless and until her earnings dropped to \$29,000 or less.

These cuts will cause real people real pain. Not only will MinnesotaCare recipients be pained, but all of us will share in the pain. We know that when we cut state spending for health care, the cost of uncompensated medical care goes up. People delay care and seek care in emergency rooms only when they're very sick. The result? You and I pay for those costs through higher health insurance premiums and higher property taxes.

All of these cuts are being proposed in order to solve the deficit. They are being proposed in a culture of false scarcity created by proponents of the no new taxes pledge.

That culture forces us to choose between funding schools or funding health care programs or providing child care or building more affordable housing.

**“Our state's budget is more than just a document. It is a moral statement and our legislators must begin their deliberations with the human needs of so many of our people foremost in their minds and hearts.”**

Archbishop Harry J. Flynn  
Focus on Poverty Tour — January 19, 2005

It is time to recognize that we are people of abundance. We do not need to live in the poverty that false scarcity creates. We can invest in our state, protect the vulnerable, and protect the whole community. In the next 10 weeks, we need to make this message a priority. If we fail, so many will lose so much.

Matt Gladue

## **THE FEDERAL BUDGET DEBATE BEGINS IN EARNEST**

If you haven't read about the President's new federal budget proposal, here's a basic breakdown:

The President wants to:

- ◆ Cut domestic spending.  
By a lot. Over several years.
- ◆ Extend existing tax cuts and put new tax cuts in place.
- ◆ Reduce the deficit.

But the cuts would save less than the total amount of spending on tax cuts, homeland security, and military obligations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which means the budget deficit would go up, not down.

**NEED MORE DETAILS?  
WE'VE GOT DETAILS!**

In 2006, the proposed budget calls for cuts in discretionary spending on domestic programs of \$22 billion, for a total cut of 5%. By 2010? \$66 billion in cuts, or a 15% total cut.

- ◆ 300,000 kids would lose access to child care.
- ◆ 300,000 would lose food stamps by 2010.
- ◆ Medicaid will be cut by \$45 billion by 2010.
- ◆ The Community Development Block Grant program would be eliminated.
- ◆ People who make more than \$200,000 would receive a new tax cut.

Devolution, the process of handing decision making and federal funding over to the states, has become devolution, or perhaps more accurately, a dilution of federal responsibility for the nation's people.

Since the 1980's, states have been given more responsibility for

setting public policy and paying for the cost of government. They also have less money to meet those responsibilities. Through the process of block granting, cost-shifting, and now, radical budget cutting, the federal government has made less and less money available.

**T**hese proposed federal cuts will be disastrous for states like Minnesota who are already dealing with big deficits. Less federal funding for key programs will make that worse.

Instead of passing decision making and funding on to states, the federal government will be passing deeper and deeper cuts to states for programs that matter the most. States like Minnesota will pass those cuts down to county and local governments. The end result will be that the people in county and local government, who are closest to the real needs and the real issues in our communities, will be put in a vise grip: higher taxes or cuts in programs?

It does not have to be this way. The administration has created a false sense of scarcity. Cutting taxes and paying for military efforts abroad have starved the federal treasury of the resources we need to meet our common responsibilities to human dignity and human development both here at home and abroad.

Really, we live in abundance. We could afford to forego the tax cuts and have enough revenue to keep us safe abroad, keep us safe at home, and protect the human dignity of all of God's family in our communities. That is what we will have to call for as the budget debate begins.

Matt Gladue



PEOPLE AND PARISHES AT WORK

Sharing the Vision

It is a Friday night in November, ten parish teams are meeting with OSJ on this weekend to strategize about ways that they can integrate the social mission into the life of their parish and strengthen their parish's commitment to social justice. We have just finished the introduction as we launch into the Leadership Workshop. We ask, "Are there any questions?"

"Can you tell us which teams have been able to completely integrate the social mission into parish life?"

"Can you give us an example of a parish that is doing this work of justice really well?"

How to answer these questions? Providing a list of these model parishes would give encouragement to the parish leadership teams and add credibility to OSJ's leadership development process. Oh, we wish we had a top10 list!

Don't misunderstand us, there are parishes successfully working toward the goal of complete integration, but just as working for peace and justice in the world is our ongoing mission, this work in our parishes is ongoing too. Integration comes in increments and gradual developments, each with its own sense of accomplishment as one moves toward the goal. In each step one can recognize that integration is taking place, and at the same time know it is yet to be achieved. It is as we say about the Reign of God -- *it is and it is yet to come.*

There is good work happening in the parishes. Many have

been successful in integrating aspects of the social mission with leadership teams of tireless, knowledgeable and action-oriented people who are committed to the long-term.

Some parishes have found ways to integrate the social teaching into liturgy and faith formation.

Some have established a practice of sharing legislative alerts after mass.

Some regularly provide educational opportunities on such things as faithful citizenship and Catholic social teaching.

Some have parish teams who have joined Archdiocesan Issue Action Teams involved in advocating for housing, health care and economic justice.

Each action is a step in the process of integration. But all of them together in one parish with parishioners working as a community integrating the social mission – now THAT is the Reign of God yet to come.

So, without a fully integrated model do we stop? Do we give up? Do we say it can't be done?

Not if we hold and seek a vision of what *is* possible if the social mission *were* integrated into parish life. As this vision becomes clearer, more vibrant and shared by more of us, it is easier to achieve. What to do and with whom become more obvious. *How to* becomes a life-giving, creative process.

(Continued on page 6)

WHAT GOD DOES FIRST AND BEST AND MOST IS TRUST HIS PEOPLE WITH THEIR MOMENT IN HISTORY.

GOD TRUSTS THEM TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

—Walter Brueggeman

## Acting for Justice

### PARISHES AT WORK

#### *Sharing the Vision* (Continued from page 5)

Together, the forty six leaders attending the Leadership Workshop imagined a future in which the social mission is integrated in the life of their parishes. Here is how they describe their vision:

- ◆ **Social justice is woven into the life of our parish community.**
- ◆ **Our parish is working collaboratively in the community locally and globally.**
- ◆ **We are experiencing civil, open dialogue leading to awareness and action.**
- ◆ **Social justice pervades all education and formation activity.**
- ◆ **We see and experience focused and effective action for systemic change.**

- ◆ **We are an energized, vibrant, faith-filled, loving community having fun.**
- ◆ **Our parish is a welcoming, inviting and inclusive community.**

The work to be done now is to share it...everywhere and all the time. And that is precisely the work going on in the parishes who participated in the Leadership Workshop this past November.

If your parish is interested in joining this exciting work of creating and sharing a vision of justice, please contact our office, 651-291-4477.

Deb O'Brien

#### *Issue Action Teams*

This January, approximately 80 people from 15 parishes joined one of OSJ's new "issue action teams".

Separate teams are focused on health care, housing, and worker justice issues. Through a process called "practical theology", teams study their issue, reflect on their faith as it relates to their issue, choose a particular focus area, and plan a strategy for affecting social change. Through "practical theology", groups identify feasible goals and create a concrete plan for achieving results.

In good Lenten fashion, we're finding that this approach is spiritual as well as practical. We don't usually work collectively in our society.

Even advocacy is often understood as simply a matter of assembling enough individual self-interests to "win". Yet our Catholic faith calls us to live as one body, Christ's body. This means being in relationship: sharing honestly, listening, arguing, compromising, and sacrificing our position for the good of all. This is the work of community. Our hope is that issue action teams will operate in this spirit.

The Office for Social Justice wants to create teams on other issues (such as immigration), or add to existing teams. Please contact Matt Gladue or Matt Rezac at 651-291-4477 to discuss how you can help.

Matt Rezac



### NEWS FROM THE

### *Evangelization Initiative*

Evangelization is:

***"Making Jesus Christ known and loved in our time by choosing to live out the Gospel in every moment."***

"The first phase of the Evangelization Initiative sought to ***Awaken*** in us a clear affirmation of the identity of Jesus.

...The Evangelization Initiative moves in this second year to the next step, that of ***discipleship***.

With the lens of evangelization we seek to become even more personally identified with the mind and heart of Jesus and we look more closely at central points of our Christian life namely, Eucharist, Catechesis and Family."

Archbishop Harry Flynn  
Archbishop of Saint Paul/Minneapolis

This presents social justice committees with an opportunity to develop new relationships with other members of the parish and to discuss the importance of discipleship.

**Holy God, fill our hearts with the fire of your love.**

**Awaken us Holy Spirit, to witness to the presence of Jesus in every moment of our lives.**

**Renew us Lord, so that our homes, parishes, neighborhoods and world are transformed into your kingdom on earth, where peace and justice reign.**

Amen.



***"I'll need to take this information and pray with it, be with it, reflect on it and allow what I need to do to be my thought.***

***How do I live this out day to day?***

***What does God ask of me?***

***And how will I respond?"***

Journey to Justice Participant

This year nearly 100 people from 12 JustFaith groups attended Journey to Justice on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at St. Patrick's in Edina.

Journey to Justice is an experience intended to help those who are more economically advantaged understand the circumstances that create poverty and how those affected effect social change.

This year guest presenters from six groups funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) and one group of union organizers shared their stories of how poverty and injustice motivated them to organize for social change. Commenting on the presenting groups, participants had this to say:

***"They gave so much information about HUD, which I'd heard of but really didn't know much about. Impressed by the perseverance of people to make change! Made me feel humble because I knew so little about this area of our lives."***

***"It was great, very informative about immigration issues and DREAM Act. It helped to put a face with the problem."***

***"Family and children's services gave a great grass-roots demonstration of what can be done. I was shocked and surprised at many unjust laws and regulations."***

Like any journey we take in life, as important as the destination is, the process of getting to our destination is perhaps the most important. This sentiment rings especially true for JustFaith participants. We hear from many that the JustFaith journey is one of deepening personal faith and a conversion to the justice dimension of that faith.

The Journey to Justice Workshop furthers this conversion and sets the groundwork for building solidarity between those who are poor and those who are economically advantaged. Experiences such as Journey to Justice allow us to build solidarity and assist us in creating communities that truly reflect the biblical principles of jubilee justice.

Deb O'Brien



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*Sow for yourselves justice,  
reap the fruit of faithful love;*

*Break up for yourselves  
a new field, for it is  
time to seek the Lord,  
until the Lord comes  
and rains down justice  
upon you.*

Hosea, 10:12

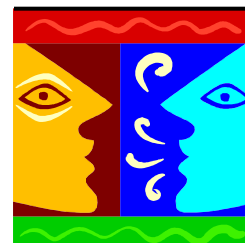


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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

### The Focused Conversation Method

- SESSION DATES:** Saturday, April 2, 2005 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
Saturday, April 16, 2005 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- LOCATION:** Hayden Center Building — Smith Hall at 328 West Kellogg Blvd.
- YOU WILL LEARN:** How do we talk about the controversial issues without locking into sides?  
How do we develop the creative capacity of group for planning?  
How do we go beneath the surface in our discussions?
- WHO SHOULD ATTEND:** Parish Justice Leadership Teams
- REGISTRATION:** Pre-registration is required. Cost is \$40.00.  
Call the Office for Social Justice at 651-291-4477  
for a brochure.



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