

Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

OCTOBER, 2000

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AFTER THE ELECTIONS THE REAL WORK BEGINS

Many Americans consider voting and paying taxes to be the hallmark of good citizenship. But most of us know that the real work of a citizen begins after the election. That's when we take the time to build important relationships with our elected officials. And that's when we urge them to consider our priorities before the policy debates and tax discussions are fully developed.

Hopefully we've all taken the time during the electoral process to let the candidates know where we stand on the issues and where we hope they stand. If our candidate was elected we might have an inside track on persuading them to vote our way on the issues. If we have never had a personal conversation with the person elected, then we have to start at the beginning. We need to make an appointment to sit down and talk with our elected officials. After the elections is a good time to do that.

As the Sowers of Justice network, we are also deciding what our issue priorities are going to be during 2000-2001. What issues should be at the top of the list? What issues are important enough that the entire network should adopt them as its own?

This was one of the questions that the parish Sower's delegates wrestled with during the Delegate Assembly on September 14, 2000. In a dialogue with OSJ staff, the delegates came up with a

list of priority issues that seem appropriate for the work of the entire Sower's network. The list of issues includes:

Housing, Welfare Reform (including day care), Prescription Drug Coverage, Immigration, and Third World Debt. This list is not intended to be exclusive, but is a way for us to focus our work. Parishes are free to work on whatever other issues they feel are important.

Why did we select this particular group of issues? Each meets one or more of the criteria recommended to the delegates for choosing priorities. The issues should:



- ◆ reflect urgent needs experienced in our local community.
- ◆ require the moral voice and leadership of the church.
- ◆ attract other partners who will work with us to accomplish our goals.
- ◆ have a realistic chance in the political arena.
- ◆ be in concert with Catholic social teaching.

While several other topics were suggested by the delegates, they did not

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attract the support of the majority of parishes represented. As a result, a couple of issues suggested by staff and some suggested by delegates fell from our top list. Given this direction, the office will center its issue education, strategies for action and web site

. . .we are called upon to work on creative solutions so that “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” isn’t an empty promise or only reserved for a few.

resources around this short list of five issues. We will also assist individual parishes on other issues of concern when called upon.

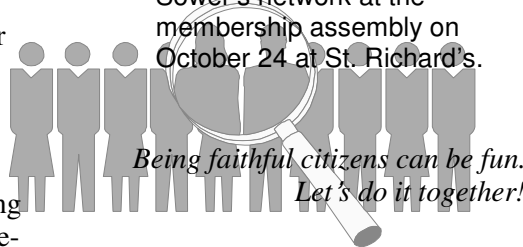
For many of us, our work on these issues may be directly related to our own personal experience. For example, some of us have had our own difficulties trying to find affordable housing. Maybe our adult children are still living at home because they cannot find housing that is affordable at their income level.

For others, the issues may seem more distant. But we are challenged by Catholic social teaching and the Scriptures to reach out beyond our own reality and experience or try to imagine the reality that others endure. And more importantly, we are called upon to

work on creative solutions so that “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” isn’t an empty promise or only reserved for a few. As the bishops remind us in *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, our nation is falling short of the American pledge of “liberty and justice for all,” because we are often more concerned about our own pocketbooks or economic interests and less concerned about the common good.

So, the real work begins. In that context, I offer some practical suggestions:

- v Participate in your parish by meeting with your Sower’s leadership team and other members of the network to organize your parish plan of action for the year.
- v Organize a team of parish members to meet with at least two of your local, state or federal representatives before the Christmas rush. Tell her/him what you are concerned about and why.
- v If you are not yet comfortable with talking to your representatives, invite a member of the OSJ staff to do a skills-building exercise with your team.
- v Invite five or ten members of your parish to join the Sower’s network at the membership assembly on October 24 at St. Richard’s.

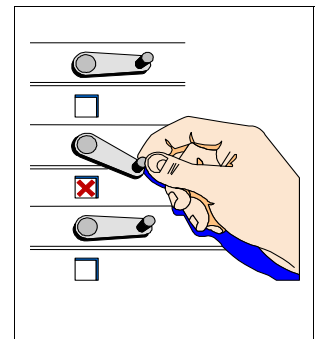


Kathleen Tomlin

Questions for the Candidates

- * How will you address the fact that 25% of our preschoolers live in poverty?
 - * How can our nation address the tragedy that 35,000 children are dying every day as a consequence of hunger, debt and a lack of economic development?
 - * How will our nation combat continued racism and overcome hostility toward immigrants and refugees?
 - * How will you lead our nation in combating what Pope John calls “The culture of death?”
- How will you address abortion, the death penalty, euthanasia and assisted suicide?

From *Faithful Citizenship*
U.S. Catholic Bishops



AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS

No economic issue in our region is more urgent than the lack of affordable housing. For tens of thousands of families in Minnesota who are poor and working class, the affordable housing crisis is so severe that it dwarfs other social and economic needs. Consider just a few of the dimensions of this crisis:

- ▶ In the Twin Cities 70,000 households face critical housing needs—that is, they spend more than one-half of their total income on housing and/or live in severely inadequate housing.
- ▶ Nearly 80,000 low-income renters are competing for just 39,000 affordable units in the Twin Cities metro area
- ▶ Approximately 40 percent of Minnesota renters do not make enough money to afford an average two-bedroom apartment.
- ▶ Vacancy rates for apartments are now less than 1% in the Twin Cities. In a normal, healthy housing market, the vacancy rate should be 5% - 7%.
- ▶ Homelessness in the Twin Cities has risen sharply in recent years. From 1987 to 1999, the number of people living in temporary housing, such as emergency shelters and transitional housing, has more than tripled. For children the crisis is even worse. The number of children living in temporary housing grew more than seven times, from 244 on one night in 1987 to 1770 on one night in 1999.

MORE FUNDING NEEDED

The severity of this crisis points to the need for bold and new approaches to the problem.

First, if one asks the question, "What is preventing affordable housing from being created at the rate and in the locations where it is needed?", it is clear that there are two sources of the problem: 1.) Cost and 2.) NIMBY-ism, or structural barriers based largely on local communities wanting to keep affordable housing out.

This means that we need a two-fold approach to policy changes. First, we need to develop the political will to devote more public dollars to affordable housing. The private market by itself simply will not supply sufficient housing that is affordable, especially for the very poor.

In the long run, we need to look to Washington to provide substantially more federal money for affordable housing. In the meantime, however, we can get the state to increase its funding levels.

Some housing advocates are suggesting one percent of

the state budget as a realistic target for state spending on affordable housing. In addition, some housing policy analysts are looking at a range of possibilities for making the state funding for affordable housing more stable, perhaps by some form of designated or earmarked funding that would both provide more dollars and be more stable over time.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE ALSO KEY

Secondly, while more funding is important, it is not sufficient. The scale of the housing problem is so large that it would be politically impossible to solve it entirely with public dollars, even if the state were to substantially increase its spending.

This means that the second part of the solution must be some kind of structural change that will stimulate the private market to increase the supply of affordable housing. It also means overcoming the local resistance or NIMBYism that arises in so many communities when proposals for affordable housing are announced.

One example of this kind of structural change might be to pass a law that would provide developers with incentives to include affordable housing units in their projects. Such incentives might include density bonuses, the waiving of selected fees or zoning requirements, etc. Another example might be the establishment of a state appeals body that could over rule local municipalities when they vote against affordable housing proposals or refuse to lift zoning barriers that keep affordable housing out of their communities.

The point here is that we have a very big problem. We need to think of solutions that are also very big. And that means more funding but also some deeper policy changes. Look for more details about this emerging effort in the coming months.

***...we have a
very big problem.
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Ron Krietemeyer

PEOPLE AND PARISHES AT WORK

The **Church of St. William** in Fridley not only “talks the talk, they walk the walk”. Both the staff, including pastor Fr. Patrick Kennedy and Marilyn Wegscheider, and parishioners have provided leadership to build community and work for change. Sowers members have established relationships within the parish and the larger community. They have advocated with elected officials and other community leaders on a variety of issues with special emphasis on affordable housing.

They entered into a partnership with Catholic Charities to develop affordable housing in the parish community. The parish is providing land for the project right in their back yard. They continue to educate neighbors and the community about the realities of the housing crisis. This education effort will continue when the parish hosts the Illusion Theater’s “Like Waters Rolling Down” as part of the parish Homecoming week this month.



Leaders from St.

It’s election time, and Sowers parishes are busy sponsoring election related activities—

Bartholomew, St. Mary of the Lake, St. George, St. Therese, and St. John the Baptist in Excelsior have been organizing an issue forum and three candidate forums in partnership with other participants in the

West Metro Faith Communities in Action campaign. The current plan calls for two candidate forums in two different state legislative districts.

St. Thomas the Apostle is hosting a candidate forum in the Southwest Minneapolis area.

St. John the Baptist in New Brighton is also sponsoring a forum in partnership with neighboring congregations.

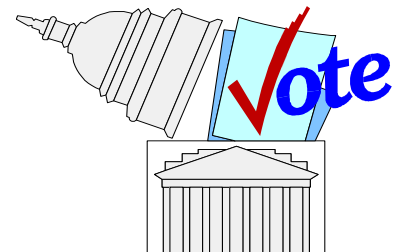
Nativity parish in Saint Paul will be hosting former Archbishop Roach to discuss faith and politics.

The **University of Saint Thomas** is sponsoring an issues forum, and they want *you* to come. Representatives from Network, a national faith-based advocacy group from Washington, D.C., will be in town to discuss the national elections. The meeting is slated for October 11 at 7 p.m. in the O’Shaughnessy Education Center Auditorium. It is free and open to the public. Sources at St. Thomas tell us parking can sometimes be difficult!

Note: This is just the election activity we heard about before we went to press. If you’ve coordinated efforts around the elections, drop us a line and let us know what you did and how it went.



Leaders at **St. John the Baptist** in Excelsior hardly let the ink on their Parish Membership Agreement before leaping into the work of justice. Marilyn Wick Lee and



PARISHES AT WORK (continued)



Please join us in welcoming Stacey Stevens, our new Parish Organizer.

Stacey comes to us from the Archdiocese of Detroit and worked in the Office of Social Ministry.

She worked with parishioners on issues including debt relief, urban sprawl, death penalty, and global warming.

Stacy also collaborated with the Catholic Youth Organization on an annual Justice and Peace Institute for youth.

Welcome to our team, Stacey!

Konrad Wurm, spent the summer meeting with business leaders, government officials, and social service providers as part of the West Metro Faith Communities in Action campaign. They learned valuable information about the effects of the affordable housing crisis, welfare reform, and transportation issues in the west metro, information participants in the campaign can share with their legislators as they continue to advocate for the common good.

Marilyn and Sharon Moeller attended the **Sowers Delegate Assembly** meeting on September 14. Sharon is also serving on the archdiocesan Commission on Social Justice. And that's all happening before they formally announce the parish's membership in Sowers in October!



Last issue, we told you we would keep you updated on **Transfiguration's** efforts to support All Parks Allied for Change, an organization of mobile home owners.

APAC and Transfiguration successfully lobbied the Oakdale city council to pass a resolution that requires park owners who sell their property to reimburse mobile home owners. A number of parishioners turned out at the city council meeting and many testified on behalf of the resolution. Many cities in the metropolitan area have passed such legislation, but Oakdale is currently the most progressive. *Congratulations!* Sowers at **Saint Edward's** in

Bloomington are working to abolish the death penalty. On the weekend of September 30 and October 1, they will ask parishioners to sign a petition calling for a moratorium on the death penalty. The local effort is part of a national campaign sponsored by the Religious Organizing Against the Death Penalty Project, an initiative headed up by Sister Helen Prejean. More information on the campaign is available at www.moratorium2000.org.

On September 14, parish leaders from across the Archdiocese came together for the first meeting of the Sowers Delegate Assembly. In a short time, the Delegates accomplished a great deal. They prioritized the issues the network as a whole should focus on. They provided valuable feedback regarding training OSJ will offer for parish leaders in the winter of 2001. They also participated in a training on creating a parish plan. Not only did the delegates provide a vision for the work Sowers will do in 2000 and 2001, they also returned to their parishes prepared to create a similar vision at the local level as well.

Matt Gladue
Michael Griffin

Is your parish doing good work for social justice? Share your story with us!

Mail information to Matt Gladue OSJ, 328 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102

My email: gladuem@archspm.org or fax us at 651-291-4487.

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF RECRUITING

Thou shalt...

Build relationships, relationships, and more relationships!

A personal invitation is the best way to recruit someone. To do that with integrity, we need to know who people are, what they value, and what they want. We learn that only when we take the time to speak with them on an individual basis.

Recruit people to participate in some form of action.

Invite people to do something more exciting than a meeting. Maybe they want to come to a city council meeting on affordable housing. Maybe they want to come to hear a guest speaker. Those are both, arguably, more exciting than a meeting!

Develop an entry-level role for new recruits to play.

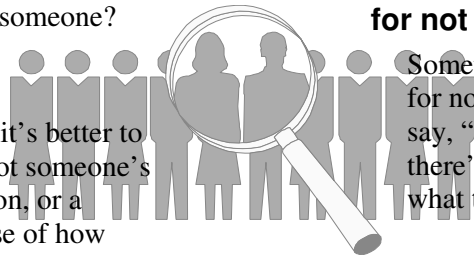
New Sowers members need a task they can accomplish and a task that teaches them about Sowers. Perhaps you would like them to staff a letter-writing table after mass along with someone who's been involved longer.

Prepare to talk about what Sowers is and what Sowers do.

There will always be opportunities to invite people to join. Are you ready to describe the work of Sowers in thirty seconds? Are you ready to describe it in terms that make it attractive and exciting to someone?

Get a firm commitment.

Even if the answer is "no", it's better to know for sure whether or not someone's coming to an event, an action, or a meeting. It gives you a sense of how many will be there and how many more you need to recruit.



Reward leaders.

Though we're reluctant to admit it, we often do this work in part to be recognized publicly. Publish the names of effective leaders in the parish bulletin, or recognize them at Sunday mass.

Practice these commandments with all thy heart and soul.

Spend some time at your next meeting asking members to give you their thirty-second Sowers pitch. Invite OSJ staff to train parishioners in relationship building skills. Role-play a phone call with a parishioner who doesn't make a firm commitment.

Thou shalt not...

Resort to guilt or simply use the bulletin blurb or the pulpit announcement.

At their best, these are more passive means of recruiting. At its worst, guilt can be manipulative and insulting.

Recruit people into mush!

Be clear about the purpose of Sowers in your parish, and also be clear about the expectations you have of members.

Passively accept excuses for not getting involved.

Sometimes, people have really good reasons for not getting involved. Sometimes, people say, "well that issue's really important, but there's nothing I can do." Be ready to tell them what they can do. Be concrete and specific.

Matthew Gladue

Training Opportunity

Building Parish Leadership

OSJ will offer a four-part training series for teams of leaders from Sowers Parishes this winter. The four sessions will be held on: January 29, February 12, March 5, and March 19.

Each session will run from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The January and February sessions will be held at the Basilica in Minneapolis. The sessions in March will be held at a location in the East Metro to be announced.

The Sowers Delegate Assembly decided that these trainings would be most effective if parishes recruited a team of leaders to commit to all four dates. The trainings will begin with basics and build on those over the course of the four sessions. Topics will include:

- ◆ Catholic social teaching and the Biblical roots of justice
- ◆ The art of social analysis and the distinction between charity and justice
- ◆ Faith and politics and how to be an effective legislative advocate
- ◆ Skills for identifying winnable issues and winning strategies
- ◆ Effective recruiting, outreach and leadership development

If you do not currently belong to a Sowers parish, see if you can recruit a team of 3-4 others from your parish to attend. By the end of the four weeks, you will have a solid leadership team ready to take action for justice!

“A congregation needs a game plan for the development of its leadership that includes three things:

an idea of whom they are looking for,

a method of inviting those people, and

an arena in which to train them in the skills they need.”

*Activism That Makes Sense:
Congregations and
Community Organization
Gregory F. Pierce*

CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Collection Weekend – November 18-19, 2000

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) and the local counterpart Christian Sharing Fund (CSF) form a strong and credible response to poverty in the United States. For over 30 years these initiatives of the bishops have provided over \$250 million to fund projects for jobs and economic development, housing and community development, and family issues.

Like the efforts of Sowers of Justice, CCHD directs resources towards changing structures and institutions

that keep people in poverty. CCHD can also be a great way for new Sowers groups to get started on plans for action.

Some Sowers groups have even joined in the work of funded groups by advocating for specific change in a community.

Sowers of Justice and CCHD

can be an important combination for carrying out the social mission of the Church. Here are a few things you and your parish can do:

- ◆ Make sure the promotion materials are visible and the envelopes are distributed.
- ◆ Urge your parish to have a speaker at all the masses on appeal weekend. Even a 3-5 minute “telling of the CCHD story” with an invitation to contribute can make a big difference in the collection.
- ◆ Learn about the groups funded by CCHD and find out how your Sowers group could join in their efforts.
- ◆ Planned giving options to the Christian Sharing Fund are now available. Call Michael Griffin, CCHD Coordinator, for this information or any CCHD related matter at (651)291-4477.

**IF YOU WANT
PEACE
WORK FOR
JUSTICE**

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Office for Social Justice
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St. Paul, MN 55102

Nonprofit Org.
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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

Sowers Membership Assembly

Tuesday, October 24, 2000

5:30 – 8:30 p.m.
St. Richards Parish, Richfield



This is the one time each year when we convene individual members. It's a chance for you to get energized by good speakers, to meet hundreds of other members and to help us set the future direction for the Sowers of Justice network. Please make a special effort to join us.

KEYNOTE: Kim Bobo

Kim is the founder and Executive Director of the National Interfaith Commission for Worker Justice. She will speak about the role that Catholic parishes can play in the struggle to guarantee prosperity for low-wage workers in a global economy.

Mark your calendar now for the annual membership assembly of Sowers of Justice to be held at St. Richards in Richfield. For more information or to register, call OSJ at 651-291-4477.