

# Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

March 2009

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## Green Jobs

### *Reducing Poverty & Pollution with One Solution*

#### POVERTY

During the day, Katie 19, attends Minneapolis Community Technical College (MCTC) while at night she sleeps in a shed. Greg is in trade school by day, and sleeps in a chair in downtown Minneapolis by night. Unfortunately, Katie and Greg are not alone among their classmates in their struggle for affordable housing.

In fact, MCTC created a staff position last year to work with students in housing crisis. 41 MCTC students sought help in the first six months alone. The story is the same at technical colleges and training centers across the metro area.

Something is not right here. For these young people, elbow grease, bootstraps and determination and have not been enough.

#### POLLUTION

Simultaneously, our world is heating up and our planet's ice caps are melting. People living in poverty across the globe are most susceptible to the devastating consequences of climate change (floods, droughts, etc), as well as more immediate and local effects such as hospitalization for elevated asthma levels and the prevalence of lead and arsenic in poor neighborhoods.

Americans have an almost insatiable hunger for fossil fuels. We are at the

mercy of foreign nations to feed our energy addiction. We are on track to hand our children a warmer, drier planet being stripped of its natural resources. Our economic decisions are creating an increasingly filthy supply of air and water. The environment is in crisis.

#### THE OPPORTUNITY

The state of our economy and environment are daunting. However, where there is crisis, there is opportunity. President Obama and the U.S. Congress recently passed the \$787 billion dollar recovery package. This is a golden opportunity to train low-income people to do work that will help save our planet.

Minnesota is working on state legislation (House File 680, Senate File 657) that will direct \$170 million federal stimulus dollars to the weatherization of homes and public buildings in Minnesota. By replacing windows, filling in cracks and adding insulation, homeowners and government can cut down on their energy consumption, emission levels and energy costs.

Weatherizing homes is good for the environment. It also saves money for renters and homeowners in heating and cooling costs. A paycheck is transformational for low-income workers seeking to support their families and live with dignity.

(Cont'd on page 2)

Proven anti-poverty tools include access to health care, food security and a strong safety net for crisis situations. Today, however, perhaps the most promising anti-poverty tools are those found on a worker's belt. In a green economy, a caulk gun, hammer and tape measures could be some of the best tools to construct a Minnesota without poverty.

### **OUR RESPONSE**

The Office for Social Justice has joined a powerful new coalition to ensure that the federal stimulus dollars will be leveraged to both fight poverty and clean up our environment. *HIRE (Healthcare. Infrastructure. Renewable Energy.) Minnesota* is led by communities of color, workforce development centers, religious and environmental groups, students and community non-profits.

HIRE Minnesota is organizing across racial, class, and cultural boundaries with a common cause - to win fair representation in the green collar job market for low-income people, while reducing our oil dependency, easing the climate crisis and fostering healthier communities. HIRE Minnesota is co-chaired by Summit Academy OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) president Louis King and arctic explorer and climate change educator Will Steger.

HIRE Minnesota began a few months ago as a simple vision to put people to work, but has morphed into the seeds of something special. Since December, the coalition held three town hall forums that respectively drew 200, 400 and 600 people from all walks

of life. The mantra is to "be prepared, be heard." A mainstream movement is taking shape. It is a groundbreaking, proactive and potentially transformative movement emerging from the poorest neighborhoods in Minnesota.

However, filling gymnasiums and community centers is not the end goal, but rather a means to an end. HIRE Minnesota aims to secure a 25% hiring rate of low-income people for the jobs created by portions of the federal stimulus package.

The weatherization bill is just the tip of the iceberg, as the coalition continues to broaden its organizing and legislative advocacy strategy toward jobs related to renewable energy, local food programs, workforce development and other sectors of the green economy

It is time to move beyond good intentions. It is time to get boots on the ground and it's time for some of those dollars to go toward paychecks for struggling families and communities. As HIRE Minnesota founder Louis King loves to say, "the best social service program in the world is a job."

Please join us in the coming weeks and months as we build broad partnerships and create a new path out of poverty for thousands of Minnesotans. Together, we can ensure that students like Katie and Greg have a realistic shot at working their way out of poverty in the months and years to come.

**Patrick Ness**  
*Public Policy Manager*

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You can get involved by:

- Visiting [www.HIREMN.org](http://www.HIREMN.org) to check for action opportunities.
  - Attending one of the March Sowers Assemblies, featuring Louis King.
  - Joining thousands of HIRE Minnesota allies at our April 20<sup>th</sup> Capitol Day – 3pm.
  - Contacting Patrick Ness at (651) 291-4484 if you'd like to get more involved.
-

### MARCH POLICY UPDATE

As you can imagine, it is quite a nervous scene over at the state Capitol. The Governor's budget is in the process of being resubmitted following news of the federal stimulus package. There is controversy over exactly how much of the money will be received by state government, how much of it can be used to fill the budget gap and what of the Governor's original budget needs to be rescinded in order to receive the funds.

State Maintenance of effort, (MOE), is often tied to federal funding, meaning that the state must agree to maintain its funding in order to receive the federal dollars. The Governor actually wanted to cut funding for some programs, like health care. But those proposals would have to be withdrawn in order for Minnesota to receive federal dollars.

The rub comes in how you define MOE. Does it mean the same number of dollars? Does it mean the same level of service? Does it mean the same level of eligibility?

The month of March will see a new budget from the administration, a new budget forecast and an attempt by legislators to set their own budget priorities. Stay tuned!

In addition to the budget crisis and the green jobs legislation (see Patrick's lead article), here's an update on the rest of our legislative agenda.

### CRIMINAL JUSTICE:

Assist ex-offenders in their re-integration into the community. SF538/HF1043 prevents public employers from inquiring into criminal record until the employer has offered the prospective employee an offer of employment. SF562/HF882 provides protections for private employers from civil liability in the hiring of an employee with a criminal record. SF564/HF881 restores voting rights for ex-felons.

### HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS:

- Secure dollars for the operation of supportive housing programs: these dollars were included in the Governor's original budget; in addition, \$23.7 million will be coming to the state in the stimulus package for emergency shelter grants over the next two years.
- Support the passage of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act: this bill has been written, but not yet introduced. Support in the House (Rep. Karen Clark), but not much support in the Senate.
- Promote proposals that transfer ownership of foreclosed homes from lending institutions to those in need of housing: Dollars from the stimulus package will be going to local units of government for housing rehab of previously foreclosed housing and loan assistance to interested buyers. HF 903/SF 708 permits foreclosure consultants to negotiate and modify terms of existing mortgages.

(Cont'd on page 4)

**"More specifically, it is the responsibility of all citizens, acting through their government, to assist and empower the poor, the disadvantaged, the handicapped, and the unemployed... Government may levy the taxes necessary to meet these responsibilities, and citizens have a moral obligation to pay those taxes."**

**-Economic Justice for All, #123**

# Public Policy

## HEALTH CARE AND

### MENTAL HEALTH CARE:

- Health Care for all of Minnesota's children: SF9/HF174 would cover all kids in Minnesota; SF118/HF135 creates a Minnesota Health Plan, universal coverage for all.
- Increase funding for community based mental health: HF506/SF503 would allow licensed mental health professional counselors to qualify as a provider under Medical Assistance—this would expand the number of professionals and cut costs. SF380/HF469 expands funding for mental health access; expands interventions for children at risk; provides grants for the education of police and other first responders who interact with persons with mental health issues; provides grants to county jails for re-entry discharge planning for those with persistent mental illness.
- Expand MinnesotaCare: SF207/HF0181 would expand MinnesotaCare for children and adults;

Minnesota is expected to get \$2.3 billion in Medicaid dollars from the stimulus.

### PUBLIC ASSISTANCE:

- Restructure and provide state funding for the Emergency Assistance Program. No action on this.
- Change eligibility for free lunch program from 130%-185%. No action on this.
- Moratorium on 60 day time limit and Diversionary Work Program in the MFIP program: SF48/HF453

expands the 60 month time limit. SF422/HF580 expands education and training to include higher education and vocational training for MFIP participants.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE:

- Protect current child care funding: SF575/HF768 would expand funding for the Child Care Assistance Program and eliminate the waiting list for subsidized child care. \$26 million from the stimulus package will come to the Child Care and Development Block Grant.
- Increase funding for early childhood education. There are several bills that would create modest pilot projects for school day and after-school early education.

### JOBS:

- Support the passage of an emergency jobs package for displaced workers: see lead article; SF5 calls for the commerce commissioner to create a state plan for green infrastructure; energy efficient residences, etc—using federal stimulus dollars.
- Support legislation that guarantees a minimum number of paid sick days for all Minnesota workers: HF612/SF461 requires employers with 10 or more employees to provide paid sick leave up to 9 days; employers with less than 10 employees to provide up to 5 days of paid sick leave.
- Increase the Minimum Wage. No action on this.

**Kathleen Tomlin**  
*Director*

**“But I, being poor,  
have only my dreams.  
I have spread my dreams  
under your feet;  
tread softly,  
because you tread  
on my dreams.”**

**-William Butler Yeats**

**ADVOCACY BY  
LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT**

Justice is about relationships; people being in relationship with God and with each other; people being in relationship to develop “right” relationships. One way to work for that right relationship is by advocating for policies that protect those in poverty.

Our budget deficit and the economic crisis have created precarious situations for many people. It calls Sowers of Justice to act on behalf of those living in poverty and near poverty.

To be successful in this action, Sowers of Justice have been working on developing another kind of relationship – one with their legislators! The old issue action teams have been merged into one large advocacy group which is acting strategically through legislative districts.

Often times, elected state officials represent members from several parishes—no simple map of one parish, one legislator. Thus the effort to develop a relationship with elected officials was directed to Sowers of Justice within a district rather than by parish. We began by organizing in districts where the legislators sit on key committees and with legislators who are new to the capitol.

District 41 was organized by leaders from **St. Patrick in Edina, Christ the King in Minneapolis, St. Edward and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Bloomington**, while District 63A had Sowers from

some of these same parishes plus **Annunciation in Minneapolis, St. Richard in Richfield** and was coordinated by the social justice group of **St. Peter in Richfield**. Bloomington was represented again by members of **Nativity of BVM Parish** in the meeting with their 40B representative.

A group of constituents from **St. Mary of the Lake in White Bear Lake and St. Odilia** came together to develop the message they wanted the representative of District 53B to hear. Their message, like that of other Sowers, had short term and long term goals:

**For Today:** Protect low-income Minnesotans from bearing an undue burden of the budget cuts.

**For the Not Too Distant Future:** Support the recommendations of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty by 2020.

**Lumen Christi, St. Thomas More and St. Joan of Arc** had a similar message for their representative in 64A, while members of **St. Ambrose of Woodbury** strategically arranged their meeting with their 56B representative to immediately follow their town hall meeting. The 56A representative was invited for coffee, conversation and to hear the message. Legislators from districts 52, 55, and 56 were invited for breakfast at **Guardian Angels** in Oakdale between their Sunday Masses so parishioners could get to know their legislators in a setting familiar to them.

(Cont'd on page 6)

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

-John Quincy Adams

## Parishes at Work

### JUSTFAITH

**JustFaith folks just experienced *Journey to Justice*. Some comments about the experience:** “Eye Opening, Invigorating, Energizing, Enlightening, Inspiring.” If you are thinking about **JustFaith** for next year, this is the time to begin. Contact Sister Kerry.

### THE TWO FEET OF THE SOCIAL MISSION: CHARITY AND JUSTICE

The Social Justice Commission at St. Thomas Aquinas knew they excelled at responding with charity to the needs of their brothers and sisters. They decided to extend a challenge to the parish. They asked at the Masses, “Can we, as a parish, and in celebration of our 125<sup>th</sup> year, perform 125 **acts of justice** during the six weeks of Lent?” The social justice team provided a flyer with a few ideas including, but not limited to, joining the Sowers of Justice and commit to becoming more educated on justice issues, and calling, writing, or emailing your legislator to support a justice issue.

During Lent, the water in the holy water fonts is being replaced with small cards for parishioners to write down any acts of justice performed. The cards are to be placed in the collection baskets at the weekend masses. They will be posted on the Social Justice Bulletin Board, and on Holy Thursday evening mass, the cards will be brought up as the parish offering of justice.

**Cheryl Peterson &  
Sr. Kerry O'Reilly**  
*Parish Leadership*

### A FAST FOR TODAY

Fasting and abstinence are tools to focus on what matters most. This Lenten season we encourage you to consider participating in a “carbon fast”. We encourage you to reflect upon the choices you make in energy use and engage in simple energy saving practices. A carbon fast is relevant to people of faith because of our belief that keeping the Earth is a responsibility entrusted to us by God.

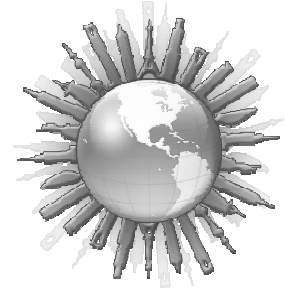
There are many simple and often free ways to reduce your carbon footprint. Encourage parishioners to take the Minnesota Energy Challenge at [www.mnenergychallenge.org](http://www.mnenergychallenge.org) to join nearly 250 congregations in Minnesota who have pledged to reduce their carbon footprint by millions of pounds. Join the Environmental Stewardship Team at [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org) and get a Parish Toolkit for more resources.

Simple things you can do to reduce your carbon footprint:

- Wash clothes in cold water.
- Turn the thermostat on the furnace or water heater down a degree or two.
- Convert your 5 most frequently used lights over to compact fluorescents.
- Combine errands into a single trip.
- Turn off electrical equipment instead of leaving them on standby mode.

Working together we can make a difference!

**Patricia B. Benson**  
*Creation Care Consultant*



**“We need to commit ourselves to caring for the created world, without squandering its resources, and sharing them in a cooperative way. In particular, environmental degradation makes poor people's existence intolerable.”**

**-Pope Benedict XVI**

“God has a plan  
to help  
bring justice  
to the world -  
and his plan is us.”

-Gary Haugen  
Founder, International  
Justice Mission

## Resources and Events

### The Parish Leadership Institute

*A three part seminar on Social Justice:*

- The Biblical Roots of Justice and Catholic Social Teaching
- Faith and Politics
- Systemic Change and Advocacy

This seminar is open to anyone, but it is especially well-suited for those who might be new to their parish social justice team, and those considering starting a parish social justice team.

There is no cost, but pre-registration is required for the preparation of materials. You may come to one session or all three.

**Where:** Hayden Building, 328 West Kellogg Blvd., in St. Paul.

**When:**

- **Wednesday, April 15:** Biblical Roots and Catholic Social Teaching
- **Wednesday, April 22:** Faith and Politics
- **Wednesday, April 29:** Systemic Change and Advocacy

**Time:** All will run from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Contact:** Cheryl Peterson, 651-291-4490, or Sister Kerry, 651-291-4482 or the general number, 651-291-4477.

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### March Sowers Assembly: Breaking Down the Barriers: Building Jobs and Re-Building Lives

The budget crisis isn't the only issue on our legislative agenda! At our March Sowers Assembly meetings, we will focus on two very important and challenging issues:

- How we can work to bring "Green Jobs" to low income communities?
- How can we help people who have done time in the criminal justice system transition back into society?

We have invited Louis King from HIRE Minnesota to talk about green jobs and how the stimulus dollars might be used for job creation and to protect the environment.

We will also focus on the "Ban the Box" campaign that seeks to assist ex-offenders who are looking for employment.

**When:** Monday, March 16, 2009

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

**Where:** Hayden Center - Saint Paul  
328 West Kellogg Blvd  
Saint Paul, MN 55102  
651-291-4477

**When:** Thursday, March 19, 2009

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

**Where:** St. Joan of Arc  
4537 3rd Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55409  
612-823-8205

Please let us know if you plan on attending the March Sowers Assemblies by calling 651-291-4477 or emailing [osj@archspm.org](mailto:osj@archspm.org).



Office for Social Justice  
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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

### March Sowers Assembly East

**Featured Speaker- Louis King from HIRE MN**

March 16 7:00-9:00 p.m

Hayden Center—Saint Paul

### March Sowers Assembly West

**Featured Speaker - Louis King from HIRE MN**

March 19 7:00-9:00 p.m

Saint Joan of Arc —Minneapolis

### April Sowers Assembly—Save the Date

April 14 7:00-9:00 p.m

Location TBD

### April Sowers Assembly—Save the Date

April 16 7:00-9:00 p.m

Location TBD

### Parish Leadership Institute

*A three - part seminar that treats topics for justice understanding. Come to one or all three.*

April 15

April 22 6:30– 8:30 p.m.

April 29

Hayden Center—Saint Paul

### HIRE Minnesota Day on the Hill

April 20th 3:00 p.m.

State Capitol—Saint Paul

### Understanding Poverty

*A multimedia presentation of the story behind poverty*

Various Dates - Visit our website

Various Locations - Visit our website

If you need more information regarding any of these events, including directions, please visit our website at [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org), or call us at 651-291-4477.