



Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

September 2008

ELECTION 2008

Like No Other?

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People my age have probably heard it said before: “This election is the most important election of all time; there is so much at stake!”

Perhaps this was true for elections that happened in the midst of economic and global turmoil – before and after major wars and depressions. It was probably also true for elections held in the midst of internal conflict, like the civil rights movement and during major immigration waves. It may be that other elections didn’t quite have the same tenor because it was a quieter, less contentious time in the nation and the world.

But when you think about it, all elections are really important because all elections are about the direction of the country and the priorities that will make or break the lives of our children—possibly for generations to come.

Let’s take a few moments to reflect on just some of the global issues that are at stake:

- As a world leader, the United States has important decisions to make about what role it wants to play in the 21st century. This is complicated and ever changing. The recent events in Russia and Georgia demonstrate just how complex and unpredictable things can be. There is a lot

to deal with: border security, nationalist uprisings, shifting national allegiances around the globe, the impact of globalization and the threat of nuclear power in the wrong hands.

How does a nation with strong democratic traditions behave in a pluralistic world? How does a nation that is only beginning to heal its own internal divisions encourage greater tolerance and a shared investment in the common good?

How does a nation that is used to consuming a disproportionate percentage of the world’s resources transform itself so that others might have the basic necessities of life?

- As a world leader striving for domestic and global harmony, we have important decisions to make on how we will use our military and technological capacity in a way that contributes to peace. We have to seriously question whether we make decisions to act just because we have the capacity to act. What does it mean for us to govern based on the premise that everybody counts and that leader nations are bound by ethical principles?
- In an ever changing world, how will the United States and its citizens engage with the growing religious, ethnic and political diversity that we see within our borders and throughout the world?

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How do we handle the fear that so many people have because of the many differences that take us beyond our comfort zone? Is there a way for us as citizens of a wide world to embrace the notion that we are a better humanity because we are open to each other, want to learn about each other and are eager to civilly share differing understandings and points of view?

- As a nation of people that promotes human dignity, how does the United States take the lead in working for human rights and against the explosion of human trafficking? The number of women of the street has increased dramatically throughout the world. It is a pervasive problem and is the consequence of a variety of complex economic, social and cultural reasons.

Many women of the street who are in prostitution in the First World come from the Second, Third and Fourth Worlds. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that currently there are 12.3 million people enslaved in enforced and bonded labor and that about 2.4 million of these are victims of the trafficking “industry”, whose annual income is estimated at \$10 billion.

Yes, the world is complicated, which is exactly why changing it can’t just be in the hands of the next U.S. president. When it comes right down to it, this election is as much about the citizenry as it is about the next occupant of the White House.

The kind of change that is required will take all of us to create. It isn’t about candidates McCain or Obama or any congressional seat alone. With

the best of intentions no new leader can lead a country that doesn’t want to be led or lead citizens that don’t want to participate in changing the culture of the country. No campaign platform will be strong enough to strong-arm the changes many know we must be about. Perhaps this election isn’t so important because of the work the next president has to do, but the work we have to do.

In his book Vote Catholic? Beyond the Political Din, author Bernie Evans reminds us that as people of faith we have an obligation to work for a more just and caring world and that this moral witness is a religious concern. He challenges us to engage each other in discerning what our society should look like. I close with this quotation from Evans’ book:

“Our participation in public discussion around contemporary news items is an expression of our belief that these issues cannot be defined solely in economic, national security or culture terms. These challenges facing our community or nation have moral dimensions as well. It is incumbent upon us as people of faith to let our faith guide us in assessing issues, in deciding on positions and in articulating moral questions. The prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament provide abundant examples of religious faith challenging “the way things are” in social, economic and political matters.”

Kathleen Tomlin
Director

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Kathleen Tomlin
Director
Office for Social Justice

IMAGINE MINNESOTA

As a child, I loved to use my imagination. Dirty sneakers became spaceships for my action figures and the old oak tree was actually the entrance to the “Land of Dairy Queen”, with flowing chocolate syrup and whipped cream clouds. But not all imagining is simple fantasy, it is also what has led to the greatest human achievements in history.

The Office for Social Justice, working alongside the Minnesota Without Poverty Campaign, is challenging the Minnesota Legislative Commission to End Poverty to be bold. It is our sincere hope that they will develop strategies that will raise the quality of life for all Minnesotans, making significant progress towards ending poverty by 2020. To be certain, ending poverty in the next twelve years is an exercise in imagination, but we feel confident it is not one of simple fantasy.

Minnesota has been hailed in past decades as the home of “the good life” and a prime example of community investment that lifted up the common good.

Here is what we imagine Minnesota could look like. How about a Minnesota where every child has health coverage? Now imagine a Minnesota that ensures that every homeless veteran has a roof over his/her head and has the support services to move ahead in life. Take a moment to imagine a Minnesota where sufficient job training and education is accessible to those

working their way off public assistance. Imagine a Minnesota where all youth have a safe, supportive place to live. Imagine a Minnesota that ensures that it will care for those who cannot care for themselves due to some mental or physical challenge.

As people of hope, we can imagine all of this and more. However, the challenges we face before we see these images realized are very real.

Our state government is facing a budget deficit likely to fall between \$1-4 billion dollars for 2010-2011. Unfortunately, funding for Health and Human Services has a history of bearing the brunt of budgetary corrections in times of deficit. Many of these programs are still recovering from the deep cuts that were implemented in 2003, and have yet to return to previous levels.

In human terms, further cuts could mean that the working mom in Hopkins loses her child care subsidy, the teen in St. Paul loses her bed at the shelter or the mechanic in Shakopee has his health care stripped away.

As Minnesotans, we will have choices to make in the coming months. While we need to keep our feet firmly planted in reality, let us not let go of this vision. Let us use our voices to protect the vulnerable by encouraging our legislators to imagine a better Minnesota. We know that it is possible and history is on our side.

Patrick Ness
Public Policy Manager

“How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world!
How lovely that everyone, great and small, can make their contribution toward introducing justice straightaway...
And you can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness!”

-Anne Frank

WORKING TOWARD OUR DREAM

*Vision without action is merely
a dream. Action without
vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can
change the world.*
- Joel Barker

With the 2008 election almost upon us, it's tough to remember that there will be hard work ahead after the men and women we elect to represent us are sworn in to office in January of 2009. In this issue of SEEDS, Patrick has reminded us that we share a dream of what Minnesota can be like. My job is to remind you that we will be working again this year to turn our dream for Minnesota into a reality.

We know that if we want a Minnesota that reflects our values, we will have to work both hard and smart. In the face of a potential multi-billion dollar state deficit, OSJ advocates will not only be calling for change, but we will be struggling to battle back cuts to critical services and programs for people living in poverty.

We will kick off the 2008-09 advocacy session on September 29th and October 2nd. At these gatherings, Action Team members will be joined by leaders from parish social justice committees, JustFaith graduates, and others to be inspired and motivated as we approach the upcoming legislative session. Noted theologian and teacher Bernie Evans will discuss our roles as people of

faith in the electoral and political processes.

On December 1st and 2nd, Senator John Marty and Nan Madden, the Director of the Minnesota Budget Project, will speak with us. Senator Marty will educate us on the work of the Legislative Coalition to End Poverty, while Nan will discuss the projected budget deficit.

In January, OSJ staff will present the annual Legislative Briefings. Patrick and Adam will be rolling out OSJ's entire legislative agenda, from immigration and criminal justice to health care and housing budgets, and discussing our strategies for advocacy.

For the rest of the 2009 session, we will continue to meet in order to strategically tackle the pressing legislative and organizing issues of the day. As anyone who follows the legislature knows, the session moves quickly, and we will be challenged to stay a step ahead of the attempts to cut important programs and services.

We are always so thankful for the work that you do, and we look forward to a challenging, fun, and exciting year.

You can find more information about the upcoming Sowers Assemblies at: www.osjspm.org or by calling 651-291-4477.

Adam Robinson
Public Policy Organizer

**"For those who have been
given much, much will
be expected."**

-Luke 12:48

37 million
Americans
live below the
poverty line.

(U.S. Census Bureau)



© 2008, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
(Catholic Campaign for Human Development)

2008-2009 Grantees:

**CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
(CCHD)**

- African Development Center
- All Parks Alliance for Change
- Mental Health Consumer/
Survivor Network of Minnesota
- Minnesota Immigrant Freedom
Network
- Somali Action Alliance

**CHRISTIAN SHARING FUND
(CSF)**

- African Chamber of Commerce
- Aishah Center for Women
- PEACE Foundation
- Workers Interfaith Network

**CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

37 million Americans live below the poverty line. They are struggling to hang on by making hard choices between food, housing, or health care for their families.

It's time to end poverty in America once and for all. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), and its local counterpart, the Christian Sharing Fund (CSF), invest in community-based solutions that know no racial or religious boundaries. CCHD and CSF support self-sufficiency and self-determination as the best strategies for change.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops founded CCHD in 1970, and since then have funded more than 4000 self-help projects developed by low-income led, grassroots groups working to change structures, strengthen neighborhoods, and create economic opportunities. Interested in getting involved in this national anti-poverty initiative? Here's what you can do:

- Promote the CCHD collection in your parish by becoming a CCHD Liaison.
- Give generously to your parish collection, generally the week-end before Thanksgiving, November 22nd and 23rd.
- Get to know a CCHD/CSF funded group and work with them to promote their work.

For more information about CCHD, contact Cheryl Peterson at 651-291-4490

PARISHES AT WORK

In addition to the two workshops featuring Bernie Evans, several parishes have worked or are working with OSJ staff to facilitate a discussion of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*: **St. Joseph in New Hope, St. Peter in Richfield, St. Bartholomew in Wayzata, Transfiguration in Oakdale, Nativity in Bloomington, St. Alphonsus in Brooklyn Center, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hastings and Lumen Christi in St. Paul.**

Understanding Poverty, a two hour multimedia presentation has been or will be held for the following groups/parishes: **Community Action Council of Dakota County, Risen Savior in Lakeville, St. John the Baptist in New Brighton, and Holy Name in Medina**

The Social Justice teams at **Lumen Christi in St. Paul** and **St. Odilia in Shoreview** recently participated in Visioning and Strategic Planning workshops facilitated by OSJ staff. Both parishes are now equipped with plans to integrate social justice into their parishes and communities!

110 middle school kids along with 20 high school kids serving as peer leaders created intricate string "why webs" as they learned about charity and justice while participating in Summer Stretch at **St. Joseph in West St. Paul**. This interactive exercise used balls of yarn to demonstrate the complex web and intersection of the issues as the students answered the question, "Why are people poor?"

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Parishes at Work

OSJ staff are here to assist you in parish planning, educating for justice, and organizing your parishioners for action in the public arena.

STRETCHING OUR WORLD

Religious communities today are smaller and older. In my Benedictine monastery we speak of aging, not of being old. It sounds less dreary! A temptation for religious communities today is to fear the future and hunker down. There is an attraction to preserve what we have and take care of ourselves. It can be a certain kind of navel-gazing, a failure to lift our heads to see the world around us.

Parish communities can fall into the same trap. Spending time in many different parishes, I observe the high priority for growth in faith and a desire for developing community. It is a privilege for me to see and it strengthens my own faith.

On the other hand, the message I bring to parishes is about the public role of the parish community in the broader community. Sometimes I am told the message is inappropriate because faith is private, the parish is for faith development, and political or economic issues are not part of the mix. Might this view also be described as “navel-gazing”?

Of course, like Jesus and his disciples, we work at building a strong community of faith. But Jesus called the disciples out of the local community and

sent them out with a message and as a sign of God’s love that says no one is forgotten, each person must be protected and cared for. The well being of everyone depends on this message. A parish that fails to reach out on important societal issues is not fully Catholic and is only responding to part of the challenge of the Gospel. Parishes are important actors in the larger community.

-Sr. Kerry O’Reilly

JUSTFAITH

JustFAITH has become an important option for faith formation in parishes as it offers participants a chance to be immersed in reflection, discussion, and prayer about social justice and the challenges we face as Christians. Nearly 700 people in forty parishes have been engaged in this program, most of them transformed by it in some way.

This year seven parishes have already registered. JustFAITH is described as a program that helps *fill the world with humble, faith-filled people who act with courageous justice and love with profound tenderness*. How do you learn more about it? Check the JustFAITH website, www.JustFAITH.org or call Sister Kerry at 651-291-4482. There is still plenty of time to form a group and get registered.



**“Take the first step in faith.
You don't have to see the
whole staircase, just take
the first step.”**

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

VOTER ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

As advocates for social justice, we understand the need to stand in solidarity with marginalized communities. Volunteers with the Office for Social Justice have an amazing opportunity this election season to partner with other Catholic Charities staff by inviting our clients and guests to become involved in the decisions that impact their lives. By doing so, we are not only doing our community a service, but we are also helping to meet Catholic Charities' mission as an anti-poverty organization committed to systemic change.

Office for Social Justice volunteers can be the catalysts for a dramatic increase in voter participation through legal, permissible, nonpartisan voter mobilization activities – voter registration, voter education, and get-out-the-vote efforts.

We had an overwhelming response to our request for volunteers for the voter engagement project this fall. We will work with thirteen Catholic Charities sites to register voters, provide nonpartisan voter education to the guests and finally (and most importantly!), help get as many people to the polls on November 4th as possible.

On August 18th and 19th, over thirty volunteers were trained on voter engagement strategies and registration procedures. Nonpartisan trainers from Wellstone Action and Urban Embassy led lively discussions and answered questions about registering voters who are ex-felons, living in homelessness or shelters, or need assistance filling out the registration card.

Over the next two months, volunteers will partner with OSJ and Catholic Charities staff throughout the Twin Cities, with the goal of reaching 1,500 Catholic Charities clients.

If you'd like to learn more about the Office for Social Justice's Voter Engagement project, or you would like more information about registering to vote, contact Adam Robinson at 651-291-4536 or robinsona@archspm.org.

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

Visit www.osjspm.org for the newest Faithful Citizen document, adult discussion suggestions, and information for parishes on the Dos and Don'ts in an election season.

The Office for Social Justice has 10 DVDs published on the document for loan or you can purchase your own at www.usccbpublishing.org

**“The opposite of love is
not hate,
it's indifference.
The opposite of art is
not ugliness,
it's indifference.
The opposite of faith is
not heresy,
it's indifference.
And the opposite of life
is not death,
it's indifference.”**

-Elie Wiesel



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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

Sowers Assembly West

Featured Speaker— Bernie Evans

September 29 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Our Lady of Grace— Edina

Sowers Assembly East

Featured Speaker— Bernie Evans

October 2 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Lumen Christi—Saint Paul

Prayer for the Common Good

October 7

In your own parish. See materials at osjspm.org.

Election Day

November 4

Visit <http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us> to locate your polling place.

“Road to Reconciliation” Conference

November 12 9:00-3:00 p.m.

Guardian Angels—Oakdale

CCHD Parish Collection Weekend

November 22 & 23

Sowers Assembly West

Featured Speakers—Senator John Marty & Nan Madden

December 1 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Christ the King—Minneapolis.

Sowers Assembly East

Featured Speakers—Senator John Marty & Nan Madden

December 2 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Hayden Center—Saint Paul

Some events require pre-registration. Please visit our website or call for more information at www.osjspm.org or 651-291-4477