

# Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

Special Edition



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## Signs of Sacredness, Signs of Success

Pope John Paul II has said that “The best preparation for the new millennium...can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply the teaching of Vatican II to the life of every individual and the whole Church.” Not a bad goal for the coming year.

A good place to start might be Vatican II’s document on the Church and the Modern World. Perhaps no other official Vatican document is as important as this one in defining who we are as Catholics and what are mission is.

**T**his document defines the Church as a religious institution whose purpose is to transform the world and help bring about the reign of God in history. The last two words are key -- **in history**. Our central mission as Catholics is to be fulfilled in history, and history is made up of social systems, culture, economic structures, politics, etc. This is the arena where the Church is to fulfill its mission. This is where the Church is to be Church.

This is also where individual Catholics are to live out their faith -- as agents of transformation in the world. In this sense we Catholics are all “missionaries,” people with a mission in the world. Consider these words of the U.S. bishops:

*Holiness is not limited to the sanctu-*

*ary or to moments of private prayer; it is a call to direct our whole heart and life toward God and according to God’s plan for this world. For the laity, holiness is achieved in the midst of the world, in family, in community, in friendships, in work, in leisure, in citizenship.*

This vision of what it means to be Catholic and what it means to be Church is articulated very clearly in Catholic social teaching. Referring to this teaching, the bishops declare, “The central message is simple: our faith is profoundly social. We cannot be called truly “Catholic” unless we hear and heed the Church’s call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace.”

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Despite the clarity of this message, it is still a challenging task to implement the church’s mission in the world. Sometimes the temptation is to shy away from this mission and to retreat into our own internal church communities. We become

*(Continued on page 2)*

so wrapped up with internal institutional affairs that we lose sight of the fact that our central purpose, our mission, is in the world, in the marketplace, and in the public square.

Our internal ministries are important, but they are not the end goal. They are instruments to help us achieve our primary goal of working to bring about the reign of God in the world. Again, the words of the U.S. bishops help us get clarity on this point. In their statement on political responsibility, they write, “We are not a sect fleeing the world, but a community of faith called to renew the earth.”

## SEVEN SIGNS

If this is the church’s authentic theology, then what are some of the ~~characteristics of a parish~~ that is actively implementing this vision of what it means to be a Catholic parish? I offer seven such signs:

1. There is evident a regular pattern of preaching that includes the social implications of faith. It draws out the justice dimensions of the scriptures, and compels the laity toward discipleship in the world.
2. The parish budget reflects the theological centrality of the social mission. This includes funding for paid staff to train and organize parish members for social action. In fact, this budget item is on a par with the budget for parish liturgists and musicians.
3. The social justice committee organizes the rest of the parish for public discipleship and resists the temptation to become the “designated doers” or the appointed social activists of the

parish.

4. The religious education and sacramental preparation programs explain the social dimensions of faith and the teachings on social justice in a way that is integral to the content of catechesis.
5. Adult members are organized into groups that use the observe-judge-act model. That is, they **observe** the social reality around them, they learn about Catholic social teaching and use it as a tool to make moral and social **judgements** about that social reality, and they **act** collectively to live out the Gospel values in the social arena.
6. The parish participates in one or more community organizations working collectively for social and economic changes that benefit the neighborhood or the region, especially those who are economically and politically disadvantaged.
7. The parish promotes active participation of its members in the political process. Parishioners are encouraged to join legislative advocacy networks, to discuss the pressing issues of the day from the perspective of Catholic social teaching, and to be active in voter registration and voter education activities.

**I**f these 7 signs are present, then the parish itself becomes a sign, a sacrament of grace, in the world. It becomes a truly “Catholic” parish in that it reflects the church’s most fundamental identity and mission.

We need to build local communities of faith where our social teaching is central, not fringe; where social ministry is integral, not optional; where it is the work of every believer, not just the mission of a few committed people and committees.

*Communities of Salt and Light*  
National Conference of Catholic Bishops  
November 17, 1993

## "Faith and Politics" ... *A Very Good Mix*

Two of the most prominent reasons why Catholics hesitate to connect faith and politics are confusion and cynicism. Both of these obstacles need to be overcome if we are to help Catholics understand and act on the relationship between faith and politics.

The confusion arises when people say that "religion and politics simply don't mix" or that "the Church is not allowed to be political." The cynicism arises as part of the deep distrust that many Americans have about politics and politicians at all levels. There is, after all, scandal, political ineptitude and gridlock galore. As more and more people remain aloof from political involvement, it fuels the cycle of declining confidence in our political institutions.

**I**n the face of this confusion and cynicism, the church teaches that politics is a necessary tool for carrying out our mission as a church and our responsibility as believers to work for the transformation of the world. In response to the "religion and politics don't mix" argument, it's important to point out that the "separation of church and state" does not prohibit the church from being engaged in politics. Indeed, it protects that engagement as a basic right. Moreover, in theological terms, our Catholic tradition says that faith and citizenship are intimately connected. Involvement in politics is an obligation.

At the local level, this means that parishes are called to enhance the civic capacity of their members by promoting civic confidence, by building political competence and by

establishing the credibility of religious voices in the civic arena. This doesn't happen by accident. It takes strategic planning within the parish to effectively promote civic participation as part of the church's mission.

**F**or example, parishes can provide opportunities for members to discuss the substantive social and political issues of the day -- not telling parishioners how to vote, but giving them a chance to reflect on the moral values embedded in political choices. Parishes can also sponsor activities that promote active citizenship and engage those who are tempted to remain aloof -- voter registration drives, non-partisan voter education forums, and get-out-the-vote activities such as providing transportation to the polls.

The church's responsibility in the civic community will be realized to the extent that all of our members are competent and effective in using the arena of politics to bring about God's reign -- defending human dignity, promoting the common good, standing up for the rights of the poor. If we are successful in this work, then the church will rightfully be seen as an important institution in the public square, as a voice for justice and an instrument of God's grace. If we fail to engage in this work, then our silence will be both deafening and defining.

Kathleen Tomlin  
Legislative Coordinator

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In their Statement on Political Responsibility the U.S. Catholic Bishops declare that "in the Catholic tradition, citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is an obligation. We are not a sect fleeing the world, but a community of faith called to renew the earth."

## Parishes at Work

Welcome to *Parishes at Work*, the section of the newsletter which reports on the successes and struggles of Catholics working for justice at the parish level. You might think of this section as “Real Life Stories of Parish Social Justice Leaders.”

**L**et’s highlight some of the parishes around the Archdiocese where the effort to do social justice is working. Where do they do justice well? And what behaviors or best practices seem to make a difference?

One such parish is **St. Richard’s** in Richfield. Periodically, the parish engages in a community *visitation* outreach. Through one-to-one visits, parishioners are asked about their hopes, dreams and concerns regarding life in their community. Usually, six or seven issues surface in visit after visit. The committee hosts an all-parish meeting to summarize what they heard in their one-to-one visits. At the end of the meeting, participants are asked to vote for two priority issues. The votes are tallied, and the justice committee focuses its work on those two issues for the year.

When a visitation process like this takes place, the parish has more input into the focus of the justice committee’s work and more ownership of the parish social ministry. The visiting process gives the justice committee a human face because the leaders get out to homes, meet parishioners, hear their concerns, maybe even explain what social justice is and does. Finally, when action opportunities arise, the justice leaders can personally follow up with the people who have already expressed an interest in one of the focus issues.

Another parish where justice has

made a lasting impression is **St. Mary’s** in Waverly. One reason for this is that the parish leadership has consistently relied on *prayer* as a key component to effective social change. Whether it is through a regular series of petitions, or through their annual prayer service for peace and non-violence, the leaders at St. Mary’s remind Catholics about the call of the scriptures to defend the poor -- the widows, orphans and aliens.

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**O**ne hallmark which distinguishes parishes that work effectively for justice is the understanding that the social mission of the Church is *owned by the many, not the few*. An example is the effort that **Transfiguration Parish** in Oakdale has undertaken over the last year or two. Through an intentional planning process, members of the parish council, in cooperation with the parish social justice committee, are working to educate all ministry areas -- from liturgy to education, from youth ministry to finance committee -- about the need to act justly. At Transfiguration, the members of the justice committee will function as catalysts for social action, not as the “designated doer’s” of justice for the parish. That’s an important difference.

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**A** long-term ability to evolve and change seems to be one of the key characteristics of success for **St. Luke’s** in St. Paul. The parish has several decades of experience working for justice, and the most recent arm that has developed has been involvement

For too many parishioners, our social teaching is an unknown tradition. In too many parishes, social ministry is a task for a few, not a challenge for the entire parish community.

The parishes that are leaders in this area see social ministry not as a specialized ministry, but as an integral part of the entire parish. They weave the Catholic social mission into every aspect of parish life—worship, formation, and action.

*Communities of Salt and Light*  
National Conference of Catholic Bishops  
November 17, 1993

Preaching that ignores the social dimensions of our faith does not truly reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our social doctrine must also be an essential part of the curriculum and life of our schools, religious education programs, sacramental preparation, and Christian initiation activities.

Every parish should regularly assess how well our social teaching is shared in its formation and educational ministries.

*Communities of Salt and Light*  
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in a regional church-based community organization called SPEAC.

Through SPEAC, St. Luke's parishioners have been able to work on the large issue of cleaning up polluted land sites in the metro area. As a single parish, this issue would have been beyond the capabilities of St. Luke's to change. But by joining with the other sixteen SPEAC churches, the organization was able to persuade the Legislature to appropriate nearly \$70 million dollars to clean up toxic waste at sites all across the city, including areas near St. Luke's.

**S**t. Williams in Fridley is an example of a parish that is working hard to move justice to the center of the parish's life by becoming a parish member of the Sowers of Justice network.

At a parish community night, three of the social justice committee leaders gave presentations on issues they are currently working on. They also used this time to educate parishioners on the differences between charity and justice and to promote individual membership in the Sowers network. In the following few days they received 20 to 25 phone calls from parishioners wanting to become involved.

Members of St. Williams are developing a process called Facing the Future with Hope. They started by inviting other churches in the area to join them in working together to strengthen their communities. By

reaching out to members of their churches, the neighborhoods sur-

rounding their churches, and to the businesses and public officials in their communities, they plan to work together on issues of importance to the community.

**L**ast but not least, the parishes that work for justice not only work hard, but know how to have fun. It isn't about constant work and struggle; they take time to party, relax, and celebrate both their own work and the successes of others.

One way that many parishes do this each year is by attending the *Taste of Justice* picnic, an event held in early June by the Office for Social Justice. At this event, awards are presented to groups and individuals who have done outstanding work throughout the year.

At the 1998 *Taste of Justice* picnic, awards were presented to a grade school student council, a nun who was jailed for civil disobedience, and a woman who led an effort to successfully provide Spanish translators at a local hospital. Celebrating the real-life heroines and heroes in our midst, these justice leaders express a key virtue of Catholic social teaching -- that of solidarity.

There's a whole lot more to say about what makes social justice work at the parish level. So tune in next time as we visit with more of the local leaders in the worldwide movement to bring about the reign of God, a reign of justice and of peace.

# Concentrated Poverty

**M**ore than 36 million people lived in poverty in the United States. This represents almost 14% of the population and one in every five children. Given that we are one of the richest nations in the world, these statistics are stunning. However, these cold facts fail to communicate the depth and breadth of the nation's ills. We need to look deeper than these figures in order to capture the growing phenomenon of concentrated poverty and the racial segregation that accompanies it.

In recent decades, the overall official poverty rate in the United States has remained essentially the same if one looks at individual poverty rather than community or neighborhood poverty. But there has been a growth in concentrated poverty, particularly in core urban areas. From 1978-1994, there was a 35% increase in the poverty rate in central cities throughout the nation. In the Twin Cities, more census tracts are poor now than in the 1970s. In 1970, there were seven census tracts that were more than 40% poor; by 1990 that number had grown to 35 census tracts.

In the Twin Cities a greater percentage of people of color who are poor live in the urban core than in any of the other twenty-five largest metropolitan areas of the nation. In 1990, seven out of eight persons living in concentrated poverty tracts were persons of color.

This complex pattern of racial segregation and concentrated poverty in our urban areas is a direct result of several structural causes:

- ◆ **Zoning ordinances** throughout the metropolitan area have encouraged low density sprawl at

the edges of the Twin Cities. This means significant additional

infrastructure cost for metro tax payers.

- ◆ **Redlining and mortgage lending** discrimination have hindered or prevented people of color from gaining access to neighborhoods outside of the central core.
- ◆ Large scale **public housing projects** have been almost exclusively located in depressed core areas of the city.
- ◆ **Transportation policies** have encouraged sprawl by focusing more on suburban road building than on urban transit needs.
- ◆ **Tax policies** have institutionalized these patterns over the years:
  - 1) Tax Increment Financing schemes in the suburbs have enticed new economic ventures to locate outside of the core cities.
  - 2) Home mortgage deductions that make larger homes more affordable for the average family encourage new development and continued sprawl.

**T**he Church's moral teaching about "option for the poor" means that we should always have the issue of poverty on our agenda. Even more so, the issue of concentrated poverty in our metro region is one that deserves and demands our ongoing attention. It's an issue that the Office for Social Justice will continue to work on. We need the support of individual Catholics and Catholic parishes, both rich and poor, in this effort.

Kathleen Tomlin  
Legislative Coordinator

*Here are a few numbers to keep in mind when you think about poverty.*

- ◆ The U.S. poverty rate for children is more than double that of any other major industrialized nation.
- ◆ If the trends in child poverty of the past 20 years continue, the number of poor children living in America's urban areas will increase by nearly 58 percent over the 1992 level, reaching 16.4 million in 2010.
- ◆ The core areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul had only 14 percent of the region's population in 1990, but almost half of its poor people.
- ◆ Currently over half of the students in the central cities live in poverty.

## GROWING INEQUALITY

Income has risen in the past two decades, but America's tide of prosperity hasn't floated all boats equally.

Segment of Popul.	1995 Aver. Income	Growth Since 1995
Richest 5%	\$188,962	54.1%
Top 20%	\$109,411	35.4%
Second 20%	\$52,429	13.0%
Middle 20%	\$34,106	6.7%
Fourth 20%	\$20,397	4.4%
Bottom 20%	\$8,350	1.5%

# Book Shelf Basics

## **Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret**

by Peter Henriot et al.

This handy little work begins with a brief overview of the development of social teaching. The core of the book consists of detailed outlines of the major social teaching documents from 1891 to 1988. A convenient reference to have on the shelf.

## **Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage**

ed. By David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon

This compendium includes the full texts of all the major social encyclicals from 1891 – 1995. Also includes U.S. bishops' pastoral letters on peace and economic justice. Indexed by subject.

## **Communities of Salt and Light: Parish Resource Manual**

U.S. Catholic Conference

This is a very practical tool for parishes seeking to assess and improve their social ministry. Includes the 1993 U.S. bishops statement on the social mission of the parish. Also includes assessment tools, planning guides, discussion questions, and lists additional resources and ideas. An essential tool for parish staff and leaders.

## **Doing FaithJustice**

by Fred Kammer, S.J.

An excellent introduction to Catholic social teaching. Written in a very popular style, this book is both interesting and inspirational. It includes stories, commentaries on the Church's teaching, and brief summaries of many of the official papal encyclicals on social justice.

## **John Paul II: The Encyclicals in Everyday Language**

by Joseph Donders

If you want to get the content of Pope John Paul II's encyclicals, but are put off by some of the dense prose style in the original texts, then get a copy of this paperback.

## **Official Catholic Social Teaching: Readings in Moral Theology No. 5**

ed. by Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, S.J.

One of the best collections of essays available on Catholic social teaching. Traces historical development, issues, and evaluations of the tradition of social teaching. Includes a number of important commentaries not available elsewhere.

## **Option for the Poor**

by Donal Dorr

An excellent commentary for those who

want a more in-depth review of the Catholic social tradition. The author discusses the tradition thoroughly, examines historical developments in the teaching, and lifts up the moral theme of care for the poor.

## **Preaching the Just Word**

by Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

This is a small but richly rewarding book by one of the best Catholic preachers in America. It explains why and how the Church's social teaching should be integrated into every Sunday's homily. Fr. Burghardt's recent collection of homilies, entitled *Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters*, is another very good resource.

## **The Busy Christian's Guide to Catholic Social Teaching.**

This is an attractive wall chart organized around an historical time line that runs from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 1990s. It lists Catholic social teaching documents and includes a brief summary of their content. This is a great item for parish resource rooms, classrooms, etc. Published by the Claritians -- 1-800-328-6515.

## Social Justice on the Web

Web surfers, you haven't been forgotten. Here's a few starting points for your browsing:

- © <http://www.osjspm.org>  
This is our home page. Stop by and check out the wide variety of tools and information that we have online. You'll find important documents, legislative updates on key issues, other web links, and lots of tools to help your parish learn more and do more in the area of Catholic social justice.
- © <http://www.claret.org/~salt>  
This is the social justice web site of Claretian Publications. Here you'll find lots of goodies, including the virtual version of "The Busy Christian's Guide to Catholic Social Teaching" mentioned above. Also includes "Social Justice for Dummies," by Joe Sullivan. (<http://www.uscatholic.org/uscatholic/1997/jul/dummies.html>)
- © <http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cm/cst.htm>  
One of the largest web listings on Catholic social teaching. This is part of a more general listing of over 4000 links related to Catholic theology. Don't miss it.



Office for Social Justice  
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St. Paul, MN 55102

Below are excerpts from the statement of beliefs of the *Sowers of Justice* network.

**As members of *Sowers of Justice*,** we believe that Christian faith requires a personal commitment to work actively for a more just world.

**We believe** in the God of justice—the God who is just, who seeks justice, who requires believers to be builders of justice.

**We believe** that human beings are sacred, and that respect for human dignity is the foundation of a just society.

**Therefore,** we commit ourselves to build a society where no one goes without the basic material necessities that are required to live a decent life—food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, and employment.

**We believe** that God identifies in a special way with those who are poor and that a fundamental moral criterion for a just society is its treatment of those who are powerless and poor.

**Therefore,** we commit ourselves to defend the rights of the poor and to evaluate economic and social policies and institutions from the perspective of the poor and powerless.

**We believe** that human beings are inherently social and that, if individuals are to grow and prosper, then community must grow and prosper.

**Therefore,** we commit ourselves to promote the common good and to create a renewed sense of public purpose in our society.

**We believe** that we are all one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences.

**Therefore,** we commit ourselves to practice and promote the virtue of solidarity and to bridge racial, economic and geographic boundaries in search of a more just society.

### **Join *Sowers of Justice* — Make a Difference!**

Sowers of Justice is a membership organization for Catholics committed to changing hearts and changing structures on behalf of justice.

If you'd like to join, or if you would be willing to promote *Sowers* within your parish, please call us for free brochures. (651-291-4477)