

Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JUNE, 2004



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FAITHFUL CITIZENS ENRICH PUBLIC DEBATE

I know it might seem like we've been in the middle of this election cycle for several years now, but the intensity of the campaigns is just beginning. At the same time, November 2 will be here before we know it. Therefore, there's no time to waste.

We are being called to seriously consider how our faith and values intersect with the positions held by the candidates. Being involved in this act of public deliberation is not just our duty as citizens, but also celebrates our participation in Christ's redeeming love. It is about being a Pentecost people acting to heal our world.

The temptation not to be involved has to be cast off in the same way that Jesus cast off the demons of his time:

- ▶ If we are serious about our obligation to be faithful citizens, we can't just sit by, passively watching and listening to the political ads, and complain about how tired we are of hearing them.
- ▶ Nor can we give up because the perfect candidate doesn't exist. It will probably be difficult to find a candidate for any office who is perfectly in sync with one's informed conscience and one's set of values and beliefs. We can't let a sense of political homelessness keep us from deciding.
- ▶ It is also counter productive to just ignore it all and wallow in the paralysis of "in the sea of so many, my vote just doesn't count." As the last national election and several local elections demonstrate, one vote does matter.

▶ Worse yet, we can't just rely on the latest poll to tell us who gets our vote. The "I like to vote for the obvious winner" syndrome is unenlightened to say the least.

Instead, we need to be proactive, interested citizens who promote our democratic form of government by encouraging voter registration drives in our parishes and in low turn-out neighborhoods and by encouraging our new eighteen year-olds to sign up to vote. Being faithful citizens, we use the lens of Catholic social teaching to reflect and deliberate with other people of faith in order to clarify our values and the political choices before us.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has published a document for Catholic voters entitled *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*.

Being involved in this act of public deliberation is not just our duty as citizens, but also celebrates our participation in Christ's redeeming love. It is about being a Pentecost people acting to heal our world.

This document is the defining guide available for Catholics to use as a basis for reflection on election 2004.

Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the USCCB, in his introductory letter says that “the Catholic community in the United States has unparalleled opportunities to shape a world more consistent with the lessons of Scripture and the values of Catholic social teaching. We can help protect the life and dignity of every human being and promote justice and peace in our world.”

The Church has a role to play during this election. As the statement indicates, “we are called to share our social teaching, to highlight the moral dimensions of issues, to participate in the debate on public policy and to witness to the Gospel.” This document discusses issues in four primary areas: protecting human life, promoting family life, pursuing social justice and practicing global solidarity.

As a society and a Church we need to be about the hard work of public deliberation on the important issues of our time. When we shy away from such activity because “it may cause tension” or “because my mind is already made up” or worse yet because “I am a private citizen” we fail to help each other become more faithful citizens. Let us remember that our nation is enriched, not threatened, when we join the debate. We are challenged to be thoughtful, civil and engaged.

To that end, the Office for Social Justice is promoting several resources for your use during this time. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops has developed a set of resources inspired by the *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* that can be used by a variety of parish

staff in the promotion of faithful citizenship. In addition, they have produced a nine minute video that gives an overview of the *Faithful Citizenship* document. For a copy of this document and other parish resources, please go online to <http://www.nccbuscc.org/faithfulcitizenship/index.htm>.

Secondly, the Office for Social Justice has created a four part discussion series that challenges people in our congregations to come together to discuss values, vision and the issues of importance. This discussion series, *Reading the Signs of the Times: Election 2004* includes the *Faithful Citizenship* video and excerpts from the USCCB document, and it is designed for small group discussion and individual reflection. This document is available from the Office for Social Justice or online at www.osjspm.org.

During this time before the election, we recommend that Sowers of Justice do whatever they can to promote participation in this discussion. Specific candidate choices are a private matter, left to the quiet of the voting booth. But deliberation on the future of this nation, our underlying values and the significant issues of our day is a very public matter. Let us celebrate this democracy by getting involved.

Kathleen Tomlin, Director
Archdiocesan Office for Social Justice

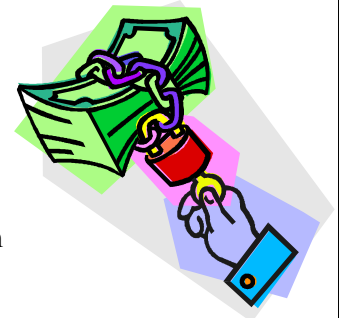


Legislative Summary—2004

Since the end of the 2004 regular legislative session, the Governor, legislative leadership, and the press have been focused on a single question: who's responsible for ruining the session?

If you are a person of faith interested in eliminating poverty, however, the blame game is useless. Our question, at the end of this legislative session, is a different question: how did people struggling to overcome poverty fare?

In this travesty of a session, the legislature sustained and deepened the pain low-income Minnesotans felt beginning with the cuts made during the 2003 legislative session. Legislators failed to restore any of the significant cuts in housing, health care, and child care passed last session, and in some cases, made the problem worse. What follows is a summary of what we won, what we lost, and what it means in the months and years to come.



WHAT WE WON

DEFEATING THE DEATH PENALTY

Governor Pawlenty's proposal to reinstate the Death Penalty died early in the session, thanks in large part to the efforts of the faith community.

Archbishop Flynn, the Minnesota Catholic Conference and the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) played exceptional roles in this effort.

THE TAXPAYER'S BILL OF RIGHTS NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY!

This proposal, put forward by the Minnesota Taxpayer's League, would have limited government spending to a figure limited by population growth and inflation. Almost no one liked this legislation, and the bill never got a hearing in either body.

IMMIGRANT NURSES WILL HAVE AN EASIER TIME FINDING WORK

Prior to the legislative session, immigrant nurses, trained abroad, faced unnecessary bureaucratic barriers to obtaining licensure in Minnesota. Legislation to remove those barriers passed with bipartisan support.

WHAT WE LOST

THE BUDGET DEBATE

At the beginning of the legislative session, the state faced yet another budget deficit. The February forecast put the deficit at \$160 million, a smaller figure than many predicted. The deficit looked easy to fix.

**"Once I thought
to write a history
of the immigrants
in America.**

**Then I discovered
that the immigrants
were America."**

Oscar Handlin
Professor Emeritus of American History
Harvard University

Legislative Summary—2004

It looked so easy, in fact, that the Governor and leadership in the House and Senate proposed new spending focused on restoring cuts and addressing emerging problems, including those related to sexual predators.

The Governor and legislative leadership devised very different strategies for paying for the deficit and new spending priorities. The final weeks of the session yielded no compromise, and the Governor decided to use his authority to balance the budget himself. Because he could not make cuts to hospitals and nursing homes without legislative approval, he had to find other means.

To fix the budget, the Governor:

- Diverted \$110 million from the health care access fund, destabilizing efforts to restore health care cuts and deepening the 2006-2007 budget deficit.
- Called on the department of revenue to increase tax compliance efforts.
- Delayed or froze the sale of bonds for projects already approved by the legislature, saving \$18 million.
- Cut \$17 million in funding for state agencies, further reducing the state's ability to solve difficult public problems.
- Saved \$8 million in debt service that the state would have incurred if the legislature had passed the bonding bill.

The breakdown of budget negotiations and the Governor's subsequent budget "solution" played a significant role in sustaining and deepening economic pain for people facing poverty. Losing the budget debate also meant lost opportunities in almost every area.

HEALTH CARE

The legislature had the opportunity to restore health care cuts made last session, reduce health care costs, and establish health care coverage for all kids in Minnesota.

Both bodies passed legislation that restored cuts and reduced costs. The bills differed significantly. The House wanted to restore health care security to fewer Minnesotans, the Senate wanted to restore nearly all of the cuts. Each body had very different plans to reduce health care costs driven by very different political ideologies.

Ultimately, the breakdown in budget negotiations meant none of these differences could be worked out in conference committee and the legislature did nothing this session to restore cuts or reduce costs.

The legislature also had the chance to provide health care for every child in Minnesota. Despite the fact that this was the boldest, most promising legislation on the health care front this session, neither body had the political will to raise the revenues necessary to pass this bill. The House never even held a hearing.

ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR MINNESOTA'S MOST VULNERABLE

In the 2003 session, the legislature made a number of budget cuts that made already vulnerable families more financially unstable. In 2004, the legislature failed to take the opportunity to restore the following cuts:

- *The family cap*: This measure denies cash assistance to families participating in the Minnesota Family Investment Program if they have an



READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Election 2004

A Small Group Discussion Series

This 4 part small group discussion series helps participants explore and apply the U. S. Bishops' statement *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* as the 2004 elections draw near.

Participants are guided through a process of personal reflection, analysis of Church teaching, and lively group dialogue.

Copies of this series are available for \$15.00 and will include

- ◆ *Faithful Citizenship Document*
- ◆ *Faithful Citizenship Video*
- ◆ *Reading the Signs of the Times: Election 2004 Discussion Guidebook*

To order contact the

Office for Social Justice
651-291-4477

WHAT IT MEANS

“The call to faithful citizenship raises a fundamental question for all of us. What does it mean to be a Catholic living in the United States in the year 2004 and beyond?”

As Catholics, the election and the policy choices that follow it call us to recommit ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel and church teaching into the public square.”

*Faithful Citizenship:
A Catholic Call
to Political Responsibility*

United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops

additional child after enrolling in the program. A bill in the House never got a hearing and its Senate companion made only limited progress.

- *SSI cuts:* Households with family members who have significant disabilities face a minimum cut of \$125 per month. The Senate sought to restore these cuts, the House never held a hearing on a bill introduced in that body.
- *The housing penalty:* MFIP participants who live in public housing lose \$50 a month. The Senate sought to restore these cuts. The House sought to increase the penalty to 200/month.

SUPPORTING AND REWARDING WORK

There were bills introduced in both bodies to restore deep cuts made to child care assistance programs last session, but they never went very far.

In a bipartisan vote, the Senate passed an increase in the minimum wage. The House never held a hearing on the companion bill.

HOUSING

There were significant provisions before the legislature this year to address the ongoing housing crisis. The Governor put forward a \$20 million bonding proposal and both bodies made minimal efforts to restore cuts to emergency and transitional housing. The House removed the \$20 million from the bonding bill early on in the committee process. The Senate included the measure, but the bonding bill failed to pass on the Senate floor.

Efforts to restore funding to transitional and emergency facilities faltered when budget talks failed.

INFLUENCE OR POWER?

In the wake of this legislative session, we as people of faith who see poverty as a central moral problem need to ask: do we have real power in the political realm right now, or barely any influence?

The death penalty debate demonstrates that the faith community has some influence. When Governor Pawlenty announced his intention to reinstate capital punishment, religious leaders spoke out and legislators on both sides of the aisle said they would not stand with him on this issue on moral grounds. A number of Catholic legislators from both parties voted their conscience, not their partisan interests, on this matter, proving that when we appeal to basic values, we can, in some cases, compel legislators to rise above the partisan fray.

We would be hard pressed to find evidence, though, that the faith community has real power to enact its economic agenda. We brought good ideas like the Children’s Health Security Act to this year’s session. But at present, we lack the power necessary to make those ideas reality. It will take a movement among people of faith to build power sufficient enough to make our vision a reality. The economic questions, of course, are inextricably tied to questions about taxes, budget priorities, and the role of government.

2004 ELECTIONS

The legislature's failures make it incumbent upon us, as people of faith, to ask hard questions of candidates from both political parties during this election cycle. There will be numerous opportunities to answer these questions: *at candidate forums; at our front doors; at the Minnesota State Fair, and at other various public gatherings where elected officials campaign.* Here are some core questions we encourage you to ask:

What is your plan for balancing the budget next session given that the state will probably face deep deficits?

What will you do to restore cuts made in 2003 to health care, child care, housing, and welfare to work programs? Will you be willing to raise taxes?

Would you support a bill that establishes universal health care for every child in Minnesota and saves the business community \$100 million, even if it means raising taxes?

Would you support an increase in the minimum wage?

2005 SESSION

Of course, we need to keep asking these questions, and advocating for real economic justice, well after the election season has passed.

There is every indication that the state will face another massive budget deficit during the 2005 legislative session. The Minnesota Department of Revenue estimates that the state could be up to \$1.1 billion in debt when taking into account the increased cost of providing services.

How do we prepare? The time to develop issue agendas and media messages will come. In the meantime, we need to do work on a completely different level.

The people who have played a central role in shaping the agenda at the legislature in recent years have been extremely successful. Their power lies in the fact that all of their issues work and all of their media messages tap into three values that resonate with many Minnesotans: they reinforce rugged individualism; they assert that the market alone can address all public problems; and they argue that Government is part of the problem, not part of the solution. Their legislative opponents have failed to articulate any promising alternatives.

Here, the Faith community has a unique role to play. We possess powerful values as people of faith that lead us to conclusions about public problems that neither political party seems willing to champion at the moment.

We now need to organize those values into a coherent worldview, one that appeals powerfully to Minnesotans of good will. And then we need to challenge politicians in both parties to translate that worldview into meaningful change for economic justice.

Doing this kind of deeper values work will lead us to issue agendas and media messages in time. Without this kind of effort, however, it will be difficult to move from simply trying to prevent the worst from happening to enacting a legislative agenda that reflects the world as it should be. It will be difficult to move from simply being influential to being powerful.

Matt Gladue, Public Policy

“The life and words of Jesus and the teaching of his Church call us to serve those in need and to work actively for social and economic justice. As a community of believers, we know that our faith is tested by the quality of justice among us, that we can best measure our life together by how the poor and the vulnerable are treated.”

*Economic Justice for All:
Catholic Social Justice and the U. S. Economy*
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

News from

The Nonviolent Peaceforce

The Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is an international organization with a mission to "create a trained, international, civilian, standing nonviolent peaceforce" that will be sent to areas of conflict to prevent death and destruction and protect human rights, making space for local groups to struggle nonviolently, enter into dialogue, and seek peaceful resolution.

NP has a pilot project on the ground in areas of conflict in Sri Lanka; 14 peace-makers have been in the country since September of 2003. See the NP website for more details:
www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org

The NP provides a proactive alternative to war. Speakers are available to give presentations to congregations or church groups on the NP; for more information or to schedule a presentation, contact

- ▶ Peter Thompson at 612-927-9138
email address:
peterthompson44@msn.com
- ▶ Patricia Keefe at 651-487-0800.
email address:
pkeefe@nonviolentpeaceforce.org;
- ▶ Bud Dixen at 763-786-3227

Have you noticed that the OSJ parish team has gotten rather ethnic? O'Brien and O'Reilly – it sounds like a pub in St. Paul or maybe the latest Irish tenors. Actually this team, Irish by marriage and Irish by birth, hasn't spent much time in local pubs lately but have been out visiting in parishes in the Archdiocese. We want to get to know as many of you as possible.

What makes our visits interesting is that we have come to know the uniqueness of each parish in its journey to know and act on the social message of Jesus. Parishes are discovering a variety of ways to enter the process of developing social awareness:

- ▶ The **Leadership Institute** is for parishes looking for background and understanding of Catholic social teaching, systemic change and faithful citizenship. *Christ the King in Minneapolis* built on this experience to develop relationships for promoting change, including inviting Don Samuels, the 3rd Ward Councilman from North Minneapolis to speak with the parish.
- ▶ Some parishes have begun deepening and broadening their understanding of social justice through the **JustFaith** program. A team from *St. Mary of the Lake, White Bear Lake* is using this as a springboard for moving into the Leadership Institute.
- ▶ *St. Ambrose of Woodbury* began their journey using **Reading the Signs of the Times** conversation series to identify parishioners who might be interested in learning more about social justice. As a result they have formed a justice leadership team.
- ▶ Parishes with a bit more experience find that the **Leadership Workshop** helps develop a strategic approach to organizing within their own parish that moves them toward action. *Our Lady of Grace, Edina* has an existing social justice structure and is now using what they learned in the workshop to make plans for increasing parish-wide awareness of the social mission.

The end purpose of our work is to assist parishes to grow in their understanding of the social mission of Jesus and to act on that mission in the world. Each parish community, uniquely rich, comes to an awareness of the social mission in its own way. It is for this reason that we encourage a variety of approaches to help jump-start the process.

If your parish doesn't know where to start or if your parish has some thoughts about how to proceed, invite us out for a visit, we'd love to help! Wherever you are on the journey we would like to walk with you awhile. It is the way of the Irish. We like to be a part of things, creating a party where there is none, adding to it where there is!

Deb O'Brien
Sr. Kerry O'Reilly
Parish Organizers



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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

Voter Registration

Monday: June 7, 2004

Location: Hayden Center Bldg.—Smith Hall
 328 West Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul

Time: 6:30 p.m.—9:30 p.m.

Audience: Open to the public—no fee.

OR

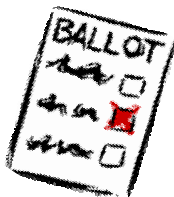
Tuesday: June 8, 2004

Location: Christ the King
 5029 Zenith Avenue South, Mpls.

Time: 6:30 p.m.—9:30 p.m.

Audience: Open to the public—no fee.

Please join us to prepare for the 2004 elections — attend **one** of the Voter Registration meetings scheduled in St. Paul or Minneapolis.



Leadership Institute

**Tuesdays: September 21 and 28, 2004
 October 5 and 12, 2004**

Location: TBA

Time: 6:30—9:00 p.m.

Fee: \$25.00 (This fee covers the Institute and the Leadership Development Workshop in November listed below.)

Leadership Development Workshop

Friday: November 12, 2004

6:30—9:00 p.m.

Saturday: November 13, 2004

8:30 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

Location: TBA

Audience: Open to the September/October Leadership Institute Participants.

Fee: \$25.00 (This fee covers this workshop and the Leadership Institute in September and October.)