



CATHOLIC CHARITIES
Office for Social Justice

SEEDS of JUSTICE

APRIL 2011

CHANGING HEARTS AND CHANGING STRUCTURES ON BEHALF OF SOCIAL JUSTICE | OSJSPM.ORG



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HELP WANTED: Struggling Legislature, Governor and Folks on the Margin Need Your Voice

As this issue of *Seeds* goes to press, we are about three-fifths of the way through the 2011 session of the Minnesota State Legislature. The governor and members of the legislature are struggling to balance the state’s budget before the session comes to a close on May 23rd. So far, it has been a contentious session. Governor Mark Dayton presented his administration’s budget-balancing bill early in the session. It matched painful cuts to important programs with a plan to raise revenue by taxing the richest people in the state. The Republican leadership of the House and Senate roundly rejected that approach. They would balance the budget by cutting program funds and/or by not matching program funding to projected growth.

As the debate at the Capitol continues, it is important to get an understanding of what is at stake in the budget negotiations. Over the course of the following pages, we’ll look at programs that are funded specifically by Minnesota’s Health and Human Services and Jobs and Economic Development budgets, how they could be affected by the efforts to balance the state’s budget, and what impact they have on people living in poverty and crisis in our communities.

First, however, it is important to get a sense of the scene at the State Capitol

this year. Republicans now in the majority, have restructured and streamlined the House and Senate committee structure and ushered in a new era of leadership. Representative Jim Abeler (48B) of Anoka is the new chair of the House’s Health and Human Service Finance Committee and Senator David Hann (42) is the new chair of the Senate’s Health and Human Services Committee.

Both of these men are new to these positions of leadership, and it is the first time either of them has led the process of putting together their version of the HHS budget, which comprises nearly 30% of Minnesota’s overall budget. Senator Geoff Michel (41) of Edina is the new chair of the Senate’s Jobs and Economic Development Committee, which has authority over some housing programs. All of these legislators are within the boundaries of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and Sowers are working in coalition with other groups to let legislators know they should not balance the budget in a way that disproportionately affects people living in poverty.

“I never expected that I would be chairing a committee,” Rep. Abeler said recently. At a community meeting in his district, Rep. Abeler noted that he is learning from policy and program

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experts as he crafts his budget and moves it through the legislature. Feedback is important from all citizens which is why it is critical that every Sower of Justice member contacts and builds a relationship with his or her legislator during these tough economic times. As our state's senators and representatives work to balance Minnesota's budget, we will need to be a voice for and with those living in poverty and crisis so their needs and our values are not forgotten in the policy, budgeting and political debates coming in the weeks ahead.

Here is a list of some of the programs that are being impacted by the budget proposals of the governor, the House and the Senate:

Group Residential Housing (GRH):

GRH is a state-funded program that pays for room-and-board costs for low-income adults who have been placed in a licensed or registered setting. The total projected spending for GRH is about \$100 million each year.

The governor would not cut GRH in his budget proposal, but did propose a \$2 million reduction in supportive services at GRH programs (primarily a reduction of one-time stimulus dollars). In the House and Senate budgets, there would be no clear cuts to GRH, but there are questions about changing eligibility requirements. Also, amendments have been presented that would cut funding for so-called "chronic inebriate housing" if clients don't achieve a 30% success rate in their treatment plans.

Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program

(FHPAP):

FHPAP funds are used for a broad range of activities aimed at addressing homelessness, with an emphasis on prevention. Each FHPAP-funded project designs its own service delivery system using approaches that make sense at the local level. The program supports continuing innovation and development of a comprehensive system to address homelessness. At this point FHPAP would not see any cuts in the governor's or legislators' budgets although it could be used in budget trade-offs later on.

Health Care:

The Senate budget bill would dramatically restructure public health programs in Minnesota. All families and children on Medical Assistance (MA) with household income above 75 percent of poverty (\$13,898 for a family of three) and all MinnesotaCare enrollees with household income above 133 percent of poverty (\$24,645 for a family of three) would lose their health care coverage and would instead be provided with a set amount to purchase coverage in the private market. These low-income individuals would likely face very high out-of-pocket costs for premiums, deductibles and copayments.

The Senate bill would also revive the poorly constructed General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) program that was just nixed by Governor Dayton when he transferred the individuals covered by this program to MA. This would mean that only metro area GAMC clients would get

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I am the only one,
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
but still I can do
something.
And because I cannot
do everything,
I will not refuse to do
the something
that I can do.

-Edward Everett Hale

Combine prayer
with action

-Matthew 7:21

coverage, as happened last year.

Mental Health Funding for Community Based Services:

The governor's budget would maintain funding for several important mental health programs, including mental health crisis teams, school-linked mental health services, supportive housing, respite care and the Extended Employment Program for People with a Serious Illness. When the Senate released its bill, however, things were not as positive. The Senate bill features over \$60 million in cuts to mental health services, including the elimination of entire programs like adult crisis services and school-linked mental health services.

Among other voices, Sue Abderholden of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) testified passionately against the Senate HHS's budget cuts of mental health services, saying:

"Just because you slash funding and destroy programs doesn't mean people will go away. They just end up in worse places. Already over 500 people die by suicide in Minnesota each year, a majority of people who are homeless live with a mental illness, over 25% of our prisons, 50% of our jails, and 70% of our juvenile justice system are filled with people with mental illnesses. We have just started making real progress, and now you are cutting those last few threads that keep people from falling into the abyss."

Hiring Equity on Publicly-Funded Infrastructure Projects:

While there has been a lot of talk about a jobs agenda at the legislature, a bonding bill has not gained traction yet this year. OSJ, as a member of the HIRE Minnesota Coalition, will continue to work towards racial equity and expanded employment opportunity for women and people of color as the 2011 session continues.

General Assistance (GA):

GA is a cash assistance program available for poor or disabled adults without children who are unable to work. Recipients receive \$203 a month for housing, transportation and other personal needs. GA is usually a recipient's only income.

GA would not see any cuts or changes in the governor's budget, but would be strongly adjusted by proposals in both the House and the Senate's HHS budget bills. The House bill would establish a 90 day residency requirement and remove many categories of people from GA eligibility, including persons with a pending application for SSI or SSDI, persons over 18 whose primary language is not English and in high school at least half time, and persons "not amenable" to chemical dependency treatment. The House bill also requires all GA recipients to do 20 hours per month of volunteer or paid work, unless professionally certified as unable.

In the Senate bill, the cuts

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would be even deeper. The Senate proposal would turn GA into a block grant to counties and would merge it with several other programs and include a \$20 million reduction. The Senate would also include a 60 day residency requirement for GA enrollees.

Child Care Assistance:

The governor's proposal would refinance money from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) fund and reduce the number of days a child could be absent before reimbursement to the provider is cut. This reduction would be from 25 to 10 days.

On the legislative side, the House would adopt the Governor's 10 day absence policy change and move \$5 million not yet spent this year in Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance funds to balance the state's budget deficit. This would occur while there are 4,000 families on the statewide waiting list.

The Senate bill would reduce rates for child care assistance by 5%. It also would eliminate several grants that improve the child care system and would adopt the governor's 10 day absence policy.

Conclusion:

This list of legislative changes is hardly comprehensive and does not contain all of the cuts that will be challenging to Catholic Charities' clients and others experiencing the worst of the economic downturn. It does, however, lay out some of the challenges that the governor and legislative leaders will have to

address as the end of the session approaches. In the space between what the governor wants and what the legislators want, it's possible that the needs of poor Minnesotans could be forgotten.

Governor Dayton has stated that he wants to see a comprehensive budget and that he will veto legislation that uses the legislative majority party's "cuts only" approach to balancing the budget. House and Senate leadership seem intractable on the issue of raising revenue, and though they've expressed some sentiment that their HHS bills are opportunities to discuss and improve policy, it will be a long struggle to balance the budget.

In other words, the conversation between the governor and the Legislature is just beginning. As the session wears on, it will continue to be critical that Sowers advocate for policies that protect the poor and vulnerable.

Your voice is as important as it ever was. Call your legislators and ask them to protect funding for the programs outlined above. Ask them to work across party lines to find ways to protect Minnesotans living in poverty and crisis.

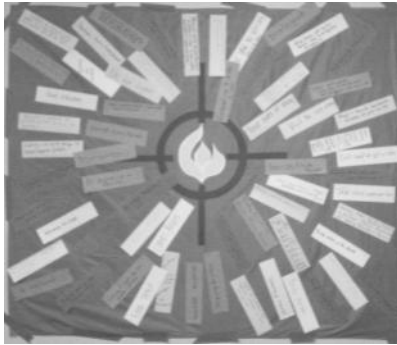
Find out who represents you by visiting www.leg.mn and entering your address in the "Who Represents Me?" section, or by calling the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services at (651) 296-2146 or 1 (800) 657-3550.

Adam Robinson
Public Policy Organizer

Marie Reigstad
Public Policy Manager

The world is blessed
most by those who do
things, and not by
those who merely talk
about them.

-James Oliver



Recently, **Lumen Christi** held a retreat for parishioners to inspire them in the charity and justice ministries. After time spent in prayerful solitude and discussions about community, the participants created a beautiful stained glass image of the ways they can act with charity and justice to be the "light of the world".

How are you hiding your light under a bushel basket?

Social Justice Meet Ups are open conversations of and for people who want to talk about practicing social justice in their parishes. A different parish hosts each meet up, and they're scheduled once every month or so. At each meet up, the participants present select the topic for the next meet up. You can attend on any topic you like. Past topics were:

- How to get people involved in social justice in our parishes.
- How can we talk about immigration in our parishes?
- How do we depoliticize social justice issues?
- How does racism impact your parish and neighborhood?

The next meet up is on May 5th at Christ the King in Mpls. 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Topic: How do the three proposed state budgets address people in poverty?

Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), a division of Catholic Charities, serves and advocates for immigrants, refugees, migrants and people on the move. They particularly *need your help* in their refugee resettlement activities.

Refugees arrive in this country with few material possessions. They need food, clothing, shelter, jobs, English lessons and friendship. While one person could become overwhelmed trying to take care of all these needs, working together, a parish can easily meet these needs. Here's just a smattering of how

parishes are responding:

St. Boniface in NE Mpls. set up an apartment and met a Karen family from Burma at the airport. They're planning to stay connected with the family regularly and are recruiting for 5 committees: hospitality, social adjustment, financial literacy, transportation and job readiness.



This will hopefully act as a model for future partnerships as the program continues to grow. **St. Patrick's** in Inver Grove Heights is planning a drive to collect bicycles. They'll take the bikes in any condition and will do the repair work before passing them on to MRS. **St. Ambrose** recently held a second collection for MRS. Other parishes are in the planning stages of a one-time or short-term involvement opportunity or an ongoing relationship.

JustFaith & CCHD: St. John Neumann hosted a soup supper with presentations by representatives of local organizations receiving funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. St. Stephen's Human Services, one of the funded groups, recently had a representative speak at **St. Joan of Arc**. If you haven't had

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Parishes at Work

your parish collection for CCHD, it's not too late. Call us and ask about getting a speaker!

Seventy-five JustFaith Grads gathered on March 26 for inspiration and continued work in justice spirituality. The event included a presentation by Fr. Steve Adrian on the Eucharist and Justice, shared prayer, and breakout sessions on Immigration, Engaging Social Justice in the Parish, Ending - not Managing Homelessness, Mission Based Communities, and The Economy, the Budget and the Common Good. Now is the time to start planning if you'd like to have JustFaith or Engaging Spirituality in your parish. Go to www.justfaith.org.

Contact Cheryl Peterson at 651-291-4490 or cheryl.peterson@cctwincities.org for more information about involvement in any of the above.



Town Hall Meetings

We encourage all Sowers to get to know your legislators, and many legislators offer opportunities right in their district.

This year, OSJ has taken on a new project of emailing Sowers when their legislator is having such a meeting, often known as a "town hall meeting." Many legislators have an email

listserve, and we have subscribed to all of them. When a legislator mentions an upcoming town hall, we do our best to send it out to Sowers in that district.

So far OSJ has sent 13 action alerts on upcoming town halls presented by 24 legislators to over 315 Sowers. We have heard positive feedback from a number of people who attended – legislators truly appreciate hearing from constituents, even when the two disagree on issues.

If you would like to receive an email when your legislator has a town hall meeting, but you do not currently receive emails from us, please send your name, address and email address to osj@cctwincities.org

The usual format for a town hall is that the legislator (sometimes more than one) speaks briefly about the current legislative session, then opens the floor for constituent comments or questions. Sometimes town halls are set up so that individual constituents or small groups set up a specific time to meet with their legislator. Town hall meetings are often held at coffee shops, restaurants, libraries, city halls, or other community spaces. These meetings are a great way to connect with your legislators in an informal setting near your home.

If you plan to attend a town hall or other meeting with your legislator, you are welcome to contact our office for more information about issues you may want to discuss. Please also share with us your experience!

The church is obliged by its evangelical mission to demand structural changes that favor the reign of God and a more just and comradely way of life. Unjust social structures are the roots of all violence and disturbances. ... Those who benefit from obsolete structures react selfishly to any kind of change.

- Archbishop Oscar Romero



Join us!

May Sowers Assembly

Legislative Session Update

Tuesday, May 2, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Hayden Building

328 West Kellogg Blvd

Saint Paul, MN 55102

For more information please contact the Office for Social Justice
at 651-291-4477 or osj@cctwincities.org.

From a faith perspective, I have learned that those who suffer the most deserve the greatest hearing, even though, ironically, their voices are often the last to be heard, if at all

-Rev. Daniel Groody,
C.S.C.

SAVE THE DATE

September 30, 2011—St. John's University

October 1, 2011—Carondelet Center

Justice for Immigrants: *The Theology of Migration and Framing the Message*



Speaker:

**Reverend
Daniel Groody, C.S.C.**

Fr. Groody, an associate professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, has written on migration, globalization and theology. He is also the producer of documentary films including "One Border, One Body: Immigration and the Eucharist," and "Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey."

More details coming soon
Visit www.osjspm.org or
contact our office at 651-291-4477



*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 of Justice
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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Homelessness in our Community

Faith Forum

April 9, 2011

8:30-10:00 a.m.

Contact Heidi Johnson McAllister at
heidi@dceh.org for more information

Sowers Assembly: Legislative Session Update

May 2, 2011

Hayden Building

More details can be found on page 7 or by
visiting our website: www.osjspm.org

Social Justice Meet up

May 5, 2011

Christ the King Church Mpls

5029 Zenith Ave S ▪ Minneapolis, MN 55410

7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Topic: How do the three proposed state budgets
address people in poverty?

More details can be found on our website
www.osjspm.org on the Parish Page

In Search of ENOUGH--Arts Exhibit

March 31-May 20, 2011

Presbyterian Church, St. Paul

Visit www.mnwithoutpoverty.org for more info

JRLC's Statehood Day Action at the Capitol

May 11, 2011

2:30 p.m.

Visit www.jrlc.org for more information

From Death to Life: A conversation with Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel:

A mother forgives and embraces the killer of her son.

May 20th, 2011

7:00 p.m.

The Carondelet Center—Saint Paul

Visit www.csjstpaul.org for more information

End of Session Wrap –Up Assembly

June—Date TBD

More details to come or you can visit our
website at www.osjspm.org