



Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

November 2010

Writing a new justice story in Minnesota

Minnesotans went to the polls on November 2nd and changed everything about the makeup of the political leadership of the state. Frustrated with a lack of economic expansion and a growing national debt, voters flipped the partisan orientation of the state of Minnesota on its head: the legislature is now dominated by the Republican party, while Mark Dayton, the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) endorsed candidate for governor holds a several-thousand vote lead over his GOP rival, Tom Emmer, in a statewide recount.

Wy Spano from the University of Minnesota-Duluth's Center for Advocacy and Political Leadership put it this way: "Politics continued its nationalization trend, so votes for local legislators became surrogates for expressing national unhappiness." At the state and national levels, the story changed from being about hope and change to being about preserving or finding personal economic security.

Of the 134 members of the Minnesota House, 72 are now Republicans, and 62 are DFLers. This is a radical change from the last session, when only 47 Representatives were Republicans and the DFL was only 3 votes away from a veto-override majority. On the Senate side, Republicans have the majority with 37 seats to the DFL's 30. This is the first time the Republicans have held the majority in the Senate in the 38-year history of party-identified caucuses in the Senate.

House and Senate members have already selected the people they'd like to lead their caucuses during the 2011 session. Kurt Zellars from Maple Grove is now the Speaker-elect of the House, and Matt Dean from Dellwood is the Majority Leader-elect. Paul Thissen from Minneapolis is the Minority Leader-elect in the House. The final decisions about who holds the leadership positions happens after the Legislature is called into session on January 4th, but the DFL and Republican caucuses have chosen their nominees. In the Senate, Amy Koch from Buffalo is the Majority Leader and Tom Bakk from Cook is the Minority Leader.

The majority party's leadership positions and committee chairs wield extraordinary power in the Minnesota legislature – they decide which bills will get heard when, and what path legislation follows through the House and Senate.

Importantly, though, legislative leadership and the committee chairs will be setting their budget targets during the session. The legislature is responsible for crafting a balanced budget for the state. They'll be deciding how much Minnesota takes in through taxes and fees and spends on programs and services. Of course, the governor will present a budget to the legislature early in the session that reflects his priorities – how he thinks Minnesota should raise and spend money – but the legislature has the ability to accept it (which seems unlikely) or reject it and write their own budget.

Since we're not 100% sure who the next governor of Minnesota will be (as I'm writing this, the recount is just beginning) or when he'll take office, the process is in limbo. We do know, though, that the leading candidate, Mark Dayton, suggested he'd help balance the budget by raising taxes on the wealthiest Minnesotans. It seems highly unlikely that a Republican-led legislature would accept increasing revenues through taxes.

And that means cuts. Projections from the Minnesota Office of Management and Budget show a budget shortfall of close to 6 billion dollars. That means if the budget stays as it is right now, we'd be \$6 billion short on the money we'd need to fund current state programs and services. If raising revenue is taken off the table by the legislature, it looks as if cuts are the only way to balance the budget.

So what does this mean for people living and poverty and crisis and anti-poverty advocates as we move forward to the 2011 legislative session?

The real answer is that we don't know yet. Committees need to be formed, budgets need to be presented, and policies need to be drafted. There's a lot of uncertainty about what programs will be on the chopping block and how deep the cuts will go.

At the same time, there are a lot of new faces at the Minnesota State Capitol, and we don't know how they'll react to the challenges ahead of them. The new members (and the established leaders) need to hear from their constituents about the values and principles that are important to them. Though they can have (and did have) powerful impacts on a community's political face, elections are not the end of the story. In fact, elections are the first chapter in the story of our community. It's up to us, as people of faith and constituents of these newly-elected leaders, to make sure the values for a just and fair Minnesota get lifted up. We need to be the voices for equity and fairness in public policy.

It's been said that "Politics is the art of compromise." With the legislature and the governorship potentially divided by party and ideology, Sowers of Justice and our allies need to work together to find common ground and to work for the common good. There will be cuts; there will be compromise. But our mission remains the same: to serve people in need while calling for justice in the community. We will do that through our advocacy and presence in the complex public policy conversations to come.

Most importantly, we can continue to write a story of Minnesota that protects human dignity, offers a preferential option for the poor, and serves people living in poverty and crisis. Jesus reminds us that our work for justice is not an option, but necessary to the fabric of our society.

Adam Robinson
Public Policy Organizer

Skills

Becoming More Civil--Strikes a Chord!

The first night of the Twins' baseball play-off found eighty souls gathered at St. John the Baptist Church in New Brighton to explore the issue of civility in civic discourse. People came from some 20+ parishes that night and many others would have attended had we not held the event on Wednesday's "parish education night."

The entire staff at the Office for Social Justice was struck by the fact that people from all over the Archdiocese really wanted to wrestle with this issue. Of course, in the midst of an election season and the negative political ads, it was more than obvious how much we need to focus on discourse rather than shouting and on civil rather than rude and obnoxious.

During our evening together, University of St. Thomas Professor Mike Klein, just began to scratch the surface of this topic. I personally found the discussion of distinguishing between positions and interests

very helpful. Typically when people get into a "conversation" each person displays a position on an issue and we seldom, if ever, understand what is behind the position they have taken.

For example, people who have strong feelings on immigration are not typically shy about sharing their position on the issue: The United States is being taken over by undocumented immigrants-- they should go back home and get in line. Or conversely: The United States has historically been a melting pot-- we should continue to welcome the stranger and not get hung up on national security.

These two statements are positions. But they are more than that. Behind these positions are interests that inform the listener at a deeper level. We just need to take the time to ask the right questions and actually enter into a conversation. If more time was spent and less judgment offered, could we get beyond the one line stance to the interests that drive the position? If so, we might find we have more common ground and agreement than was apparent at first blush.

What interests might actually lie behind the first statement? Perhaps:

- being unemployed but seeing Latinos working
- Anglo-Saxon interpretation of law-- strict construction
- a vacation to Arizona
- the opinion of a favorite politician

Conversely, these interests might actually lie behind the second statement:

- education in American history
- experience as a peace corps volunteer in Guatemala
- fluent in Spanish
- father was a landscaper who hired Latinos

Digging deeper into interests and having a conversation that listens to the experiences of others without challenging motives might unearth a much deeper understanding of why they take the positions they do. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will agree in the end. But it will allow us to understand at a deeper level, reflect on meaning of that understanding, and analyze if there is any common ground that can move us forward.

For sure, this approach is bound to capitalize on our responsibility to each other and might make for fewer "parking lot" conversations that occur after meetings--when people air their differences in a less than constructive way.

In this post-election time (prior to the election of 2012), let's develop some new habits that make a serious attempt to listen deeper.

Kathy Tomlin
Director

Parishes at Work

Parishes of our archdiocese are rich with activity and OSJ would like to be able to communicate and share this richness so that we all might benefit. We invite you to peruse the parish

social justice page at http://www.osjspm.org/parish_social_justice.aspx, an ever expanding list of events and ideas that share the great work going on in the metro area.

An Events Page is for you to invite others to your parish for events that you are hosting. For example, Bernie Evans is discussing the book, *Holy Longing*, at St. Therese in Deephaven on November 8, 15, 22, 29, and December 6.

What is your parish doing that others might like to take part in? A discussion or a speaker or a movie? Just give us the details and we will help get the word out!

A Social Justice Meetup Page tells you about the last conversation and the one coming up. A brief report on each meet up will be posted which includes the topic, some of the comments of the group, and conclusions if any were drawn. Information about the next meeting will also be included.

Best Practices; Good things that worked in your parish:

What is something that you have done that achieved what you were hoping it would?

- Perhaps a discussion topic with questions; maybe something at the Ministry Fair; a visit with your legislator; perhaps how to develop plans without lots of meetings

By sharing events, ideas, practices, programs and initiatives we multiply our capacity by – well – a possible 192 parishes, after mergers!

Many families are fleeing from their home countries and our American State department has asked Catholic Charities to help. People from Bhutan and Burma (Myanmar) are arriving and needing support, assistance and the human touch. Parishes can help in so many ways. The staff professionals from Catholic Charities' Migration and Refugee Services are the contacts that work with the large systems to meet the needs of our newcomers. There are small and large things, but all necessary, that parishes can do to help these refugees feel not only safe but welcomed.

What kind of things?

- Gather household items and move them into the family's apartment
- Organize a drive for bus cards, winter coats, bedding
- Help a refugee enroll in driving school, and ride with him/her for practice
- Serve as a "conversation partner" for someone learning English
- Assist a family with learning American culture, holidays, customs
- Staff a homework center for school aged children of refugees—young adults and teens can do this
- Cook together – teaching American dishes, learning cultural dishes

You can form groups and work together for big projects. Individuals can work at their own time and pace. As a parish you can work with a family in many different ways. Above all, this is an opportunity for the gospel value of hospitality – welcoming someone in and sharing who you are.

New refugees are in town and are hoping to be welcomed.

Immigration Sunday – January 2, 2011

Immigration Sunday is officially celebrated on the feast of the Epiphany in Minnesota this next year. The month of January is also considered an extended time of celebrating roots and looking at the issue of immigration today.

The Minnesota Catholic Conference has updated information for Immigration Sunday and put it all on a very user friendly website, www.immigrationsundaymn.org. If you click on **Parish Planning** you will find what you need to get everyone in the parish involved.

- The *Educational Activities* are creative with children's activities and suggestions for gathering oral histories and lots more. Select a number of different activities for the month of January.
- The *Liturgy Planning* has all you need to make the Eucharistic celebration special whether you are using Epiphany or any other Sunday in January. Be sure to have your pastor check out this site.
- The *Church Teaching* has much more including gospel foundations about migration and refugees, statements from the U.S. bishops and MN bishops.

Plan ahead and join with others in the Parish.
Make January a time for remembering and celebrating who we are
and then learning about and loving the newest among us.

Let us know...by emailing Kerry.OReilly@cctwincities.org

Immigration Tour

We have an Immigration Tour that looks at former immigrants' contributions in NE Minneapolis and contributions of today's immigrants of Somali, Hmong and Latino cultures. It is a bus tour done on a Saturday, 8:30 – 1:00, which provides interaction, discussion, song and fun.

Question:

Would you pay \$10.00 to go on the Immigration Tour? \$20.00?

OSJ VHS video Resources

We wonder if we should clear out the videos we have here at OSJ.

Question:

Does your parish still use VHS videos or are you essentially DVD focused now?

Resources and Events

Please give generously to the Catholic Campaign For Human Development (CCHD) collection at your parish this weekend!

The annual CCHD collection taken in Catholic parishes throughout the United States is the U.S. Bishops' response to poverty in America. America *needs* a response to poverty. Right now, in our country, nearly 40 million people live in poverty. Here in Minnesota, 563,000 individuals are living in poverty.

CCHD was founded 40 years ago by the Catholic bishops as they realized that outreach through established charitable services was not creating the changes needed to keep people out of poverty. They saw a need to address policies and systems that perpetuate poverty as a complement to their direct services programs.

In the last 40 years, CCHD has funded nearly 8,000 projects that empower the poor to come together and solve community problems. If you, as part of a *Jus*faith program ever participated in Journey to Justice, you've met, first-hand, people working for systemic change to address the root causes of poverty right here in the Twin Cities.

When the collection is taken, our archdiocese keeps 25% to fund small local groups who might not be ready to compete on a national level for grants. One example is Project NAVIGATE (<http://www.navigatemn.org/index.html>) The Christian Sharing Fund of CCHD was the first funder of the work of these young Latino adults who address barriers to their ability to access the higher education system. Now they're sharing what they've learned with others. The backing CSF was able to provide to NAVIGATE helped lend them credibility with other funders. While the other 75% of the collection is sent to the national CCHD office, most if not all of that comes back to fund organizations in our local community in the form of CCHD grants.

CCHD has recently gone through an extensive review and renewal process which reaffirms CCHD's Catholic foundations and priority for the poor, responds to concerns about some of CCHD's funding policies, and makes "10 Commitments" to strengthen CCHD as a faithful and effective expression of Catholic teaching and the Gospel mandate to defend the lives and dignity of those who are poor in our nation. For more information on the CCHD Review and Renewal, click here to go the CCHD website: <http://www.usccb.org/cchd/reviewandrenewal.shtml>

Thank you for your support of CCHD's efforts to help carry out the mission of Jesus Christ to "to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind and to set the downtrodden free" (Luke 4:18).

Welcome

Our New Public Policy Manager



We welcome **Marie Reigstad** to the staff of the Office for Social Justice. Marie is graduate of the Law School at the University of St. Thomas, an attorney with public policy experience at the state capitol and in Washington D.C. She did a law internship at the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota. Marie will be working with Adam and the rest of us as we move into the next legislative session. I hope you will welcome her when you get a chance to meet her soon. We are happy to have her on board!

You can contact Marie by calling 651-291-4484 or via email by [clicking here](#).