Jubilee Year of Mercy

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

“Here, then, is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favourable time to heal wounds; a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God; a time to offer everyone, everyone, the way of forgiveness and reconciliation. May the Mother of God open our eyes, so that we may comprehend the task to which we have been called; and may she obtain for us the grace to experience this Jubilee of Mercy as faithful and fruitful witnesses of Christ.” Pope Francis

In this year of mercy, we are challenged by the cries of refugees, of the members of the black community, of the poor and disenfranchised.

We are called to work toward right relationships.

We need to show that refugees are not “Skittles” candies, Black Lives do matter, Humans are not commodities to be trafficked, and income needs to be redistributed to those who are kept out of our economic system.

How will we respond to Pope Francis’ call to mercy? Will we give in to the biases being foisted on us by the media and politics? Or will we remember the words of Matthew 5:7. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

In this edition of the Social Justice Newsletter we will look at current issues and how we can respond during this Jubilee Year of Mercy and beyond.

Black Lives DO Matter

“Together, we demand an end to the wars against Black people. We demand that the government repair the harms that have been done to Black communities in the form of reparations and targeted long-term investments. We also demand a defunding of the systems and institutions that criminalize and cage us.

This document articulates our vision of a fundamentally different world. However, we recognize the need to include policies that address the immediate suffering of Black people. These policies, while less transformational, are necessary to address the current material conditions of our people and will better equip us to win the world we demand and deserve.”

from Black Lives Matter Platform
https://policy.m4bl.org/platform

This year’s LCWR resolution is “Following in the footsteps of Jesus, we commit ourselves to examine the root causes of injustice, particularly racism, and our own complicity as congregations, and to work to effect systemic change as we struggle to establish economic justice, abolish modern-day slavery, ensure immigrant rights, promote non-violence, and protect Earth and its biosphere. We pledge prayer, education, and advocacy and commit to using our collective voice, resources, and power in collaboration with others to establish justice.

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which reflects God’s abundant love and desire that all may have life.”

There is a special call to address racism as a root cause of injustice.

Each week it seems we hear about another unarmed black man being killed by police. I never have to worry about this. I have white privilege.

By saying Black Lives Matter, we are not saying any other lives do not matter. Because we say “Save the Whales,” we are not saying it’s okay to kill other endangered species. Right now black lives do not seem to be taken as seriously as others.

We have white privilege, which gives us the opportunity to use it to support our black brothers and sisters.

8th Day Center for Justice came out with a statement on White Privilege and makes suggestions.

Here are few that might continue the transforming efforts:

- Begin to own that addressing white privilege is self-work;
- Listen to Black people when they talk about their experiences;
- Organize a forum to talk about racism and privilege among your friends;
- Go to the streets and participate in protests;
- Write a letter to the editor of a publication to express your support for the Black Lives Matter movement;
- Insert yourself into a conversation if you notice another white person saying something racist.

This is our work. Now is the time!

http://www.8thdaycenter.org/content/addressing-white-privilege

One Way to Reduce Poverty in the U.S.

One issue that has been noticeably absent from our recent political conversations has been poverty. One entitlement that has helped to alleviate some of the hunger in our country is SNAP. I thank the Food Research and Action Center for their continuing work on this important issue.

“For more than four decades the supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) has been a fundamental bulwark for the poorest and hungriest people in our nation, as well as an important boost to farmers, stores and local economies. Deemed “a government reform that worked” by the National Journal, the SNAP program serves as the nation’s first line of defense against hunger.

There have been numerous proposals thrown around by opponents of SNAP about reducing SNAP spending, changing the SNAP structure, or tightening rules around eligibility and benefits. Cuts to SNAP would harm not just beneficiaries, but would damage states, localities, communities, the food industry, American agriculture, and food retailers. They would cost jobs. They would roll back a generation of progress in this nation against very deep hunger. They would destroy a bipartisan compact that for two generations has developed and sustained a strong and effective national nutrition safety net. They would reduce nutritional quality for poor families even while our nation struggles with problems of obesity and resulting health costs.

Sadly, there are provisions under current law to cut SNAP benefits for people in need. The return of a three-month time limit in many areas will contribute to further caseload and spending declines in 2016. More than 500,000 and as many as 1 million of the nation’s poorest people

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We commit ourselves

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will be cut off SNAP over the course of 2016, due to the return in many areas of the three-month time limit on benefits for unemployed and underemployed childless adults aged 18-49 who are not disabled (known as “ABAWDs”). These individuals will lose their SNAP benefits regardless of how hard they are looking for work or whether there are sufficient work or training opportunities available.

A strong, robust SNAP program helps many millions of seniors, people with disabilities, children, struggling parents – working and unemployed – and others thrive. With a strong, robust SNAP program, our country will see less hunger and poverty, better health and educational outcomes, increased productivity, and lower health costs. The nation as a whole will be stronger – morally, economically and fiscally.

We oppose changes that would harm needy people, increase hunger, and dilute the program’s strengths described above.

Instead, we support key proposals to strengthen the program:

1. Legislation that would improve SNAP benefits, including a bill (H.R. 3657) to require SNAP benefits be calculated with reference to the cost of the Low-Cost Food Plan rather than the inadequate Thrifty Food Plan.

2. Legislation to ameliorate the harsh time limits on benefits for certain jobless adults (“ABAWDs”) willing to work (S. 2420, H.R. 1025).” Food Research Action Center

The Refugee Crisis

“Dear President Obama, remember the boy who was picked up by the ambulance in Syria?” Alex wrote in a letter published by the White House. “Can you please go get him and bring him to our home... we’ll be waiting for you guys with flags, flowers and balloons. We will give him a family and he will be our brother.”

Alex, 6 years old

“As a member of the United Nations, the United States is committed to providing asylum for refugees. UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) recognizes the sovereign right of governments to control their borders and ensure their national security, and many states have adopted measures aimed at preventing people without proper documents from entering their territory. However, if applied indiscriminately, those same measures can also create obstacles for refugees and asylum-seekers in genuine need of international protection. While refugees and asylum-seekers account for only a small proportion of the estimated 200 million people on the move in the world today, they are finding it ever more difficult to gain access to countries where they can seek protection.

“Everyone is entitled to exercise their fundamental human rights under international law. Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in an irregular situation are no exception to that rule. In reality, however, their rights are often violated. In places throughout the world, they are subjected to arbitrary and discriminatory treatment. In some of the world’s most prosperous states, people, including women and children, who

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have arrived without the required papers can be held in detention for weeks or months on end, even after they apply for asylum.

“Even the fundamental human rights principle of non-refoulement—that people should not be returned to a country where their lives or liberty are at risk—is being tested. A recent rash of involuntary returns of people who may need international protection in regions across the globe testifies to the vulnerability of even this long-established legal norm.

“Adding to the overall erosion of asylum are increasingly negative public attitudes in some countries toward foreigners, including refugees and asylum-seekers. There has been a perceptible rise in racist and xenophobic acts in many nations, sometimes fueled by politicians and the media.”
— UNHCR

Encourage your representatives to take in refugees that are fleeing for their lives from Syria and challenge other countries to do the same.

Everyone, let us be more like Alex.

Collaborative to End Human Trafficking

The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking sponsored a luncheon on September 15, 2016 entitled “CLE Unites to End Human Trafficking.” As one of the Sponsors, at the level of “Partner,” our congregation had a table for eight. Attending were: Sister Barbara Ennis, Sister Carol Ann Killoran, Sister Francis Therese Woznicki, Associate Jeanne Boros, Sister Joyce Soukup, Sister Judith Wood, Sister Sandy LoPorto, and Ms. Sunnie Poplar. Nearly ten years ago, the Collaborative identified its mission as one of educating, advocating, and connecting services on behalf of trafficked persons. Following are reflections from some of the participants.

“T”his event was such an eye opener. Human trafficking is modern day slavery. Those who are trafficked are not just those from other countries, but right here in Cleveland and in all over our nation. And the circumstances that got them into this are tragic and familiar—drugs, alcohol, runaways from home, foster children, sold on the Internet. All these are vulnerable people. And in this situation—needing money, needing attention—they fall prey to someone who promises to take care of them, and then forces them into sex, or labor, to get the payment for the “care” they provided. There are many other ways of trafficking, but this was all a new learning for me. I was provided with an overview of all the services that those who are trafficked need, and this event showed that it has to be a “collaborative” of groups working together who have to address this problem and service those who are trafficked.”
—Sister Sandy LoPorto

“For over 10 years the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking in Cleveland has grown to nearly 30 organizations and agencies working together to make a difference in today’s experience of modern-day slavery. The speakers at the luncheon demonstrated the real effectiveness of a multi-disciplinary response to the very human challenges of trafficking.

The stories the speakers shared let us glimpse not only the expertise of professionals... but the very real and tragic experiences of people living among us. We witnessed the commitment of so many in the Cleveland area to bring law enforcement, social services, medical services and educational efforts together in response to this growing need.

The witness of the Executive Director of the Ohio

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Hotel & Lodging Association regarding efforts they are making to educate their 35,000 employees in the red flags to identify human trafficking in the hotel work setting was one more safety net for victims. I was grateful to hear how this collaborative effort is being supported in the Cleveland area and is serving as a model throughout Ohio and the nation. Yes, as it was pointed out, Cleveland has more than a winning sports team to be proud of!

I was also grateful for the financial donation made by our community in support of the work of the Collaborative. Wonderful things can be achieved in working together."

—Sister Joyce Soukup

"Ten years ago I joined a small focus group on the plight of exploited men, women and children known as Trafficking—another form of human slavery. To learn of it then was sad, shocking and could leave you feeling totally helpless to do anything, unless many groups joined together. For this event, 10 years later, 300 people filled the room!! This program demonstrated the power of working together across religious and civic lines. Speakers represented all areas in which victims could be encountered and therefore, helped: lawmakers; safety forces; medical profession, crisis centers and most notably, the hotel industry. All speakers made the point for all of us to be aware of "red flags" by which someone’s hidden suffering might be recognized. I am grateful that our community was one of the sponsors."

—Sr. Francis Therese Woznicki

"What was most impressive to me was the way in which the police, hospitals and providers of housing are working together to ensure that the needs of those who are the victims of human trafficking are addressed appropriately. Having worked in the field of child abuse for over twenty years, I experienced that kind of collaboration was sorely lacking in the past. Each of the speakers discussed how they are working to increase collaboration.”

—Sister Judith Wood

"STONG—POWERFUL—COURAGEOUS—RESILIENT

There are people all over the world and even right here in northeast Ohio who have these qualities. You see them in various places—hotels, eating places, factories, massage parlors etc. No! They are not people to whom you would normally attribute these qualities.

They range in age from 13 to 50. They are the victims of human trafficking, both sex and labor trafficking. These are not innate qualities but have been developed in order to have survived the circumstances through which they have gone."

—Sister Barbara Ennis

Attending the Event
and representing the SSJ-TOSF Congregation

Sisters Barbara Ennis, Sandy LoPorto, Joyce Soukup, Francis Therese Woznicki, Associate Jeanne Boros, and Sister Judith Wood
Civil Discourse Grounded in Empathy
by Sister Rose Grabowski

In the last issue of our newsletter, which I edited, Sister Dorothy Pagosa had shared an article entitled “Civil Discourse: ‘Creating Just Language.’” This month I am following up on that topic with a Letter to the Editor that was published in the Stevens Point Journal, written by Lois Lawler for our Social Justice Book Club which meets here at St. Joseph Motherhouse each week.

To the Editor:

Among the books recently discussed by the Social Justice Book Club that meets weekly at the Sisters of St. Joseph, TOSF Motherhouse was an outstanding publication, Healing the Heart of Democracy. In it, Wisconsin author Parker Palmer makes the case for civil discourse as essential to the preservation of democracy.

Openness to the other, sincere listening, a willingness to share in experiences and feelings foreign to us, and the ability to hold the tension created by diversity—all are needed if we are to engage constructively in our society.

Palmer emphasizes that engaging in civil discourse requires empathy—the ability to feel with another, to enter into another’s experience and to share on an emotional level the feelings the experience generates.

On an international level, in April 2016 Pope Francis addressed scientists, physicians, patients, religious leaders, philanthropists and government officials gathered to discuss the healing of rare diseases. Here, too, empathy emerged as a major theme, indicated by part of the Pope’s message in his statement, “The globalization of indifference must be countered by the globalization of empathy.”

Empathy is the key to the civil discourse we so desperately need in our country. It is also a source for healing.

—Lois Lawler for the Social Justice Book Club (meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph, TOSF)

Recommended Resources

Movie “Snowden”

Is he a traitor or a hero? He revealed how much data the government was gathering that he felt was unconstitutional. Others are concerned that he released info. There is a movement to call for the President to pardon him.

8th Day Center Resource Books

- Feminist Platform: Looking at current issues through its impacts on women.
- Creating Just Language: Language matters. It can extol or it can demean.

Go to www.8thdaycenter.org

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of
- “Sightings”
- Brief write-ups of your activities, “prototypes,” suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.

Note: The next issue of We Commit Ourselves will be published in December.

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to Associate Maxine Smith by November 23rd—the day before Thanksgiving.

~ Your Social Justice Committee