

The Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop of St. Louis
The Catholic Center
4445 Lindell Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63108

27 January 2004

Dear Archbishop Raymond Burke,

Welcome to St. Louis. The members of the Catholic Action Network for Social Justice (CAN) would like to introduce you to our organization, and a few of the social justice issues facing St. Louisans. We hope you will join us as a voice for peace and justice in this Archdiocese. St. Louis has a rich tradition of commitment to social justice issues, with faithful leadership from those who have gone before us such as Cardinal Ritter and Mev Puleo.

The Catholic Action Network for Social Justice is a grassroots, action-focused organization that affirms and acts on the living tradition of Catholic Social Teachings in the everyday life of the Church. Our founding in 1999 was related to a decline in support from Archdiocesan officials for the Human Rights Commission of the Archdiocese. Its standing committee structure was dismantled and its former members created the Catholic Action Network to address the pressing need for a Catholic voice for social justice in the St. Louis community. The Catholic Action Network will continue to have a prophetic voice in the community, and also hope that we can work with the Archdiocese on certain justice issues.

The enclosed paper will provide an introduction to five issues of justice that affect St. Louis Catholics:

- Fair Trade Coffee
- Justice, Evangelization, and Urban Sprawl in St. Louis
- The Labor Movement in St. Louis
- The Role of Women in the Church
- The St. Louis Instead of War Coalition

We have included background, present circumstances, and requests for specific actions for each topic. These are issues that influence Catholics from the inner city of St. Louis to the widest suburbs and rural areas. We hope you will read this paper in the spirit in which it was written- to create dialogue between CAN and Archdiocesan officials.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. Please contact Jenny Truax, CAN Program Coordinator, at your earliest convenience to discuss any of these matters. We look forward to hearing from you, and again welcome you to the St. Louis Archdiocese.

For the members of the Catholic Action Network for Social Justice, yours faithfully in Christ,

Jenny Truax
Program Coordinator
The Catholic Action Network for Social Justice

FAIR TRADE COFFEE IN ST. LOUIS

Introduction

Coffee is the world's most heavily traded product behind petroleum, and is the largest food import of the United States. Approximately 20 million farmers and coffee workers in over 50 countries produce coffee, often for extremely low wages (\$2-3/day) and in poor working conditions. Many coffee farmers receive prices for their harvest that are less than the costs of production, forcing them into a cycle of poverty and debt. Furthermore, the rural nature of farm work makes workers especially vulnerable to threats and coercion by plantation owners. In the past 5 years, certification agencies that ensure a living wage, just working conditions, and basic human rights have emerged. TransFair USA is the primary certification organization in the United States, certifying Fair Trade coffee, tea, chocolate and other products.

History in St. Louis

Several community organizing groups have educated the St. Louis public on the importance of Fair Trade since 1998, including the InterFaith Committee on Latin America, St. Louis University's Pax Christi Chapter, and the Catholic Action Network for Social Justice. An increasing number of retailers, including Plowsharing Crafts, Kaldi's Coffeehouse, MacroSun Intl. and People's Coffee, supply Fair Trade products locally. Equal Exchange, a highly-respected Fair Trade coffee provider founded in 1986, features a wholesale web-store for churches, individuals and organizations.

Relationship to Church

The Catholic Church has a long history of promoting positive solutions to global injustice in the area of labor and global trade. Church teaching supports trade structures that place people over profit:

“The Church in America must encourage the international agencies of the continent to establish an economic order dominated not only by the profit motive but also by the pursuit of the common good of nations and of the international community, the equitable distribution of goods and the integral development of peoples” (**Ecclesia in America**)

Many St. Louis Catholic parishes now serve Fair Trade coffee after Mass, and several make weekly orders for parishioners to purchase the coffee in household quantities. **The Church should vocally support such efforts, and provide leadership by serving Fair Trade coffee at all Archdiocesan functions.**

Emerging Issues

Catholic Relief Services allied with Equal Exchange in November 2003 in an effort to “... connect Catholic communities in the United States with their brothers and sisters around the world.” CRS hopes to enlist 1,900 parishes, or 10 percent of the nation's Catholic churches, in the program. **The Church should participate in this campaign by encouraging Archdiocesan parishes to buy all coffee from the InterFaith Coffee Program of Equal Exchange, and by featuring information on Fair Trade in the St. Louis Review.**

JUSTICE, EVANGELIZATION AND URBAN SPRAWL IN ST. LOUIS

Introduction

As is the case in most urban centers across the nation, St. Louis city and also the inner rim suburbs are suffering a continual depletion of population, jobs, and services. It has been documented that St. Louis is the most distressed urban center in the whole country when measuring the number of people moving out of the urban center as a ratio of population per unit of land. A familiar list of causes includes the migration of businesses and jobs out of the urban center (partially subsidized by state tax dollars,) and inadequate tax and private funding for public transportation.

Given the duration of the trend toward depletion of St. Louis city, there is every reason to expect that it will continue if there is no change in policies by civic leadership and if there is no change in the current every-parish-for-itself approach to evangelization.

Inter-Church Issues

The evangelizing mission of the remaining (merged) Catholic schools is under-focused, and not supported enough financially by the rest of the diocese to prevent these schools from continuing to close. Each school closure destabilizes the neighborhood of that school. A recent attempt by the North City Dean to meet with alderpersons to ask their help in getting businesses to support Catholic schools resulted in no attendance by the alderpersons. **Vocal support directed from the St. Louis Archdiocese to the alderpersons would help address this issue.**

In relation to city parishes, often priests are assigned without proper training in regards to the ethnicity and the various needs of that parish. Typically, the result of this haphazard transition is a shoddy mix of rather poor Church ministries. This contributes to the migration of people from the city.

The diocese has sent significant financial help to distressed parishes and schools in the city, especially for building maintenance, but for the most part, these parishes must find their own way when it comes to evangelizing in their neighborhoods. **Increasing financial support, pastoral training and creative funding solutions for these parishes would build a more integrated and authentic St. Louis Archdiocese.**

Emerging Issues

There is insufficient funding of health care needs in the City of St. Louis. The last trauma center in the north side, De Paul Hospital's center, found funding for one more year of operation last year, and may be closing very soon. **Parishes need effective methods of organizing "bridge"-type healing discussions to help heal racism between different parts of the the St. Louis region, and they need community organizing training to address new stresses, including poor health care, in neighborhoods.**

Lack of affordable housing and health hazards in older city housing such as lead paint, remains a serious problem in St. Louis. **The Church should support efforts at providing affordable housing and lead abatement in St. Louis.**

Due to recent budget cuts, the Archdiocesan Human Rights Office has not been given sufficient resources to offer leadership to help the local Church address these justice issues. **The diocese may want to consider a more comprehensive utilization of this office in order to address these regional issues as a whole diocese with one prophetic voice.**

LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN AREA

Introduction

The Catholic Church in St. Louis has for many years had a strong relationship with the labor movement. It springs from the fact that many members of labor unions, especially the building trades, are also active Catholics in their own parishes. Another historic factor has been the influence of two priests in particular, Monsignor John A Shocklee and Father Leo Brown, SJ.

Issues in St. Louis

Several labor issues in St. Louis provide a framework in which to place the St. Louis Church:

1. The recent strike of the Retail Clerks (2003) against the Schnuck, Dierberg and Shop & Save Grocery Chains.
2. The effort to raise consciousness of the practices of Wal-Mart, including right of workers to organize, worker compensation, and a potential link to sweatshops, and seemingly irresponsible real estate and business practices.
3. The continuing work of locally- based groups like the National Farmworker Ministry, Jobs with Justice and the Workers' Rights Board, and national resources such as the Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice.

Inter-Church Issues

Addressing the dignity of human labor from *within* the Church is even more important because it gives integrity to issues raised in the marketplace. With the lessening of the Human Rights Commission's role within the structure of the Human Rights Office, the Labor & Religion Committee disappeared, resulting in the loss of formal relationships between those charged for advocating for human rights and the organized labor movement. Both are poorer for it. **The Church would benefit from initiating a revival of these relationships.**

The second area is offering formal recognition to the Archdiocesan Catholic Elementary Educators (ACEE) as a collective bargaining agent. This formal recognition was years ago extended to secondary teachers of the Archdiocesan system. It appears as discriminatory not to offer the same standing to elementary teachers. **The Church would benefit from offering formal recognition to ACEE as a collective bargaining agent.**

Emerging Issues

The Catholic Church should support labor in: 1) creating and improving education systems, 2) ensuring that jobs are not exported to nations where workers are paid much lower and benefits nonexistent, 3) supporting the 40-hour work week and overtime pay, 4) supporting immigrants and their human rights, 5) actively support groups that seek to organize low-wage workers so that persons of color may gain access to union membership.

These are areas that not only have helped to address the needs of individual workers, but have also enabled family life to be stronger and have made authentic community life within the Church possible.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

In 1998 “Catholic Women for Justice” was formed in St. Louis in anticipation of Pope John Paul II’s visit. The group wanted the pontiff to understand the ongoing suffering of women in the St. Louis Diocese whose call to the ordained ministries has been ignored. This group held a prayer service on the steps of the Cathedral Basilica that was attended by 600 Catholic men, women and children. With such participation, an obvious need emerged for an ongoing group to address the issue of women in the Church. The group reorganized and affiliated with the Catholic Action Network for Social Justice, changing its name to Justice for Women in the Catholic Church (JWCC) to better reflect its mission.

Issues in St. Louis

The St. Louis Archdiocese is facing the crisis of school and parish closings, as are many dioceses across the county. Unlike other geographic areas, however, the St. Louis Archdiocese is not using the laity in positions of parish administrators, which would avoid parish closings due priest shortages.

The diocese is uniquely blessed with many qualified laity, due to the wealth of women religious and the presence of the Aquinas Institute. Catholic parishes are an anchor for many neighborhoods in St. Louis. Parish closings destroy the support networks and ministries that are fostered within the geographic boundaries of a neighborhood. Laity understand this, are a permanent part of the community and as parish administrators have a vested interest in the parish’s survival. **The Archdiocese should promote the laity of St. Louis in the roles of parish administrators, so that the role of priest can be freed up to concentrate on the sacraments.**

Church Issues

Within the Catholic Church, JWCC advocates for the full participation for women in all leadership positions including priestly ordination. Our Protestant and Jewish brothers and sisters have come to understand this as a justice issue. **The Catholic Church should look to these faiths in discerning a role model for ordained women.**

People interested in this issue, and committed to justice for women in the Church are predominantly active members of local parishes and committed Catholics, involved in parish councils, Vincent de Paul Societies, RCIA, and Social Justice Ministries. This wide group of Catholics promote a diverse, feminine face of the Church in the 21st century.

Emerging Issues

1. The need for women in leadership to prevent parishes in St. Louis from closing
2. The need for women’s voices in decision-making at the Archdiocesan level
3. The need for women’s voices, stories and prophetic witness at the pulpit

The Archdiocese should initiate an honest and inclusive dialogue on the role of women in church decision-making, and on the question of women’s ordination. It is necessary not only because of the shortage of priests, but because we are standing in the way of the work of the Spirit to do otherwise.

THE INSTEAD OF WAR COALITION IN ST. LOUIS

Introduction

The St. Louis Instead of War Coalition (IOW) is the successor coalition to the St. Louis Forum for a Just Peace, which sought to prevent the first Gulf War in 1991 and to end the sanctions on Iraq through out the 1990. IOW is a member of the national United for Justice and Peace network, a coalition of more than 650 local and national groups joined together to oppose the U.S. government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building.

History in St. Louis

The Instead of War Coalition has mobilized thousands of St. Louisans from its beginnings shortly after September 11th, 2001. In July, August and September of 2002, IOW organized educational house meetings, which were followed up by a Town Hall Meeting at the University City Library Auditorium This event attracted over 400 people. Throughout the fall of 2002, IOW members initiated hundreds of letters, faxes, phone calls, and met with aides from both Rep. Gephardt and Sen. Carnahan offices. In October and March, IOW coordinated two nonviolent direct actions at the Boeing Missile Plant in St. Charles. The plant is producing guidance systems for cruise missiles and smart bombs for the war on Iraq.

The months of December, January, February, and March each saw massive local rallies for peace. Each successive event increased in number until over 4500 artists, religious activists, labor union, university students, veterans, high school students and children gathered for the "World Wants Peace Rally".

Relationship to Church

The Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese was a member of the St. Louis Forum for a Just Peace. It has not participated in the Instead of War Coalition. However, hundreds of members of Catholic religious orders and St. Louis area parishes have been active participants in the Instead of War Coalition.

Pope John Paul II spoke out clearly against the U.S, invasion of Iraq, meeting with world leaders, issuing statements, and even calling on Catholics to fast for peace on Ash Wednesday in 2003. Locally, the Catholic Action Network for Social Justice was a founding member of the Instead of War Coalition, and has held a candlelight vigil for peace every Sunday evening since September 23, 2001.

Emerging Issues

The Instead of War Coalition recently initiated a "Feed the People, Not the War" campaign, recognizing existing programs that provide food and meals, and publicly identifying this work as an alternative war. The campaign includes yard signs that read "Feed the People, Not the War" and "Instead of War, Work for Justice" and a series of Potluck Dinners for Peace. A number of Catholic parishes are participating in the distribution of the new yard sign. **The Archdiocese should support this campaign by helping with sign distribution, offering public support through appropriate media, and coordinating with IOW.**

The United for Justice and Peace national network is planning a global day of action for justice and peace on March 20, the first anniversary of the war on Iraq. Corresponding IOW plans in St. Louis include a March 19 send-off rally and a "Peace Train" to the national rally in Chicago. **The Church should vocally support this event, encouraging attendance from St. Louis Catholics.**

