

Social Justice at OLQP

Looking back at the rich social justice tapestry at OLQP, it is clear that the universal church has changed much in the past 63 years. At the time of our founding in 1945, most parishes were limited to women's sodalities, men's groups and nocturnal adoration. Today, Queen of Peace has morphed into a vibrant parish with about sixty ministries. When Fr. David Ray arrived as OLQP's 5th pastor in 1958, no one could have predicted the enormous changes that would transform both the church and American society. OLQP remained a predominantly Black parish as the 1950s ended; people of different races, ethnicities and, in many cases, economic status, worshiped separately.

By 1960 the world was changing. John F. Kennedy, an Irish Catholic, was elected President. Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II in 1962 and when it ended in 1965, the Church embarked on changes that included new perceptions of the role of women, the family and the liturgy. There was also a mandate for the Church to recognize the value of the cultural identities and human rights of all its members, and Catholic Social Teaching was emphasized, with greatly enhanced roles for the laity.

Developments in the United States were fueled by the growing civil rights movement, led by a young, charismatic Southern Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, Jr. African Americans could not use facilities used by whites. Blacks had to use separate entrances to doctor's offices and sit in separate waiting rooms. They could only sit in the balcony or in other designated areas of theaters. They had to ride at the back of streetcars and buses. The lunch counter in Peoples drug store in Arlington was closed in 1960 rather than serve Black students. But sit-in tactics and demonstrations ultimately succeeded because of their moral force -- and because businesses lost sales. The struggle wasn't easy -- by 1964, five years after the end of 'Massive Resistance,' only 5 percent of black students in Virginia attended integrated schools.

Responding to Dr. King's call for "equality for all people", Father Ray and several OLQP parishioners boarded a bus from the church parking lot on August 28, 1963 to participate in the March on Washington where they witnessed Dr. King deliver his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Fr. Ray and members of the parish established the Catholic Interracial Council of Northern Virginia to work on issues of poverty, employment and fair housing.

Some of its members included Connie Latier, John Phoenix, Dixie Rigdon, Joe Wholey, Emerson Hynes, Frances Kelly, Patricia Bonbrake, and Marguerite Thomas.

OLQP got designated boundaries only in 1963. During the 1960s, a modest number of whites began to attend services at OLQP. Fr. Ray's service as military chaplain at Ft. Myer resulted in many military families becoming members of OLQP. Under Fr. Ray's 25 years of leadership, community-oriented programs were created, including the tradition of a nutritious breakfast after Mass. Central to his philosophy were the words of Matthew 25:35 -- this concept of helping others less fortunate was embraced by OLQP. Rather than solely handing out food baskets at Christmas and Thanksgiving, or sponsoring used clothing drives, OLQP inaugurated the Family Activities Center, a child care center for low income families, as well as a federally chartered credit union in 1965. Remedial reading classes and after-school tutoring were offered in the FAC for eight years. The first officers of the credit union were Cornelius Vahle (president), Jack Casey (treasurer), and Jackie Alfred, nee Smith (secretary). Alvin and Mary Batiste were founding members of the Family Activities Center; Alberta Thurmond served for 25 years as its third director. The initial Board of Directors of the FAC included Father Ray, John Reed, Arthur Roehrl, Daniel Morrissey, Ethel Camp, Elise Smith, Carol Tuttle, Raymond Jay, Sylvester Puryear, Floyd Agostinelli, and Susan Cooney. After his death in 1983, the FAC was renamed Fr. Ray Hall. The hall served another vital function: it was one of the few places Blacks had available for social events and community meetings.

During the 1960s, Bishop John Russell of Richmond allowed our parish to use a farm, 'Our Acres,' in Penola, Caroline County, roughly midway between Richmond and Frederick, as part of OLQP's child development/Montessori program. Children from the FAC, residents of the shelter Fr. Ray ran in the rectory basement, and parishioners planted crops there; the farm was a place of respite for children with few recreational opportunities. In 1974 the Diocese of Arlington was formed from the northern counties of Virginia, extending from the Northern Neck of the Potomac River to the Appalachian Mountains (21 counties and seven independent cities.) Arlington diocese consists of approximately a sixth of the Commonwealth of Virginia but there are almost twice as many Catholics living in our diocese as in the Diocese of Richmond.

The mid-sixties were pivotal times for the Church. As mentioned, Pope John Paul XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Fundamental change was expressed in *The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, issued at the end of the Council in November, 1965: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts....” Of course, Pope Leo XIII had inaugurated the Church’s modern day concern about social justice with his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*” in 1891, but it took Vatican II to move social justice and peace from the periphery to the center of what it means to be Catholic. The duty of every Catholic was clearly defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997):

There exist also *sinful inequalities* that affect millions of men and women. These are in open contradiction of the Gospel:

Their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace.⁴⁴ (Section 1938)

During the 1970s, the diversity of OLQP was enriched by arrivals from Central and South America. With vibrant and expressive liturgies and dynamic and rich cultures, Spanish-speaking individuals and families became an integral part of the parish. During the early 1970s, Hispanics attended services in English. The present 1:00 PM. liturgy in Spanish began in 1985; at the same time, a Latino choir was established and ESL classes were offered through Hogar Hispano, part of Catholic Charities. At the request of Fr. James Healy, in 1990 Fr. Joseph Nangle, O.F.M. became the third priest to serve OLQP’s Hispanic community.

Fr. James Healy, pastor from 1984-1995, an extremely gifted homilist, was passionately committed to social justice. Fr. Healy’s vision for the parish was one of full and active participation, and through his dynamic preaching, he called people to be involved in the parish as well as in the community. With his powerful presentation of the Gospel, he attracted many to the parish, challenging and creating opportunities for them to put their

faith into practice. The parish began “Ministry Sunday” on Pentecost 1986 to assist parishioners in choosing ministries that suited their talents and interests. This was followed by “Commitment Sunday” in September, when parishioners enrolled in their chosen ministry. In 1989, a Social Services Office was opened, with Sr. Mary Healy, Fr. Healy’s sister, providing counseling in many areas. In 1991, Juan Pablo Ordoñez became the full-time director of the parish Office of Social Ministries, but after a year or two, the position became part-time, and it was held by a succession of ministers, male and female. Fr. Healy departed in April 1995 due to illness. At that time associate pastor Fr. Edward Kelly, who Fr. Healy had called out of retirement in 1989 to assist at OLQP, became parish administrator. Fr. Ed animated us with his example and ‘no frills,’ on target social justice homilies for eleven blessed years. Fr. Healy often admitted that he got many of his inspirations from Fr. Ed. The parish published Fr. Ed’s collected sermons shortly after his death in July 2000.

Evolution of our social justice effort at Queen of Peace was not overnight. Direct service activities came first; in 1972, a simple building was erected in the rear of the parking lot to house “Matthew 25 Bazaar,” where used clothing and basic household articles were recycled. The Credit Union shared a small corner of this facility. From 1979 to 1987, the parish ran a shelter for homeless men, providing food and counseling in the rectory basement (now the parish office building) until the County began to press for a zoning permit to operate a group home. Eventually, the parish decided to direct its resources to support County-run programs for homeless individuals while maintaining a commitment to aid all who seek help with referrals and funding for emergency assistance.

In 1985, a **Social Justice Committee** evolved from the Hunger Study Group; Fr. Kelly was a very active participant. Over the years, affordable housing and homelessness, work on the Living Wage in Alexandria, Arlington and nationally, action to stop genocide in Darfur and the pandemic of AIDS in Africa have had high priorities. A Black Dimensions Committee was established in 1987 to reflect the special commitment of the parish to remember, reverence and celebrate the faith and gifts of our founders. It was later renamed the UJAMAA Committee, meaning ‘family’ and mutual cooperation. In the late 1990’s we had an extremely active AIDS ministry, which eventually dissolved when no one stepped forward to lead the effort. OLQP began participation in the “Christmas in

April" program in 1989, since renamed "Rebuilding Together" to help low income and elderly people repair and stay in their homes.

In September 1995, Fr. Jeffrey Duaine was assigned pastor. Having been a missionary in Haiti, he helped establish our twinning relationship with St. Joseph parish in Medor, Haiti. He also helped institute an Interfaith Service with Mt. Zion Baptist Church and the Unitarian Universalist (2000) Church of Arlington in 1999 to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's holiday, an annual liturgy that has become an interdenominational celebration of prayer and exceptional musical attended by participants from other congregations. Fr. Jeff initiated planning for our Ministry center and supported acquisition of a new rectory building at 1901 Edgewood in 2002.

The **Social Justice Committee** has worked closely to lobby with SALT (Social Action Linked Together), the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, NETWORK the National Catholic Lobby, and other groups. About four years ago, we joined around 40 other congregations in Northern Virginia to form an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate which last fall was named **VOICE**, *Virginians Organizing for Interfaith Community Engagement*. In March, VOICE's issue areas were selected, all of great interest to OLQP: housing, homelessness immigration, and health care. We are now working towards our first 'public action,' to be held in the Woodbridge area on October 5th, during which specific proposals in each of these areas will be put forward for elected representatives' response. Queen of Peace's goal is to turn out 50-100 parishioners for this kick-off event, which will be the opening round of a multi-year community organizing campaign. Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) is in its twelfth year and Action in Montgomery (AIM) has celebrated eight years. Both have made steady progress on a variety of issues. Although it will be a long struggle in Northern Virginia, we can aspire to the kinds of gains achieved in Washington, where Mayor Fenty and other leaders committed \$1 billion in new revenue for neighborhoods this May, which will mean 14,000 affordable homes for DC residents. Action in Montgomery is pressuring County Executive Ike Leggett to quadruple the county's housing budget, to \$80,000 by FY 2010.

In October, 2000, Gene Betit was hired as full-time Social Justice Outreach Minister. Parishioners reached out to the unemployed to create a web-based Job Bank for three years from 2001-4, and shortly afterwards a Computer Lab was born. Ministry in general

received a big boost when the Ministry Center was completed in the spring of 2003. The new store-like facility in the Ministry Center tremendously upgraded Matt 25. In the last four years, we inaugurated the Just\$ program, selling Giant and Shoppers cards and certificates to raise funds for our Early Learning Center and a local rural program in Kenya assisting AIDS orphans. This fall will mark our fifth year of JustFAITH, a 30-week program of studying the root causes of social justice problems and exploring workable solutions and the Lenten Stone Soup series started in the 80's was joined by the Fr. Ed Series at Fr. Tuozzolo's initiative.

After serving as Executive Director and Co-Director of the Franciscan Mission Service for twelve years, Fr. Joe Nangle became associate pastor of Queen of Peace in January 2006. In December 2007, he was elected chair of the Social Justice Committee. As you know, this June I retired and Fred Cain became our second full-time Social Justice Outreach Minister. Recently, the intent to hire a Youth Minister was advertised, an important step which will integrate young people into parish life and the work of social justice. Katie Remedios, hired as Director of Religious Education in August 2007, has laid the foundation for a totally revamped program built on the pillars of social action. With this retreat, we are counting on each of you will help write new pages in a collaborative effort to achieve social justice, producing fruitful efforts badly needed in a world filled with grinding poverty and devoid of peace.