

LIVING OUR FAITH at St Philip Neri

January 2004 Volume 2 Issue 1

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable. Welcome to the latest issue of "Living our Faith," the Peace & Justice Commission newsletter. This issue highlights another core theme of Catholic Social Teaching – the option for the poor and vulnerable. To make an option for the poor is to make a commitment to transforming society into a place where human rights and the dignity of all are respected. This option, or choice, can be made by individuals or by communities or even by a whole church. On the back page of this issue, you will learn more about how this commitment is lived out in our parish community through our participation in the **Daybreak Shelter** for homeless families and our new **Refugee Resettlement** program.

The Gospels and Catholic Social Teaching place service to the poor and vulnerable at the center of Christian witness. Concern for the poor echoes through the Scriptures - in the passion of the prophets, the words and witness of Jesus, and the example of the early Church.

In the *Old Testament*, God calls his people to care for those on the margins of society. The Book of Genesis teaches us that every person is made in God's image and likeness and endowed with inalienable dignity.

In the *New Testament*, we learn how Jesus loved those who were poor or vulnerable in a special way. In the Parables of the Rich Man and Lazarus and of the Young Rich Man, Jesus urged us not to ignore those who are suffering in our midst and warned that attachment to riches can be a barrier to discipleship.

"How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads? . . . Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning His voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty."

*Pope John Paul II
Novo Millennio Ineunte*

The call to overcome poverty and to uphold human dignity is not new. It is as old as the prophets and as current as today's headlines. Today this challenge is especially compelling because we have the capacity to make a difference and because the impact of rapid globalization makes it more urgent.

In our world and nation, many of our sisters and brothers live in poverty. The causes are complex, but the results are clear. They cannot find decent work, feed their families, educate their children, secure health care, or find adequate housing. Millions of children live in nations with too much debt and not enough development, in societies with deadly diseases and inadequate health care, in lands where conflict and corruption leave people without a place at the table.

"As Catholics, we must come together with a common conviction that we can no longer tolerate the moral scandal of poverty in our land and so much hunger and deprivation in our world. As believers, we can debate how best to overcome these realities, but we must be united in our determination to do so. Our faith teaches us that poor people are not issues or problems but sisters and brothers in God's one human family."

- A Place at the Table

US Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of helping people at risk. Each of us is called to serve those in need. Through parishes and dioceses and through committees and organizations, **we house the homeless, feed the hungry, welcome immigrants**, and provide countless other services. While we can be proud of what the Church and our parish already do, there is much more to be done. Please read about ways you can help meet the demands of the Gospel and needs of our sisters and brothers on the next page. If we can **make time in our busy lives to assist those with urgent needs**, we be answering God's call to commit to the poor and vulnerable among us.

Refugee Resettlement Committee. Did you know that there are approximately 20 million people in the world today who have been forced from their homes due to conflict or persecution? St. Philip Neri, working in conjunction with Catholic Charities, will host a refugee family from Africa in January or February.

Africa currently has 4.6 million refugees, most coming from countries that have been in civil war for years, sometimes decades. Because refugees are not always able to return home or remain in their country of refuge for security reasons, third party governments allow certain refugees to seek asylum. The US government allows 70,000 refugees to gain permanent residency within the US each year. Despite the best efforts of countries of asylum to help people who have fled their country, the trauma and suffering of refugees doesn't quickly disappear. They are rarely able to simply pick up everyday activities in a new setting and live and work as they did before. Through resettlement, refugees gain legal protection from a host government and assistance from private organizations to adapt to a new way of life.

The Refugee Resettlement committee has identified five areas that parishioners can contribute to:

- ❖ **Welcome committee** will greet the new arrivals at the airport, take them to their new apartment and help them settle in...showing them how to use the appliances, orienting them to the neighborhood and providing moral support.
- ❖ **Transportation committee** will assist the refugees in fulfilling appointments during their first month in town at the SSA, doctor's offices, grocer's etc. They will also assist with getting goods to the family's apartment prior to their arrival.
- ❖ **Goods Collection committee** will put together furniture and other household items needed by the new family in order to get established in Portland.
- ❖ **Cultural Orientation committee** will provide long-term assistance to the family helping them to acclimate to life in a new country...helping them find their way around the city, connect with others from their home region, learn about the dos and don'ts of American culture, and simply offer friendship.
- ❖ **ESL committee** will provide assistance to adults and/or children in learning the English language.

Please consider what you can contribute to a refugee family in need of support and assistance. Contact Debbie Driscoll 503-235-2648 or Anne Santiago 503-777-1160 for more information.

Daybreak Shelter is a family shelter currently operated by Human Solutions in cooperation with congregations from various spiritual traditions, including St. Philip Neri.

Daybreak provides temporary shelter and support to homeless families as they look for housing and employment. This program is unique in that it keeps families together during this process as opposed to separating the men and teenage boys to one shelter and the mother and young children to another.

Every nine weeks St. David's Episcopal Church (located at 2800 SE Harrison) hosts the families for 1 week (Sunday to Saturday). Other neighborhood churches provide volunteer support. Host congregations provide overnight lodging, meals and limited transportation for up to 14 guests from 5:00 PM to 7:00 am the next morning.

Daybreak is a program that works. Since August 2003, 43% of families have found stable housing, 29% have gained employment, and 38% have increased their income. This is evidence that in a relatively short span of time this program is making a huge impact on the quality of life for some of the most vulnerable in our community - children.

St. Philip Neri provides the bulk of the volunteers at St. David's, as we are the largest church in our rotation. We need volunteers for the following positions:

- ❖ **Van Driving:** Provide morning or evening transportation (in the program's van) to and from St. David's church and the Day center where families stay during the day. Volunteers may sign up for one or more shifts.
- ❖ **Meal Preparation:** Prepare and serve a hot dinner one evening during our week of service. The meals may be prepared at the well equipped kitchen of St. David's church or brought in prepared. The guest count will not exceed 14 people.
- ❖ **Overnight host:** Spend the night at St. David's church providing chaperoning to the guests involved in the program.
- ❖ **Daycenter Volunteers:** Provide a variety of services to guests such as child care and mentoring in parenting skills. Clerical help and supervision of guests in absence of staff are also needed.

Our next week of service is February 8. To volunteer, contact Michelle Kinsella at 503-235-3276.