

Proclaiming and Witnessing the Gospel through Community Action

Carolyn Klein from Sparta, Wisconsin

The Gospel message calls us to live and be in community and to work together with others for the common good. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). To be and to work together for the common good creates a sense of belonging, ownership and purpose. These are the threads which bind and hold humankind together in mutual faith and life journeys. Our personal spiritual journey needs to move beyond our own walk of faith and to enter the quest for finding our purpose which can lead us into meaningful involvement for the greater good; in whatever form that might take.

I believe we are all given a purpose to fulfill in our lives and our responsibility is to make this part of our quest in our spiritual journey. I am reminded of a passage in Isaiah 49 paraphrased as, "I knew you before you were born, I formed you in your mother's womb; I have carved you in the palm of my hand." I believe our life experiences have formed the people we are today. I certainly know that my childhood experiences out in nature exploring the beautiful and wonderful world around me had a powerful impact and influence on me. These experiences nurtured a deep and profound relationship of love, appreciation, passion and respect for all forms of nature.

Sometimes in our life's journey, situations literally jump out and grab us when we least expect it. Such is the case with my involvement with the Friends of Sparta, Inc. Little did I know a year ago in February that I would be spending the year engaged with a group of other concerned residents of Sparta trying to prevent the building of an ethanol refinery within our city limits. Working with the Friends of Sparta has certainly been an experience of working in community for the common good. One of the main guidelines of our group is to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4). It's been a combined effort of each individual to engage in research involving ethanol production and the hazards it creates on many levels of the environment. This information was collected and presented to the public by various means such as pamphlets circulated door to door, writing letters to the editor in local papers, speaking at public hearings, writing and talking to politicians, and getting signatures on petitions.

One of the greatest gifts coming from this process has been to witness individual residents discovering they do have a voice in such matters. At the beginning of our endeavors, when we were speaking to residents of Sparta, all we heard was: "Don't waste your time and energy. It's a done deal!" However, as time went on and people came to understand the risk factors to both human life and the environment by the production of ethanol, there was an ever increasing number of people coming forward to participate in the efforts to stop this ethanol refinery from being built.

Another positive dimension of the Gospel message becoming a living experience was the combined effort of the Friends of Sparta with one of Sparta's leading businesses, Century Foods. Their milk production process would have been put in jeopardy along with the jobs of over 350 people. Everyone agrees that neither the Friends of Sparta nor Century Foods alone could have accomplished what was done in stopping the building of this ethanol refinery. It took the combined effort of both, working in cooperation, to accomplish this task. There are still issues being dealt with but for the most part, an ethanol refinery will not be built within Sparta's city limits.

This has been such a positive experience of working in community for the common good. As a group we have stated what a blessing it has been in discovering and making friends with people who are like-minded in environmental and human rights protection issues. When times and situations became very difficult during or

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How do you proclaim and witness the Gospel through politics?

Sister Rosalia Bauer from Beloit, Wisconsin

I ardently strive to learn how politics influence and control the lives of people who have no voice, save mine. Through an aide at the State Capitol, I am informed of bills, especially those which pertain to pro-life issues. I have spoken at hearings, written letters to the editors, and on Fridays, regardless of weather, I, along with others, go to stand before an abortion clinic in Rockford, Illinois. Twenty mothers or more come to have their pregnancies terminated. Because of prayers, some mothers choose life for their babies. Then, baby showers and the mother's needs are provided by us. I organize and distribute baby bottles on Ash Wednesday for people to put in their loose change during Lent as a fundraiser for pro-life actions. All of my efforts are intended to raise people's consciousness of the inherent value of every person, be they pre-born or born. Many, indeed, have no voice. Proverbs 24:10-12 states, "If you remain indifferent in the time of adversity, your strength will depart from you. Rescue those who are being dragged to death, and from those tottering to execution withdraw not. If you say, 'I know not this man!' Does not he who tests hearts perceive it? He who guards your life knows it, and he will repay each one according to his deeds."



Sister Rosalia Bauer, center, with volunteers for the 2007 Baby Bottle Project

Linda Kerrigan from La Crescent, Minnesota



It never occurred to me that standing on a downtown La Crosse street corner holding a sign which reads, "Blessed are the peacemakers," might constitute political action. Yet, in these politically sensitive times, simple, yet cogent peace messages stir public reaction, mostly positive, I'm pleased to report.

For the past few years, on a now and then participation level, I've joined the Women in Black silent peace vigil held every first and third Wednesday, 12-12:30 p.m. Typically, several of us gather

and divide up sign boards calling for war to end and for peace and justice to prevail. We hope to gain the attention of pedestrians and passing motorists. Many take notice; most smile, wave, honk their car horn or gesture a "thumbs up." Then, there are the negative few who flash a solo finger peace sign, shake their head in disgust or disagreement, yell an obscenity or become verbally aggressive.

I'll never forget the middle-aged man who angrily challenged me and my scripture-based message on peacemakers. He shouted from his rolled down pick-up cab window, "Lady, when those terrorists come over here, you'll be the first to get your throat slit." As I forced a smile in reply to this stranger's threatening insult, I felt the ugly sting of his words. Later, I drew consolation in reflecting how it must have been for Jesus himself who made a career out of public criticism and humiliation. His messages weren't always appreciated and accepted by everyone in his day either, and they still aren't today.

For me, standing at a busy intersection while silently promoting peace is the loudest and most public (okay, call it political) way I can proclaim the Gospel. The way I've got it figured, if Jesus were here today, he'd be standing right along with us every other Wednesday.

Marilyn Pedretti from Holmen, Wisconsin

I believe we are all called to "proclaim and witness the Gospel" every day . . . whether it is through our actions of attending church, helping at a soup kitchen, teaching children or even through politics. Having lived and worked in Washington D.C., I have seen how policies can affect and change people. I also see how the things we (citizens) do affect the policies. For instance, in the 60s people demanded clean water and clean air (political action) and policies were created to help accomplish that demand.



God created this beautiful planet and I think we are called to preserve the beauty. My small part of that preservation has been to work towards building a "greener" home and to help educate (anyone who will listen) others about the enormous possibilities. My home was built using renewable (straw bales, earthen clay), recyclable (products destined for the landfill), sustainable (wood milled locally) and earth friendly (as few chemicals as possible) practices. The past few years, I've seen a huge shift of people seeking a greener alternative. But it will take more . . . more people demanding cleaner energy, more people researching alternative energy sources and more education.

A hundred years ago, it took a group of concerned and dedicated Christians to stop the abuse of child labor and it took political action to change the laws. I will continue to proclaim and witness in the area of political activity not just as it relates to the environment but to anything I believe important as a Christian.

2008 Franciscan Living Challenge:

By the end of 2008, affiliates and sisters will no longer use plastic shopping bags.

Barb Lawless from Woodruff, Wisconsin

Thanks for the green grocery bag. I have put it in my car so that I will not forget it, and it will be handy when I need it. It is a really good idea; I hope more people start to take notice of all the plastic we use.

Pam Small from Spokane, Washington

A MISSION FOR SURVIVAL

1. Q. Paper or plastic? Neither. Take and use cloth bags. If forgotten, ask for paper—a renewable resource—and use these bags again and again, or use for lining your wastebasket. Bags with handles from clothing stores make good grocery sacks.
2. Cars. Take out extra seats. Use the smallest car in town and keep the bigger one that uses more fuel for road trips or bulky loads (shopping) or when you are driving more people. Combine trips and have a preplanned route to make the shortest driving distance. Properly inflated tires improve your gas mileage by up to 3 percent. 8000 miles saves about 8 gallons annually. Think about buying a hybrid next time purchasing a new car.
3. Stop junk mail.
4. Use lukewarm water to wash clothes or hot water with cold cycle. Run only full loads.
5. Find new use for old clothes. Give operational or usable items to Goodwill, or other recyclable charity.
6. Recycle. Read the information in your utility bill and the city inserts in the newspaper on how to get rid of trash.
7. Use compact fluorescent bulbs.
8. Have a garden? Build a compost pile. Try not to use manufactured chemicals.
9. Use a broom, not the hose to clean sidewalk and driveways.
10. Install water-saving showerhead and washers in taps.
11. Use a drip system in your garden.
12. Cool drinking water in the refrigerator, don't run the tap.
13. Save the rain? Think of the southeastern United States—rain wasn't a problem with their annual "monsoon" season,

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this intervention process, I personally went to a prayer I had received from a friend which says: "Lord, take me where you want me to go; let me meet who you want me to meet; tell me what you want me to say and keep me out of your way" (Fr. Mychal Jusoe, OSF).

which hasn't happened for a few years. Now drought has caused a real crisis in Atlanta, Georgia, and other places. Their reservoirs are drying up. Save rain with barrels under the eaves troughs. Use the rainwater to water plants inside and out.

14. Fix any leaking taps, pipes, toilets, etc.
15. Run dishwasher once a day.
16. Walk whenever possible. Bike.
17. Avoid canned food. Buy fresh. Start a garden.
18. Use paper wisely. Sometimes large envelopes can be reused.
19. If timing and the destination is right, use public transportation.
20. Try researching and using natural cleaning products.
21. When replacing old appliances, buy Energy Star rated appliances. Look into high efficiency water heaters and furnaces. Rebates come from power companies and the added cost pays for itself in about three years.
22. Use a set-back thermostat for heating and cooling. Keep thermostat settings below 70 degrees in winter and above 80 degrees in the summer.
23. Use green building materials, or recycled materials such as the plastic/sawdust planking used for back decks, etc.
24. Plant trees.
25. Read about the latest developments that will help save our planet.

Did You Know?

**The average American can use
anywhere between 300 and 700 plastic
shopping bags per year?**

Dates to Save in 2008

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| May 30-June 1 | North American Conference of Associates and Religious in Vienna, VA |
| June 17-27 | Sister and Affiliate Mexico GATE |
| July 20-24 | Affiliate Live-In |
| June 22 | Sister and Affiliate Picnic |
| August 7-10 | Affiliation Retreat at Prairiewoods Spirituality Center |
| October 10-11 | Fall Sister and Affiliate Gathering |

Caring Hearts/Helping Hands

Marywood invites you to offer your services

Marywood invites you to offer your services in preparing meals during our various retreats and “vacations with a purpose” that are scheduled for this summer and fall. The times we would be grateful for your service are:

Vacation with a purpose: Beginners Watercolor Workshop – May 25-30

Vacation with a purpose: Watercolor Painting Workshop – June 15-20

Vacation with a purpose: Beginners Pastel Painting Workshop – July 13-18

Directed retreat – August 10-17

Vacation with a purpose: Exploring the Northwoods – Sept. 28-Oct. 4

Those who have volunteered in previous years often enjoy being able to schedule some free time for themselves to enjoy the beauty of Northwoods nature. Also, we have a corp of local volunteers that are often happy to assist with meal preparation. Those who volunteer for meal preparation during *Vacation with a purpose: Exploring the Northwoods*, Sept. 28-Oct. 4, will be able to join us as our guests at nearby Holy Family Parish for the Feast of St. Francis on Saturday, Oct. 4th, for Fr. John Dear's 9:00 to 3:00 presentation entitled *Our Lifetime Call – to Follow Jesus and Francis on the Path of Nonviolence*. For further information and to volunteer, please contact Sue Torgersen, CSJ, at 715-385-3758 or suetorgersen@gmail.com. Thanks very much for your help with these volunteer needs!

Summer volunteers invited to Prairiewoods

Would you like to spend a week helping in a retreat atmosphere surrounded by quiet surroundings? Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center invites you, our FSPA affiliates and friends to spend a week (or more) with us as volunteers. We welcome volunteers to assist in the kitchen, with housekeeping and outdoors with the lawns and gardens. You will be provided room and board, along with good Franciscan companionship with the staff. And you will have time to enjoy the beauty and the peaceful setting of the woods and the prairie. At the same time you will be helping us carry out our mission to be “a sacred space where people explore and integrate their relationships with God, Earth, self and others.”

You are invited to volunteer your services for several days or weeks this summer. Your help is especially needed during these weeklong retreats:

June 8-15 Yoga Retreat

June 22-29 Silent Directed Retreat and a Merton Retreat

July 6-13 Silent Directed Retreat and an Icon Retreat

Come with a friend or alone. Let this be an enriching experience for you. We will appreciate your consideration of this opportunity. If interested, please contact S. Helen Elsbernd at helsbernd@prairiewoods.org or 319-395-6700, ext 204.

We are all here to assist one another in ministry and can best do so by being aware of needs. Call or email your information to “Caring Hearts, Helping Hands” directly to Marci at mmadary@fspa.org/phone 608-791-5610.

Living Simply, Living Franciscan

Mary Ellen Dunford from Hiawatha, Iowa

The Challenge of Plastics

The invention of plastics was a huge breakthrough for technology in the early 20th century. It was lightweight, flexible, sturdy and its uses were unlimited. Over time the reality of the overuse of plastic emerged. Today we face environmental and health risks from the production, use and disposal of plastics. Toxic chemicals, such as benzene and dioxin, are released from some plastics during the manufacturing process. This poses a toxic threat to the surrounding communities and nature. We know that some plastics leach chemicals as we use or reuse them. In addition to these problems, disposal of plastics is a huge environmental issue. There are few options for plastic disposal. Plastics can go into landfills, become litter, be incinerated or recycled.

From our landfills we have learned that plastic takes hundreds of years to break down. As it breaks down it turns into toxic substances polluting the soil and ground water. Plastics that become litter kill animals and aquatic life if they are mistaken for food and eaten. Some studies have shown that fumes from the incineration of plastics poses health risks as toxins are emitted into the air. Recycling is an option but not the answer. The American Plastics Council states that less than 25 percent of U.S. used plastics are recycled. Increasing the percentage may sound reasonable, but there is limited use for recycled plastic. Recycled plastic becomes a lower-quality plastic and has fewer applications, like plastic lumber.

So perhaps the best solution to plastic problems is to reduce our use of it. This month I invite you to reduce your use of plastics. Choose your plastic products carefully, buy only plastic products that are necessary. Remember when you shop to use your “Living Green Being Franciscan” bag! You’ll be amazed at how many plastic bags you can eliminate.

Congratulations!

- Dolora Brinks, Isabelle Feld, Malinda Maiers, Beverly Miller, Sandra McKee, Janice Munson, Arlene O’Loughlin, Max Ortner, Patti Ortner, Rose Robacker, Helen Rupiper, Delores Schneider, Agnes Stoolman and Anita Tegels on the renewal of their prayer affiliation.
- Joyce Hanson and Katie Richel on the renewal of their covenant affiliation.
- Malinda Maiers on her 90th birthday celebration.
- Sheila Garrity on receiving the Iverson-Freking Award

Pray for...

- ☞ Joan Gerhards
- ☞ Yvonne Kramer, RIP
- ☞ Gene Portz on the death of his father
- ☞ Mother of Renee Ruchand
- ☞ All of the family members of affiliates who are serving in the military in the Middle East