

Is Your Voice Being Heard?

“An informed and active citizenry is the lifeblood of a democracy.”

- *Citizens' Guide to State Government*

Often we may follow the candidates during an election cycle to listen to their views and commitments regarding issues we think are important. How often do we then contact those who are elected to see if they are following through on their promises?

During a two-year session, the Michigan Legislature will introduce approximately 3,500 bills – 700-800 of these will become law. During the last Michigan Legislative session many bills were introduced by the Legislators. **270 bills were signed into law!**

These new laws affect our lives and the welfare of our entire community. Most of us were well aware of the decision that was made about the roads, but do we know any of the other issues that are now part of State law? The following are just a few of the issues of the new laws:

- modify weapons carry;
- modify industrial wastes;
- requirements for insurance companies;
- modify employment security benefit provisions related to taxable wage base reductions;
- sales tax on gasoline;
- and most recently, voting restrictions.

The direct link between us and our legislators is reflected in the declaration at the head of every law:
it reads:

The **People** of the State of Michigan enact:

The political system is set up for our active participation – it can easily seem overwhelming. We need to be informed when we vote; we need to continue being informed on the issues and to contact legislators about issues we care about.

We have access to all the workings of the State Legislature at www.legislature.mi.gov

Dot Wolff

Need some Inspiration?

Check out the following resources:

- www.dailygood.org
- www.awakin.org
- *A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity*, by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, 2014: Alfred A. Knopf, publisher

\$\$\$\$ Can Talk Our Values

“Millions of people in the U.S. live in poverty... can’t find jobs... and have lost hope in a better future. How can we help? Please give money to appeals that will feed and house people and meet their immediate needs. Also set aside money to give to groups that seek to change the more fundamental, flawed structures of our economy and society:

- groups that pressure ... government to spend more on affordable housing, and drug treatment.
- worker organizations seeking higher wages, full time hours
- advocates who want reform in the criminal justice system... early childhood education... and affordable higher education.

So give to charitable organizations... also donate some dollars to groups that are working to put soup kitchens, clothes closets and homeless shelters out of business.”

- *excerpts from an article in Witness for Justice, published by The United Church of Christ.*

Submitted by Mary & Bill Carry

Voice for Justice

JUSTICE & PEACE NEWSLETTER • FIRST ISSUE 2016



Finding Our Voices

At the wedding at Cana, Mary was challenged by current social norms to stay quiet in light of the pending wine disaster for the host family. She rose above the social norms to tell Jesus that his time had come. Even though he didn’t initially react, without her intervention, the family would have been permanently disgraced resulting in social stigmatization. Mary knew this and instinctively acted to avoid disaster. She was also very aware of her place in society. Women had no power, no rights, and certainly could not voice their opinions. But just as Jesus was realizing his divine powers, Mary too was growing in awareness of her own potential by finding her voice.

Certainly in today’s problematic world, finding our own voice is critical to sparking change in the world. It’s important to step up, realize the importance of our individual role as citizens and to form and vocalize our

opinions. One way to start is by talking to people who may not share our views. Only then will we critically and intellectually form our own views based not only on known facts but, more importantly, to do so in light of our faith.

Is this our time to speak up? The 21st century Cana wedding is not about Jesus turning water into wine. It is listening to our hearts, as Mary did, and finding compassion for other families/people. Compassion leading to action is in such short supply for our displaced brothers and sisters in the world. Our support and our voice is crucial for many organizations advocating for those most lacking in basic human needs. It’s our time to call for change. Will you find your voice?

Sue Buratto



Immigrant children, Ellis Island, New York. Vintage print. Records of the Public Health Service.

Immigration and Living the Gospel

A wise woman once said, “Remember, the Christmas story is about two immigrants in a strange land looking for a safe place to have their baby.” Who could ever fear a helpless baby?

As the granddaughter of Italian immigrants my thoughts on immigration and living the gospel are a mix of dismay, confusion and hope.

“Dismay” because were my grandfather seeking to enter this country today, he would be met with a closed door. He arrived with the clothes on his back, an inability to speak English or be literate in his own language and with no marketable skills. He became a rag picker, some might say he scavenged garbage, and raised eight children, one of whom was my father. Dad worked two years with the Civilian Conservation Corps thousands of miles from home, to provide food for his family.

“Confusion” because we forget that we all come from somewhere else. We believe we can only be safe by keeping others out. How do we balance

the truth of our backgrounds with those we see as “others”?

“Hope” because at the end of the day, we must demonstrate compassion for those who struggle to make a better life or we ourselves are diminished in our lives and in the eyes of Jesus. Compassion is the ability to enter into the suffering of others. If we believe we are compassionate, how is it possible to ignore pictures of dead children, of thousands leaving their homes and everything behind, or pictures of tent camps in the cold?

At the Statue of Liberty, we read these words, seen by many of us and our forebears, engraved in her base:

With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Will we choose silence or raise our voices for those poor and tired, seeking safety and freedom? Will we raise our voices in the political arena, in our social circles and in our workplaces? Or will we be silent to the deaths of more children like Aylan Kurdi on the beaches of the Mediterranean?

Judith Aumente Runk

Pope Francis on “Indifference”

- “The enemy of peace isn’t only war, but also indifference.”
- “...let ourselves be reborn, to overcome indifference which blocks solidarity, and to leave behind the false neutrality which prevents sharing.”
- “Dear young people, Christ asks you to be wide awake and alert, to see the things in life that really matter.”

Speak up! Stand up! Show up!

No one seems to escape from the horrific noises of the world, usually just “one click” away for 24/7 news. My mind explodes with all the political ranting, war unrests, suicide bombings, mass refugee migrations, global food and water shortages, gun killings, weather storms, wildfires, and numerous human tragedies, etc. Often I do not want to hear anything, anymore. Just let me enjoy my peaceful home, thank you very much. Don’t touch my “Do Not Disturb” sign. The world’s problems are not going to find a perch on my shoulders!!

However, that is not why you nor I are here today, on this Earth, as thinking, loving, and caring human beings. If we are to be people of God –striving to be Christ-like—we cannot remain silent and uninvolved. The God within us yearns to be heard and set free as love energy! Our small cries for sanity in this crazy world can be joined with others, can create change movements, can finally break the “bonds of tyranny”! (ex. the tobacco industry, the Berlin Wall)

The unreported whispers of kindness, courage, and compassion may seem to get lost in the explosive words of hate, violence, warmongering, bigotry, misogyny, etc. Yet goodness will prevail. Our faith tells us that. So our small voices count.

How can our small voices be heard? SPEAK UP! STAND UP! SHOW UP!

Use our God-given gifts to speak our truth. Don’t let silence be encouragement for darkness. Bring our Christ-light out of the shadows. Be willing to stand up for unpopular opinions or causes. Slavery was once acceptable until people started to publicly question it. Today the problems of human trafficking need public awareness and support.

Finally, show up! Whether marching for a cause, creating some artwork, being a caregiver, or engaging in 101 other human interactions, be our best selves. Don’t let the dream-snatchers of the world win. Show them the face of God – not perfect, but human.

B.J. Schlachter

“If you ask me what I came to do in this world, I will tell you, I came to live out loud.”

- Emile Zola (novelist) 1840-1902

The following are suggestions from “Live Your Life Out Loud” by Sonya Derian, www.tinybuddha.com

1. **Live your life on purpose.** Be proactive. Make conscious and deliberate choices.
2. **Love generously.** Hatred is already rampant. Tip the scales the other way.
3. **Own your own opinions.** Live in the evolution of changing opinions.
4. **Be authentic.** Thoreau said, “If I am not I, who will be?”
5. **Be of service.**
6. **March to the beat of your own drum & stay the course.** Your task is to find your own “Om” – your life force vibration, life pattern or purpose, your song or melody. Find it, claim it, express it, and live it. You are divinely supported.

A Bias Toward Action

Jesus says, “I am not asking you to just believe my words, look at my actions, or the ‘works that I do.’”

“Actions speak for themselves... Without action and lifestyle decisions, without concrete practices, words are dangerous and largely illusory.

Reflect

What actions can you take to more fully realize the power of the Spirit?” - Fr. Richard Rohr, OSM

Submitted by Sylvia Graham