

## A Great Divide

**“I see in the near future a crisis approaching ... (when) wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.”**

- Abraham Lincoln, November 21, 1864

The struggle for a political system that works for the common good – *the greatest good for the greatest number* – is long-standing and complicated. As followers of Jesus we believe that any system that “fails to help my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed” (Matt. 25:45, Contemporary English version) is a system that has failed.

Because **we** haven’t solved this ‘great divide’ doesn’t mean that **we** can’t... and it doesn’t cost any money! The solution though will cost us our time and effort. We may think that we, as citizen-voters, are at the bottom of a chart that explores solutions to systemic problems, but we are actually the foundation. Our foundation is built on our right and duty to vote for a fair system. However, today, our foundation has some cracks.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics (a non-partisan Washington group) 36.4 million voted in [Nov.] 2014 elections, lowest in 72 years; and \$3.67 billion was spent, \$40 million more than in 2010.

**We** need to study the issues and candidates – that is our time and effort cost—to determine which candidates are going to work for the system **we** want. Will **We** work to have a political system that works for everyone?

Dot Wolff

### YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE

**Bought through the loss of thousands of lives.**

**Priceless.**

**Don’t throw it away.**

**Use it.**

## January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Month

Often human trafficking victims are fearful, manipulated, and exploited. Racism, gender and educational inequality, and all causes of vulnerability create situations whereby greed/dominance perpetuates the slavery of men, women, and children. We can all make a real difference every month and every day of the year by learning more, discussing the issue, becoming more aware of its presence in our own community, and reporting suspicious activities to proper authorities.

To learn more: [www.humantrafficking.org](http://www.humantrafficking.org)

## Dividing the Spoils

By **Bill Moyers & Michael Winship** in *Reader Supported News* 11/22/14

“The framers debated the meaning of corruption at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, and Americans have been arguing about it ever since. Today, gifts to politicians that were once called graft or bribes are called contributions. The Supreme Court has granted corporations the rights our founders reserved for people, and told those corporations they can give just about anything they want to elect politicians favorable to their interests.”

The watchdog Sunlight Foundation reports: “From 2007 to 2012, the two hundred most politically active corporations in the U.S. spent about \$6 billion for lobbying and campaign contributions. And they received more than \$4 trillion in U.S. government contracts and other forms of assistance. That’s \$760 for every dollar spent on influence ...”

Sylvia Graham

# Voice for Justice

JUSTICE & PEACE NEWSLETTER • FIRST ISSUE 2015



## Breaking Chains, Raising Voices

**“Let your life speak.”** - Quaker saying

OK, couch potatoes, this article may not be for you. Read this if you are someone that is “sick and tired” of hearing the nightly news about wars, violence, and a steady stream of “bad news.” This is for anyone frustrated or angry at all that is wrong in this world. There are too many “ills” to list them. However, do you know what is needed to create change?

You. And a willingness to listen and learn. And a willingness to move beyond personal comfort. And a willingness to become more than one, isolated voice. And a willingness to offer servant leadership and participative teamwork.

First, soften and expand your heart. Oh, it is everyone else’s problem? Oh, people ought to be held responsible for their choices? Oh, “those people” don’t deserve a break? GIVE UP those lines of thought! Instead, hear the voice of Jesus stating, “whatsoever you do for the least of my brothers [sisters], you do unto me.” (Matt. 25:40). Being a Christian is not a guaranteed ticket to heaven, but an invitation to be Christ-like always.

Therefore, discern what is your passion and purpose in life. Listen to your anger and frustrations! What are your interests and talents? Discern not only what work you can do, but also what you LOVE to do. The Spirit is calling YOU to make a difference! Each of us cannot do anything about everything that is wrong in this world.

But put your GOD-ENERGY into doing something. **Victims, causes, or movements are all calling out for help.** You can decide to be an answer to a need.

For example, focus on helping the poor in a nearby neighborhood. Oh, you don’t know any of the poor? Then, find a place or organization that serves the poor. Spend some time in a courtroom, unemployment agency, or service organization. Listen to their stories.

The seeds of systemic change begin to germinate when enough people ask the question, “why?” Why are children going to school hungry? Why are there 4 million assault weapons in the U.S.? Why are 40 million Americans without health insurance? Why are some educational districts better than others? Why... why... why? And don’t settle for no answers. Indifference and apathy breeds unfairness, vulnerability, and injustice. Let a need touch your heart and lead you to seek solutions.

Systemic change happens when hearts are changed. Simple, yet complicated. Just reflect on the long, long struggles in this country regarding racism, homophobia, or women’s equality. There are no magic words that will change hearts or couch potatoes. However, what matters is what will change you. And me.

**Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.** - Helen Keller

B. J. Schlachter

## Michigan Incarceration & Criminal Justice Reform

Michigan's penal system's budget for fiscal year 2015 probably will exceed \$2 billion. In 30 years, Michigan's prison population grew at 29 times the rate of its total population. ([www.capps.mi.org](http://www.capps.mi.org)) Yet this system has not reduced gangs, drug-related crimes or the number of ex-prisoners who commit more crimes and return to prison. Many people who are very poor, without a good education or good judgment, or much hope for the future have been put in prison – often cycle through for the rest of their life. Often the system appears to be set up to help people fail. For example, there are incredible demands put on parolees to find a job within 30 days, pay for their court ordered supervision and tethers if they have them, and obtain stable housing if their own families cannot take them in. We need to consider if our prison system is intended for retribution or rehabilitation – or both.

The Michigan Legislature has created the Criminal Justice Policy Commission to study sentencing guidelines and parole rules, as well as create alternatives to incarceration. However, at the same time, parole reforms were defeated. Spending decisions are inevitably policy decisions. What gets cut, what gets preserved, and how resources get shifted from one area to another, all reveal the priorities of the decision-makers.

Careful examination of the consequences of any governmental action or inaction should be one of our top priorities. The Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy and advocacy organization that “works to reduce the social and economic cost of mass incarceration. Because policy choices, not crime rates, determine corrections spending we advocate re-examining those policies and shifting resources to services proven to prevent crime, better prepare people for success after release, and improve the quality of life for all Michigan residents.”

### How could our “system of justice” reflect more fully our Christian faith and gospel values?

- Many of our prisoners are illiterate --- teach them to read.
- Many lack job skills --- give them training.
- Many struggle with drug addiction or mental illnesses --- provide the support and help needed.
- Support strategies that reduce the reasons why people commit crimes in the first place!
- Jesus' justice: “Love your neighbor....” That means everyone.

*B. J. Schlachter collaborating with Marge Huggard and Susan Masiak*

### POPE FRANCIS SPEAKS OUT

Pope Francis, before an international gathering of grassroots social activists, said, “Today I want to join my voice to yours and accompany you in your struggle.” He urged them to “struggle against ‘structural causes’ of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and shelter, the denial of social and labor rights”... and confronting what he called the “empire of money.”

Jesus affirms that we cannot serve two masters, God and wealth. (*Luke 16:13*) (*Matt. 6:24*) Pope Francis in his new book, *Pope Francis: This Economy Kills* states clearly, “To care for the poor is not communism, it is the Gospel.... The Gospel's message is for everyone, the Gospel does not condemn the wealthy, but the idolatry of wealth, the idolatry that makes people indifferent to the call of the poor.”

## Systemic Issues in Health Care

### Looking at an overview of the health care landscape:

Health care in the U.S. has historically been considered a privilege and not a right. What that means is that there is not a minimum level of health care available to all. The U.S. is still the only developed country that doesn't provide basic health insurance for all its citizens.

We want care that is convenient (want it when we want it), compassionate, communicative and coordinated, cutting edge, cheap or cost free. Current system is based on “the more you do, the more you are paid.”

### Key systemic changes needed in providing health care:

1. National IT (Information Technology) standards. Currently only 1.5% of hospitals and 4% of doctors have a fully comprehensive medical record therefore, there are limited ways to access current information and extra tests and treatments ordered and paid for.
2. Comparative outcomes research. How do we care for patients with a specific illness? Is there consistency in care? At Mayo Clinic all patients are cared for under research based protocols. Outcomes (cure, prevention, mortality, morbidity) are better than others AND costs are lower.
3. Emphasis on primary care.
4. The medical home where patients go for primary care not just diagnosis and treatment.
5. Creating health insurance exchanges.
6. Reform medical malpractice.
7. Better study of new drugs and devices.

**“... be a people with the strength and generosity of spirit to bridge divides... to unite in common effort ...”**

*President Obama, 2015 State of Union speech*

*“I was sick and you took care of me.” Matthew: 25:36*

### What can individuals and small groups do to promote systemic change in our health care?

1. Work with churches and not-for-profits to find those who need basic health and dental care. These include people who work one or more low wage jobs and do not qualify for free care.
2. Hold “sign up” clinics with Healthy Michigan for those who qualify under the expanded Medicaid system.
3. Enhance the Parish Nurse Ministry to provide health care workshops on obesity, exercise, smoking, managing diabetes and high blood pressure.
4. Partner with schools to provide nutrition counseling for parents who purchase food with a Bridge card to learn basic cooking skills.
5. Question what ending the Affordable Care Act will mean to the under 26 year old who stays on their parent's insurance; the Medicare person whose drugs fall in the donut hole; the young child with a pre-existing condition who is dropped from their current insurance; the woman who has received free mammograms to provide early diagnosis of cancer.
6. Take responsibility for your own health by checking hospital and physician ratings through multiple web sites such as [healthgrades.com](http://healthgrades.com) or [aha.org](http://aha.org). Demand information and bring an advocate with you when in the hospital or physicians' offices.

**Footnote:** One of the clearest discussions about the current system is a small volume: *The truth about getting sick in America: the real problems with health care and what we can do.* Dr. Tim Johnson, ABC News Senior Medical Contributor and ordained pastor. Hyperion: 2010.

*Judy Runk RN, MEd*