

J/P Alert

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN *JUSTICE AND PEACE OFFICE*

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CMSM:

- *assists major superiors in their role as leaders;*
- *promotes dialogue and collaboration with the conference of bishops and other major groups in church and society;*
- *provides a corporate influence in church and society.*

April 2005

Ecumenical Advocacy Days and JP Gathering Focus Dialogue on “Catholic Voice” in Politics

CMSM was one of several sponsors of the Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC March 12-14 which brought together over 800 people of many denominations from around the U.S. to network, strategize, and meet with legislators on a wide range of domestic and international issues. This year the Catholic representation was over 115 and they were as diverse in their interests as any other denomination. Participants were able to participate in tracks on Africa, the Middle East, Domestic Policy, Asia, Eco-Justice, Global Security, Latin America, and Jubilee and Economic Justice. The tracks sponsored expert panels and assisted the participants in preparing for visits to their representatives. Plenary speakers included Dr. Maryann Cusimano Love, Bishop Vashti McKenzie, and Bladermar Velasquez.

During the Advocacy Days, a time was set aside for denominational meetings and the Catholic participants met to hear Dr. Angela Senander from the Washington Theological Union address the issue of Catholic Social Teaching and the broad range of issues that the Church has addressed because of the rich tradition of action and theology. A lively discussion

followed about Catholics can more effectively promote this wide range of issues in the public debate and not always be reduced to dialogue on abortion. Many participants expressed their dismay at the most recent election process that narrowed the “Catholic” concerns to abortion and neglected most of the other issues that were also of concern such as poverty, health care, immigration, the budget, and the ongoing war in Iraq.

The Advocacy Days were followed by the annual Justice and Peace Coordinators’ Gathering sponsored by the Washington Theological Union and CMSM. This meeting is intended to bring together coordinators from religious institutes for networking and mutual support. Almost 50 people participated this year. On the evening of April 14 the coordinators shared the justice priorities of their institutes and it was amazing how many issues are being covered by religious communities in collaboration with laity and other social justice groups.

The highlight of the gathering was the meeting with Members of Congress and their staffs who were named by the House leadership of both parties to meet with our group. The first scheduled meeting was with Republican Christopher Smith (NJ), chair of the House Interna-

tional Relations Committee Subcommittee on Human Rights and Africa. Because of votes Rep. Smith was unable to make the meeting but his staff assistant George Phillips, was able to meet with the coordinators. Mr. Phillips was able to explain how Rep. Smith, a Catholic, is guided by his faith when working on issues in Congress. Mr. Smith is active in addressing many issues such as human rights, debt cancellation, HIV/AIDS in Africa, human trafficking, refugees, immigration, and workers rights. Mr. Phillips encouraged the legislators who find themselves often voting to support some important legislative issues that the Church supports but never being acknowledged for their actions. Rep. DeLauro spoke passionately about Catholic Social Teaching and the role the church has played in being a catalyst for change in our society. She challenged the coordinators and by extension leaders of Religious Institutes to not abandon their roles as voices for the voiceless or to leave the political and social agenda to a small group of individuals. Mrs. DeLauro invited the Conference and WTU to participate in her meetings with Catholic Democrats by providing resources and guidance during this session of Congress.

The participants in the Ecumenical Advocacy Days and the JP Directors' Gathering were satisfied with the outcome of the days spent together. Following the meetings with the Representative and staff, one of the participants summarized well what we heard and learned. After hearing that there were issues that we agreed and disagreed with, it was noted, "We have no permanent allies and we have no permanent enemies."

As plans develop for next year it is hoped that we can increase participation in both and continue to effectively promote a Catholic agenda that addresses the needs of the poor and the marginalized.

Conferences

Interfaith Worker Justice National Conference, May 22-24, Chicago, IL. "Come to sow seeds and till soil for a new vision together." The conference will provide an opportunity to deepen connections through networking; share ideas and effective strategies for worker campaigns; build skills for religion-labor organizing; renew commitments through interfaith worship, stand

with leaders in the movement across geographic and generational boundaries. More information can be found at the IWJ's website www.interfaithworkerjustice.org or by calling 773-728-8400.

Alternative Response to Terrorism to be Introduced in Congress

The "Sensible, Multilateral American Response to Terrorism (SMART) Security Platform for the 21st Century" proposes a U.S. security policy based on preventing acts of terrorism, strengthening international cooperation and the rule of law, reducing weapons proliferation, promoting disarmament, and addressing the root causes of terrorism and other deadly conflict.

Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) is supporting this legislation which has been developed in cooperation with NETWORK, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) and Women's Action for New Directions (WAND).

SMART Security is a sensible step toward a constructive alternative to resolving international conflicts by military force. It would help prevent terrorism, manage international conflicts and promote global stability. SMART security is tough, pragmatic, and patriotic. It is a smart way to keep America and the world safe. We need to build a real platform for peace. The platform defines SMART security as having five main points:

- Shifting U.S. budget priorities to create a more effective national strategy focused on multilateralism, nonproliferation, diplomacy, and conflict prevention;
- Working with international institutions to root out terrorist networks and cut off funding to these organizations;
- Strengthening intelligence and law enforcement while respecting civil and human rights;
- Ending the proliferation of nuclear weapons; and
- Pursuing to the fullest extent alternatives to war.

For more information, visit the NETWORK website at www.networklobby.org.

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