

CATHOLIC SOCIAL MINISTRY GATHERING 2019 February 2-5, 2019

The Catholic Social Ministry Gathering is an annual conference organized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development. The four-day event includes speakers and panels on Catholic social teaching, culminating in visits to legislators on Capitol Hill to discuss Catholic social priorities.

With a theme of *Let Justice Flow: A Call to Restore and Reconcile*, the 500 attendees gathered at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. were principally leaders and workers in the various fields of social justice ministry in the Catholic Church. The theme reflected the desire of the organizers to emphasize our commitment as Catholics to cultivate God's justice for the common good domestically and internationally and to heal the brokenness of our communities in areas such as racism, poverty, and the disappearance of civility in public discourse.

The meeting began officially on Saturday afternoon with a keynote presentation that urged us to become bridges over troubled waters (no, they did not play the song), and to become ministers of healing, builders of peace. We were told to reflect the title of the keynote: Let Justice Flow: Called to be Prophets, Pilgrims, and Peace Builders. Following this inspiring talk, I went across the corridor to the exhibit hall where I found that our Executive Director, Andrea Cecilli, had set up a table that beautifully displayed our resources and brochures and that attracted many visitors throughout the meeting. Then back across the hall for the Opening Mass presided by Bishop Frank Dewane of Venice, FL. That evening, we enjoyed a beautiful dinner at which Sister Norma Pimentel received the Sister Margaret Cafferty Award for her work with asylum seekers, setting up a humanitarian respite center while working with federal and local authorities. This award is presented to an individual or group working on the margins demonstrating witness to Gospel values. This concluded our first day.

Sunday began with a breakfast sponsored by Catholic Charities at which the Executive Vice President for member Services for CCUSA and the CCUSA Vice President for Social Policy spoke to us of the extraordinary work Catholic Charities does to offer the corporal works of mercy throughout our country. Morning Prayer was followed by an address by the General Secretary of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Monsignor Bransfield first spoke on the deep wounds the clergy sex abuse scandals have inflicted on innocent victims and on the Church. He said it cuts us to the heart just like the hurt suffered by Jesus as He hung on the cross. He likened the story of the Good Samaritan to that of the victims of abuse passed by or ignored, abandoned. Victims can become Survivors with compassionate help and sincere penance. All the Church must progress together, leaving none behind. He spoke of the strengthened systems of accountability now in place and the need to lift our sorrow to the crucified Christ, insisting that Christ's light lead the steps the Church now is taking. He then said that there is a second area of woundedness, Racism. There is a beautiful new pastoral letter on racism released by the USCCB (available on our website, www.nccw.org and mentioned in my message about the USCCB meeting of November 2018). Too many Catholics support institutions and laws that deny access to groups of people. God demands more from us in our communities, parishes, schools, seminaries, and in our nation. The full human dignity of all His children is still not recognized by all. God demands more of us; He demands better. He then introduced Bishop Fabre who led the team that developed the pastoral letter on racism called Open Wide Our Hearts.

Bishop Fabre began by stating that the committee on racism was formed when the bishops noted that racism, rather than vanishing, was rising in our communities. Open Wide Our Hearts is the follow-up to

the bishops' 1979 letter on racism. All men are made in communion with God and each other. When divided by race, that reality and image are shattered. Members of the Church commit acts of racism when they stand silently or do little. Need to bring about a genuine conversion of heart. In the 4 years it took to write this letter, racial harmony diminished. The Church is challenged to speak out, discuss, and understand reality. Learn what it takes to combat racism in society and in the Church. The most consistent comment heard around the country was that the congregation never hears a homily about racism. Priests are now challenged to preach about the evil of racism. A panel then convened, the first speaker being a priest who is Native American. He said that his birth record (they were not given birth certificates) states, "Birth of an American Indian" so from the day of his birth he faced discrimination. They were relocated, separated, taught to assimilate and completely lose their culture. He proudly stated that he tells people he is FBI -Full Blooded Indian! He spoke of the Trail of Tears and government efforts that took children from their good Christian homes and put them in schools where they were punished severely for using their native language. This separation from their homes ruined their lives and this persists down to their grandchildren. Because the Catholic Church ran many of these schools, it is very difficult now to evangelize native people. He credits his parents for teaching him to deal positively with injustice and prejudice. Many others do not and due to inferior schools, lack of work, and outright discrimination descend into drug and alcohol use. We next heard from a woman who spoke on the injustice groups suffer by being incarcerated at rates higher than other groups. A complete reform of our criminal justice system is needed. Our rates of incarceration are off the scale compared to other nations. It was noted that rates of incarceration in the US were relatively stable until the 1980's when there was a sharp increase that continues to rise. There are now generations of men in the same families in prison. This can be corrected and must be corrected. This presentation was followed by one on discrimination experienced by people with special needs. We were told that we get numb hearing of the numbers of immigrants yet each one is a person, a brother or sister with the same DNA that makes us humans. All are daughters and sons of God. We need to challenge racism with the power of love. Prayer does have effect! We were told of a sheriff who told his police to target undocumented immigrants for traffic violations and give the \$600 tickets for the most minor infractions. The surrounding parishes decided to pray for this sheriff. He had a change of heart and now gives classes on safe driving to undocumented immigrants. Pray, pray, pray! Listen and live the message of Christ. The most lowly can be transformative (look at Mary and Joseph). Listen to what God is saying and end racism forever. Be people of faith transformed and transforming society. Last in this session, we heard from a priest from the Philippines who witnessed discrimination in his life including when he became a priest. One of his pastors refused to allow the celebrations of saints and customs that the Philippine community in the parish desired to have. There was tension because there was no respect for other's values and culture. We need to learn to expand our peripheries. Now, he is the pastor of a parish that has 24 languages and he tells the parish to be patient and respectful. We give witness with our behavior. Their air conditioning broke and they held services in a grotto outside on their grounds. The neighborhood saw them and how they all got along and asked to join. Non-Catholics came and worshiped with them and many became Catholic. He said that the foundation of our faith, Jesus Christ, knew that relationship with others is key. He said that Jesus did not come to found a church but to create a family.

Takeaways from this session:

-Jesus has the answer when dealing with racism or any injustice or sin. He brings forgiveness.

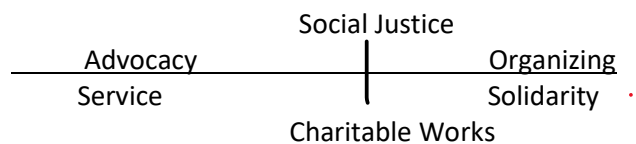
-Come to terms with history. The present is shaped by the past and we need to confront the past before we can move on.

-Pay attention to the moment. This seems a dark time for the Church where sins and racism converge. It means it is time to renew the Church with all working together to do this.

-Don't be discouraged. Understand that some are hardened by experiences. Patience and prayer will triumph. God works through us to change hearts. We are not alone.

We then enjoyed a lunch with special guest Mark Shields of the PBS Newshour. He is a devout Catholic, loves our country, was a Marine, and has long been involved in politics and now political commentary. He spoke of our history, present difficulties, and ended by giving hope because our nation is based in extraordinary legacy and is a nation of hope. The hope of all immigrants who came here and made this country a success. He reminded us that with the exceptions of Native Americans and those brought here in chains as slaves or indentured servants, the rest of us are or are descended from immigrants who came here with little more than hope. America is a nation of hope.

After lunch, we heard a panel speak on Immigrants and Refugees Building Communities of Hope with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. A short video was shown on the two feet of Justice and Charity followed by a diagram:



The left side, Advocacy and Service, changes the world **for** others

The right side, Organizing and Solidarity, changes the world **with** others

The US is still seen as the land where one can make dreams come true. Immigrants must leave their families, language, culture and history behind and this is hard but they do it for a future, a better future, for their children. There is discrimination where immigrants are not seen as fellow human beings and are not given the respect due any child of God. They are labeled and suffer discrimination. Communities, like parish communities, can be empowering. To build stronger communities with immigrants:

-Try to understand them. Very hard working. They try very hard. Some organized fringe groups do not speak for the majority. No one wants to leave their home. They do so because they have no choice: Crushing poverty, persecution, and war force them to leave. It is leave and save your life or die. Create bridges with them.

-Organize. Report bad treatment against them. Look for ways to help them.

-Coach: Be a good leader to help others. Have empathy. Help them find a light in the darkness; help them find hope.

Later that afternoon, we broke into workshops. This was a little frustrating because inevitably, there are at least two and usually three that I would like to attend but can only select one. I chose God's People: Practical Strategies to Implement Laudato Si. After a brief introduction, we heard from three excellent presenters. The first was a program officer from the Rice Bowl Program who highlighted how the poor suffer the most from exploitation of the environment and how CRS tries to help with things like seeds adapted to drought and microfinance loans. The second speaker was the Senior Director of Disaster Operations for Catholic Charities USA who said that climate change hurts the poor the most in the USA.

She noted that 45% in the US say they do not believe in global warming despite the world's senior climate scientists, to include most who did not formerly believe in global warming, now reporting in study after study that climate change due to global warming is occurring at a much faster pace than had been predicted and we are starting to see the effects on our lifetime. Climate patterns are erratic and storms that formerly were labeled as occurring perhaps every hundred years are now occurring with rapid frequency. Tides are rising and already island nations have had to abandon some of their island settlements where people have lived since oral legends recall due to the islands being submerged. In the US, the tides are rising and we are recording superstorms every 12-18 months. People are not prepared. These are not 100 year storms but happen yearly now. 39,700,000 live in poverty in the US today. Disasters always disproportionately affect the poor. There were 18,900 severe storms in the US last year. Frequency of these storms is increasing and people have no chance to recover from one before another hits. Catholic Charities (CC) developed software to pinpoint where the aid is most effective. CC responds even if there is not a declared federal disaster. Of course, their work is never on any news broadcast for any station. CC has 65,000 staff spread from Guam to Puerto Rico and they have all gone through training to respond to disasters. In a disaster, 80% of the people served have never received assistance before. She then showed a video called Plan, Prepare, Protect which is aimed at the parish level to prepare for future disaster response. "The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor" - Laudato Si. The final speaker was the Executive Director of the Catholic Climate Covenant who will be speaking at our 2019 Convention. He told us that 800 cities, companies, and organizations in the US have independently signed the Paris Accord. The US population is 23% Catholic with 573 Catholic hospitals serving 84.7 million patients. Catholic schools educate 2.5 million students. He reminded us to download the Feast of St. Francis Family Guide and Catholic Climate Covenant's Guide to Earth Day found on their website (see our nccw.org homepage). He spoke of Creation Care Teams formed at the parish level. 400 parishes are now fielding such teams and the number is growing. Catholic Energies is a program to reduce waste in Catholic facilities and saves dollars for parishes and schools. Initiatives include things like installation of solar panels and upgrading lighting to LED's. It is a simple thing to get like minded people together and form a Creation Care team. The Vatican is now the first carbon neutral country in the world! Climate change has been made into a political issue but it never should have been. It is a moral issue and if we don't act now, there will be very grave consequences for our children and grandchildren.

The second workshop I attended was on ending poverty in US Reservations: Native American Reservation Poverty Causes and Solutions. Native Americans have the highest poverty in the nation with the highest percentage of children living in poverty. They have a suicide rate 27 times the national average. One-third live on tribal lands. Causes of this are: 1. Land sovereignty was used to force tribes to the poorest land in the nation. Their right to occupy their own land and determine its use was removed. 2. Doctrine of Discovery which stated that Native Americans had no rights to land in North America as the land was "discovered" by Europeans. 3. Dawes Act of 1887 occurred when settlers wanted land so the large tracts that the Native Americans had lived upon were taken and the tribes were forced to move to live on small pieces of land that after generations led to fractured land title with many people living on one small piece of land needing to agree unanimously on everything associated with that small piece of land. 4. Overlapping bureaucracies as at present there are 27 government agencies that oversee reservations and nothing gets done. 5. US Trustee Role which has its origin in racism and implies that Native Americans do not have the ability to govern their own affairs. 6. Racism seen in the type of jobs Native Americans can get outside the reservation where they are subject to low paying jobs, harassment, and police targeting. 7. Education-The Bureau of Indian Education has the worse statistics in the country for dropouts and college admission. The best schools for the Native Americans are the Catholic schools but they only service 1% of the population. Tribal schools are

deplorable, underfunded, the attitude of the teachers is that the kids are dumb. There is a constant turnover of teachers and administration and the buildings are falling apart and are infested with pests. People ask, "why don't you just leave?" but they fail to understand that the land has a spiritual component and many are too poor to leave even if they wanted to do so. Solutions include: 1. Community organization. Even at present, communities on the reservations are isolated. Ensure that treaties are enforced. 2. Accountability in education. 3. Subsidiarity -let local decision be made locally. 4. Let them control their own resources. 5. Look at how we teach about Native Americans in our Catholic School systems. Erase racism. Education is a game changer. Most programs over the years have not worked. Include Native Americans in the decision making. God is needed to make a difference. Please pray for this grace.

That evening we gathered for Adoration, the Rosary, and Benediction.

Monday morning began with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Broglio, Archbishop for the Military Services. After breakfast we met back in the Ballroom for a beautiful Opening Prayer that remembered refugees and migrants who have lost their lives on the journey of migration around the world. This was followed by a plenary on Domestic and International Policy. Subtitled Pursuing Justice and Reconciliation: The Witness of the Church. Speakers took us through the history of the teaching of reconciliation on social order from the last generation to the present. Reconciliation is seen as a social message for societies that suffered civil wars and genocides and other evils. 1. We are seeing a global wave of political transition from dictatorships to democracies. 90 countries have tried to do this. Civil wars are coming to an end in many areas of the world. We must face past injustices to be able to build sustainable peace. There are presently 40 truth commissions active in the world. We are seeing the revival of trials for genocides and human rights violations. Apologies come from political leaders and reparation settlements are on the rise. Forgiveness is looming larger than ever before. 2. We are seeing the rise of religion in global politics. In 1968 we heard God is dead and there was no religious influence on politics. But this has reversed, and the influence of religion rose. The Islamic resurgence, Liberation Theology, etc. 3. Rise of Reconciliation in Catholic Social Thought. Forgiveness is seen as a social ethic. The next speaker questioned why the major challenge for immigrants in the US is not being welcomed. We have forgotten our own history. The Catholic Church in the US has always been an immigrant church. National parishes were common. Today, in the public sphere, there are no concrete actions or policies, just buzzwords. We are not listening to each other or to our history. The Catholic Church had national parishes. Today, there are problems with shared parishes not integrating until the 2nd or 3rd generation. This was actually what it took before. Recall our history. Don't force things. Try to encounter each other with understanding and patience. The US is still a magnet as a symbol of hope. People are fleeing their homes, trying to escape from horrible situations. They need us to welcome and heal them. The system criminalizes people in need. This is a system we can and must change. The third speaker was a judge who said we need to hear each other's stories. She told a story of how a woman was murdered and her family was full of hate and unforgiveness and unhappiness. When she had them speak to the murderer, he apologized and cried and then he told them of their daughter's last words. He said he could never forget them because she said to him as she was dying, "I forgive you and God forgives you." This really helped her parents to reach forgiveness and a sense of peace. Need to focus on the humanity of people, not systems. There is a huge need to talk to each other and hear each other. Get away from systems and see God's face in each other. Healing circles of conversation have proved immensely valuable. Forgiveness requires truth telling, reparation. Catholic schools have long served as places where immigrants receive a good education academically and morally with compassion. Every time a Catholic school closes, another immigrant community is not served. Church should be a place to

relax and be welcome just as Jesus would welcome. It needs to be a space of reconciliation, understanding, dialogue, full of the healing love of God.

During lunch, we met with our state captains who had made the appointment for the next day with our legislators. We determined who would present which topics and how we would get to and from Capitol Hill together.

Following lunch, we gathered back in the meeting room where we were then given our talking points to use when we were to meet the next day with our own State legislators. This year there were three divisions with specific “asks” in each of the three areas. Domestic asks were: Resist reductions in funding for nutrition, affordable housing, and promote efforts to protect the environment to include bipartisan legislation to address climate change and carbon emissions. There is a lot of talk about reduction in joblessness, etc., but we need to look deeper. Four out of ten adults do not have \$400 saved for an emergency. Real wages, adjusted for inflation, have decreased and the suicide rate has increased. International Priorities were: Preserve funding for 2020 at at least the same level as for 2019 for poverty reduction and humanitarian aid; To maintain a strong investment in diplomacy in developing countries to guarantee stability and prosperity; and Support and pass the Global Fragility and Violence Reduction Act to prevent civil unrest in fragile societies. Currently, the State Department budget is less than 10% of the Defense Department budget and humanitarian aid is less than 1% of the total national budget. The last priorities concerned migration and were: A bipartisan solution to protect the Dreamers and a path to citizenship; Permanent legal status for TPS holders; and Maintain protection for Unaccompanied children and asylum seekers. We were reminded that every budget decision should be measured by its ability to protect or threaten human life and dignity.

The final day we met for the Sending Mass celebrated by Cardinal DiNardo, President of the USCCB. After breakfast, we gathered into our state groups and went off to Capitol Hill to visit our State senators and representatives. It was a gloriously sunny warm day (in February!) and we enjoyed meeting with our legislators or their aides and speaking about the “asks” with which we were entrusted.

The Catholic Social Ministry Gathering 2019 was a most worthwhile event where we were able to speak with persons from throughout the nation who are vitally concerned with and engaged in Catholic Social Justice Ministry. . I am grateful to have attended as president of our NCCW. I hope this summary of my time there gives you some feeling for the commitment of our USCCB, clergy, and lay persons to living out Catholic Social Teaching which can be summarized as living the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in our modern world. How happy we are that our own beautiful NCCW Mission Statement urges us to provide this same hope and service to our world

-Maribeth Stewart Blogoslowski
NCCW President