

Leader's Message

PRACTICAL MATTERS

by Richard L. Kiniry

As a religious group that professes values and opinions relating to social justice, we are challenged to come up to the plate and do something. But as a religious Society we are constrained in what we can do. If the solution to a social problem appears to lie with politicians, the most effective avenue of action would seem to be partisan politics. But in a secular state we must uphold another value; we can support values and policy but not politicians. Besides that, while every congregation in America probably leans in one political direction or another, freedom of conscience must be respected, especially by us. There are myriad legitimate reasons for voting or not voting for any one candidate.

Campaigning for certain causes is a different matter. In such cases, the principle is the focus and although issues are often identified with certain political parties and ideologies, it is the pain, the dislocation, the neglect behind the cause that we are addressing.

While it is usually the true believers who are involved in any organized social justice cause, the primary purpose of those groups must be affecting the minds and hearts of those who remain unconcerned. Civil rights for African Americans did not start to be addressed until a critical mass was created that felt the injustice. Breaking through the normal self-interest of the average citizen and bringing those citizens to the point of concern for distant peoples or the environment is the ultimate aim of any social change group.

And that is the aim of many of our Sunday Platforms – an issue is brought to our attention in the hope that some of us will get involved, or at least that we will be more aware. Beyond that, the focus of our Ethical Action Committee's efforts is either getting us to participate in some event or organizing forums that will present an issue that touches the minds and hearts of others in the larger community.

Which leads to the reason for this message. The EAC will be doing a few new things in the near future. We will be offering a monthly movie night that will start in November with a film that focuses on resource depletion. And close to my heart, we are going to initiate a project in which members are invited to help build a network of religious congregations involved in anti-death penalty work.

We can't just wish ourselves to a better world, it takes work. And we have some work in mind. Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is leading the abolition effort that was so successful in New Jersey but PADP lacks the person-power to do the necessary but time-consuming work of contacting the area's liberal congregations about the abolition effort. That could be a small but significant project for us. We're hoping that after a Sunday Platform speaker on the death penalty issue, some of you will be inspired to get involved in the hard work of phone calling and letter writing.

Abolishing the death penalty is a basic human respect issue – a person's life does not belong to the state – yet abolition is a hard sell because of the unattractiveness of the victims. Working against the Death Penalty is truly a walk with our foundational values. Other religious groups might find pretexts within their belief systems to execute human beings, but because intrinsic worth is our foundation we are forced to respect and fight for those who appear to be the least deserving of our brothers and sisters.

