

Focus on Faith Theme 2009-2011

Hear the word of the Lord...learn to do good, seek justice. (Isa. 1:17)

The authors of the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament proclaimed a strong message of justice to the people of their time. They cried out against the social injustices of the rich ruling class against the poor, and taught that God had a plan in which all, rich and poor, powerful and oppressed, would have a part. This message is still relevant for us today.

Over the first two years of Focus on Faith, under the guidance of the theme “And God Saw That It Was Good,” we introduced the Social Justice themes and essential questions through the Curriculum Maps. We encouraged our teachers to include experiences of faith in every subject taught in our schools. We explored our church’s social justice teachings with our staff at Faith Day and each school community committed themselves, through a Mission Statement developed by staff, to living out a chosen social justice theme in their schools.

The chosen theme for 2009-2011 has a three-fold message calling us to: **Hear, Learn and Do.**

First, we are called to *hear the word of the Lord*, to open our ears and our hearts to God’s message, and to recognize that we are called to do God’s work. Too often we jump to a task because it is what **we** want to do. All that we do belongs to God, therefore, are our planned actions in accordance with God’s plan? This is achieved, first and foremost, through prayer. We cannot hear God’s word if we do not quiet our minds and hearts from the busyness of our daily lives. No project can be undertaken in God’s name without prayer and discernment. What are the needs of our world today? How is God calling us to respond? Have we asked God for strength and guidance in our task? Have we listened for God’s response?

Secondly, we must *learn to do good*. Before we commit to a project, we must learn all that we can about the community, people, needs, culture and agencies involved. How will our actions impact those we are trying to help? For instance, sending toys to children in a village in a developing nation may seem like a good idea; however, they may have a greater need for warm blankets, clean water or food. If we are offering our help through an agency, can they provide the best solution to the needs of the people? How much of the funds raised actually get to the people in need? Does the agency reflect our Catholic values? Is the project that we plan to undertake for the benefit of the community we choose to serve, or is it for our own benefit? **Every act of social justice must effect change** – change in ourselves, and change for the people, communities and countries we hope to serve.

Finally, we must *seek justice*. There are two feet to social action – charity (direct service) and justice (social change). But we need both feet to keep walking and to keep our balance. Food

drives are direct service and they address a serious need in our communities, but taking this to the next level and working to form a food co-op acknowledges that poverty and hunger is a community problem, respects the dignity of the human person by empowering those in need, allows all to share their gifts and abilities and provides a foundation for creating social change. This is social justice.

Love of God and of neighbor is the first and greatest commandment and absolutely basic to our Christian faith. We are social beings, called to live in society and to find fulfillment of our human development in social interaction. The Second Vatican Council stated in *The Church in the Modern World*:

“Let everyone consider it a sacred duty to count social obligations among his or her chief moral duties today and to observe them as such... This challenge cannot be met unless individuals and their associations cultivate moral and social virtues, and promote them in society. Thus with the necessary help of divine grace there will arise a generation of new men and women, artisans of a new humanity.”

It is our responsibility, as disciples of Christ, to witness and teach the Good News of Jesus to the young people entrusted to our care, to embody the social justice teachings of the church, and to promote and support social justice in our school, community and in our greater society. It is our hope that through the guidance of this theme we will “Hear, Learn and Do” the work of God in our schools and throughout our Board.

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