

for REFLECTION

Loving Mercy and Doing Justice

by Sarah Nolan

*You have been told, O mortal, what is good,
and what the LORD requires of you:
Only to do justice and to love goodness,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

—Micah 6:8

As part of NM Communities in Action & Faith (CAFé), an organization supported by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Kenneth Servais and his wife Janice agreed to lead a parish group to collect signatures to place a minimum wage increase on the ballot in Las Cruces, New Mexico. They had never done anything like it before and were nervous about the response they would get.

Kenneth and Janice arrived to their parish of Immaculate Heart of Mary early, before the first Mass, setting out clipboards on tables in the foyer. I could see they were nervous and excited all at once. Temperatures were on the rise and expected to be in the high 90s, but even that didn't stop them from canvassing later that afternoon.

With their leadership, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish collected the second largest number of signatures of parishes and congregations helping in the effort to raise the minimum wage. With over 700 signatures collected, including from the former bishop of Las Cruces, Ricardo Ramirez, they and others were putting their faith into action.

A living wage is a fundamental right of workers and a moral imperative of employers. But I know that it's not just one task or campaign or even the issues that transform and deepen a person's faith. It's the experience of having one's hope renewed and helping

to foster hope for others. It's an awesome thing for me to witness. Those working to affirm the dignity of others are always affirmed in their own faith, dignity, and worth.

The prophet Micah calls us to love mercy and do justice. Over and over again in my experience as an organizer, I've found that as parishes and individuals, we can easily fall into the habit of *doing mercy and loving justice*. Not a bad thing, but we're called to carry out the more challenging words of the prophet, loving mercy and **doing** justice. That seems more challenging. Yet, in our baptism, are we not anointed with power and love to be priest, prophet, and king in the service of God and God's people?

I've been committed to my ministry as a community organizer ever since I was a Catholic Campaign for Human Development intern in 2003. I know that institutions like our parishes are ideal places to affirm the dignity of our communities. We need to train ourselves and our parish communities in the best practices of being prophetic witnesses and leaders in our cities and towns. Prayer and deep reflection in community, with brothers and sisters who share a vision of doing justice, keep us all grounded in a vision for a future not our own. This is exactly what groups like CAFé are doing in parishes. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development provides parishes and organizations involved in the work of *mercy and justice* the needed empowerment to begin and continue the work.

Sarah Nolan is a community organizer with NM Communities in Action & Faith and a former intern for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

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