

Honoring Dr. King

Continuing His Unfinished Work

The 1968 Poor People's Campaign...Economic Justice For All

The year 2008 marks the fortieth year since the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. It also marks the fortieth year since the inception of King's Poor People's Campaign, a noble, interracial initiative to tackle the issue of systemic poverty in the United States.

Dr. King's brutal and untimely death left the Poor People's Campaign without his visionary leadership before the Campaign could take root. Even with Reverend Ralph David Abernathy stepping up to the plate to assume leadership of the Campaign, its revolutionary outlook on race and poverty in the U.S. – the unity and collective action of the poor – was rejected by many.

Today, forty years later, poverty in the United States continues to be a divisive element both between and within racial groups. The most current poverty statistics, from year 2006, show that 36.5 million Americans live in poverty (equal to the population of California). We must and can do more, and the Catholic Church has been attempting to do so over the years.

Charity and Justice

Roman Catholic Christians have both a wealth of insight and a longstanding record of action in the area of charity. However, in the modern age, since the beginning of the 20th century, the Catholic Church has re-postured itself to pursue justice, in addition to charity, in response to new manners of economic organization across the globe.

In *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical letter, the Holy Father affirms the Church's concern in the achievement of just societies:

The Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. (from *Deus Caritas Est* #28a)

Today, amidst the dynamics of social and economic organization, the Church has a unique placement. Not interested in usurping the realm of temporal responsibility, the Church *"is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls"* (D.C.E. #28b). As a part of its Christ-centered mission, the Church at once meets immediate material needs and pursues just societies from the ground-up by the reform of hearts and minds as well as creative action within communities.



Martin Luther King, Jr. announces the Poor People's Campaign

*“God is Love”
Deus Caritas Est*

I John 4:16

The Constancy of Catholic Social Teaching

Since the landmark Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (Revolutionary Change) in 1891, successive popes have offered Gospel-based calls to social justice and peace. Pope Benedict lists a few:

[*Rerum Novarum*] was followed in 1931 by Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* [*The Fortieth Year*]. In 1961, Blessed John XXIII published the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* [*Mother and Teacher*], while Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* [*The Progress of Peoples*] (1967), and in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* [*The Eightieth Anniversary*] (1971), insistently addressed the social problem, which had meanwhile become especially acute in Latin America. My great predecessor John Paul II left us a trilogy of social Encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* [*On Human Work*] (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [*Social Concern*] (1987) and finally *Centesimus Annus* [*The Hundredth Year*] (1991). Faced with new situations and issues, Catholic social teaching thus gradually developed, and has now found a comprehensive presentation in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

A variety of social ministry activities in the Archdiocese of Atlanta enable Catholics, and others of goodwill, to apply the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in their own lives and toward the benefit of others.

Catholic Campaign for Human Development

www.usccb.org/cchd • 404.885.7208

CCHD focuses on addressing domestic poverty by means of systemic change with a two-fold mandate: to fund low-income-controlled empowerment projects and to educate Catholics about the root causes of poverty within the context of Catholic social tradition. With the assistance of the local CCHD committee, parish grants, local community and national grants are awarded to qualified empowerment projects. The Good Friday Pilgrimage is held annually in Atlanta as a means of education, through the "Stations of the Cross," about social justice issues in our world today.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Inc.

www.catholiccharitiesatlanta.org to volunteer: 404.885.7271



Catholic Charities Atlanta, Inc. (formerly Catholic Social Services, Inc.) is an outreach ministry of the Archdiocese of Atlanta rooted in the Gospel, serving people of all backgrounds and religions, with special concern for those most in need and most vulnerable.

Emergency Assistance Program
Family Enrichment Program
Immigration & Resettlement Services
Parish & Social Justice Ministries
Pregnancy, Parenting, & Adoption Program
Village of St. Joseph Counseling Services

Catholic Relief Services

www.crs.org • 404.681.4600

Since its founding in 1943 by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, CRS has expanded in size to reach more than 80 million people in more than 100 countries on five continents. The CRS mission is to assist impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas, regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity, working in the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching to promote the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person. Within the United States, CRS engages Catholics to live their faith in solidarity with the poor and suffering of the world.

St. Vincent de Paul Society

www.svdpatl.org • 770.458.5415

The St. Vincent de Paul Society is an international nonprofit charity that has been actively helping people in metro Atlanta and north Georgia for over 100 years. The Society's mission is to respond and reach out to people in need, regardless of their race or religion. The Society strives to equip individuals experiencing a time of hardship with the materials, education and confidence needed to establish financial security and self-sufficiency.