

J/P Alert

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN *JUSTICE AND PEACE OFFICE*

IN THIS ISSUE

- Letter from Fr. Stan De Boe, OSST



CMSM:

- *assists major superiors in their role as leaders;*
- *promotes dialogue and collaboration with the conference of bishops and other major groups in church and society;*
- *provides a corporate influence in church and society.*

June 2005

For over five years I have gathered the information and edited the JP Alert. These two pages have been filled with brief reports on issues and action alerts that hopefully have been of interest and useful to CMSM members and members of the religious institutes that we serve through the National Office. This one, however, is perhaps the most difficult that I've written. On May 20, after over five years as the Justice and Peace Director, I left CMSM to begin a new ministry at Praesidium, Inc. The new Justice and Peace Director, Michael McNulty, SJ, will have already started his ministry at CMSM and I know that you will welcome him and be as supportive to him as you have been to me during my tenure at CMSM.

Michael brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the office. You will get to know much more about him, but briefly, he has experience in Central America, has been on the faculty at Marquette University, and most recently was on the staff of the Center of Concern. He is passionate about the justice issue and the work of peace and justice through the Conference will flourish under his guidance and care.

As Michael and I transitioned, I found the same difficulty telling him about the work here as I have had for my entire five years here. How do you describe a ministry that can change from the time you leave home in the morning to when you arrive in the

office just a few minutes later? That was my experience on September 11, 2001. I had been on vacation for two weeks and was driving to the office when the first reports of planes crashing into the World Trade Center aired. Within hours all of us were riveted to televisions and radios as we realized that the U.S. was experiencing what many others in our world experience each day – the horror and fear of living under the threat of terror. The next few days, living in shock and wondering what direction our government would take, I started to realize that whatever my job was before September 11, it had changed dramatically by September 12.

Suddenly, “wars and rumors of wars” became a focus of the justice and peace work. Theological and spiritual reflection on the experiences, analysis of the U.S. government’s response, working with the USCCB and other organizations to craft a Catholic response that was clear and consistent became primary tasks. Justice issues that the office addressed before September 11, 2001 became even more pronounced – immigration, refugees, global solidarity, trade and investment, militarization, budget. All were adversely affected by government policies that separated “us” from “them” by manipulation of scripture: “if you are not with us, you are against us.” Religious living in the U.S. and missioned around the world live and act in solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed;

experience the effects of torture and oppression, work among the displaced and disenfranchised. And religious had something to add to the conversation and analysis, a commitment to solidarity, to seeking justice through peaceful means, and to working with all people to create a society where the conditions that allow terror to be often the only response to what many experience as hopelessness.

Shortly after that first sea-change, the Church was rocked by the scandal of clergy sexual abuse. The most vulnerable in our society, children and vulnerable adults, had been abused by priests, and that abuse covered up by bishops. The credibility of the Catholic Church had been badly damaged and the voice of the Church on issues of justice and peace was questioned in light of the great injustice done by some in the Church.

The need to address this injustice demanded a great deal of time and energy from the Conference, as it should have. However, we also realized that it could not paralyze us from addressing other important issues in our society. I remember being introduced to the press at the 2002 Assembly in Philadelphia and telling the reporters that this office was focusing on issues other than the sexual abuse scandal. I was immediately hit with questions about why the Conference did not see this as a justice issue. My first experience with the media during this crisis taught me a great deal.

These two moments: September 11, 2001 and the clergy sexual abuse crisis that broke in 2002 significantly altered the work of the Justice and Peace Office. They could have also hijacked the entire agenda of the office. However, the work of the office could not be narrowed to the crisis of the moment.

One of the major tasks of the office is to be a corporate presence and voice of religious in the United States. Religious are involved in many important justice issues not only in the U.S. but also globally. These issues helped set the agenda for the national office. In addition, resolutions adopted by the membership set priorities that went well beyond the two crises. Over the last five years the Conference adopted resolutions making Haiti, Colombia, Cuba, the Middle East, and Sudan countries areas for action. In addition, justice issues of the death penalty, immigration, human trafficking, cancellation of debt, and responsible engagement in the political process

were also made priorities by the members. These are complex issues and I have welcomed the challenge of learning about them and working in close collaboration with many organizations to bring attention to these important issues.

Of the many things I have had the privilege to be a part of, I have to say that my involvement and work in promoting just peace in the Middle East has had the most profound effect on me. With barely a week under my belt in the office, I found myself in Israel and the Palestinian Territories beginning a learning process that I know will continue. After six visits to the region and developing strong contacts and proving the commitment of the Conference to seeking peace and justice for the people of the region, CMSM has not only been present to the people there, CMSM is a presence in the process.

There are many people who have been supportive and encouraging in my five years at CMSM. I have been privileged to work with a Justice and Peace Committee made up of men who have provided guidance and advice that have helped craft the effective justice work of the Conference. I owe a word of thanks to Mike Seifert, SM; Seamus Finn, OMI; Bill Quigley, CICM; Jim Stormes, SJ; and John Celichowski, OFM Cap. I also want to thank former committee members Ed Dunn, OFM and Phil Reed, MAfr. The staff at CMSM is a great team to work with. I knew that following Ted Keating in this ministry was going to be no small task, but he provided a foundation that I hope I built faithfully upon. Matt Wade, SM took on the task of following the issue of Colombia and has become a valued colleague, except on the days when the Ravens play the Browns. Bob Bozek has provided a model of organization that I could only admire, but never come close to. And I could have never done this job without the assistance and support of Sandy Harper who kept the office together while I ran around Washington and the world. And to all of you, the Members of CMSM, who have encouraged and challenged me, who have supported the work of this office and have promoted the justice agenda in your congregations; it has been an honor to serve you and to serve the Church. I am certain that I will see many of you through my new ministry at Praesidium. May our struggle for justice in our world and in our congregations continue to fashion us more into the image and likeness of the God whom we serve through our lives for others.

Stan De Boe, OSST, Editor