

TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



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POLITICS AND THE JUBILEE

by Anne Scheibner

THIS MORNING'S NEWSPAPER HEADLINES trumpeted primary election news – or what passes for news. Although I do not share one commentator's yearning for Pat Buchanan to blast the blah-blandness of the so-called "issues," I did wonder at the paucity of Jubilee themes in what would seem to be a ripe year. So the next time you're in a "town meeting," here's a starter on your crib sheet of questions to ask the candidates:

1. Sir, it says in Leviticus 25 that God owns the land. The land is not to be treated as a commodity. And further the Jubilee is the year in which everyone is to return to their home. That presupposes the idea of community as real, renewable, and rooted in place. Isn't it shortsighted to allow corporations to buy up woods and prime farmland as if "development" were something to be measured in new subdivisions, jobs and profits? Shouldn't we be looking for ways to help people have a stake in the land and houses in their urban and rural neighborhoods? How about re-envisioning the local market economy so that farmers see their work not as a business in a global marketplace but as a responsibility to feed the people in a locality? Around the world indigenous people are being evicted from their ancient homes to provide Americans with cheap French fries and export fruits and flowers. Having homes and feeding people needs to be seen in a human, regional scale. What does your Administration intend to do to help all of us – from local schools to local banks – begin to use the bioregion and ideas of shared and sustainable resources as the base on which to measure progress and productivity? Both Jeffersonian democracy and the Reconstruction vision of "40 acres and a mule" demand that we act now before the promise of the American dream drowns in a violent sea of consumer products, packaging and lost community.
2. I trust that you are supporting the **Jubilee 2000** initiative begun in Europe to forgive the overpowering debts of Third World countries. Those debts were incurred because of First World banks eager to find a place to invest money and the principle has been repaid many times over. Forgiving debts – or in fact foregoing to collect more interest – is part of recreating the level playing field which is part of the Jubilee idea of return and restitution.
3. I also trust that you are opposing the continuing privatization of the nation's prisons. One of the Jubilee provisions is the release of captives. Of course, in biblical times this meant indentured servants and not people convicted of criminal acts. But it would seem that it is an act of imprisoning the American people to make them assent to a system which actually is designed to profit from the incarceration of fellow

Continued from page 1.

citizens. Such a notion is totally contrary to a biblical understanding of retribution and makes us all party once again to condoning chattel slavery in this country, i.e., turning human beings into commodities not to mention the use of prison populations as a labor pool.

4. There has been some talk this election year about the national debt and what to do with the current budget surplus. It seems clear to me that the real debt needing to be paid is to the earth. The wealth of the industrial revolution and the new paper wealth being created by "downsizing" and gutting older forms of business organization needs to be used to halt – if possible – the accelerated degradation of the land, air, and water. This degradation has been the cost of "development" which no company has incorporated into its bottom line. Do you favor holding companies responsible for their toxic byproducts or having the government take responsibility? Taking one example of the above, would you favor refitting Trident submarines to retrieve the canisters of toxic and nuclear wastes which have been dumped into the oceans of the world instead of refitting them for conventional warfare as the current Administration has proposed?

5. I'm sure you have given some thought to the long term implications of genetic engineering. Who, for example, will be responsible if major famines occur as native plants are inadvertently – or even intentionally – sacrificed? Do you feel that government matching funds should be made available and that the companies seeking to market genetically altered seeds and food products should have all short term profits held in escrow? These funds would ensure that the entire population of the earth and not just a few rich Westerners could be sent into space if the earth is rendered unfit for life as we know it. Evolution is the course of our development as a species. Development is endless and as we know from our saints, the highest forms of human development generally end in martyrdom and a loin cloth. Unlimited growth is a cancer. What are you in favor of doing to



reinvent an economy currently based on endless consumption? If you think unlimited growth is the solution and not the problem, in whose back yard are your Think Tankers planning to place the garbage dumps of the next 100 years? Or will it be left to the market to decide where poor people live so that God's earth can be degraded selectively – at least until after your second term?

* * *

FRIDAY NIGHT MEETINGS FOR CLARIFICATION OF THOUGHT

We begin with Evening Prayer at 5:30 p.m., followed by a simple supper at 6:00. Conversation on the chosen topic begins at 7:00 p.m. with a brief presentation. All are invited to participate. We end promptly at 8:30 p.m. You may come for all or part of the meeting and children are welcome. Call St. Francis House (437-8890) to put your name in the pot if you want supper.

February 11 Armando Gonzalez on Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon missionary visions.

February 25 Dr. Linda C. Powell of Teachers College, Columbia, on a theology of urban education reform.

March 10 Emmett Jarrett & Anne Scheibner on urban ministry, a report on the Episcopal Urban Caucus assembly in Minneapolis.

March 24 Hartford and other Catholic Worker friends on the Trident Resistance Network.

April 12 (a Wednesday evening) Ken Leech visits from the East End of London to talk about urban ministry in old London with New London friends.

April 21 Good Friday: St. Francis House is open for prayer and reflection. There will be Stations of the Cross at Electric Boat in Groton. No meal in respect of the Good Friday fast.

May 5 OPEN HOUSE: All are invited to meet for prayer, refreshment and reflection on the first year of St. Francis House with members of the Board.

May 19 Emmett Jarrett on the poetry of William Blake and radical discipleship today.



THANK YOU!

Since April 26, 1999, St. Francis House has received 56 gifts of money, a few large ones and many small ones, which total \$38,029.50. We are grateful to all of these donors for their generosity, their confidence in us and our work, and their prayers. The following people and institutions are remembered before God every day as benefactors of St. Francis House:

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Jesus the anointed,
teach us how to honour those who need our help,
and we shall give without condescension,
and receive with humility.

Jesus,
receive our love and worship.
Show us how to give you what we have,
for nothing is too big or small
for us to offer, or for you to use.

Amen.

— A New Zealand Prayer Book



Rest in Peace

John J. Flaherty, Jr.
(11/8/23 – 2/7/00)

Jack Flaherty died February 7 in Rockville, CT. Jack was a friend of St. Francis House before we existed as such. He presided at Thursday Night Suppers for homeless people in Boston at St. John's, Bowdoin Street, where Emmett was Rector from 1981-87. Anne remembers him as "announcing the menu like the headwaiter at the Four Seasons" to homeless guests. His respect for human dignity was boundless. He was an example to all of us.

**Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord,
and let light perpetual shine upon him.**

OUR READERS WRITE

E-mail from Dave Rainey of St. James Church,
New London, dated 6 Feb 2000:

I enjoyed reading the TROUBADOUR this morning. I especially enjoyed Sarah's Sermon. I could see the crowds of helpless harassed people like little sheep. What is this about, and how did it make me feel? In my mind as I stood next to Jesus looking out over the crowds he turned to me and said to feed them. I felt a tremendous burden. How could I carry out this responsibility? Then I knew, I had to trust in God and Jesus Christ for I could not do it. God would provide the fishes and loaves. I just had to pass out the baskets.

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