

**To:** Voice of the Poor Committee  
**From:** Ann Cole

**Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering**  
Washington, D.C. February 22 – 25, 2004

For two days we attended a series of workshops on how to advocate, national issues before Congress, and international issues. Our group (Lorraine, Deborah, Ed, Ann) attempted to attend different workshops whenever possible so that we could cover many topics. This report is only on my experiences.

The keynote address on the first evening was by Bishop Charles Palmer-Buckle from Ghana. I will share a few thoughts, but I have the recording of this talk and anyone who is interested may borrow it.

- When Communism imploded, Capitalism exploded, became unbridled. We have given reign to our base instincts in our quest for profit.
- Globalization is damaging the U.S. as well as other nations, as witnessed by unemployment and poverty in this country.
- There is a need for a new world order. We are called to re-evangelize the Church (ourselves), then it is our duty to evangelize our society, our culture, and bring a new world order.
- Globalization as such is not the problem – it is wrong when it has an eye only for profit.
- Catholics number about 1.07 billion worldwide – about 1 of every 6 people is “some kind of Catholic” – we together are a force to be reckoned with.
- The Church is the only organized institution that is global, members in every part of the world, people who belong to every culture. Not uniformity, but we belong together.
- We are to be salt of the earth. It does not take a pound of salt to flavor a pound of food – a little bit can make a great difference. How salty am I? If we are one out of every six in the world, where have I failed?
- For every gift God gives there is a related call that is my responsibility.
- If there is bad governance in this or any country, we as Catholics must take our share of the blame. We must form people with moral principles so their political choices will follow these principles.
- Let your light as American Catholics shine. If you don't the world will die of dark and cold.

The first meeting was on “Advocacy 101”. Here are my notes:

- Goal is to establish a relationship with the Member of Congress or staff
- Alert them that this set of issues is very important to me and to the Church
- Close the sale – get commitment to take action
- It's ok not to know all the answers; the most important thing is the relationship.
- Find out what the expertise of the staff person is, and focus on these issues.
- Say that I am not representing my personal interests but those of the people we serve
- Ask what is the best way to make contact with them in the future.

- Invite them to visit us when they are in town, see our work and recognize problems in the community.
- Follow up with both member and staff person – thank for opportunity to visit and reinforce the message.
- Be sure to provide any follow up material
- Write a letter to editor, to SF Catholic, put in bulletins; send copy of printed letter/article to the Member.

From a speech by John Carr, Secy, Dept. of Social Development and World Peace, USCCB:

- Before you respond to those who criticize/attack you, consider what God is trying to tell you
- At end of each Eucharist, we are sent forth to provide a “place at the table” for every person
- We, as Church, are more than our mistakes – i.e., schools, shelters, hospitals where each person is treated with dignity.
- We don’t fit any of the parties or candidates. We have to challenge or support each issue regardless of party.
- The fundamental difficulties we face have moral and ethical basis. We have a problem with selective orthodoxy in our Church.
- It’s not just what we believe, but what we do every day that’s important.
- What’s essential and what’s not in assessing the Church now:
  - o Understand that social ministry of the church is essential
  - o We must anchor that mission in our worship
  - o Must share our social mission – if it’s a secret, we have failed
  - o Integrate this mission into the Church as a whole. We have to act like it is essential
  - o We have to make the “political” “personal”
- In political candidates’ consideration of “Nascar dads” and “soccer moms”, where is consideration for poor moms and dads.
- The test of TANF is not whether people leave the welfare rolls but whether their lives are better
- Emphasize a consistent ethic of life – the fundamental issue is not abortion, hunger, etc. It is loss of respect for human life. This leaves us, as Catholics, politically homeless – which is not a bad place to be.

From a speech on “Standing up for Human Dignity” by Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League, and former mayor of New Orleans.

- We need a new ‘movement’ in this country – not tied to politics, but as a moral issue. We must elevate this issue beyond Democrat or Republican.
- Why would an investor or a wealthy person care about poverty? If people are employed, they will spend money. Helping people out of poverty is not only better for those people but also good for the economy and for the future of this country.
- Jesus was an activist – against the establishment of his time.
- Caring is not an option for a Catholic – it is the right thing to do.

- Use the economic argument: the more productive and independent people are, the better off we all are.

One of the most useful workshops I attended was titled “Consciousness Raising with the Middle Pew”, and was facilitated by Dr. Donald Emge from the Diocese of Springfield. Some of his comments that we may find useful are as follows:

- The Catholics he defines as “middle pew” may clearly identify themselves as Catholic. However their faith may not be reflective, it is propositional rather than integrated, and tends to be an “accepted” faith rather than an “owned” faith.
- We need to raise our consciousness about who is suffering – may be a neighbor who is ill, a person who has lost a child. We are all a bunch of broken people.
- We need to help people see the workings of society in terms of what the gospel values say and how we can do something about it.
- Social teaching is nothing more than the Gospel. It is a work of evangelization.
- To be Catholic Christian is to serve the poor and the two cannot be separated. Evangelization is about the liberation and salvation of the entire person and society. It is a lifelong process.
- How do we do it?
  - o Conversation – not ruffling feathers. I need to be strong in my conviction, but I listen attentively, find points of agreement, and we together try to find points of agreement.
  - o Begin with facts and talk with nouns, not with adjectives.
  - o Our only ideology is the Gospel, not to promote any political agenda.
  - o Say “here is the situation – what do you think we should do in light of a specific gospel teaching”
- Be very clear that this is God’s work. You and I do not build the kingdom of God. We put ourselves at God’s disposal. Don’t say there aren’t enough hours in the day – God made the day. Don’t try to do more than God expects of you.

There was a large contingent of Californians who visited both our senators. However, only five of us visited the office of Representative Tom Lantos – Deborah, Ed, Ann, Ben Vaissade, and Melanie from the Archdiocese office. We met with Ron Grimes, who is the Legislative Director, for nearly an hour. We were able to present our thoughts on several legislative issues, and the meeting was a very positive experience for all of us. Our task now is to keep in touch and to follow up on the items we discussed. I have sent a “thank you” email to Lantos and to Ron, as well as to the person in the local office who set up the appointment for us. This is only the first step. We now need to arrange to visit the local office when Lantos is available to meet with us, and we need to maintain contact with the Washington office.

I have a copy of the “Faithful Citizenship” document published by the USCCB and a small flyer that summarizes it. We should consider ordering more of the booklets – or printing the document from the Internet.