

ROUNDTABLE REPORT

THE ROUNDTABLE ASSOCIATION OF DIOCESAN SOCIAL ACTION DIRECTORS

July 2008

Roundtable Board Expands Membership, Chooses Awardee

The USCCB's Joan Rosenhauer will receive the Harry A. Fagan Roundtable Award February 21.

In the first expansion of membership in the organization's 23-year history, the Roundtable Board voted to add the category of Associate Member for directors of justice and peace offices for religious orders. The move came after the association's pilot program was judged a success. Religious order social action directors have joined in at events like the Social Action Summer Institute and Symposium and the Virtual Roundtable email discussions.

Meeting in Washington, D.C., the Roundtable Board also selected Joan Rosenhauer of the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development, to receive the 2009 Harry A. Fagan Award for her many contributions to the church's social action ministry, in particular her efforts staffing Faithful Citizenship and promoting collaboration among education and social action offices.

Looking towards February, the Board also selected a theme for the 2009 Symposium: "Engaging the Faithful on Food Justice." This symposium will go beyond the policy issues involved in food justice and look at ways diocesan social action directors can frame these issues effectively to animate people in the pews to take action for justice. The program will include a major segment on spirituality and food as well as an exchange of "best practices" in the area of conscience formation on food justice.

Board members also met with the staff of the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development to discuss areas of common interest, including the national roll-out of Faithful Citizenship resources and ways The Roundtable might support the five targeted areas of focus for the USCCB, in particular "the life and dignity of the human person."

Another meeting with national organization partners, "The Outreachers," yielded advice from the leadership of the Roundtable Association on coordinating the various poverty campaigns among the national organizations leading these campaigns. Board members counseled stronger links between the campaigns to signal to partners and to the nation that we are one church working together

In other business, Suzanne Belongia was re-elected Vice-Chair (Barbara Budde enters her second year of a two-year term) and the Standards and Expectations Committee received feedback on developing a new evaluation tool for members to use in assessing their offices and planning for the future. The Board also enjoyed dinner at the Georgetown home of Bob and Sarah Nixon, hosted by Agnes Nixon, and a presentation that evening on "Emerging Models of Parish Leadership" from Marti Jewell, director of the Emerging Models of Leadership project.

What I Did in Guadalajara: Spiritual Exercises for Charities/Caritas Directors

by Brian Corbin

Executive Director, Catholic Charities Services & Health Affairs, Diocese of Youngstown, OH

I gratefully participated as one of approximately 75 US delegates at the "Spiritual Exercises" sponsored by The Pontifical Council, [Cor Unum](#) (One Heart). This Vatican dicastery, organized by Pope Paul VI, helps to coordinate the charitable works of the Church on a global level, fosters the catechesis of charity, and operates various development foundations. Paul Josef Cardinal Cordes, in attendance with us, serves as President of the Council.

Over 450 Catholic Charities/Caritas directors from all the countries of North, Central, South America and the Caribbean came to Guadalajara, Mexico from June 1-June 6, 2008 to engage in a first ever hemispheric retreat led by the Preacher of the Papal Household, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap. Two major aspects moved me during this unique experience: 1) the power of the reflections by Fr. Cantalamessa on the nature and work of "charity/Love" based on the papal encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*; and, 2) the interactions I had with many directors of Catholic Charities (or Caritas in all other parts of the world except in the US).

Fr. Cantalamessa led us in a series of meditations that helped us as "Caritas" workers to integrate in our agencies and personal lives various aspects of systematic theology, spirituality and Scripture. He called us to meditate on the six strophs/verses of the ancient hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come, Holy Ghost). I gained a much deeper insight into the work and theology of the Trinity through his reflections on the power and gifts of the Spirit. Cantalamessa continued his meditations on four specific "beatitudes" (blessed are the poor, the meek, the hungry, the peacemakers) and challenged us to review in our own lives how these impact us as leaders of Catholic Charities/Caritas agencies. He then led a series of meditations on several well known parables: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and Lazarus and Dives, and again called us to better understand how these stories form our spiritual lives and apostolates. Finally, during the daily Eucharistic celebrations, Cantalamessa preached on the various aspects of the Mass (the Word, the Eucharist, Communion) and on Mary. Some very specific themes that impacted me specifically related to the Christian call to holiness, the need to refuse/reject "indifference," and the radical witness of the call to love God and our Neighbor.

Another aspect that moved me involved the interactions I had with Caritas Directors from many other countries of the American hemisphere. I gained new insights into the work of the Church in various dioceses of the Caribbean, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala to name a few. I grew to appreciate how the Church is a trans-national/global institution with local outreach in almost every neighborhood on earth. I learned that even though I need to focus my work in my own diocese, that there is a need to find ways to connect to our brothers and sisters around the world. I gained an appreciation on how some of our fellow directors are personally at risk for their work. I experienced how all of us share in the work of the Church continuing Jesus' call to be servants. The mission is universal: be a sign of God's love in the world.

I left this retreat more committed to living out my faith – both personally and institutionally -- as a director of a Caritas agency in the US. We are called to act --and love-- locally and think globally by practicing some of core insights of our faith: solidarity and communion.

Books by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap, Preacher of the Papal Household:

- *Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator* Liturgical Press (May 2003)
- *Contemplating the Trinity: The Path to the Abundant Christian Life* Word Among Us Press (January 15, 2007)
- *The Eucharist, Our Sanctification* Liturgical Press (January 1993)

Roundtabling with Dennis O'Connor

Dennis O'Connor is the author of *Bridges of Faith: Building a Relationship With a Sister Parish* (St. Anthony Messenger Press)

RR: Why did you write this book?

DO: I had looked around the marketplace for something like it, and there was only one book out about sister parishes; it was a 1996 book by Dick Fenske called *In the Good Struggle: The Sister Parish Movement*. It was specifically related to his experience in Guatemala, so it was very country-specific. Dick's perspective was from the Lutheran Synod, and I thought the heart and soul of the sister parish movement in the U.S. is Catholic, not entirely so, but by and large, the lion's share of the faithful participating in this process are Roman Catholic. So, the newest product out on the topic was ten years old, and it was specific to Guatemala. I thought there was an opportunity.

RR: I want to give you a scenario. There's a parish pastoral council meeting in an upper-middle income parish. Someone gets a bright idea which becomes brighter as the meeting goes on: "We ought to develop a sister parish relationship with a parish in another part of the world." Then someone else says, "Fr. Kwadwo from Ghana, who served in this parish for a few years, has returned to Ghana. Why don't we partner with his parish?"

What advice would you give them?

DO: That's really how it happens a lot of times. You'll have a visiting missionary or a visiting priest or religious come through and actually spend time with a faith community. It's only natural that you maintain contact. Pretty soon, he or she will begin inviting the faith community to come and see what they are doing, and little by little you get more and more drawn into this partnership.

The advice I would offer is try to use the resources that are available. If you're in a Roman Catholic diocese, chances are good that you will have an active mission office, and the mission office will be tied into support groups throughout North America and even internationally. They are going to be able to find leads on resources available to you and help you with the kinds of decisions which need to be made.

Do you send a group over to explore the feasibility of such a partnership, and if so, how large should that group be? Normally, what happens is that one to three people from a parish would actually hop on board a plane and go. They would do a feasibility study on the spot, see what the needs are, see what kind of financial commitment is involved in the process. There almost always is some kind of financial

commitment, even if it's just providing transportation back and forth between parishes. Sometimes a parish will get involved in ministry and lay down money toward that goal.

A good illustration of that is Immaculate Heart of Mary parish here in Cincinnati. This parish has had a partnership for years in Managua, Nicaragua. The former principal of the school was a Sister of St. Joseph. She decided after 30 years of teaching that she wanted to be a missionary. She bopped around in Central and South America, and she landed in Managua, at a cultural center. The pastor at IHM, he was listening to his social action committee. They were saying that they would like to reach out and form a partnership. He said, "Why reinvent the wheel, let's call Sr. Margie Navarre, SSJ and let's see if she has opportunities for us. To make a real long story short, after a long process of sending people back and forth, bringing groups of Nicaraguans to the States, and having groups from southwestern Ohio going down, they pledged over \$300,000 over a several-year period to help the center.

Back to the advice: take it slow. If you're in a Roman Catholic parish, go to your diocese, and ask them what kind of steps to take. Buy copies of Bridges of Faith. If you're looking for some of the best minds in the business, Mike Gable in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Missions Office is probably the leader in this concept nationally. Mike Haasl from the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis Global Solidarity Office is also right on top of the movement. Rosanne Fischer in the Diocese of St. Cloud is also very well-versed on the topic.

RR: Is this really a new idea? If you look at St. Paul's letters, it seems like there was a lot of solidarity among the early churches.

DO: Yes, all of this is a fanciful way of building community. Transportation changes—being able to hop on board an airplane and fly anywhere—have eliminated a lot of borders and allow for new communities of faith to be formed, through this process. That's been going on for two thousand years, building faith communities.

RR: How do these parishes act on each other once they are in relationship with one another?

DO: The answer is that almost always, the North American faith community ends up being humbled by the partner, just through the spirituality that they witness. This is what I have seen time after time. Most often these sister parishes are in Third World settings, so you have all the challenges of that: poverty, lack of national development, infrastructure, roads, running water, and that kind of thing. People in the United States have this built-in gene of being chauvinistic problem-solvers. It's just ingrained in us. We see a problem and we go fix it. Often when you get involved in these relationships, the Third World partner will not rebuff, but will say, "Look, don't throw money at this; money isn't what we're talking about here. Yeah, we'd like to do something, down the road, but what we want to do is for you to come listen to our stories. Almost always, Americans will walk away from these experiences with a deeper sense of spirituality than they've ever understood before—in almost every case. In short, what very often happens is that the overseas partner will provide spiritual sustenance and the Americans will provide material sustenance.

RR: Say you've got a parish with a sister parish relationship, but it's currently simply about the transfer of money. What advice would you have for them?

DO: It's important to maintain that relationship. Not every faith community in the United States is going to have the depth of partnership that others will. Not every parish is going to have ten people on a committee who are going to want to go over once a year to visit their faith partners, but one thing they can do is recognize their faith partners in prayer, in community celebrations, a Mass, once a month, that's dedicated to their faith partners, and then giving the money is very important. When people say that money isn't the only solution, that's true, but money opens doors. It's an important activity for a parish even if most of what they're doing is giving money. As long as it's not just an annual collection and that's all they think of the other parish. If they're involved in an exchange of letters or some other kind of communication, you don't necessarily have to have a back-and-forth program of visiting.

RR: Catholic Relief Services has a program of diocese-to-diocese partnerships. What do you think of those?

DO: Those are great. The best example I can think of is the Diocese of St. Cloud. They have a partnership with the Diocese of Homa Bay, Kenya that evolved bishop-to-bishop. What's great about these partnerships is that they allow for smaller sister parish relationships to evolve. The partnership energized the whole diocese to become involved in mission activities. They're in Central America, Africa, and poor areas of the United States.

RR: How can a program like JustFaith help sister parish relationships develop?

DO: Unless you are inherently oriented towards social justice, you need some formation. JustFaith brings participants into the mindset of a person who is really just working through the challenges of what it takes to survive. Programs like that, such as Salt and Light here in Cincinnati are invaluable for individuals who are just getting their feet wet in the whole area of mission.

RR: What's different about "sister school" relationships?

DO: The school relationships are great because they get young people involved at a time when they will be most influenced by the experience. As a practical matter, faith partnerships with schools are geographically limited, in most cases. Most times, you do not take a group of kids, hop on a plane, and go to El Salvador. What you can do is have an exchange of letters, have an exchange of emails, maybe have an exchange of audiotapes or videotapes. And probably the most valuable learning experience for the students is for them to discover how much commonality they have among themselves: "This kid's just like me." There's more formal structure to it, because you're in a classroom setting—and that's fine. Oftentimes, what you'll find is that a parish has a sister parish relationship and then adds a school component as that relationship develops.

RR: Are their opportunities for legislative advocacy that emerge from sister parish relationships?

DO: I think these kinds of partnerships are a wonderful opportunity to explore how much influence people actually have, and how much voice they can actually bring to someone who is dispossessed. One of the things we've done here in Cincinnati is getting in the habit of seeing our congressman, who happens to be on the House Foreign Relations Committee. If you are working with a particular faith community and they are having a particular problem that could be influenced by legislators in this country, legislators will listen to you. That's one of the great strengths of these programs. If we make the wheels squeaky, we can make things happen.

Roundtable Roundup

Unafraid of Big Bad Wolf, Winona Director Builds House of Straw

Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Not Suzanne Belongia, social action director for the Diocese of Winona, who is building a straw-bale house in the picturesque lakes region of southern Minnesota with housemates from a Catholic Worker community. Suzanne began volunteering with the Catholic Worker ten years ago and later moved into a Catholic Worker community. Friends have pitched in on the construction, and the home will be ready to move into in the fall. The house will be spacious but quite efficient, taking advantage of passive solar heating of living space and geothermal heating of water. Suzanne explained the construction process during a tour earlier this week prior to the diocesan Ministry Days. On a day like the one we toured (75 degrees and partly cloudy), home construction sounded like fun!

Tricia Hyt of Phoenix Diocese Pursues Biblical Studies Doctorate

Tricia Hoyt of the **Diocese of Phoenix** is a believer in lifelong faith formation—and not just for others! Tricia has enrolled in a PhD program in Biblical studies at **Brite Divinity School** at **Texas Christian University**. Is it hard for her to find the time? In her first year, the night and weekend work she performed for the Diocese of Phoenix allowed her to jet to Fort Worth for classes and return to her ministries with no reduction in weekly hours. One of her favorite classes, with **Dr. Warren Carter**, “takes seriously that economic and social concerns are everywhere in the Gospel According to Matthew,” she said. Dr. Carter is known internationally for locating “strategies of resistance” to the Roman Empire within the text.

Tricia explained that she has a special interest in “how Biblical texts have been used to disenfranchise people.” We all will recall wincing when culturally-bound Biblical texts are read (e.g. “Wives obey your husbands”), but Tricia’s aim is not to excise such texts from the Bible. Rather, she aims to “deconstruct and reconstruct” the texts so that they may come to be “heard in such a way as to be revelatory,” through new “hearing strategies.” “We must stop the misuse of a text,” she said.

Soon, Tricia will identify a dissertation topic—a completely original contribution she will make to Biblical studies. At this time, she feels especially drawn to humor in the Bible. Mind you, when Tricia speaks of humor in the Bible, she is not referring to knee-slappers (although the image of Zacheus in the tree gets me every time). Instead, she is looking at irony rooted in the context of the lives of the people who are hearing the message of Christ. For example, the term “savior” takes on an ironic meaning among a people accustomed to being told that the Roman Empire is their savior.

What does Tricia plan to do with this new degree? “I love teaching,” she said. “I want to use it in the context of my teaching.” With her Tricia’s passion for scripture fortified with weekly reading and reflection with some of the top Biblical scholars in the country, one envies the parishioners in the Diocese of Phoenix who will attend her presentations and workshops.

Marco Raposo Plants Fowler Flower in El Paso Diocese

Marco Raposo made a name for himself leading the **Justice for Immigrants** campaign in the **Diocese of San Bernardino**, working alongside **Jeanette Arnquist**, office director. Now the master of four languages

turns his attention to leading the justice and peace office in the **Diocese of El Paso**, replacing the retiring **Sr. Kathleen Judge**. With others heading up Justice for Immigrants, Marco will focus on fighting poverty and promoting social justice ministries in parishes. Marco is an exponent of the “Fowler Flower Model” (clickhereforimage) of parish social ministry, a reimagining of the vision of Communities of Salt and Light utilizing the image of the parts of a flower developed by **Rich Fowler** of the **Diocese of Stockton**. He seeks to implement this vision in the diocese over the coming months.

A Victory for Commutative Justice

Roundtable Members recently received courtesy checks of \$100.00 apiece from the Hyatt Corporation, in compensation for a sleepless night at the Roundtable Symposium, February 23-24. Over 1,000 fraternity and sorority members packed the halls of each floor of the hotel, partying until breakfast on Sunday. A team of negotiators from USCCB’s Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development rendered the settlement.

The receipt of the checks set off spending sprees from coast to coast. **Dee Rowland** of the **Diocese of Salt Lake City** reported that she will spend her check on “a new immigration DVD from Notre Dame and resupply my Social Justice Principles cards, Pax Christi prayer cards, etc.” **J.L. Drouhard** of the **Archdiocese of Seattle** is more ambitious. He stated, “I’m going to Disneyland!!! If that’s not approved, then I’ll invest in crude oil futures. Lacking that option, we’ll put it into our fund to assist parishes with JustFaith program costs.” **Sr. Gail Young, SSS** of the **Archdiocese of Los Angeles** represents the “saver” faction of The Roundtable, noting that she will be depositing the check in her travel reimbursement fund for future continuing education.

Virtual Roundtable Discussion Yields Article in *America* Magazine

A Virtual Roundtable email conversation has led to an article in this week’s *America* magazine. After a dialogue among Roundtable members about Amnesty International’s new policy regarding abortion, members shared how their dioceses are responding. Roundtable Director Jeffrey Odell Korgen followed up with the diocesan social action director participating and interviewed their sources in parish, universities, and dioceses.

The result was an article in the June 23 issue which can be viewed by clicking [here](#)

Brigit Hurley’s Top Ten Leadership List: Top Ten Reasons You’re Having Trouble Recruiting New Volunteers

10. You assume that everyone is busy.

You might be surprised at who responds to an invitation. Some people are looking for a challenge. Don’t ask the most likely suspects – the parish council chair, the longtime Sunday School teacher. Commit to approaching 5 people you don’t know and who you are almost sure will say no. What do you have to lose?

People devote time to efforts that provide them with meaning and inspiration. For some that is late hours at the office or volunteering for their child's sports team. For others, it might be putting their faith into action at their parish.

9. Committee meetings consist of reports on past activities and upcoming events, broken up by a little gossip here and there.

Would you want to join a clique that holds boring meetings? Probably not.

Save time and energy by having reports on past activities submitted in writing. Use your committee's time together to plan future events and discuss how your activities fit into your goals and objectives for the year. And DON'T GOSSIP! It's not nice and it makes people feel like the committee is a clique who welcome some people and not others, instead of being a ministry open to all parishioners.

8. It's not like you're asking them to chair the committee; you've done that for years and you'll continue to do it.

Rotate responsibilities and roles on the committee. You'll only attract leaders if you offer leadership opportunities. Make the social ministry committee a place for parishioners to develop skills and offer new ideas.

7. You are the world's expert on distributing Christmas baskets, because you've been doing it the same way for 15 years.

If people don't happen to like the way you do Christmas baskets, why would they join the effort if they have no hope of changing it? Be open to suggestions for change; give other people ownership of projects.

6. You can't understand why that nice woman only came to one committee meeting.

Follow up! Ask her! Approach her after Mass or give her a call to ask why she has not returned. She may offer you ideas on how to attract new members.

5. You lost the list of people who signed up for social ministry at the Ministry Fair last month.

Be organized! To do this work requires a heart for justice, a love for all God's people . . . and a good filing system. If keeping track of paperwork is not your strength, delegate those responsibilities to someone else on the committee.

4. You ran that request for volunteers in the bulletin 6 months ago, and no one responded.

Have you heard that advertising maxim that people must hear or see something 6 times before it really sinks in? Apply that here. People respond to multiple invitations, presented in a variety of ways.

Some people never read the bulletin; others always leave Mass early and miss announcements. Look for any opportunity to tell the story of your committee's work, and devote most of your recruitment efforts to talking with people one-on-one.

3. There's so much to get done, there's no time to pray.

PRAY! It's what Jesus did when things got tough. We have been given every assurance that our prayers are heard and answered (though we don't always receive the answer we are hoping for!)

2. You don't have time to do volunteer recruitment - you're too busy getting things done.

Be a leader, not a doer. You a leader on your committee - your job is to coordinate the work, not do it. If you are stocking the food cupboard and driving bags of clothing to the shelter, you won't have time or energy to ask the big questions, like "Are we fulfilling our mission?" and "How can we engage more people in this work?"

1. You're grumpy.

Be joyful! Celebrate victories! Laugh!

If this work does not bring you joy, find another ministry. Pursuing social justice doesn't always feel good but it should be providing you with some satisfaction and opportunities for fellowship. Your enthusiasm will be contagious.