

Faith and Justice  
March, 1 2010

Shall we pray together: Lord, guide our feet and use our hands this day; open our minds to possibility and enlarge our hearts. In all things, Thy will be done. Amen.

I would like to tell you about my experience in WIN . . . how it has deepened my faith as it so closely allies with the teachings of Jesus.

Fourteen years ago, a mild-mannered black Baptist preacher from the South spoke at the rector's forum. He told about a newly forming citywide organization called Washington Interfaith Network (WIN). His words immediately got my attention and aroused a new energy. He spoke about justice for everyone . . . a desire for wholeness in the city. He talked of the city's four quadrants joining hands to bring about a change in the culture. He said it was about relationship building and acting out of faith.

Jim Donald convened about 25 parishioners who wanted to hear more. A much smaller group took the WIN idea to the vestry; Charlie and Vi Lund and Jody Schwarz were in that core and remained active. We started going to meetings in different parts of the city to address local issues brought up by parishioners in neighborhood churches. WIN always *follows the energy*—does not seek to create it. We began learning the language and principles of WIN:

- *Power* . . . not to dominate but the ability to act;
- *Accountability* . . . holding elected officials accountable for their promises and responsibilities to the city;
- *Systemic change* . . . as different from charity and good works;
- *A place at the table* . . . for those marginalized by rules of society and political hierarchies;
- *Self interest* . . . not the selfish kind, but that which motivates and allows people to make decisions that improve lives and transform neighborhoods;
- *Being in relationship* . . . as a way of effecting change and bringing about *justice*.

WIN is clearly an activist, highly energized and joyful organization . . . and, I might add, relentless in its demands. Somewhere along the way, my feelings about it have changed; they have *deepened*. WIN has become more than an outreach involvement and more like a calling from my religious center. I began thinking about Jesus and what I knew: He was born in a stable surrounded by animals; the news of His birth came to simple men, shepherds; He was a carpenter by trade; He called fishermen to carry his message; He walked among the people over land and in cities, healing and teaching; He said repeatedly, "Love thy neighbor." And I have learned more:

Palestine in the first century was a world with sharp social boundaries. Jesus defied this social scheme centered in holiness and laws around purity. His was a vision of compassion and inclusion. In this sense, Jesus' message and ethic were radical. He preached against the rigid practices and beliefs of Judaism as it was being practiced. He sought out the so-called impure, touched lepers and blessed beggars, healed the sick and wounded in spirit. He chose to eat with outcasts . . . "tax collectors and sinners." Women were included at His table and His fellowship extended to the "poor, the maimed, the marginalized." His was a "discipleship of equals," where the concept of "the other" was not spoken.

The life and teachings of Jesus are mirrored in the principles and actions of WIN, known to be a justice-seeking urban organization. Justice *is* key, but it is the underlying faith of members that sustains WIN's power and achievements. That has been my experience, for which I am very grateful.

– Tish Gardner

*Sources*

The New Testament

*Meeting Jesus for the First Time*, by Marcus J. Borg

*Rules for Radicals*, by Saul D. Alinsky