

Summary

The Spirituality of Sustainability: *Looking at our world in faith, hope & love* Saturday, April 26, 2008

Murphy Initiative Conference on Justice and Peace honoring the memory and ministries of
Most Reverend P. Francis Murphy, D.D
Auxiliary Bishop of Baltimore: 1976 – 1999
†March 25, 1933 – September 2, 1999

The Murphy Initiative Annual Conference held this year on April 26 was a success in every way. As it takes a village to raise a child, so it takes a “village” to produce a conference. Our village had four very competent, committed and energetic groups; the presenting team of four United Nations NGO representatives, the Murphy Initiative organizing committee, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, who hosted the event, and finally the attendees themselves. The interest and enthusiasm of the approximately 150 participants indicates that the topic, *The Spirituality of Sustainability*, is a timely one. It is interesting to note, that in his talk at the U.N. on April 18, Pope Benedict XVI said “The promotion of human rights remains the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security.” This was the message our NGO representatives brought to us.

The keynote speaker, Sister Carol Zinn, SSJ, placed sustainability in the context of Sacred Scripture, Church documents and the major themes of Catholic Social Teaching and then raised it to the level of spirituality which transcends denominational religions. **Sustainability is a way of life based on the sacredness of all creation. Ecology, economy and equity are steps of the holy dance called sustainability.**

It is a dance which all of us must learn and enter into so that all 6.6 billion of us on Planet Earth may have life and all that is needed to live it to the full. **Ecology**, she identified as relationships within the household of all creation, **economics** is how we manage the goods of the household, and **equity** is the balance of both for the **common good**.

Each panelist, speaking from her/his area of expertise, together created a comprehensive view and understanding of the vital issue of sustainability. Sister Joan Burke, SND spoke from her expertise on poverty eradication and development. She pointed to the 2005 UN Report on the World Social Situation as clearly defining the dangers of development if inequality is ignored. Using economic growth and income generation as the only development strategy, leads to the accumulation of wealth by a few and deepens the poverty of many. The richest 2% of the world’s adult population owns more than half of global household wealth, the poorer half owns a mere 1% of global wealth; an astounding statistic Sister Joan gave!

Sister Ann Scholz, SSND talked about the need to address the inequities in education. Among illiterate populations, five out of six are women and girls, poverty being the greatest contributing factor. If a family is able to send a child to school, it will be the boy. Safety is another factor that keeps girls from attending school. There is greater possibility of their being abused than boys. The quality of education is very poor in developing countries due to the lack of educational materials, and prepared teachers. It is easy to see the long term effects that lack of education has on perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Marianist Brother, Steve O’Neil addressed world finances and the complexities, inequities, and responsibilities that must be faced in that arena. Even within the very poor countries there exists a huge discrepancy between the small minority of rich and the majority of people who live on \$1.00 a day or less.

The afternoon was clearly the pragmatic part of sustainability, but no less spiritual. It was another way of hearing St. James say “What good is it if you see someone in need and say to that person, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well, but do nothing to help them?” Faith must express itself in the hard work of systemic change. Those who attended the daylong conference left more committed to being part of the solution to the problem of sustainable development and hoping that the momentum created that day will not be lost. A follow up session is planned for June 7th at the Oblate Sisters of Providence from 10:00 until noon to help us decide the next step in order to enter the dance of sustainability.

[Click here](#) to view the 2005 UN Report on the World Social Situation