

November 2010

A&SJ Committee  
Mission Statement

We promote social justice as central to all Daughter of Charity ministry. We move together with persons who are poor and marginalized from reflection to advocacy for systemic change.

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Sr. Mary Ann Azar

Sr. Faith Colligan

Sr. Julie Cutter

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Sr. Carol Durkin

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# Advocating for Social Justice

Joint Newsletter of the  
Daughters of Charity Advocacy & Social Justice Committee USA

## CLIMATE CHANGE

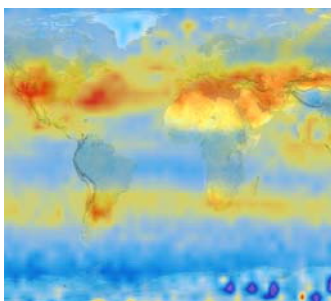
by Sr. Faith Colligan

In 1969 one of my professors was expressing concern about the accumulation of carbon dioxide and the resulting greenhouse gas affect over the earth. At the time it did not mean much to most of us. Today, the ravages of that greenhouse affect are becoming evident all over our planet. According to a report issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, July 28, 2010, "the past decade has been the warmest and the Earth has been growing warmer for the last fifty years."



Mary Robinson, first chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights notes, "Climate change is already undermining the realization of a broad range of fundamental rights for many people—the right to health and even life, the right to food, water, shelter and property, rights associated with livelihood and culture are all affected. Our challenge is to build accountability for human rights into future efforts to address climate change. By doing so we will better understand who is most at risk and how we should act to protect them."

With food insecurity already touching over 1 billion persons world-wide, it is hard to imagine the additional impact of climate change on agriculture and thus on food production and availability. Rising temperatures in agricultural areas of the United States have changed the predictability of the growing season and have given rise to new crops previously not able to be grown in these areas. In time, traditional crops will no longer be accommodated. Subsistence farmers, those who depend on their crop (s) for their own meals are already becoming those most impacted by the effects of climate change, especially those living in sub-Saharan Africa.



In an earlier issue of this Newsletter, Sisters Sabina Iragui, DC and Bogdana Kavcic, DC shared that most of the 9-million people living in Rwanda make their living by subsistence farming. People are stealing to get food; the kettle of beans is cooking outside; if the cook turns away the kettle is stolen. The sisters also reported that their health clinics are overflowing with hundreds of new patients daily suffering from anemia, poor nutrition and malaria. 150,000 people die every year from health-related effects of climate change. Malarial bearing mosquitoes are being found in highland and mountainous regions as they become warmer.

Changes causing rising sea levels and crop failures could create 150 million refugees. The small island developing countries, especially those that are located in tropical and sub-tropical areas, are experiencing forced migration. Occasionally, the Governor General of Tuvalu while speaking at the United Nations seeks asylum for his citizens are being displaced by the rising waters of the Pacific Ocean. In Bangladesh (South Asia), a very low-lying flat country with many rivers, there is massive urbanization due to natural disasters. The capital, Dhaka, where 12 million people live, has absorbed "environmental" refugees who live in bamboo and polythene shacks. This rapid growth in population strains water, food, and energy supplies.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops urges us to reflect on the environment, "with special concern for the poorest members of the human community, as poverty and environmental degradation often go hand in hand." (USCCB, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, 2001)

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## Health Benefits Resource Centers in Province of the West

by Sisters Marion Bill and Betty Marie Dunkel

We live in a time where many of the families with whom we work are living with the fear that the parents won't be able to provide adequately for their children should there be a job loss or serious illness or injury. Hospitals sponsored by the Daughters of Charity and other congregations are often the ones left with the challenge of ministering to the uninsured or underinsured. This is certainly the case in California where, in true Vincentian style, our hospitals have implemented the core value of "inventiveness to infinity."

In 1996, St. Francis Medical Center, a DC medical center in Lynwood, CA, initiated the **Health Benefit Resource Center** programs to partner with the Department of Social Services and community organizations to increase access to health care, food stamps, emergency and transitional housing, and on-going health, social and mental health services to families in the service area, one of the most impoverished areas of Los Angeles County. As of November 1, 2010, there are HBRCs at four of the five medical centers in the Daughters of Charity Health System. The HBRCs also regularly provide services to families in all four of our sponsored schools in Los Angeles County. They also provide a dependable referral mechanism to social service agencies, schools, churches, and community based organizations.



This past year, the HBRC collectively served over 17,000 visitors and performed close to 10,000 health and food stamp eligibility screenings. The Department of Public Social Services reports indicate that the HBRC Food Stamp program experienced an 85% average approval rate and Medi-Cal (Medicaid) applications had an approval rate of 98%. While statistics reflect success, it is reflecting on what this means to families that matters most.

One mom came into the emergency room of one of our hospitals. She was screened for eligibility for Medi-Cal and Food Stamps. Within 10 days, she received her letter for approval of \$244 in food stamps a month. She was also found to be eligible for the hospital's Charity Care program and her emergency room visit was 100% covered, relieving her of that financial worry.

*(Statistical information from Health Benefit Resource Management annual report)*



### Daughter of Charity ENDORSEMENTS

Since our May newsletter, the Advocacy and Social Justice Committee, with the endorsement of the five Visitatrixes, has joined other advocacy groups in support of the following initiatives which affect the vulnerable and marginalized:

1. Supported the effort of **ATEST (The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking)** by signing a letter of support for funding appropriations to fight the **growing** problem of human trafficking through government programs that had been authorized but not yet funded.
2. Supported the **Coalition on Human Needs** letter to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility requesting the Commission not make cuts that hurt low-income people. The letter recommends that the long term deficit can be fixed through equitable and sensible revenue increases and savings in areas such as waste in the military. This Commission is charged with making recommendations to the President that will substantially reduce the deficit by 2015.
3. Supported the efforts of **FRAC (Food Research and Action Center)** by signing their letter urging the US Senate to reject efforts to cut SNAP (formerly called Food Stamps) in order to fund other priorities. Over 40 million vulnerable Americans depend on SNAP benefits in their struggle against hunger. These benefits also contribute to strengthen and sustain economic recovery efforts.
4. Supported a letter initiated by the **NGO Committee on Social Development of the United Nations** that asked G-20 leaders to support a resolution entitled "The human right to water and sanitation" before members of the UN General Assembly.



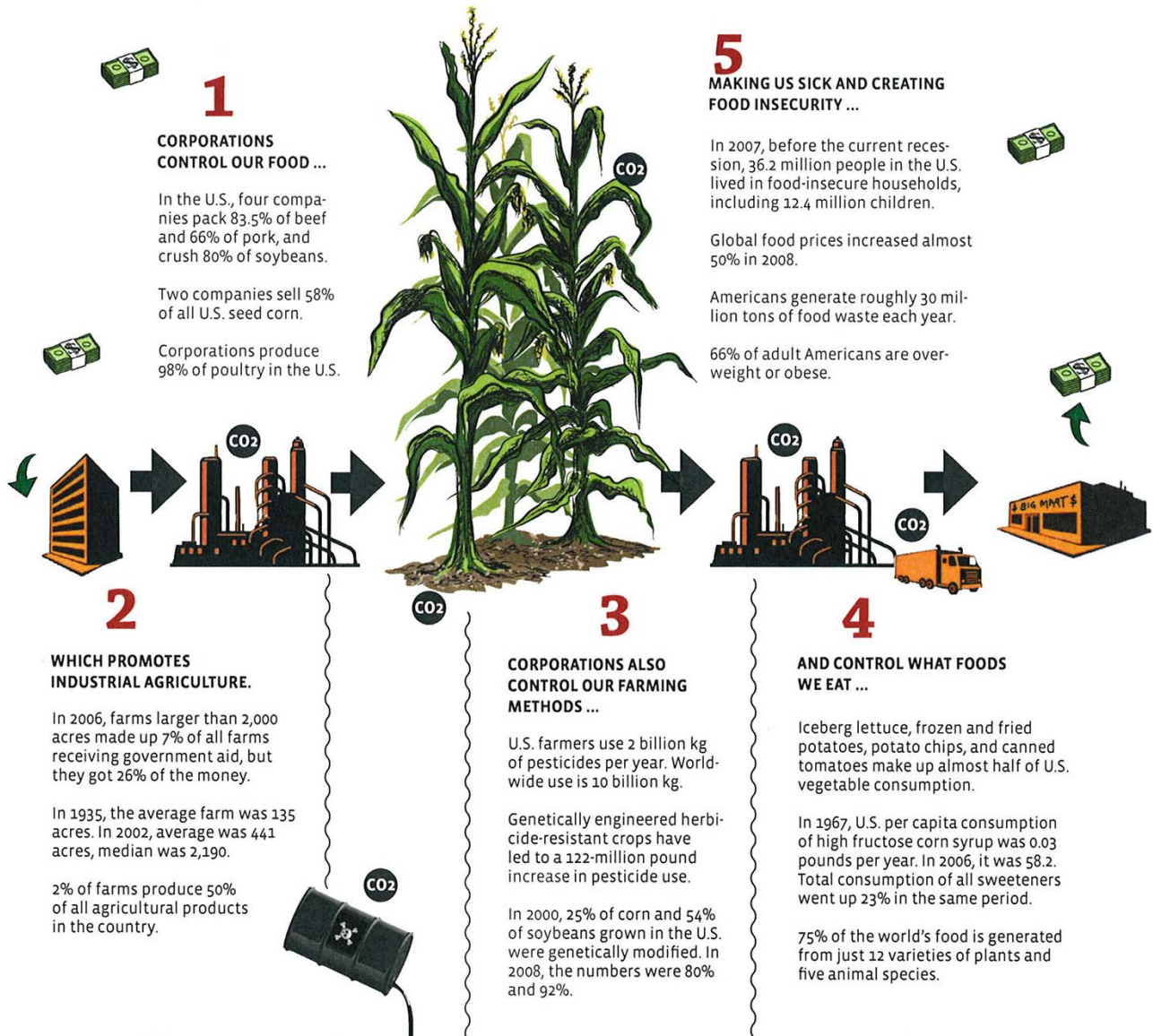
Read more about Food for Everyone in the Spring 2009 issue. [YesMagazine.org/foodforall](http://YesMagazine.org/foodforall) Back copies at [YesMagazine.org/store](http://YesMagazine.org/store)

Submitted by *Sr. Faith Colligan*

# Just the Facts

## When Corporations Rule Our Food

Hunger. Pollution. Instability. Obesity. The problem with corporate food—by the numbers.



Research by Kim Nochi, Anna Stern and Doug Pibel. Citations at [www.yesmagazine.org/49facts](http://www.yesmagazine.org/49facts)

**6**  
**AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS.**  
The "dead zone" at the mouth of the Mississippi River is now 8,000 square miles—about the size of New Jersey.  
38% of agricultural lands worldwide are designated "degraded."  
Livestock production creates 18% of greenhouse gases globally.

## Preying on the Margins of the Sacred and Profane

by Cherie Sammons, RN, NP  
VP Mission Integration, St. Mary's of Michigan Saginaw

*The Trade in Human Persons Constitutes a Shocking Offense Against Human Dignity and a Grave Violation of Fundamental Human Rights"*

Pope John Paul II



The faces of human trafficking. They are the newborn babies exploited and used for ransom for young women forced into prostitution to pay their "debts". They are deaf mutes in urban areas forced to sell trinkets on the street. They are migrant workers exploited in long hours of unpaid labor. They are Asian women and men working in sweatshops in our own country. They are families fleeing their worn torn countries. They are vulnerable and fall prey to the lure of false pretenses of improved living conditions, education, financial security, etc. Human trafficking is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest revenue producer next to guns and drugs. The number of known victims is escalating in proportion to the increase of public awareness. Pastors, emergency room personnel, neighbors, bartenders, firemen, workers in laundry-mats and corner stores, housing inspectors and people trained to recognize the invisible trade are all becoming more aware of its presence in their communities.



Trafficking is defined in two groups. First, they are persons who are induced by force, fraud, or coercion into commercial sex. It also is for minor children under age 18 involved in commercial sex. They are *forced* because, as minors, they cannot consent to this activity. The second group is persons who are forced into servitude or debt bondage. It is Modern Day Slavery existing in our own backyards.

They are unseen and unheard in our society, and rates of trafficking internationally number over a million each year. Estimates are between 15-20,000 are trafficked into the United States *each* year. The majority of victims are women, and about 10 percent are children. The force and fraud in human trafficking is not smuggling. There are many cases, though, that start as smuggling, then become trafficking because of "endless debt".

They are commodities for sale, and perpetrators bring them to emergency rooms, to our clinics, even to our dentists to keep them in "good working order." They are the patients and clients we see in our safety net agencies, and we have missed opportunities to reach them.

They may be the victim of domestic violence, but when you look beneath the surface, and hear their story, they are identified as trafficking victims. Raise your index of suspicion. If you LOOK, you will find them.

### Simple questions may reveal a story of human trafficking:

- Why and how did you get to this country?
- Where do you eat and sleep?
- How did you get here today?
- Where do you live?
- Can you leave your job if you want?
- Are you paying off a debt?
- Is anyone forcing you to do anything you do not want to do?
- Have your "papers" been taken away from you?

### What Can You Do?

- Call the Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline - 1.888.3737.888
- Get involved. Ask questions. Talk about it-to anyone anywhere and anytime.

*"The heart of the matter is society's failure to identify victims, and at the heart of THAT is the average person's lack of knowledge and vigilance"*

Sr. Mary Ellen  
Dougherty, SSND



## Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts in Austin, Texas

by Sr. Jean Thomas Dwyer

In Austin, Texas, when a trafficking victim escapes or is rescued from a life of slavery, Refugee Services of Texas (RST) sees that they get enrolled in the Office for Crime Victims program. This brings them financial assistance for food and safe shelter, usually in a furnished apartment, as well as case management services. These benefits, which are available for a maximum of 12 months, are all provided through a government-funded program.



Sr. JT Dwyer meets with collaborators

The caseworker at RST also helps the victim apply for a T-Visa. When granted, this will give the victim a four-year work permit with legal status, and the possibility of 8 months of Adult Medicaid, SNAP (Food Stamps), and reunification with spouse/children. Sometimes, the 12-month benefits expire before the T-Visa is approved. RST does not have the resources to continue the provision of housing and other benefits for those they are assisting, and RST is not allowed to do fundraising. Until the trafficking victim receives a T-Visa, (s)he cannot legally work

To help RST deal with this challenge and to further educate the Austin community regarding the existence of slavery in our city and beyond, a group of advocates have begun an organization named ALLIES. ALLIES is affiliated with RST and the Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (CTCAHT).

Sisters Nancy Sullivan and JT Dwyer currently belong to the group. Both have ministries in the Seton Family of Hospitals.

Seton hosted ALLIES first fundraiser and community education event on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. The film "Cargo – Lost Innocence" was shown followed by a panel discussion on the reality of human trafficking in Austin and efforts to eradicate it. Representatives from the FBI and Homeland Security joined ordinary citizens for this event which yielded information concerning a human trafficking victim that had been identified by a local Lady of Charity and her husband.

In a sex trafficking case in which approximately 100 victims were rescued in Houston, TX, 80% of them reported having been in contact with a medical provider during their enslavement, yet none was recognized as being held against their will. Seton is spearheading efforts to train key medical personnel to recognize possible trafficking victims should they present in Seton's healthcare environment. Emergency room workers at Seton's University Medical Center Brackenridge have undergone this training. Other target groups include social workers and chaplains. Seton is working with CTCAHT and RST to develop an educational video which will make this training more readily available to all Seton sites and eventually to others who would like to use it.



## Next Steps on Promoting Systemic

by Sr. Julie Cutter



On November 4-7, 2010, the Vincentian Family International Commission to promote systemic change engaged 103 leadership and trainers from many branches of the Vincentian Family from Canada, the Caribbean and the United States in the study of the process of systemic change as a way of promoting on-going development of persons living in poverty.

After presentations, reflections, conversations, and prayer, the leadership committed to the following next steps:

- create a Vincentian Family Vision Statement on Collaboration; meet annually; stimulate collaborative regional trainings on systemic change; support outreach to youth.

The trainers committed to the following next steps:

- organize regional training sessions; organize a training for college students, Vincentian volunteers and young adult lay Vincentians at DePaul University; blog on their efforts; create tools that will assist in evaluating and transforming current ministry projects to move toward systemic change.



# Implementing Healthcare Reform

EXPANDING COVERAGE, ENSURING ACCESS



## Dispelling Myths around Healthcare Reform

*by Susan Nestor Levy, Ascension Health*

Enactment of health reform legislation will bring about many needed changes to our healthcare system. Once the reforms are in place, more than 30 million Americans will be newly insured. Because of the scope of health reform change and the contentious political debate, some people have misconceptions about the new law. Here are some important facts to dispel these myths about healthcare reform.

- **No one will face jail time or have their property taken by the government for failing to have health insurance coverage.** In 2014, a tax penalty will be imposed on some people who choose to remain uninsured, but the law prohibits the IRS from imprisoning people or seizing property in order to collect it. Also, the penalty will not apply to uninsured people with incomes below the tax filing threshold, those for whom coverage is not affordable, and those with religious conscience exemptions.
- **The law does not eliminate any of the benefits that are available through Medicare.** In fact, seniors with high prescription drug costs will benefit as, over time, the Part D “donut hole” is eliminated. Some people in private Medicare Advantage plans may see their extra benefits reduced, but even for them, basic Medicare benefits will be unchanged. For years, the Medicare actuaries and other experts have said that these plans were being overpaid by the government. So, it is likely that these changes would eventually have been made as part of federal budget tightening, even if health reform had not passed.
- **Health reform is not a “government take-over” of our healthcare system.** The new health insurance exchanges that begin in 2014 were created to help people find and afford private health insurance coverage, and consumers will be able to choose among different private plans. Ascension Health and other private healthcare providers will remain as independently run organizations.
- **The law does not allow federal taxpayer dollars to pay for elective abortions.** No federal dollars can be used to pay for abortions except in cases of rape or incest, or where the life of the woman would be endangered. Also, states may prohibit abortion coverage under insurance plans offered through the insurance exchanges.
- **No law is perfect, and further improvements to our health system will be needed down the road.** But enactment of health reform represents a big step forward in making sure our healthcare system works well for everyone.



### Sr. Phyllis Nolan

#### Interviews Asylum Seekers in El Paso

The ministry of Sister Phyllis Nolan takes her often to an Adult Detention Center for immigrants as a legal assistant/intake specialist for Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, a non-profit legal agency in El Paso, Texas, the US border city proximate to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. She has the privilege of making the initial visit to persons from many countries of our world who seek help in obtaining asylum, listening to their stories, sharing with the agency's lawyers and assisting immigrants in many ways as they go through the legal process.

## Effects of Arizona Law on Native Americans

by Sr. Mary Rogers

### A Brief History:

Native Americans arrived in Arizona between 16,000 BC and 10,000 BC. Spanish Franciscans arrived in 1539. All of present-day AZ became part of the Mexican state of Vieja California in 1822. The United States took possession of most of AZ at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. The Navajo survived the “ethnic cleansing” of the US government as more and more Anglos came to Arizona. Arizona became the 48<sup>th</sup> state in 1912. Native Americans were finally recognized for their role as the “code talkers” in the two World Wars.

Today, Arizona has the largest percentage of Native Americans in the United States. How does Arizona’s anti-immigrant legislation, SB 1070, affect them?

The following are personal accounts related to Daughters ministering in Arizona:

James, a Queschan Native, is visiting his mother in Yuma, AZ. She lives on a reservation. He is in front of their family home when the police approach and ask him for his papers. Having none, he is detained in their jail for two days until authorities finally realize their mistake. James is not an illegal immigrant. His story is being repeated throughout Yuma. The Queschan Tribal authorities have been confronting the police with this and other similar detainments.



Robert is from Tuba City, AZ and is traveling to visit friends in Tucson. He is stopped and asked for his green card. He must prove he is not an illegal immigrant. More and more Native Americans are fearful of going to the southern part of their own state. Being brown-skinned with straight black hair makes them targets of SB 1070.

There is anxiety and humiliation generated by SB 1070 on our Native Americans. So I ask: who was here first?

## Recent Developments in Immigration Reform

by Sr. Mary Ann Azar

The defeat of the DREAM Act was a great disappointment to those of us who were advocating for its passage. However, on September 29, Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-NY) introduced the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2010 (S.3932) in the Senate. The bill was read, then referred to the Committee on the Judiciary. It is possible that there will be more action on these bills during the “lame duck” session of Congress after the elections in November.

To provide more food for thought, reflection, prayer and discussion, Sojourners Magazine has published “REEL Images of Immigration”, a study guide to several recent films addressing immigration issues.

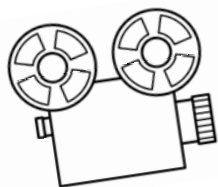
The films in the guide include the following:

**The Visitor**—the story of an older man and an immigrant family and how their presence in his life made a lasting impact on him. (104 minutes)

**Made in L.A.**—which chronicles the struggle of women garment workers in Los Angeles trying to obtain better working conditions. (70 minutes)

**Dying to Live**—the story of immigrants to the US from Mexico, what motivates them and reactions of people both pro-immigrant and against. (33 minutes)

**Farmingville**—a documentary about a small Long Island community struggling with their changing population. (78 minutes)



The guide contains discussion materials and prayers/reflections as well as suggestions for group viewing and discussion. To download the guide and see current updates on immigration issues, see <http://www.faithandimmigration.org>

## Father Gregory Gay Affirms A&SJC

by Sr. Jean Thomas Dwyer

As part of his visit to the West Central Province Father Gregory Gay, Superior General of the Daughters of Charity and Congregation of the Mission, set aside time to meet with the Interprovincial Advocacy and Social Justice Committee (ASJC) on August 28 in St. Louis, MO. He affirmed and encouraged our efforts in the Social Justice arena, and stated the Daughters in the United States and other English-speaking countries of the developed world are real leaders in advocacy efforts on behalf of poor and marginalized peoples.

Advocacy, he reminded us, is core to our charism and was a dimension of the service of the Poor introduced by Vincent and Louise. Through the centuries it became a forgotten aspect of our lives and ministry and only in more recent years has come back to prominence, at least in some parts of the world.

Father Gay particularly remarked on the way the committee has encouraged action on the local level yet moves the sisters to think globally about social justice issues. Father's presence influenced further discussion on our call to educate and advocate on these issues. The Committee was honored to learn that after reviewing back issues of our ASJC newsletters during his airline flights around the province, Father had requested to be added to the ASJC Newsletter mailing list.



Pictured with Fr. Greg are Committee Members (back row): Sisters JT Dwyer, Betty Marie Dunkel, Mary Ann Azar and Carol Durkin; (front row): Sisters Julie Cutter, Katie Norris and Faith Colligan. Not pictured are Committee Members: Sisters Julia Huiskamp, Kathleen Natwin and Mary Rogers

## A&SJC Goals

by Sr. Julie Cutter

At their August meeting, the Interprovincial Advocacy and Social Justice committee revised their goals in the following ways:

**Goal 1:** Continue education and advocacy around issues of

- International and domestic food
- International and domestic water
- Healthcare reform
- Comprehensive immigration reform
- Human Trafficking

*Timely Advocacy Issue E-Alerts are forwarded to the DCs who have indicated interest.*

*The committee produces two newsletters each year.*

**New Goal 2:** Publicize news of international issues as presented on the CM-DC NGO website.  
([www.cmdcngo.org](http://www.cmdcngo.org))

**Goal 3:** Collaborate for the purpose of promoting justice and systemic change.

Encourage DCs to look for opportunities to collaborate with the Vincentian Family and other groups with the same charism, especially in concrete projects with NETWORK, Bread for the World, Ascension Health, CHA, Catholic Charities and Pax Christi.