

# History

In 1998 a group of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF) volunteers came together to form OLF's Social Justice Committee. The name has since been changed to Social Justice Ministry to better reflect the work at hand.

For many years OLF has been a member congregation of Schenectady Inner City Ministry (SICM). OLF's social justice actions were accomplished through its membership in SICM. SICM was formed in 1967 as an ecumenical partnership of a handful of city churches. SICM now consists of some 50+ congregations throughout the city and surrounding suburbs, representing 15 denominations working together to address the needs of low and moderate income residents of Schenectady County.

SICM promotes four types of social concerns:

1. Social Service
2. Social Education
3. Social Witness
4. Social Action

From its inception the major goals of OLF's SJM have been to communicate, educate and act upon Church teachings on social justice. We accomplish these goals by looking at ways to address social justice problems beyond charitable works and direct service (i.e., distributing food, clothing, money, etc.) to educate others about the root causes and advocacy for the marginalized. The ministry has also engaged guest speakers, visited various inner city sites and studied the doctrines of the Catholic Popes, Bishops and other Church authorities to gain further insights and share that information with the parish and others.

## **"Journey to Justice"**

At the outset SJM members believed it was imperative to educate themselves about the Church's teachings on social justice. For starters, SJM members participated in a weekend retreat held in March 1999. This retreat was sponsored by Catholic Charities and called "Journey to Justice". The program covered eight reflection/action sessions, took its participants on a journey of transformation to study the root causes of domestic poverty, and considered what actions could be taken to bring awareness to others of the "cry of the poor". Scripture readings, interactive discussions and guest speakers helped SJM to complete this journey.

# Accomplishments & Activities

The committee acts as a liaison for a number of social justice oriented organizations and initiatives. Organizations include the Schenectady Inner City Mission (SICM), Regional Food Bank, Hunger Action Network of NY, Respect for Life Program, Catholic Relief Services, the Home Furnishings Program. Among the initiatives that SJM spearheads are letter-writing

campaigns on issues such as world hunger and immigration, organizing parish participation in the annual CROP Walk, running Respect Life events and many others.

Completed and ongoing projects include:

- Letter writing campaigns for Bread for the World and Hunger Action Network of NY State
- Staying abreast of public policy initiatives of the NY State Catholic Conference and publicizing these to the parish
- Work of Human Hands sale of fair trade handcrafts by artisans from developing nations
- Organizing OLF volunteers for SICM's Summer Lunch program
- Sponsoring OLF participation in the Empire State Economic Security post card campaign to local legislators
- T-shirt sale as OLF's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event with proceeds helping our sister parish, the Church of San Augustin.
- Spearheading of OLF's participation in the CROP walks and Souperbowl collections
- Presenting an event on hospice and end-of-life issues
- Leading the annual OLF blanket drive for the Home Furnishings Program
- Educating parishioners of service opportunities and social justice issues within our community through church bulletin inserts and SJM bulletin board notices.