

Be a Light for Children...Support Educational Justice.

February 26, 2003 is Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem Day in Harrisburg! Mark your calendar and join us!!

Clergy and Laity throughout the Diocese are encouraged to set ***aside this one day*** and take a stand for children. Be part of delivering 100 *Stars of Bethlehem* to Pennsylvania Senators and Representatives encouraging them to *Be a Light for Children by supporting Educational Justice.*

What is Educational Justice?

Educational Justice is one of the justice issues we commit ourselves to as part of our Baptismal Covenant – to “...strive for justice and...respect the dignity of every human being.” Our National Church has passed several resolutions calling us to commit ourselves to support and improve public schools, particularly in urban and rural areas recognizing that they are crucial vehicles of hope and advancement for children who would otherwise be left behind.

What are the issues?

Over the past 30 years, the state’s share of local educational expenditures has declined from 55 to 35 percent. Communities have had to turn to local property taxes to make up the difference. The practical result is an unforgiving gap – up to \$8,500 difference per child – in the amount wealthy and poor districts provide for public education. The gap suggests that we tolerate economic segregation, that a substandard education is adequate for the poor and near poor. Reliance on real estate taxes has also placed a heavier burden on our senior citizens and citizens of our poorer communities who often pay a higher milage rates than more affluent communities while generating less revenue.

More than 85 percent of Pennsylvania’s children attend public schools. Most of those oppressed by inequity live in poor inner cities and rural areas. What can we do about this inequity? We know what makes public education work. We see this in school districts that are adequately funded. We know that every dollar spent on early childhood education saves seven dollars down the line on remedial costs, juvenile delinquency and criminal costs. Yet today Pennsylvania spends \$3,709 per student and \$35,302 per prisoner per year! Something is wrong with the state’s priorities.

Critical Juncture

We are looking at a window of opportunity that is not likely to occur again in the next decade. A new governor has been elected who is committed to improving the situation. While there is bi-partisan agreement in the General Assembly that change is necessary, they are stymied as to how to make the change. We can dramatically affect the outcome of this important debate by making sure every state elected official hears from their constituents that we must increase resources to poor district if we have any hope of

seeing higher achievement of all children in this state. Money alone is not a solution, but smaller classes, pre-k, kindergarten, highly skilled teachers and the other key ingredients to student success are not free. They require new state funds and they must be equitably distributed. The time is now.

Why should the Church get involved?

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." He also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

The matter of wealth and poverty is a focus of reflection throughout scripture. The Biblical witness in many instances underscores God's love and favor for the poor. Yet, in our society those with fewer resources are often looked down upon and are given less consideration, including the education of their children.

As Bishop Paul recently said, "The future of our children, particularly of the children who need a way up and out of poverty is not a partisan issue; it is a moral and spiritual issue." In our society where value is often conveyed by dollar value, it is up to us as faithful witnesses of Jesus to express to children their value and worth in God's eyes. It is up to us to demonstrate to our public officials God's radical love for all children by standing up and advocating for children and their needs. It is up to us hold our public officials accountable for the ways in which inequitable funding is a stumbling block for children.

Join the Action

50 Days of action will take place on Capitol Hill beginning January 27th. The Diocese of Bethlehem Day will take a stand on February 26, 2003 and ask our Legislators to *Be a Light For Children and support Educational Justice* in Harrisburg. Our day will include: Legislative Briefing, Prayer Vigil, Observing the House & Senate in Session and Star Delivery.

God created all children and loves each one of them, yet today in Pennsylvania many children do not receive the quality education they need and deserve. Without this education they will never have the opportunity to actualize their potential or to become the person God created them to be.

Should the quality of a child's education be dependent on their zip code? If your answer is "No!" then call today to register to attend. Transportation is free. Bring a bag lunch or money to buy your lunch in the Capitol Cafeteria.

Buses will leave from the four places throughout the Diocese making various stops on the way to Harrisburg as listed below.

Call Judy Kery at Diocesan House to register at 610-691-5655 or jkery@diobeth.org. Include: name, home address, town, zip, e-mail address, daytime/evening phone number, parish, and departing bus stop. If you wish to travel on your own, please register so that we can include you in our updates.

Northwest - *Van departs 7:30 a.m.*

- (1) Church of the Redeemer, Sayre
 - (2) Christ, Towanda – 8:00 a.m.
 - (3) St. Peter's, Tunkhannock – 9:00 a.m.
- Arriving Harrisburg at 10:30 a.m.
Departing Harrisburg at 3:30

Southeast – *bus depart 8:30 a.m.*

- (1) Transbridge Charter Bus Parking Lot
Industrial Park, Bethlehem
 - (2) Mobil Gas Station, Intersection Rt. 61 & I-78 – 9:15 a.m.
- Arriving Harrisburg 10:30 a.m.
Departing Harrisburg 3:30 p.m.

Northeast – *Bus departs 8:00 a.m.*

- (1) Victoria Inn & suite, Route 315
Pittston
 - (2) Laurel Mall, Hazleton, Boscov's Entrance – 8:45 a.m.
 - (3) Schuylkill Mall, Frackville, K-Mart Entrance – 9:15 a.m.
- Arriving Harrisburg at 10:30 a.m.
Departing Harrisburg 3:00 p.m.

Southwest – *Bus departs 9:15 a.m.*

- Lebanon Plaza Mall, near Sears
Arriving Harrisburg 10:15 a.m.
Departing Harrisburg 3:30 p.m.