

Co-workers with God for economic justice

*Shall crime bring crime forever
Strength aiding still the strong?
Is it your will, O Father
That men shall toil
For wrong?
from the musical, "Godspell"*

At the end of our recent Christmas party for the after-school program children of St. Frances Academy, one of the parents asked another, as they were leaving, if they could walk going the same way with their children. As it turned out they were traveling in opposite directions, one to the Latrobe Homes and the other, I overheard, to the nearby Salvation Army Shelter on Calvert Street. And there in that brief conversation I heard the state of our economy for many, public housing versus a homeless shelter. What is happening to our society?

I am angry that there are homeless people in the wealthiest nation in history. I'm embarrassed children are hungry, the elderly are cold in winter and sweltering in summer, and that folks struggle to get medicine. Three years ago many of us were hopeful and inspired and now we worry about tomorrow - for our neighbors and ourselves.

Our worries are borne out by facts. The Pew Research Center reported July 26 that the wealth gap between white American and black and Hispanic households has widened dramatically since 2005, the most in our history. According to the report, Hispanics lost 50 percent more and blacks lost 37 percent more household wealth than their white counterparts. That means, quoting from the report, "As a result of these declines, the typical black household had just \$5,677 in wealth (assets minus debts) in 2009; the typical Hispanic household had \$6,325 in wealth and the typical white household had \$113,149." Further, the Pew Center researchers write that declines in the values of houses were the principal cause of the decline in household wealth with Hispanics being hit the hardest from 2005 to 2009.

Poverty grows, gains evaporate in what seems like unbridled economic inequality that threatens the meaning of life in America. It begs the questions, "Who are we as Americans and what became of our sense of fairness?"

The latest unemployment figure from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated it went down to 8.6 percent in November 2011. But if you look closer at that number it is sadly surprising: The Labor Bureau reported then, "Among the major worker groups, the unemployment rate for adult men fell by 0.5 percentage point to 8.3 percent in November. The jobless rate for whites (7.6 percent) also declined, while the rates for adult women (7.8 percent), teenagers (23.7 percent), blacks (15.5 percent), and Hispanics (11.4 percent) showed little or no change. The jobless rate for Asians was 6.5 percent, not seasonally adjusted."

Jobs are still the best anti-poverty program America has to offer everyday people. That's why, on Monday, Jan. 16, in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city of Baltimore, we will hold the 10th annual Martin Luther King (Day of Service and Self Help) Job Fair. At St. Frances Academy Community Center, 501 E. Chase St. in East Baltimore, job seekers and volunteers are welcome to the full day of activities, including job readiness classes, lunch and the afternoon job fair itself. Call 410-539-5794, ext. 30 or 28, for details.

But don't let it stop there: get active in fighting and praying for economic justice. Remember what Rev. King told us, *"The belief that God will do everything for man is as untenable as the belief that man can do everything for himself. It, too, is based on a lack of faith. We must learn that to expect God to do everything while we do nothing is not faith but superstition."*

Rev. King reminded us in his letter from the Birmingham Jail that we must be co-workers with God. We have much work to do.

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