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Key Issues in Region Targeted by COPA Founding Assembly

The banners that hung at the back of the stage at the Founding Assembly for Communities Organizing for Relational Power in Action (COPA), resembled pillars on which the newly formed organization will stand. Flown ceiling to floor at the June 8 event, the banners read like headlines that have played themselves over and over in discussions about

building better communities; Economic Opportunity, Health Care, Safe Communities, Education, Immigration and Housing.

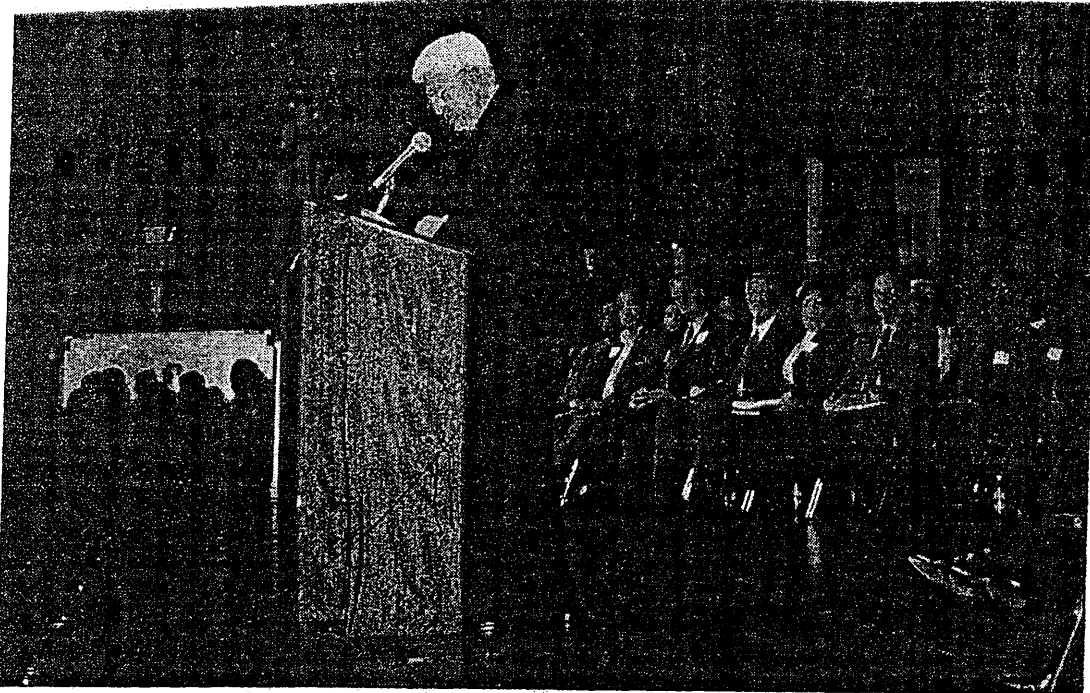
COPA emerged from the Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors project which worked for three years with community organizations and numerous congregations in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. Monterey Bishop Sylvester Ryan was one of the

heads of eight religious denominations that gave the original impetus to the project. COPA now emerges as a potent voice for an assembly of groups that have the added collaborative power to effect change in ways that no individual group could muster. Over 1500 leaders filled Sherwood Hall in Salinas for the Founding Assembly.

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COPA

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"Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphans plea, defend the widow," urged Bishop Ryan quoting from the book of Isaiah during his COPA keynote address.

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Fr. Hector Cruz, pastor at Star of the Sea parish in Santa Cruz said that the three year planning process that his parish engaged in broke new ground in the parish. "The issues of immigration, housing and employment have interested both Hispanic and Anglos in our parish. Once we shared our stories, a common bond grew between groups in the parish who may have thought before that they did not share many common interests."

Fr. Larry Kambitsch, pastor of Madonna del Sasso in Salinas, marveled at how wide the net had been cast in gathering COPA support. "I have been to all kinds of meetings, workshops and conventions. But have you ever seen Protestant, Catholic and Jewish ministers, pastors, bishops, elders, deacons and rabbis, male and female, in the same auditorium, on the same stage? Add to this union representatives, politicians (federal, state and local), police chiefs, hospital CEOs, housing developers, school superintendents and lay leaders of all kinds, nationalities and back-

grounds. It is a local, united and powerful movement gathered together to solve the pressing problems of our region."


One distinct feature of the three year planning process was that organizations and congregations spent time with each other and listened to each other's stories. Vivienne Moore, parishioner at St. Angela's parish in Pacific Grove, was one of the many who took the stage at the Assembly to share an individual story that rang true for many others. Speaking of her hometown she said, "Pacific Grove is where my son took his first steps. His dad and grandmother are buried there. His great-grandmother kept the town dry until 1970. Before that, the only place you could get a sip of wine in public was at St. Angela's where my son took his first communion."

Moving on to an issue that affects virtually every community in the diocese she said, "My only son had to leave because he could not earn a living wage anywhere on the Monterey Peninsula. My story is not unique. It is the experience of other parents and

grandparents throughout our region who have shared their stories with me. Not only families of the working poor, but middle and upper income earners too."

"With COPA, I believe we can restore our regional economy so our families are not split up. I believe this is not the work of one generation only and with COPA we can make a beginning."

Like many of the stories told about the issues of housing, employment, health care, safe communities, immigration and economic opportunity at the assembly, the point was both personal and universal.

Looking forward to the long work ahead for a community she clearly loves, Vivienne Moore concluded, "My son's first child was born yesterday. My hope is that we keep the promises we make to one another today, here, East of my son's Eden, so that families throughout our region are re-united and that the lives of my grandson's children can take root in "the significant soil" of our family's hometown, Pacific Grove, my son's "first garden." 

COPA Keynote Address by Bishop Ryan

Dear Friends and
CCIS Co-workers,

Today I am privileged to speak on behalf of the Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors. First I welcome all of our guests and elected officials present with us today. We are elated and grateful for your presence. We see in your presence a bond of solidarity with these hundreds of members of CCIS. You see them here, ordinary folks who already have accomplished extraordinary work under the direction of CCIS to achieve the doing of justice within the neighborhoods and communities of our Central Coast. Some of you, guests and elected officials, have made commitments to join in some of the plans initiated by the people represented here. We are deeply grateful and encouraged for those commitments and hope that they will increase in the near future.

In the first chapter of the book of Isaiah, we can hear the prophet speak on behalf of the Lord of hosts: "Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes: cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." (Is. 1:16). Jeremiah, a near contempo-

rary of Isaiah adds that only those who dispense true justice to the weak and the poor obtain true knowledge of God. (Jeremiah 22:16). And the prophet Micah universalizes the doing of justice as a way of life in a phrase well known to all of us: "(This) is what the Lord requires of us: to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

In sum the biblical teaching on justice is to make things right, right relationships between people on the basis of what we all share in common, the dignity and sacredness of every human person with a special option for the poor and the marginal in our societies.

From both conviction and experience we realize that the dignity and sacredness of every human person can only be realized and protected in solidarity with each other. The mission of justice is found in protecting and nurturing fundamental human, economic, social and political rights. Furthermore, social justice needs the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the various layers of community and civic life.

All of you here today who

have participated in these three years of formation in CCIS seek not just a minimal participation in the social and political life of your neighborhoods but no less than the fullest possible participation of yourselves and your neighbors in all the areas of decision making that affects you, your families and your neighbors.

You have engaged yourselves these last three years in the daunting work of social justice, seeking to redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, and to defend the widow in their contemporary dress and reality: housing, immigration, education, safe communities, health care and economic opportunity. You have done so under the umbrella of the CCIS Sponsors. Now it is time for you to do so under your own entitlement as citizens and members of your many communities. It is a proud achievement and one that possesses enormous future possibilities based on what you have already accomplished.

Please know, all of you, that as you move from our denominational sponsorship to your own identity, structure and mission, all of us in this company of religious sponsors will continue the journey with you as proud partners and companions. The work of justice is not always popular, and is never finished, but in faith to each other and our God, always an obligation and a debt we owe to each other and to all for whom we advocate.

We must, also, acknowledge the immeasurable debt we owe to Ken Smith and his staff for their sure guidance of CCIS from its first small steps to its present collective maturity and readiness for the work of justice in our midst.

Each Founding Member Organization has selected two leaders to come on stage at this time to be commissioned. I invite all sixty of you to join me now on the stage for this commissioning ceremony.

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La Reunión COPA, Presentación Clave

por el Obispo Silvestre D. Ryan

Estimados amigos y trabajadores del CCIS,

Es un privilegio hablar a favor de los Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors hoy. Primero quisiera decirles bienvenidos a todos nuestros huéspedes y los representantes del gobierno presentes con nosotros hoy. Sentimos júbilo y agradecimiento por su presencia. Vemos en su presencia un lazo de solidaridad con estos cientos de miembros del CCIS. Los ven presentes, personas ordinarias que han trabajado de manera extraordinaria bajo la dirección del CCIS para realizar la meta de actuar con justicia en los barrios y comunidades de nuestra Costa Central. Algunos de ustedes, huéspedes y representantes del gobierno, se han comprometido a apoyar a algunos de los planes iniciados por la gente representada aquí. Nos encontramos profundamente animados y agradecidos por estos compromisos y esperamos que hayan más dentro de poco tiempo.

En el primer capítulo del libro de Isaías podemos escuchar al profeta hablando

por parte del Señor: "Alejen de mis ojos sus malas acciones, dejen de hacer el mal y aprendan a hacer el bien. Busquen la justicia, den sus derechos al oprimido, hagan justicia al huérfano y defiendan a la viuda" (Is. 1,16). Jeremías, casi contemporáneo de Isaías, agrega que sólo los que dispensan una justicia verdadera a los débiles y los pobres obtienen un verdadero conocimiento de Dios (Jeremías 22,16). Y el profeta Miqueas hace universal el hacer justicia como un modo de vida en la frase que conocemos bien: "Ya se te ha dicho, hombre, lo que es bueno y lo que el Señor te exige: tan sólo que practiques la justicia, que sepas amar y te portes humildemente con tu Dios" (Miqueas 6,8).

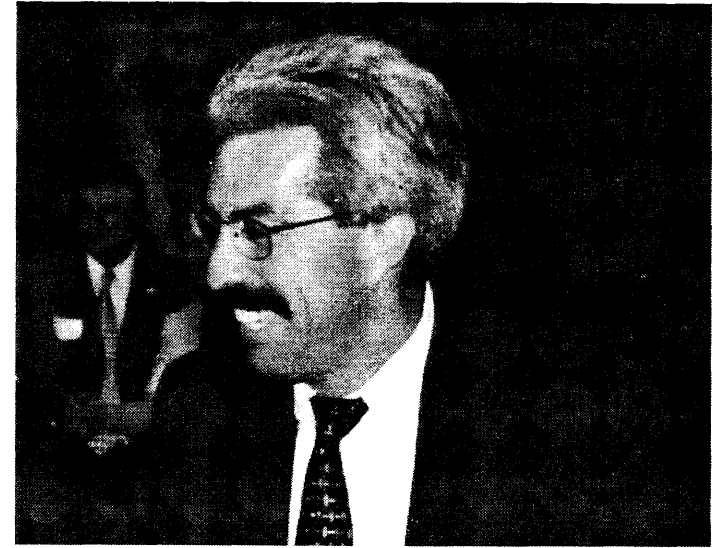
En suma, la enseñanza bíblica sobre la justicia es rectificar todo, las relaciones correctas entre personas basadas en lo que tenemos en común, la dignidad y la naturaleza sagrada de cada persona humana con una opción especial por los pobres y los marginalizados de nuestras sociedades.

Por nuestra convicción y experiencia, reconocemos que

la dignidad y la naturaleza sagrada de cada persona humana solamente puede ser realizada y protegida en solidaridad el uno con el otro. La misión de justicia se encuentra justamente en proteger y criar los derechos económicos, sociales y políticos fundamentales humanos. Además, la justicia social requiere el establecimiento de niveles mínimos de participación en los varios niveles de la vida comunitaria y civil.

Todos ustedes presentes hoy que han participado en estos tres años de formación en el CCIS buscan no solamente una participación mínima en la vida social y política de sus barrios sino nada menos que una participación completa para ustedes y sus vecinos en todos los asuntos decisivos que afectan a ustedes, sus familias y sus vecinos.

Ustedes se han comprometido durante estos tres años pasados al gran trabajo de la justicia social, tratando de dar sus derechos a los oprimidos, hacer justicia al huérfano, y defender a las viudas en su realidad contemporánea: de habitación, inmigración, educación, comunidades seguras, cuidado de la salud, y oportu-



Ken Smith and his COPA organizing team have trained leaders from over 50 area congregations during the last three years.

nidades económicas. Han hecho esto bajo el apoyo a los Patrocinadores del CCIS. Ha llegado el momento para hacer estas cosas por su propio derecho como ciudadanos y miembros de sus varias comunidades. Es un momento de orgullo que ofrece grandes posibilidades futuras basadas en lo que ya han alcanzado.

Espero que sepan, todos ustedes, que al mover desde nuestro patrocinaje denominacional para formar su propia identidad, estructura, y misión, todos nosotros en esta compañía de patrocinadores religiosos seguiremos en este

viaje con ustedes como socios y compañeros orgullosos. La obra de justicia no siempre es popular y nunca se acaba, pero con fe entre nosotros y en nuestro Dios, siempre es una obligación y una deuda que debemos el uno al otro y a todos para quienes abogamos.

También debemos reconocer la gran deuda que debemos a Ken Smith y su personal por haber guiado al CCIS desde sus primeros pasos hacia la madurez y disposición comunal actual para seguir en el trabajo para la justicia entre nosotros.