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A COMMUNITY OF CARE

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Rural Roots

Spring has finally come. At least that's our hope having now spied a few robins, some daffodil sprouting from the earth, winter's passage is now underway. But the coming of spring does not herald anew the hopes of many in rural America that their financial, emotional, and familial struggles will now subside. This issue of Catholic Rural Life speaks concretely to the range of concerns which remain with us. We still need to drink deeply of the springs of Catholic Social and Environmental Teaching. There we will find some of the resources which will frame the lens through which current concerns may constructively be viewed. Douglas O'Brien offers us some legal and legislative areas of concern. His thoughtful review of current state and federal perspectives guide our reflection on the realm of the possible. Politics is, they say, the art of the possible. Would that the legislative agenda Douglas O'Brien fleshes out were to become the law of the land! Some of our fears would be lessened. From my own observation of state legislatures in action in recent months, I would not suggest that the road is easy. I would suggest that if Doug's directions were followed, we would be headed toward a better condition.

Dr. Bernard Evans can be relied upon to be thoughtful, clear, and reliably on target when he writes about Catholic Social Teaching and agriculture, which he does here. As succinct and clear a reflection, one could not ask for as that provided in these pages. We need not question the heritage that we've been bequeathed except to comment on how poorly understood and appreciated it is as a set of values which our tradition provides us. Would that we could mine it so well as it's articulated here for policy and action. Wisdom not practiced is a great shame. Here is some wisdom which our world needs mightily. It is perhaps a road away from decline to redemption and renewal. Would those who have eyes to see and ears to hear welcome Bernard Evans' words?

Dr. Hilary Cunningham helps us understand how our world of globalization often works, welcoming the money but blocking and harassing people. Her recording of the development of sanctuary and of a border consciousness brings greater clarity to our need for a cultural appreciation of the conditions of life of all peoples who come through the gates to our continent and seek to pass freely for work or for hospitality. In

many parts of our country, we're recognizing that the border is everywhere. So too, is the need for a culture of greater hospitality and solidarity to be everywhere. That may mean that many of us need to challenge our own feelings and change our convictions in order to provide a greater appreciation of human diversity and of our real need for broader perspectives.

Dr. John Hart provides a compelling account. He not only retrieves a Catholic perspective on social and natural ecologies but also expands and deepens the tradition by adding new insights to our horizons of community inclusion. Our love of the earth, its origin and destiny finds a nuanced treatment in this thoughtful reflection for the Jubilee. Even with the Jubilee's passing, a new millennium provides the ongoing context for the appreciation of the circles of care our hearts need to fathom. A rich and penetrating reflection is now in print to benefit the thousands who could not be with us in November for our 77th anniversary.

Globalization is a term, which has been with us for a short while but will continue to be on the lips of hundreds of articles into the near future. Eva Jensen reminds us to "Come to the Table" but traces the length and breadth of the table in a historical analysis that brings us to our evaluative knees. How did this happen? Who benefits from the global food system? What is the role of the people of faith in this context? These are the questions we face in a state of sober reflection. Jensen's global vision assists our personal moral reflection. It also strengthens our corporate capacity to "see, judge, act" should we choose to be so moved.

Dr. Thomas Lyson of Cornell University gives us a new language with which to speak about a preferred agricultural future. The language we've become used to speaking is one of "sustainability," the term "civic agriculture" helps us see additional dimensions and new contours to alternatives to industrialized agriculture practices. Religious and secular groups are bringing new social forms into being. The new language bespeaks a new hopefulness and a new wholeness. Rather than the economic piecemeal approach, Lyson speaks about an ecological vision for agriculture.

Dr. Paul Lasley helps us think about the victims of agricultural industrialization. While a new system is being developed there are some who are being swept away under the destructive winds of industrialization. There are roles for the churches to play during the times of crisis. They can be change agents and healers. Resiliency can be part of the human experience, but it can meet its completion in hopefulness if there are support systems along the way. The faith community can be once again a force for healing as well as creativity. In Lasley's analysis, the healing needs to be part of the leadership role of the churches. He fleshes out a number of dimensions in which this role can be effectively realized.

Whether it is in forging a new vision for agriculture or being a healing force amidst climatic change, we at Catholic Rural Life are working as best we can to respond and to lead during this time. Our tradition of spirituality, education, advocacy and outreach are being well utilized. Leadership such as found in these pages strengthens and equips us well for yet a 78th year of vital engagement.



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