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Psyching Out Our Values

During our last election cycle I was asked to come to Flaherty (my home town for 4 happy years) to provide help for 7th and 8th grade religious education students on the topic of Faithful Citizenship.

Now I have learned my limits. One learning: the younger people are, the fewer skills I have in communicating with them. Another learning: know when to ask for some help.

So I asked Sister Joetta Venneman, PBVM, who serves in the Sisters of Charity Office of Global Ministries how she would approach such a Flaherty task.

She had a very simple plan. Ask the students to think about:

- a couple decisions they had made in the past week and then determine what values had driven those decisions.
- some decisions made by their parents and the guiding values.
- some civic community decisions and their values.

In the first round, after some moments of silence and then chuckles indicating their discomfort, the students did some really good deliberating. The three teachers in the room loved the approach, saw opportunities to move it along much further! “It takes a village” to educate took on fresh meaning!

Joetta’s plan is a good one for us all, it seems to me. We would benefit from reflecting on our decisions—at personal, interpersonal and society levels, and becoming conscious of the values shaping those decisions.

Another way to come at this: if someone came from another planet and observed me, my family and friends, our city, county, state, country or world, what would they understand our values to be?

- Would they have a clue that I/we believe that:
- ALL persons are holy, made in God’s image.
- When one suffers, we all suffer—because we are both holy and social.
- EVERYONE has a basic right to life, food, shelter, health care, education and work.
- God’s test of a community/society is how it treats its neediest members.
- Money, work and business exist to serve people, not the other way around.
- We are all called to work for justice/right relationships for all people.
- We take care of God’s creation.

(The above wording appeared on tee shirts worn by young people from a parish in Spring, Texas.)

Or - another way to examine the ways we apply our values to our lives: using the above society values, how would I grade the way I live them, how persons in my circle of influence live them? Our whole society?

Then, as in all evaluating, the next question: what can I do to improve these grades? What all do we need to do together to have a better, more just society?

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