



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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SUMMER INSTITUTE OFFERS MUCH TO INVOLVED CATHOLICS

By Kim Wadas, Associate Director

This past July, I had the opportunity to attend the Twenty-First Annual Social Action Summer Institute at Marquette University, hosted by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. This annual event, sponsored by several national Catholic organizations including Catholic Charities USA, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the national association for Diocesan Social Action Directors, unites people within the Church dedicated to furthering justice, human dignity, and the common good. Conference attendees usually work for parish or diocesan offices that develop programs, events, and activities designed to advance the principles of Catholic teaching through social action.

Like myself, many of the participants were new staff attending the Summer Institute for the first time. We attended Track 1, a professional development track that focused on the fundamentals of Catholic social teaching. The week started with theologians reviewing the teaching of the Catholic Church and its foundational concept: that every person has a unique dignity as a creation in God's image. From this human dignity flows a host of rights and duties that all members of society possess, regardless of background, education, or faith. As Catholics, our duty is to protect and promote these rights for all.

There was also a second track of workshops offered for "veterans" of the Institute. Track 2 traditionally concentrates on a different area of public policy every year that is relevant to the Church's social action focus. This year Track 2 focused on "Climate Change and Care of God's Creation." Attendees of this track learned how changes in the environment are affecting children's health around the world, and how minor changes in climate are severely affecting the work of farmers, fishermen, and others, as well as the environment.

The Track system ended after the first few days. At that point, participants chose from a host of workshops concentrating on topics that varied from increasing parish and diocesan participation in social action activities, to working with other faith-based groups and organizations. Many of the workshops explained how to better engage various groups within the Church, such as Latinos or teens, and how to foster cooperation among different advocacy groups within the Church, such as those engaged in pro-life and pro-justices activities.

Conference participants heard from individuals with social action success stories. We heard from those who live their faith by fostering programs that assist farmers, immigrants, the poor, single-parent families, individuals with disabilities, the incarcerated and newly released, and the

hungry. Each workshop included time for questions and many involved a review of best practices to assist those new to social action departments. Participants further shared their faith throughout the week in daily Mass, Morning Prayer, social events, and mealtimes.

At the Social Action Summer Institute, I was reminded that our faith requires that we serve those both inside and outside our parish community. To do as we are commanded to do at the end of every Mass – to “go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” I had the opportunity to meet people at the parish, diocesan, state, and national levels who have devoted their lives to promoting the common good. Their example and instruction left me, and everyone who attended, better equipped to deal with the difficulties that arise when facing this daunting task. I would encourage those interested in learning how to better advance the social ministry of the Church to consider attending the Social Action Summer Institute next year in Atlanta.