



# **CCS WEEK 2012**

## **SUGGESTIONS TALKING POINTS**

### **FOR CCS WEEK SPEAKERS (APPROXIMATELY 5 MINS)**

Thank you Father... My name is John Hickman and I am...

- director Of Finance and Operations for at Catholic Housing Services and a member of St Mathew Parish in Seattle

It is good to be with you this evening/morning and I am grateful for the opportunity to talk to you about our work at Catholic Community Services and Catholic Housing Services. This is a special place to be at advent. We await the celebration of the Birth of Christ, Our Hope, and we are in a building named for his earthly father, St. Joseph. My own relationship with the Josephinum goes back to the late 1980's. I was serving AB Hunthausen on the Archdiocesan Finance Council and was part of the process to approve the plan to convert this magnificent building to affordable housing. Over twenty years later I was part of the team that helped bring this Parish here and I have the privilege to do what I can to make sure we provide a safe decent affordable home for over 240 residents here.

Fr Paul invited me to share my reflections on today's readings. Advent is one of the great season's of our Catholic tradition. We call it a time of waiting and we need to take time to reflect on what it is we are waiting for. The background for the first reading today from Baruch is that the Jews were suffering the Babylonian exile. They waited for the restoration of Jerusalem, which for the Chosen people was the restoration of God's Kingdom. They also awaited the Messiah, the King who would reign over the Kingdom, an earthly Kingdom not just Spiritual. The Gospel tells us of John the Baptist, crying out in the desert

that the wait for the Messiah is over. The King is here, the Kingdom has come. For those of us living in the 21st century, we aren't waiting for the Messiah to come as a little baby. We know God came incarnate in the person of Jesus. We still wait, but as Paul tells us in the second reading today, we wait for the Second Coming, we wait for the day of Christ Jesus, the day of Christ, Our Hope. We live in the mystery of advent that the Kingdom is here now, AND the Kingdom is yet to come. These are rich readings that the Church offers us, and I encourage you to read and pray with them this week. As I read and prayed with these scriptures to prepare for being here, my attention was caught by the image that is in the first reading and the Gospel: that the Mountains will be made low, and valleys will be filled. I stumbled on these because I could not understand what that image means. I talked to Fr. Paul and he shared some ideas and then he sent me some commentary on the readings. One idea is that when the terrain is made level, when mountains aren't so high and valleys are not so low, travelling is easier. When Mountains are low and valleys filled it is easier for the Kingdom to arrive, and life in the Kingdom is better for everyone.

What might this mean for us today? In a personal way the mountains represent our pride, the heights of our self centered egos. and the valleys represent our laziness, thoughtlessness and lack of awareness. When we do not bring down our mountain of pride and humbly approach God in gratitude, we do not live in the presence of the Kingdom. When we do not rise out of our valley of laziness and ignore our world, we do not live in the presence of the kingdom. In a collective way, the mountains represent the obstacles that keep our society from being as good as it can be. The valleys represent our inattention and failings that keep people in poverty and without justice.

And what is this Kingdom that God Dreams of and that Jesus came to preach to us? God made the world, the whole universe, and it is full of everything we need . There is enough for each one of us, there is enough for everyone. Jesus said the Kingdom is here now But we don't always experience that. In our own lives we do not always have what we need and certainly we can see others who are suffering from unemployment, hunger, homelessness, illness, and conflict.

We who are the Church, who profess to believe in God's Kingdom, we have our own role in bringing about God's Kingdom both as individuals and as part of the Church.

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, God is Love, Pope Benedict states :

*"The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia) and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable" (Deus Caritas Est, 25).*

Christ Our Hope Parish and The Josephinum Apartments stand as a living witness to this reality of the Church's work in the world in the best possible way. Here the sacraments are celebrated every day. The Good news of the gospel is proclaimed. not just in the parish ministry, but in the ministry to the poor and vulnerable who live here. The works of charity here are combined in a way that stand for all the world and our Seattle neighborhood to see, that we Catholics and the Church not only believe in God's Kingdom, we will do our part to proclaim it and make it present to all, especially those who do not experience the abundance of God's creation that we are all meant to share. Your Volunteer fair, , donations for our Women's Wellness Center, involvement in our Dialogue

for Justice and annual Catholic Advocacy Day in Olympia provide such meaningful support for our shared ministry to people in need.

This sacred season is a particular reminder of our solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities, and it offers an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to loving and compassionate service to those struggling with poverty. Each day, our Catholic community joins together in efforts that offer hope and joy to those most in need within our communities. Through our shared efforts and commitment, Catholic Community Services and Catholic Housing Services are able to provide care to over 80,000 people each year throughout Western Washington.

- Families move into safe homes,
- Children succeed in school,
- Elders remain in their homes,
- Those who are addicted and abused find support and healing,
- And our homeless and hungry neighbors receive shelter and meals.

In countless ways, we fight injustice without losing heart, confront evil while holding strong to a belief in the power of love, and show through our actions and words that peace on earth is possible. Most importantly, we resist becoming cynical or indifferent, and serve as the living proof that hope is alive and well more than 2,000 years after the birth of Christ. We knock down mountains and we fill valleys.

Everyone we serve has a story. I do not have time to tell you them all, but I would like to share with you three short anecdotes that may give you some idea of the type of work we do.

First, though the gifts you give support our local work, but we have a global impact. Here in King County we have a refugee and immigration support program. This past year we were contacted by an Iranian family who had fled Iran because they were being persecuted for their Baha'i religion. They were not welcome by the Muslim majority. They came to America seeking the same religious liberty that we Catholics experience. I am happy to say we were able to help this family and they are now American Citizens.

We also have a national impact. Hurricane Sandy devastated our eastern seaboard. I have cousins and family in new Jersey and have heard of the suffering directly from them. Catholic Charities USA sent out a call to all the Catholic Charities in the country for Disaster Case Managers to help the poor and vulnerable who have lost all they had in the storm. I hope you will share the pride and gratitude for our nine staff members who went all the way from Seattle, CCS and CHS had the first team of case managers on the ground in New Jersey and they are still there.

Finally, just last month we opened Michael's Place near Seattle U. It is a transitional housing program for homeless veterans. Just three weeks ago our first veteran moved in. He had served in the first Iraq war and for the past 10 years he has lived in the woods and parks of Seattle, afraid to talk to anyone or come inside a shelter. Today this veteran has come in from the rain, he has shelter and is working with our service staff to begin to repair his life.

These are **REAL** examples of the work we do for **REAL** people—helped by our Catholic community. Together, as Catholics, we are greeting the poor and vulnerable with compassion, and embracing them with love and deep respect. **While other topics may divide us—these are the things which unite us.**

Last year alone, we prepared more than 1.4 million meals for our hungry neighbors; provided 4,800 families and individuals with safe, warm homes; and provided more than 1.7 million hours of loving service to seniors and disabled persons.

We are **CAREFUL** stewards of your financial gifts, ensuring that 92 cents of each dollar spent goes **DIRECTLY** to providing services to people in crisis.

Please join me and others within our Catholic community and renew your commitment to loving and compassionate service to those struggling with poverty. Stand with us, through both your financial gifts and prayers. Together, we can bring light and hope to the tens of thousands of children, families, adults and elders in Western Washington who need us. We can knock down the mountains and fill the valleys.

If you have already made a gift to CCS this year, please know that we are **deeply grateful.**

If you are able to make a gift this year but have not yet done so, please use one of the CCS envelopes you received on your way in >hold up an envelope< — it's the one with the beautiful image of Madonna and child—and prayerfully consider a gift.

5 cents \$5, \$50, \$500 or \$5,000...whatever you can offer will help meet the needs of our neighbors

Thank you for inviting me to tell you about the compassionate, transformative work of Catholic Community Services and Catholic Housing Services.

Thank you for all of your support of this work. Thank you for being the body of Christ Our Hope

May you have a blessed advent and a very Merry Christmas.