

**Prayer of St Francis –
Respecting Life by Pursuing Meaningful Dialogue
“Make me an instrument of your peace....
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.”**

Last month the Social Justice Committee hosted several social conversations around the issue of civil marriage. Our purpose was to give people an opportunity to speak, but also to listen. The complexity of the issue calls us to look at all sides. We can come to a better understanding and be more informed if we allow ourselves to hear other points of view. As with many societal issues, discerning where we stand takes effort, thought and prayer. The challenge may be to suppress our fears and suspicions, as this could lead to prejudices. Another challenge is being complacent. At times we may feel an issue doesn't affect or concern us, but we all contribute to our community in big and small ways; thus being informed is really very important. Faced with these social issues provides an opportunity to develop our conscience.

Two documents from Vatican II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium et Spes GS), and "The Declaration on Religious Liberty," (Dignitates Humanae DH), are guides to Catholic teaching on conscience. Another resource is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It states: "Man (sic) has the right to act on conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters." (CCC 1782).

There are many resources, including web sites, available with information and arguments that support and/or oppose Minnesota's proposed Constitutional Amendment on Marriage which will be voted on in the November elections. We encourage respectful conversations as one way of being informed and discerning our beliefs and values around this issue. As St. Francis expresses, being an instrument for peace is replacing hatred with love. Civil and meaningful dialogue is an important first step in creating a peaceful society. As Catholics we value compassion, justice, family, love and truth. These qualities are the basis for our beliefs, the heart and soul of the Gospel, and what Jesus taught.

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