

Profiles in Justice article for March 2018 – Joyce Vortherms

Twenty-five years ago – in 1993 – church leaders from the Westbrook Minnesota area decided it would be a wonderful ecumenical service experience for the people from their congregations to serve a meal at the Banquet in Sioux Falls, a ministry of hospitality and feeding the body and the soul for the poor. People from the different churches in Westbrook embraced the idea, and Joyce Vortherms was among them, leading the way and encouraging involvement from the people of St. Anthony Catholic parish in Westbrook. That first experience went so well that the group continued to plan an annual day of service at The Banquet for the people of Westbrook. Initially these service trips were organized by the pastors of the Lutheran Churches, but after the first few years Joyce was called upon to “make it happen”, and she stepped up to the challenge. She has been organizing the event and recruiting volunteers for the past 20+ years.

The Banquet project was so successful that in 2004 the Westbrook churches began another service project, “Food for Kidz”, which is a food packing event that provides food in places around the world that are battling starvation and hunger. Once again, Joyce became involved in the leadership for this annual community event, raising funds and recruiting volunteers each year since the beginning. She continues to serve in this role as well, to bring another opportunity of service to those in her community.

These are just two of the examples of Joyce’s quiet, unassuming, but tenacious dedication to service. Her passion about issues of social justice was ignited during her days at St. Teresa’s College in Winona, where she was chairperson of the Christian Service Commission, a tri-campus organization with participation not only from St. Teresas, but also St. Marys and Winona State. This continued when she went through the Lay Ministry Institute at the Diocese of Winona, and she fondly recalls learning more about the issues of Social Justice there, under the tutelage of Todd Graff, who continues as director of the Institute of Lay Ministry for the Diocese, and Suzanne Belongia, who was then working as director of parish ministry for Catholic Charities. Joyce’s dedication extends to making this mission of service one that can be shared ecumenically in her community. She is a person who brings people together.

Joyce’s devotion to God’s service and her parish community are the primary forces in her life. Her roles at St. Anthony are many, including directing Faith Formation (currently for high school and Confirmation preparation) and Youth Ministry. When working with youth, Joyce weaves in the Catholic Social Teachings and experiences of service, with the hope that the young people will incorporate this practice in their adult lives. When you ask Joyce about her contributions to social justice and charity, she humbly downplays her role, but those of us who have been blessed to know and to have served with Joyce, know that her contributions are much greater than she likes to admit. She is one who leads quietly but powerfully from the sidelines, preferring to draw attention not to herself but to others who also deserve credit, like the youth

that she cares so much about. She admits that while she knows that social justice requires both works of charity and justice, her ministry has led her more to works of charity, but she also does her best to understand the issues in the world that impact justice. "Awareness" she says, "Is the 1st step towards helping others." Thank you Joyce for serving your community so well!

Submitted by Lisa Kremer.