

Wake Up! There's Work To Be Done!

For a month that often finds us hunkered down due to snow and ice January memorials call us to shake off our lethargy and get involved.

The anniversary of the Roe v Wade Supreme court's decision on abortion in 1973 underscores the need to protect human life beginning in the womb. That ruling had a deep impact on me since I was pregnant that year with my oldest child and feeling him moving and alive within me underscored the preciousness of life.

Though I never have had the opportunity to go to the March for Life in Washington D C marking the anniversary of that Supreme Court decision several of our youth group members went last year and were deeply moved by the experience. When sharing its impact they also talked about how speakers and events expanded their understanding of what it means to be pro life to also include such issues as, poverty, health care, immigration, care of the environment, and racism.

That brings me to the second January event that challenges me to act— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. As much as we may think things have progressed since his death and the passing of the Civil Rights act, racism continues to survive and in some ways is becoming more overt today with an additional focus on immigrants and refugees who often speak other languages and have different cultures and life experiences from ours.

When I was growing upon the West side of Cincinnati, almost everyone in my neighborhood was Catholic. There was very little diversity. It wasn't until I was freshman in high school that I had any interactions with people whose skin color wasn't the same as mine. I am ashamed to admit that I had stereotyped and feared African Americans. And here I was a scared little freshman with one sitting in front and another sitting behind me in homeroom. When I talked to my dad about my feelings he wisely advised me to work at getting to know these students. As I followed his advice I learned that we were very much alike as we shared worries about school, love of family, and the same faith. However I also learned that they faced more obstacles and misunderstandings than I could ever imagine—just based on the color of their skin. I remembered when our class had won a boat ride to Coney Island. We were excited to go but that excitement waned when we learned that our African American friends and classmates weren't welcome at the amusement park. We chose not to go. I learned that an African American friend had a

relative who was a high ranking FIB official who was transferred to Cincinnati but wasn't able to find housing in many neighborhoods in the city because of his race. It simply wasn't fair. These experiences and learning about Catholic social teaching gave me courage to get involved in the civil rights movement.

My spirit weeps when people demonize and fear people who at first seem different from them. Getting to know more about them as I did as a high school freshman breaks down barriers, helps us see similarities, and often leads to friendship—or at least greater understanding. For me this has been a great blessing. I have come to know that we are all God's children and each one brings a unique gift. I think we all are poorer without these gifts.

January continues to invite us to expand our view of the importance of working with others who at first seem different from us in the week of prayer for Christian unity. When I was young we were so focused on our Catholic identity that we weren't friends with our non-Catholic neighbors and certainly didn't ever consider entering their churches. I remember feeling uneasy as a young adult after Vatican II when I was invited to speak to a youth group at a neighboring Presbyterian church. I had never been inside a non-Catholic church before and I felt a pang of guilt as I walked in the door. That quickly dissipated as I began to meet with them and once again found how similar we were. I've since been in many different churches and temples and have learned

how much we are alike and need each other. In communities like the one where St. Leo is located the churches are small and need to come together in order to accomplish things. Our need for each other has become a true blessing. I believe God smiles on these common efforts and works powerfully in and through us when we work together.

The final celebration of the month is Catholic schools week where we take time to acknowledge the great work these schools are doing in educating and deepening the faith of our children and we are invited to visit and get a first-hand look at the opportunities they offer and the dedication of the faculty and staff. Hopefully we'll find ways we can volunteer or support them.

So wake up and buckle your seat belts! We've got a lot of work to do!

—Angela Anno



**NONE OF US CAN THINK
WE ARE EXEMPT
FROM CONCERNS FOR THE
POOR AND FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.
POPE FRANCIS**

