

Social Justice Network

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REFLECTION

Early one evening, a man was walking along a beach when he saw a boy picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. The man asked the boy why he was doing this. The boy explained the starfish would die if left until morning. The man observed, "What difference will your efforts make when there are thousands of starfish on the beach?" The boy stopped and looked at the starfish he was holding and said, "***It will make a difference to this one***".

I find it tragic to hear so many people say that there is nothing they can do to make a difference in a country and a world where the chief concern of government is gaining and holding power rather than the common good of the people or the planet; where the global poor go hungry and children literally starve to death; where corporations and financial institutions rule the world for profit and our planet and its people suffer a slow death. It certainly sounds tragic - which it is!

However, the story of the boy and the starfish calls each of us to reflect on the 'power of one' to make a difference. It reminds us that every Canadian can make a huge difference at all levels of life. It becomes possible when ordinary people recognize their power and seize the moment.

There are inspirational people who dedicate themselves to making a difference in the lives of others. They are usually ordinary people in our family, community, neighbourhood, country and world doing ordinary things that change a life or lives, or who contribute to the healing of our planet.

'In a world where people stand for hours to catch a glimpse of a movie star, famous musician or well-known politician,' ordinary people are often the real heroes who look for nothing personal in return for their dedicated service to individuals and the common good of humanity.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of the 'power of one' to make a difference is the Gospel story told by Jesus of the 'Good Samaritan'. Although a man is robbed and left badly bleeding on the roadside to Jericho, several people pass by on the other side of the road and go on their way.

But one ordinary man passes, and feeling great compassion, stops and carries the man on his mule to the closest inn. He pays to have the man cared for and tells the innkeeper if he needs to spend more than he has given him for the care of the man, he will settle the debt on his way back. Jesus' story is a moving illustration of the power of one person to make a difference in the life of another.

Whatever their religion or beliefs, ordinary people who 'make a difference' are witnesses to God's dream for the earth and its peoples.

INFORMATION

Parents are ordinary people who have a huge impact on the kind of adults their children become. My parents (like many of yours) were ordinary people who gave the gift of life to seven children and taught them spiritual and human values that endure beyond time. There was much sacrifice in their lives, always characterized by a totally selfless love which was, at times, heroic. They often did without things to educate us and give us music lessons (my father always said it was cheaper than bailing us out of jail!). They made a difference by example.

Just think of the difference **ordinary Canadians** made in the lives of Haitian children, women, and men because they saw and felt their indescribable pain and responded so generously to the devastating earthquake in January. Wisely, they sent their donations to organizations they trusted and not to governments.

Then there are other ordinary Canadians like Richard Colvin who spoke truth to power in Parliament and was ridiculed and treated shamefully by the governing party because he stood up for a nobler Canada for all. He refused to give up in the face of injustice and humiliation. Only very recently has he been vindicated when the Speaker of the House ordered the documents relating to the abuse of Afghan prisoners to be made available to the members of Parliament. I believe that Richard Colvin made a difference by courageously challenging the Government of Canada's lack of transparency concerning the torture of Afghan prisoners.

Many of our **Canadian young adults** are not interested in politics because they perceive the political arena to be so totally

uninspiring, but they are moved to help people in the developing world because they see the great injustice on so many fronts and want to make a difference for these people. Shanna Moyle is a 26-year-old from Ottawa who volunteers for 'Safe Passage'. (*Camino Seguro*, as it is called in Spanish, was itself started by a North Carolina teacher, Hanley Denning, in 1997 – see her story at www.safepassage.org).

This is Shanna's fourth year in Guatemala. She makes an inspirational difference in the lives of children and teenagers in many ways such as teaching music and movement to two to five-year-olds, break-dancing to the youth on Saturdays to keep them off the streets, mentoring a 14-year-old to get her off drugs. Young adults such as Shanna have not been soured into passiveness but are committed to building a better world for all.

The farmers of this country and around the world are certainly ordinary people who, although so often unappreciated and unsung, make a most significant difference to our food safety and sovereignty. Sometimes they have to fight our own government to do so. It is the farmers, not the government or agri-corporations who are our most reliable allies when it comes to our food supply. "Rather than waiting for or calling on the government, the movement is declaring and building food sovereignty on the ground and creating its own public food policy" (*The Ram's Horn, April 2010*).

And they are succeeding. From seed-savers to large organic farms, from urban community gardens to farmers markets to buy local policies, there are new structures of production and distribution everywhere (ibid).

What you did for one . . . for millions . . . for billions, "you did it to me"!

Claiming their Power in Latin America

“The poor South will (rise up) and judge the rich North. And the poor people and poor nations - poor in different ways, not only lacking food, but also deprived of freedom and other human rights - will judge those people who take these goods away from them, amassing to themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of others.”

- John Paul II in Edmonton

Ordinary peoples in Latin America, fed up with the way they have been exploited and colonized by the Western powers, are becoming part of a huge movement to create an alternate economic system that doesn't cater to the rich at the cost of the poor. They have been playing a central role in changing regimes, determining national agendas, leading struggles against international trade agreements as well as establishing regional and local bases of power.

Venezuela: President Hugo Chávez is demonized by much of the Western press and governments, but he is a hero to the masses of poor in Venezuela because he repudiates the global economic system that has impoverished the poor, colonized their country, and robbed the nation of its rich resources. It is the ordinary poor people of Venezuela who put Chavez in power and keep him there. They have claimed the 'power of one' at the ballot box and in so doing have become the 'power of many' that has changed their lives and that of their country.

Brazil: Thousands of people in the rainforest of Pará, the second largest state in Brazil, marched to obtain justice for Dorothy Stang. In 2005, the 73-year-old nun, known for her fight against large land owners in the Amazon rainforest for over 40 years, was assassinated. The government was pressured into action and finally, on **April 10 of this year**, Vitalmiro Moura, the Brazilian rancher accused of ordering her death, was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

1,400 rural workers have been killed in land conflicts since 1985. Today, **three bishops** of Pará **are also facing death threats** for their outspoken criticism of governments, social elites, and powerful ranching, mining and energy interests for the colonization, plunder, and exploitation of the Amazon while its people continue to fall further and further behind (*NCR* June 16, 2010).

Peru: On February 25, Peruvian Indigenous organizations, local government bodies and civil society organizations met in Cusco to formulate a strategic response to a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization event that promoted greater use of genetically modified organisms. **A demonstration through the ancient Inca streets followed up this multi-stakeholder gathering.** For more than 10,000 years the diversity of potatoes and other important crops have been nurtured by the originating cultures within a ritual agriculture that has made possible **a sustainable base of genetic diversity and variability of native crops.**

For Indigenous and farming communities, seed diversity is critical for sustainable agriculture, climate change mitigation and adaptation processes, and for **the dignity, and food sovereignty of the communities.** 'We,' they declared, **“express solidarity with the farmers, Indigenous and professional organizations throughout the world that also have voiced their protest against this new season of GMO promotion** and call for a global moratorium

on GMOs and for uniting efforts to adequately protect and **regulate local and national food markets**, preserving biodiversity, agro-biodiversity and ancestral cultures of Indigenous and farming communities of the world” (*La Vida Locavore*, March 3, 2010).

Ecuador: In 2007, the grassroots-supported Acción Ecológica proposed to the Ecuadorian government that the oil in Yasuni National Park, with its vast Amazon rainforest, remain **undeveloped** as a contribution to saving the forest and confronting climate change by preventing new carbon emissions. President Rafael Correa

did bring the proposal to “Keep Oil in the Ground” to the United Nations and asked the international community to compensate Ecuador for this global service. To date, Germany, Spain, France, Sweden and Switzerland are among countries that have contributed to the Yasuni Trust Fund, under the management of the UN Development Programme. More countries are needed to support the proposal and the campaign continues, with predictable opposition from **oil interests in Ecuador and internationally**.

These are but four stories of ordinary people determined to make a difference in their country and world.

ACTION

The National Farmers Union is a voice for the six working farms connected to the Canadian federal prisons. In April, Minister of Public Safety, Peter Van Loan, announced that “the prison farms are set up on a model of agriculture that really reflects the way it worked in the old days of the mixed farming in the 1950s.” He therefore claimed they should be closed.

Of course this is nonsense and insulting to the thousands of mixed farmers who contribute so much to the movement for food safety and sovereignty. The prison farms are diversified, well-equipped and highly respected – they are considered

models in other countries. (*The Rams’ Horn*, June, 2009).

Like the ordinary people in Latin America fighting for justice, let us support our national farmers **by signing and sending the enclosed postcard**. For more information on prison farms, go to the web site at www.saveourfarms.ca. At this same site, you can **sign in electronically** if you receive the Network paper on the web.

It is obvious that our Canadian government is not going to meaningfully address, let alone take action to resolve, issues such as biodiversity, pollution/contamination.

PRAYER

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

In light of these words of Jesus, spend some time this summer to pray over them in relation to yourself individually and to Canada as a country – its disgraceful mining practices in the developing world, its leadership in promoting genetically modified seeds, its cutting funds to Canadian organizations struggling for justice in the southern hemisphere, its support for big agri-businesses as opposed to mixed farming; and its lack of commitment to the global environment.

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