

A Faith Response to the School Bonds

Rev. Dr. Joan Parrott spoke at a recent Mecklenburg Ministries' Food for Thought lunch on the School Bonds. Her words about the cost of our distrust will challenge you - as will her thought-provoking comments: "When I feel irrelevant in my faith - walk I read the book of Matthew and I hear Jesus' astounding warning to us all whispering in our ears as we vote on this bond issue,"

Matthew 18:6(NIV):

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Please read her comments below. Mecklenburg Ministries encourages every citizen to vote this Tuesday.

Rev. Dr. Joan Parrott: A Faith Response to the School Bonds

Mecklenburg Ministries - Food for Thought Luncheon Meeting

Faith Response to Dr. Peter Gorman from Reverend Dr. Joan S. Parrott

Thursday, September 27, 2007

I stand here today as the proud recipient of the precious gift of a public education. Why is it that with

all that I have to remember during the course of the day that I can still remember the names of Mrs. Todd, Mrs. Resamono, Mrs. Polidoro, Mrs. Schmidt, Mr. Exum and many, many more teachers from K-12th grade that poured into my young vulnerable life? "Memories light the corner of my mind" of their names daily because they changed my life and opened up new possibilities in my mind, heart and soul. Dr. Gorman, I am glad to hear you say that the opportunity to learn foreign languages is being added back into the curriculum.

It was the foreign language requirement in East Orange Public High School that prepared me

with the French that I needed to become a Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger, West Africa working with

children dying of malnutrition between 1981 and 1983. My insurance rates are low with GEICO today because I am an excellent driver thanks to the Driver's Education Program taught in the public schools. There is a strong connection between faith and education because my prayer life grew tremendously when I taught curious 4th graders for one year at Washington Elementary Public School, whose first question to me was, "Are you going to be boring?" Dr. Gorman, we are grateful for your inspirational leadership along with the tireless work that all of our educational stakeholders do everyday on behalf of God's children in Charlotte, NC. You are truly making a difference. Let me respond to your brilliant presentation of the CMS Strategic Plan for 2010 by just raising a few points which may shed some light on the 2007 Bonds issue.

After talking to my pastor and a number of persons I was made aware that there are at least two

forces competing for resources and both of them are legitimate. The first one is the unprecedented

growth of Charlotte and the second one is the need to renovate outdated facilities that are the

recipients of historical neglect. Both are legitimate forces that are in desperate need of financial

resources and the faith community is called to respond to them both. Growth is good, and I moved to Charlotte because I could feel the strong tidal wave of growth and progress reeling me in. This is an exciting time and Charlotte is an exciting place to be. I am here and there is no place that I would rather be. Nevertheless, if Charlotte is truly to become a "world-class city" its growth must reflect a place where all children of God are ensured a "healthy-start, a head-start, a fair start,

a safe start and a moral start in life with successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities." (1) This is the kind of city that I want to live in and this is the kind of city that I believe will please God. How do we get there?

We must continue to establish trust. In your presentation Jack Welsh is quoted saying

that "Leaders establish trust with candor, transparency and credit." This is absolutely true. While this is true we must also be mindful that historical neglect breeds distrust within the affected

communities and makes it difficult for these communities to support initiatives seen through the

lenses of impoverishment and disenfranchisement. As Dr. Harris was absolutely right when he exclaimed that the "Faith Community is called to Speak Up, to Serve and Support our schools and the vision of the Superintendent and Board as they strive to provide an excellent education for our children."

The Faith Community is also called to tell the truth about the schools that have historically been

neglected and left behind. Stephen M.R. Covey in his celebrated book, *The Speed of Trust: The One*

Thing That Changes Everything, exegetes the "economics of trust" through this simple formula, "Trust always affects two outcomes, speed and cost." (2) He describes the formula like this,

when you have authentic trust in a relationship, the speed of service delivery will be up and the cost of delivering the product will be unbelievably down. Conversely, where there is no trust the speed of

delivering a service will be severely compromised and the cost of product delivery will climb through the roof. (3)(My translation, Covey's point). Ralph Waldo Emerson was right when he once confessed that "Our distrust is very expensive." (4)

Covey's main premise is that the "Serious practical impact of the economics of trust is that in many

relationships and interactions we are paying a hidden low trust tax.(5)" He continues by warning us

that "The ability to establish, grow, extend and restore trust with all stakeholders is the key to leadership competency of a new economy." (6) Accordingly, if Charlotte is to become the city that God is calling her to be she must eliminate distrust which is quite expensive. \$516 million to restore 12 schools that have been historically neglected is expensive. (7) \$1.4 Billion to catch up on all necessary renovations in the school system (8) is expensive but our children are priceless and worth every cent that we need to spend. How can we eliminate distrust?

The World-Class City of Charlotte can eliminate distrust by telling the truth and confessing that historical neglect has been a fact in Charlotte and ensuring that the proposed monies for renovations go for renovations and renovations only that will not be diverted to other politically correct expenditures. Our children deserve the best. They deserve a faith community that will stand up for all of God's little ones. When I feel irrelevant in my faith-walk I read the book of Matthew and I hear Jesus' astounding warning to us all whispering in our ears as we vote on this bond

issue,

Matthew 18:6: (NIV)

6But if anyone causes one of these little ones who

believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have

a large millstone hung around his neck and to be

drowned in the depths of the sea.

This passage was so important that it is repeated in Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:2. Now remember,

this was not spoken by Tony Soprano, this was spoken by our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus cares about the little ones. Continue reading in Matthew and you will find in the parable of the "Last Judgment" where Jesus is separating the sheep from the goats accusing them of not feeding him when he was hungry; nor giving him drink when he was thirsty; nor taking him in when he was a stranger; nor clothing him when he was naked; nor visiting him when he was sick and not coming to him when he was in prison.(9) The goats are outraged, shocked and incredulous of the Savior's harsh accusations and ask "When did we do these things?" Jesus' answer always reminds me that I need to be doing more to serve other when He said:

Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brothers (or sisters) you have done it to me.

While directing the Haley Farm Leadership Institute, a young student named John (11) applied in a competition that awarded several fellowships to outstanding students interested in journalism. The recipients were to receive an all expenses paid fellowship to New York City to intern for a prestigious publishing company of children's books. Going quickly through the applications I noticed on his application it said that he lived in a shelter.

After further inquiry I found out that this young man's family had fallen on hard times when his father walked out on his mother leaving her with nothing but several beautiful children without food, shelter or health insurance. Without any warning or preparation they found themselves in a shelter trying to make sense of life and trying to make ends meet. No one knew that this young man with excellent grades, a magnificent disposition and a desire to be somebody was homeless. He won the fellowship on his own merit. Although he had one white shirt and one tie and one dark suit, he went to work everyday impeccably dressed. He was the first to arrive and the last to leave. He always asked questions and engaged the staff. He never turned down an assignment and was asked to return the next summer.

At the end of the fellowship the CEO called and spoke with pride and affection about his performance. As it turned out, John was the only student that strategically found a way to say thank you to the CEO for the experience. And the rest is history; John received a full scholarship to Morehouse and is now a successful young journalist with a passion for justice and excellence. He didn't get lost in the crowd of hopelessness and despair, someone noticed him and saw the glimmer of promise and gave him a chance. "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brothers (or sisters) you have done it unto me."

Finally, the faith community's response to this urgent and ambitious but necessary CMS Strategic Plan should be as courageous as the response that the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. penned in the 1960's to white clergy who were neutral in the call for justice when he prophesied,

There was a time when the church was very powerful-in the timewhen the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent --and often even vocal sanctions of things as they are.

As faith leaders in general and followers of Jesus Christ in particular we must ensure that all of our children will get all that they need to be productive citizens with compassionate hearts that will always seek the justice and righteousness of God. As the late William Sloane Coffin wrote, we share the double burden of showing "prophetic concern for the poor while having a pastoral concern for the rich." (13)

1) Mission of the Children's Defense Fund

(www.childrensdefense.org)

2) Stephen M.R. Covey, The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything, p.13-14.

3) Ibid.

4) Ibid., p.21.

5) Ibid.

6) Ibid., p.13-14.

7) Dr. Peter Gorman, CMS Strategic Plan 2010

8) Dr. Gorman's presentation

9) Matthew 25:31-46.

10) Matthew 25:40

11) The name has been changed to protect the identity of the student

12) Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't

Wait: Letter From A Birmingham Jail, p.92-93.

13) William Sloane Coffin, A Passion for the Possible: A Message for U.S. Churches, p.37.