

A Justice Ministry II

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

August 8, 2021

Fr. Tony Davis

Last weekend, we addressed the question, ‘Why a Justice Ministry?’ As we continue reading from John 6, the ‘Bread of Life Discourse,’ we move into our second question regarding justice and the formation of a Justice Ministry at our Church: ‘What is BREAD?’

The name BREAD stands for ‘Building Responsibility Equality and Dignity.’ In summary, it is a local faith-based community organizing group that pressures elected officials in Columbus to listen to the needs of the people, in particular, in the ways of justice for all. Currently, there are about 40 congregations in the city that belong to BREAD, including a number of Catholic parishes. Personally, I have been receptive to the idea of our parish joining BREAD for the following reasons:

- 1) *BREAD is biblically based.* Even though it is not specifically Catholic or even exclusively Christian, the foundational scripture passage for the organization is Micah 6:8, which states, “and what does the LORD require of you: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Yes, we love and we pray, but we cannot forget the first requirement: to do justice. Another key scriptural reference is the story of Nehemiah in the Old Testament. In that story, Nehemiah becomes angry when he realizes all the of injustices that the Jewish people were experiencing in Jerusalem. As a result, he goes to that city, advocates for the people who are being treated unjustly, and rebuilds it. Because of this story’s connection to justice, the large assembly in Columbus each Spring calling for just solutions to our community issues is called the ‘Nehemiah Action.’ Finally, Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves plays an essential role. BREAD emphasizes that this commandment

implies that to love your neighbor, you have to love yourself first. In other words, you have to stand up for yourself and embrace your self-interests! When we do that, we can truly love our neighbors and stand up for them.

- 2) *BREAD has a great theology.* They are very critical of what they call the 'market god,' which is a god based on money. In our country, this is the god most people believe in, perhaps unconsciously. BREAD does not rely on the power of money or doing favors for those in authority. No one is their Pharaoh. Instead, they rely solely on the God of Justice, a God of abundance, hope, and possibility and the power of people telling their stories.
- 3) *BREAD is organized!* It is one thing to talk about justice or complain about injustices, but BREAD is about organizing people to gain power. Through intentional organization, grassroots relationship building, and discovering common self-interests, they multiply people power to bring about change in moral, just, and God-like ways. They are actually so well organized that they use the DART school of community organizing, which stands for Direct Action and Research Training Center. DART is affiliated with over 20 other local community organizing groups throughout the country and is supported by the *Catholic Campaign for Human Development* of the Conference of US Catholic Bishops. Upon joining BREAD and supporting their work, St. Matthias Church would have access to a full-time local community organizer to help us. This person would put us in communication with the other congregations throughout the year, meet with our team leaders, and follow up on our progress.

More could be said about BREAD, but that covers the basics. Next week for the Feast of the Assumption of Mary we will explore the question: 'What does Mary say about God's justice?' For today, I invite you to reflect upon the question from Bishop La Fayette Scales of the Rhema Christian Center here in Columbus: "How is it that we can have successful congregations and failing communities?"