

REFLECTIONS ON THE FALL CAMPAIGN (by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

November 8th brought an end to the most disturbing and depressing Presidential election of my lifetime. All the public traditions and values developed over the years to give further meaning to the words, "we the people," seem to be in jeopardy. Many of us are still in shock, feeling despair, and not yet ready to study all the factors that led to Trump's victory. In trying to find some solace so I could get through my daily activities, I recalled some positive moments and events that occurred at the local level this fall that offer a bit of hope for the future. I briefly review them here.

On September 20th at the Peaslee Neighborhood Center in Over-the-Rhine a workshop on protecting voting rights kindled some hope at the grassroots. "Voting Rights 101" featured a panel that included Camille Wimbish, Director of the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition, Catherine Turcer, Policy Analyst for Common Cause/Ohio, and Pat Youngblood, Peaslee Caregiver Project Lead Organizer. The speakers provided the diverse attendees with information they need to steer themselves through the legal procedures that often make it difficult for would be voters to cast their ballots. They especially honed in on Ohio's voter ID law and the problems people often encounter at the polls. One young man was able to register to vote immediately after this Workshop ended.

At the Community Issues Forum at Christ Church Cathedral on September 29th, Moira Weir, Director of Jobs and Family Services for Hamilton County, made the case for the Children's Services Levy, Issue 53. Weir clearly described the services that this renewal levy pays for, and depicted how recent state funding reductions have cut these services to protect children to the bone. It was refreshing to hear from a social service professional who is such a staunch advocate for children. (53 won handily.)

Then two weeks later, the Forum focused on Issue 44, the Cincinnati Public School Levy. This levy includes new money to pay for preschool classes for children living in Cincinnati. Known as the Preschool Promise Initiative, its goal is to provide a quality preschool experience for every four year old in the district. Obviously, the \$15-million of new money will only be a start toward reaching that goal, but the new revenue from increased property taxes will be earmarked for scholarships for young children from low income families as well as grants to boost the quality of various preschools. Eve Bolton, a Cincinnati School Board member, and Jack Jose, Principal of Gamble Montessori High School, discussed the complexities of this levy and why it is needed for both the preschool expansion and activities in the regular elementary and high school system. (This levy passed easily.)

Meanwhile, it was refreshing to see some progressive and thoughtful political candidates emerging at the local level. At the Christ Church Forum on October 27th, two young women running for Ohio House District 31 revealed their

intentions if elected of promoting needed services for families and individuals who live in the state. Republican candidate Mary Yeager, a struggling mother with young children, knows first hand the kind of services that families often require. Her Democratic opponent, Brigid Kelly, comes from a labor union background, and she advocates for better working conditions and wages, as well as more state funding for public education. (Kelly won this race.)

At the same Forum, Denise Driehaus displayed why her knowledge of policy and her dedication to serving her constituents make her an especially appealing candidate for the Hamilton County Commission. After reaching her limit of terms in the Ohio House, Driehaus decided to run for a Commission seat. She promised to be a more activist Commissioner in fighting for increased funding for areas such as children's services. She also showed a grasp of the complex Metropolitan Sewer District issues. (Commissioner Deters was represented at the Forum by an aide who said he did not wish to speak for his boss on specific issues,) Driehaus won a close election on November 8th.

Finally, an event that gave me the most hope during this depressing election year was a presentation by Sr. Simone Campbell, Director of Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice in Washington, D.C.. Sr. Simone is also a leader of Nuns on the Bus, a project that has taken nuns to twenty-three cities in thirteen states to talk about the issues at stake in the upcoming Congressional and

Presidential elections. Speaking to an attentive audience at Christ Church Cathedral on Wednesday evening October 26th, she emphasized the theme of "mending the current economic and social gaps that exist in the U.S. by reweaving the fabric of our society."

The very wide and ever growing gaps in income and wealth distribution in American society, declared Sr. Simone, have created a number of serious injustices that must be addressed. The platform of Nuns on the Bus includes support for a living wage for all workers, a more equitable tax policy, access to good health care, the availability of safe, affordable housing, family friendly workplaces, and reforming the democratic process. She used members of the audience as props showing how wide the distances have grown between the poor, a shrinking middle-class, and people of great wealth.

A good speaker, Sr. Simone made the "Social Gospel" come alive, and she sprinkled her remarks with self-deprecating humor. She preached that we must replace our current emphasis on individualism with a return to "we the people" working to solve problems. Only by putting aside our differences and coming together will we be able to effectively mend the gaps that tear us apart. I left the Church that evening buoyed by her message of hope. Maybe Sr. Simone's words can sustain me in getting over what happened on November 8th and getting back to work on renewing our democratic process.