

Contemporary Perspective on Social Justice

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for sisters and brothers to dwell together in unity!”
– Psalm 133:1

Most people have an inherent belief in equal rights. Unfortunately, in the chaos and upheaval of the modern world, many people still face ethnic persecution, unsafe living and working conditions and lack even the most basic survival necessities. Awareness of such conditions is more important than ever.

It may be hard to find a focus in the overwhelming need for social justice. There is, however, a starting point. Many groups, secular and religious, share basic commitments to social justice, such as equal rights for all people, providing care for the sick and the poor, improving rights for workers and prohibiting discrimination.

Many religious groups embrace social justice by providing resources for the poor and oppressed, such as sanctuary, guidance and money. Through their care for those in need, such groups live out the biblical call for justice.

For Benedictines, social justice is integral to their spirituality. The practice of justice is pervasive in the Rule of Benedict’s articulation of how to make community work and how to create an environment where each member is treated fairly. Benedict’s description of the instruments of good works includes providing clothes, visiting the sick and caring for the poor.

Guests at Benedictine monasteries come for planned offerings of educational and spiritual opportunities, but they also come because they know of the Benedictine tradition of hospitality. According to Benedict, all guests are to be received as Christ.

Benedictine Women of Madison do this through an open invitation to community prayer, spiritual guidance and retreats. They have given hospitality to families from Asia, Africa and South America. Within the last sixteen years, over 33 Missionary Benedictine Sisters lived with them at Holy Wisdom Monastery.

Guests always bring gifts, whether of experience, insight or new questions. As theologian Rosemary Haughton states, the guest becomes host and the host becomes guest. This fluidity in the guest-host relationship invites us to be aware of and open to mystery in our lives.

The hope of effecting change worldwide guides Benedictine Women of Madison in its endeavors as it weaves hospitality, prayer, social justice and care for the earth into a shared way of life.