

## A Journey into Social Action

Michael Yakawich

March 8, 2011

**“We should be the north star for this fallen world that has lost its compass.” SMM**

**“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.” Mother Teresa**

A few days ago I was sitting around the conference table with department heads at the Billings City Parks Department, along with community members and a local architect. I was heading up a committee to rebuild a gazebo in South Park, a local park in Billings, MT. It is a \$200k project that will be a big asset to the city when it is completed.



*Recognition for the South Park Gazebo Project*

I like to think that God places each of us in many interesting situations, both to lead and to be a plus to others. During a recent conference in Las Vegas, I heard Father Moon speak on the value of social action and this made me think more about how to live a public life. I believe that each of us can experience spiritual growth in the process of serving our community. ***“When you put the purpose of the whole before the individual purpose, good give and take action can come into being.”SMM***

What is social action? I think there is a calling to be ‘heavenly social workers’. Webster’s Dictionary defines a social worker, “Any service or activity designed to promote the welfare of the community, and the individual, as through counseling services, health clinics, recreation halls and playgrounds, aid for the needy, the aged, and the physically handicapped.” I am mindful how my church members recently worked with the Montana Wyoming Tribal Leaders Wellness Center. The center was in need of supplies. Our church community took supplies from our own homes as well as reaching out to others for donations. I received a letter recently, expressing gratitude for all the donations which also included several copies of Rev. Moon’s autobiography. ***“If you sacrifice your private life for the public, you will be respected by people around you.” SMM***

Last night I met with a group of parents who are concerned about the bullying in the local schools. We had previously formed the “Montana Family Coalition Against Bullying” We are working with the local school board, state legislators and other parents. Families in the community are very, very upset when faced with such difficult situations. Having a daughter abused, or a gang attack your son: people are dealing with such things every day. I know that God calls each of us to bring aid and to bring light into dark situations. ***“If you shed tears for the public more than for yourself, your descendants shall be***

*prosperous.” SMM*

Working with the South Side Neighborhood Task Force our church youth have helped the annual Easter Egg Hunt each year by placing candy in over 5,000 plastic eggs. They have then hidden the eggs and monitored the children during the event. It is wonderful to see the smiles on the children participating, and to see our church youth investing in the community, side by side with our neighbors. It can be a humbling experience to work with people from the community. They are talented, educated, wise, motivated, and dedicated. I learn so much from them. Several have become my mentors. I am grateful to have a former city councilwoman, healthcare professionals, teachers, and Dr. Harr, a retired psychiatrist and a leader in mental health, and others genuinely offering advice and guidance. ***“If you sacrifice for the greater good, you will be loved by more people.” SMM***



Annual Easter Egg Hunt in South Park



Southside Neighborhood Task Force Board

Social action is a way to invest into the community. We can roll up our sleeves and volunteer for the sake of others. We can volunteer in small ways at first. Gradually, we gain in credibility and in our capacity to step up to higher challenges. Step by step gaining trust and proving ourselves able and willing. It is an honor to be trusted and handed greater responsibility. It requires humility; a willingness to listen, making time to read, learn and ask questions. There are times when you are persecuted, shunned, spoken about behind your back, slandered in the media and even physically attacked. I recall our Founder’s words on Home Church, ***“I want you to have concern and pity for those who fiercely reject you, because they are the ones whose hearts have been hurt deeply and cannot trust. You must understand that they need***

*more love than anyone else.”*



*Earth Day Clean Up*

I believe that we do not need to wave flags in order for people to know our faith or the church we belong to. This is a natural way to witness. In Matthew 7:20, Jesus pointed out, “Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.” These same people who recognize our fruits reciprocate in turn with kindness and good will. I remember when I injured my back and was out of action for about a month, many people stopped by my home with food, support and encouragement. It is true that what we sow is what we will reap. I can glimpse a little of Rev. Moon’s vision when he said, ***“When you accomplish Home Church, there will be no more need for churches, for every home will be a church.”***



*Social action: Behind the scenes hauling the tables and chairs*

Fourteen years ago we started an anti-drug education program with a handful of youth, some parents, and a couple of pastors. We organized a march from city park to city park to bring to the attention of the community that we are facing serious drug and violence problems. A teenager was shot and killed three houses from where I live in a drive-by shooting. I was shot at simply standing next to my car. My son, in elementary school, found a drug needle. This got my attention and motivated me. I felt the Holy Spirit and had to do something. Over the years this March has grown to include several community agencies and organizations and now involves 400+ participants. In this area of social action we are focusing on education and awareness building, networking, and community involvement. Through this project our church has received two awards from the United Way recognizing and appreciating our work. ***“The Church should save the area and the country in which it located.” SMM***

Tom Krause, in the book, **Chicken Soup for the Volunteer’s Soul**, has sai

***“It is one of God’s true lessons***

***how my walk is meant to be,***

***true happiness I find when***

***life’s not only about me.”***

We can find how much joy and inspiration is created when we serve others.



*Suicide Prevention Coalition event*

Suicide prevention: I know it is preventable. Montana is usually between #1 and #4 in per capita suicides in the nation! It is hard to avoid not doing anything. Working with moms and dads who have lost a son or daughter, husband or wife, is heart wrenching. Their stories have motivated me to do my best to help. In all these ways, we make incredibly deep relationships. As the Chair of the Suicide Prevention Coalition for Yellowstone Valley, my board members have become some of my best friends. Recently, when my father had a stroke, they were some of the first to respond with an outpouring of prayer and words of support. They are amongst the first to seek recognition for our church youth in the local paper, or to point out the good work our church is doing in the community. We do not do social action for reward or praise. It is genuine and sincere. In St. Matthew 5:16 it says: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

***“The public person cannot live as he likes, because of his public responsibility.” SMM***

Seven Keys to Social Action:

1. A willingness to serve.
2. Think outside the box. (From shoveling snow on your neighbor’s sidewalk to cleaning up garbage on your street)
3. Be sincere and genuine.
4. Volunteer. (Join other groups, participate).
5. Be creative, consistent and have confidence.
6. Be willing to ask others for help
7. Let prayer and study be your guide

For the past 15 years our church youth have performed music in local rest homes, hospitals and retirement homes. Led by parents, Yukiko Yakawich and Chad Martin, the youth have received awards for their

service from the Stillwater County Hospital and other institutions. They perform with trumpets, clarinets, piano, violin, flute, and guitar. The residents, their family members, and the staff have expressed sincere gratitude and appreciation. The voice of my church Founder echoes in my heart. In his book, As a Peace Loving Global Citizen, Father Moon comments, *“The ultimate purpose of religion is to bring about the reality of a human community filled with love and peace.*



*Park View Rest Home Musical Performance*

I believe that social action requires exactly that, **action!** It cannot be theory or concept alone. When we act and serve, then because **our actions are speaking louder than our words**, we will surely find the Holy Spirit, true joy and unity. I am mindful of Father Moon’s words, *“The best things that happen in your life should happen in your Home Church area. When you become old and look back, you will say those were your happiest days and you will have a foundation for eternal happiness.”*