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Faith should guide in all aspects of life, including politics

Bill Tammeus | Jun. 15, 2011 A small c catholic

The morning of the walk dawned crisp and spectacular, and our team collected in a church parking lot near the start.

More than 20 members of our congregation [1] gathered with about 3,500 others for AIDSWalk 2011 [2], the annual event that raises funds for the AIDS Service Foundation of Greater Kansas City [3]. Through our own donations and the pledges of others -- mostly gathered by our AIDS Ministry from other church members -- our team turned in nearly $4,000 to the cause.

This particular year we were walking in memory of our retired organist, who had died in February at a 24-hour skilled nursing care facility for HIV/AIDS patients [4] that our church helped to create more than 10 years ago.

It was, among other things, a way of remembering that by the time this man told our congregation he had the HIV virus, our AIDS Ministry had been around long enough [5] to do the necessary work of educating our congregation about the disease. The result was that no one in the congregation denounced the man, either to him personally or in public. Rather, he was embraced and supported and loved.

This is part of what congregations are called to do. They have to be the ones who process information about what?s happening in the wounded world and then help members respond in ways that are in harmony with the values of the faith.

So in the case of AIDS, those of us who became members of our ministry team first educated ourselves. Then we began to educate the congregation at large. Education does not, of course, mean passing along prejudices. Rather, it means knowing facts and sharing them. And it means hoping that facts eventually form the basis for wisdom, which can guide a measured and compassionate response.

The same approach is needed no matter what the issue is -- from sexual abuse to immigration, from race relations to peacemaking.

And it is faith communities -- my church and yours -- that should be at the forefront of helping to create wholesome, helpful, loving responses to all these issues.

Sometimes, of course, we find faith communities leading the charge toward prejudice, making major contributions to the worst of the culture wars. Thus you find such fools as Fred Phelps announcing that God is punishing the U.S. because Americans accept gay people. And we have Terry Jones burning the Qur?an because he?s convinced that Islam is the religion of Satan.

But these are among the sad exceptions in the U.S. Much more often we find congregations seeking to educate their members about public issues so they can respond in a sensible way.

In my own congregation within the past year we?ve offered not just Bible study but also sessions on

immigration, the U.S. Supreme Court case that gave corporations the right to make huge contributions to political candidates, inner city crime, interfaith relations and much more.

I?m sure you can create a similar list from your own congregation. If not, it?s time to ask why not.

That?s because our faith should guide us in all aspects of living, including how we respond to hot-button public issues. If we?re simply falling for what the divisive talk show hosts are spitting out and not running it through the filter of faith, we wind up contributing to the problem of a house divided against itself.

I?m not suggesting that our clergy or other religious leaders tell us what to think about each issue. Not at all. But I am saying that our leaders have a responsibility to help us imagine what we should be thinking and doing about education, poverty, war, abortion, homosexuality, environmental degradation and much more.

If our faith isn?t helping us live compassionately and lovingly in a world filled with crises, what good is it? Besides, sometimes pondering these issues means getting out on one of God?s most beautiful mornings for a good walk.

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