

Address by the President, Ann Smith At NLA 2001

As most of you know, one of our own, Rev. Dennis Jacobsen, has written a book entitled *Doing Justice*. It is a wonderful book with a wonderful spirit. It is filled with not only spiritual insights about our work but also poignant stories about how organizing has enriched his own life and the lives of those whom he loves.

Just recently there was a review of *Doing Justice* in the Christian Century magazine. The review states that Dennis walks a line between theology and practice. I would have to say that that is the line we all walk all of the time. We walk a line between our highest ideals and pragmatic action. Between spirituality and tough and nasty fights. Between the world as we would like it to be and the world as it is.

The reviewer, Professor Carl Dudley, ends his review with this question: "Why is the Gamaliel Foundation the fastest growing network in the country?" It might be a peculiar way of ending a book review, but it is perhaps the best way to begin my remarks.

"Why is the Gamaliel Foundation the fastest growing network in the country?"

Last year, I attended National Training in Cape Town South Africa. (Some of us attend in Joliet, Illinois, others attend in Cape Town, South Africa. Position has its privileges.) One of the leaders there was Ms. Debbie Fransman. For some reason, Debbie and I clicked. We did our obligatory one-on-ones; and, as the manual says, we began a relationship. Debbie is a devoted mother and wife, she had been a nurse. She actually attended to Nelson Mandella when he had been hospitalized in the last years of his imprisonment. She is a church goer. She had been supportive of the ANC but not a leading activist. A few months after our training, Debbie was hired as the lead organizer for CBCO South Africa of Cape Town. Within less than a year of her being hired, just two weeks ago, that organization had its first public meeting. 1500 people attended. There were those at the meeting who wept because they realized the spirit of revolution and activism was alive and well in South Africa.

This network can take a Debbie Fransman, a Terrance Faltein, a Michael Stepp, a Sue McCulloch, and an Andreas Kriefall and somehow move them from good people, intelligent people, loving people, and give the tools and the space to become powerful organizers. That is one reason, why the Gamaliel Foundation is the fastest growing network in the country.

In January of this year I was in Tanzania with Dennis, Terrance and Greg. The Gamaliel Foundation conducted National Training in Swahili. Greg was nervous about doing this training. He said the language would inhibit the Socratic method and perhaps the confrontive style would not work in the Mwehru culture. It was an amazing process to watch. Within a brief time, the reaction of those in the training was just like the reaction I have observed in Techny, in Buffalo, and in Cape Town. The participants were

grappling with power, and their willingness to use it; with self-interest and their willingness to claim it; with confrontation and their willingness to confront. I have observed this reaction in Spanish, in English and in Swahili. I have observed it among people of all races in South Africa and in the United States. The Gamaliel Foundation is applying concepts that are universal and that are universally needed. And the Gamaliel Foundation is applying them in a way that each person of the thousands of people touched each year is dealt with in a way that calls forth his or her own greatness. And this is another reason why the “Gamaliel Foundation is the fastest growing network in the country.”

I have observed the staff and the leaders of this network, whether in South Africa, Tanzania, Saint Louis, New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, and here, right here in this event, work incredibly long hours to insure that each event conducted is conducted in a way that proclaims that the work of the people is a work that demands the very best of each of us. I have been to public meetings conducted by MICAH, MAC and VOICE Buffalo, and seen them conducted in a powerful and disciplined manner. I have observed evaluations of individual training sessions, of large public meetings and of the NLA. I have observed how tough you are on each other. Each of you is driven to get it right. And you want to get it right because you know the people deserve nothing less. And this is another reason why the Gamaliel Foundation is the fastest growing network in the country.

I have felt a passion for justice, an anger against racism, an uncompromising stand against oppression. This plays itself out in Oakland, California; Baltimore, Maryland; in Albany, New York; in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape of South Africa in Arusha, Tanzania, and among people with special needs in New Hampshire. And I have observed how this passion is directed into a creative analysis of urban sprawl, the concentration of poverty, and structural inequity. And I have seen how this analysis has led to new ways of organizing, has led to stretching old models, has led to the creation of metropolitan organizations tackling regional issues, and has pressed upon us the need to create a national network. And this is another reason why the Gamaliel Foundation is the fastest growing network in the country.

I could go on with many other reasons why we are a special group of people, but I am the president of the board and bragging about our success and our passion is only part of my job. It is my duty to also take stock of where we are and ask, “Are we on track? Do we have the resources to do the job? Will we be overwhelmed by our ambition and our very success?”

This is what I observe.

Our programs this year were conducted with their usual excellence. We conducted four National Trainings in the United States, two in South Africa and one in Tanzania. Greg points out that two of these trainings (for the first time in the U.S. and for the second time in South Africa) were done without him, and much to his chagrin, the quality seemed to have improved. Ntosake, Advanced, and Clergy Training were all well done. Our staff development programs have also been expanded and improved. The success of our

programs is to a large part due to John Norton who is now our director of Program. Mary Gonzales, Sue Lacy, and Dennis Jacobsen were responsible for the three three-day training programs. Three of the four National Trainings had to be stretched from the customary three simultaneous sessions for 120 people to four for 160 people. Our programs are now at maximum capacity in the present structure. We need to examine how we are to accommodate the ever greater demand on these programs. We must do better.

The Gamaliel Foundation received significant new monies from the Ford Foundation and the Mott Foundation. Paul Marincel has been working with the board and senior staff to increase the financial base of the network. The money has increased, but not sufficiently to meet the demands of an expanded central staff, expansion to new metropolitan areas, and regionalism initiatives that are presently on the drawing board. By the end of this year Mary Gonzales will be working full time to expand the base on the West Coast. John Norton will be working full time expanding our base in the Northeast. Ana Garcia Ashley will be moving toward opening up the Southeast. We do not now have the financial resources to put these, our most talented of staff, on full time salaries to do this work. We have a plan to expand our regionalism staff by bringing Vicki Kovari in to work with Michael Kruglik. The need is there, the possibilities of greater victories are there, the money is not there. We all, the board, the central staff, and the local organizations need to redouble our effort to raise funds. We must do better.

We have recruited lead organizers for Quad Cities, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, Baltimore, and New Jersey. We need lead organizers in Rockford, and for HOSEA, and in EZEKIEL. Tom Hawkins had done a good job recruiting organizers. However, we are always short. Nor do we have enough African American, Hispanic and Asian organizers in the network. Remember, our strategic plan calls for a staffing plan requiring 200 professional organizers. We must do better.

Don Burton, our new director of communications, has given us a powerful electronic tool to publicize our work, to communicate with each other, to streamline our registration programs, and to recruit staff. Check out our Web Page, it is first class. Now we just need to learn how to use it. If we are to move into the 21st century, we must do better.

Cheryl Liske has worked with leaders in Kalamazoo to create a ISAIAH. She has also brought Flint, Michigan into the network. Mary Gonzales is working with ACORN to create a new project in San Diego. Ana Garcia Ashley is creating a new project in Beloit, Wisconsin and enlisting a project on Long Island. She will soon be focusing on Atlanta Georgia. (We need C.T. Vivian's help to make this happen). Mary Gonzales is creating a new project in San Diego. Two new projects in Connecticut have joined the network. This all sounds good, but not good enough to realize our strategic plan of 100 organizations by 2010. We must do better.

This is my challenge.

The board of directors of the Gamaliel Foundation must play its part in raising more funds. The board must manage the resources of the network, its money and its central staff with utmost care. The board must be intimate with the Strategic Plan, must monitor it carefully, and must play its role to implement it. I will take this challenge to the board.

Greg Galluzzo must continue to shed his responsibilities in this network. He has given up the program part. He is giving up the fund raising part. He must continue to develop others to develop and manage new projects. He cannot be the bottleneck for further growth. I and the rest of the board will push him in this direction.

The Central Staff must assume even more responsibility for making things happen. You are our most developed and professional people. You must make sure each of your own projects are setting the standards for all other projects. You must make sure that each of the projects with whom you consult are moving toward true metropolitan organizations. You must do your part to insure that more money is available to make this enterprise happen. You must be the ones that create coherence, unity and common purpose among all of the staff.

Each lead organizer must insure that their project has the resources it needs to continue to grow. To be leadership driven. To win significant victories for the people of your region.

And now I turn to the most important group of people in this network. You the leaders.

First, I want to address a very important group of leaders, the pastors, the rabbis, the immans of this network. You are in a sacred position, you have been ordained, you have been called to bring about the kingdom of God on this earth. This too is the work of the Gamaliel Foundation. As Rev. James Leary has stated, it is your job to be the vision carriers of this network. It is your job to develop the spiritual and theological tools necessary to keep us in this work for the long run. It is your job to make sure that there are core teams in each of your congregations, it is your job to develop strong clergy caucuses that work to expand the regional organizations. It is your job to utilize the relationships you have to other clergy in other cities to help us expand to other regions. And it is your job to make sure that the gathering of judicatory leaders in September is successful.

Secondly, I want to talk you the rest of you. You are the ones that must make sure that each core team is strong and active. You are the ones that must make sure that task forces are on the move and winning victories. You are the ones that must make sure that each fundraiser is more successful than the one before. You are the ones that must do the power analyses that develops the public relationships that reveal new solutions. You are the ones that must put together the public meetings that put your organizations at the tables of power. You are the building blocks of the network. You are the infantry that does the work and wins the battles. You are the ordinary people called upon to do extraordinary things. You are the ones that insure that what has been built will remain built and become stronger.

And you from South Africa. You must do all of the above. For it is our intention to be an international organization.

You have in your packet a more detailed description of our accomplishments for last year and our goals for this year.

My message to you is that we enter 2002, the second year of our strategic plan, with some confidence and some caution to continue on our path, we will need much commitment and resolve.