

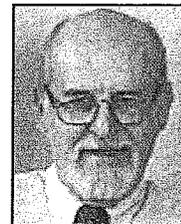
INTRODUCTION

Richard P. Poethig

This issue of *Church & Society* Magazine celebrates one hundred years of Presbyterian engagement in ministry with urban, immigrant and working people. Back in 1903, when Charles Stelzle was called to head the Workingmen's Department for the Board of Home Missions, he came with a vision for engaging the Presbyterian Church with working people. Stelzle had been a machinist; he knew first hand the issues of working people and their unions. For him, concern for working people was an evangelical mission, but he did not separate his evangelical faith from the issues of justice faced by working people in their jobs and in their family life. His was a unique witness to the social dimensions of the Gospel.

Thus the first article in this anniversary issue tells the story of Charles Stelzle himself. Stelzle was a man of the city. He had grown up in New York's tenements, played on its streets, and worked in its factories. He studied and wrote about the issues and people of the city. He generated a multitude of ministries, many of which provided the foundation for what came later, as subsequent articles will reveal. George Todd, former staff for the United Presbyterian Church's Joint Office of Urban Ministry, outlines the unfolding of Presbyterian engagement in the city from the end of World War II through 1980. During a portion of that period, Presbyterian urban ministry was uniquely structured through the Joint Office to reach beyond U.S. borders to support an ecumenical urban-industrial mission on a worldwide scale.

Many of the inner city ministries in the post-war era drew heavily



Richard Poethig, now retired from the Presbyterian ministry, is a member of Chicago Presbytery. With Phil Tom, he served as Co-Content Editor of this issue of C&S. He is introduced in more detail on page 5 of this issue where his article, "Charles Stelzle and the Workingmen's Department," begins.

upon community organizing to enlist neighborhood people in challenging urban power structures to win benefits for their communities. Trey Hammond tells the story of how community organizing had its genesis in the experience of Saul Alinsky in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago. There he learned, through the experience of this neighborhood dominated by meat packing plants, the need to organize for power, whether from a workplace or a neighborhood base. Hammond points to the historical connection between Stelzle's own efforts at Labor Temple and the continuing relationship of church and labor issues in 2003, particularly as seen in Living Wage Campaigns that are being initiated by Congregation-Based Community Organizations in cities across the country.

Phil Tom adds to this story in his review of Dennis Jacobsen's book, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*, which provides a biblical-theological framework for congregational involvement in organizing for justice in their communities.

One of the indirect descendents of the Labor Temple legacy is the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. Kim Bobo, its director, provides an overview of the work of the NICWJ as it brings together over sixty groups in pursuit of justice for working people with the support of religion and labor coalitions in cities across the country.

Stelzle considered the establishment of Labor Temple in the vacated Second Presbyterian Church on the Lower East Side of New York one of his highest achievements. His goal was to provide programs for the immigrants who had flooded into the area. Labor Temple lasted over forty years as an affirmation of the importance of immigrant peoples in the shaping of U.S. community life. It was here in 1945 that the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations had its start under the leadership of Marshal L. Scott. P.I.I.R. carried the industrial ministry of the Presbyterian Church into the 1970s reaching thousands of seminar-ians and pastors with its programs.

Esther Nieves tells the story of an even longer lasting effort of urban engagement to provide succor, education and support to a succession of immigrant families on Chicago's Near Northwest Side. Erie Neighborhood House, begun in the late 1800s, has served as one of the Presbyterian Church's major efforts in providing an affirming environment to an ever-changing racial-ethnic landscape.

Akin to this effort is the commitment of the Presbyterian Church to

racial ethnic advocacy. Grace and Luke Kim tell the story of the Sierra Mission Area in California and its thirty years of support and advocacy for a continuing stream of immigrant groups.

Central to the creation of an office in 1903 to relate to working people was the issue of justice in the workplace. By 1908, when the Federal Council of Churches was born, workplace issues in U.S. industry had taken center stage. Stelzle, who was a Presbyterian representative at that meeting, lifted up a paragraph from Frank Mason North's speech on "The Church and Modern Industry," which called for support of justice principles on behalf of "the toilers of America" and proclaimed them "The Social Creed of the Churches." Two years later these principles were adopted by the Presbyterian General Assembly and became the groundwork for future social witness policy in the area of economic justice.

Those principles have been foundational in providing direction to the churches as they have engaged the justice issues in each generation. Four such engagements are presented in this issue.

- Charles Rawlings tells the story of the shutdown of Youngstown Sheet and Tube in Ohio in 1977, which became symbolic of the deindustrialization that was affecting communities across the U.S. Rawlings details the efforts of the religious community in response to the destructive impact which the sudden loss of a major industry had upon workers, their families and their community.
- Part of the deindustrialisation story is the flight of industry overseas to gain access to low wage, unorganized labor in the developing world. David Dyson, pastor of the Lafayette Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, tells the story of the People of Faith Network which has worked in solidarity with labor and human rights groups in other countries, generating support for workers laboring in sweatshop conditions, to help their voice be heard by corporate managers and stockholders in this country. The People of Faith Network has been effective in generating both consumer boycott strategies and direct confrontation of corporations over their practices in highly oppressive work situations in Central America, Asia and Africa.
- Closer to home, Cynthia Arnold tells the story of the struggles of women workers in the garment industry in El Paso, Texas. Little

has changed since 1908 when the conditions facing women workers were lifted up in "The Social Creed of the Churches." The struggle continues in the story of La Mujer Obrera, which came into being with assistance from the Presbyterian Self-Development of People Fund, and their efforts to organize and create an alternative economic future for women in El Paso.

- And finally, Noelle Damico brings us up to date on Presbyterian support for the Taco Bell Boycott, voted by the 214th General Assembly (2002) in response to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, who pick tomatoes for Six L's Corporation, which supplies tomatoes for Taco Bell restaurants. The action was brought to the Assembly by the Presbytery of Tampa Bay in an effort to win a wage increase for farm workers whose income has not changed since 1978.

This issue of *Church & Society Magazine* is itself the result of a 2002 General Assembly action calling for a celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the creation of the Workingmen's Department. The action called not only for a retelling of the story of Charles Stelzle but also for a celebration of the current scene in Presbyterian social ministry. It also called for materials to be used in recognition of this anniversary on Labor Sunday 2003. Frank Kim, who is staff for the Southern California Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice in Orange County, CA, is preparing worship resources to be used in celebration of the anniversary this year. A sampling of the kinds of materials that will be available are included here. Further worship materials are available from NICWJ at 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60660-4627.

Finally there are suggestions For Further Reflection and Engagement during this unique celebration of 100 years of Presbyterian engagement with urban people and issues of economic justice.

Our thanks to the staff of the Presbyterian Historical Society without whose help this issue of C&S and other work on Charles Stelzle and his groundbreaking ministry would not have been possible. Several photographs appear here through their generous assistance. 