

# OPINION

## In Pursuit of Justice and Peace

### Why I Vote

BY M. LINDA JARAMILLO

As far back as I can remember my mom and dad were engaged in public life, taking their civic responsibilities seriously at the local, state, and national level.

It may come as a surprise to learn that for years my parents did not belong to the same political party — one was Democrat and the other Republican. However, it did not get in the way of them learning all they could about candidates and issues.

These discussions and debates were common in household conversations especially during the election season. I can still hear my mother, who came from a community cloaked with injustice, calling



on people to step up and step out. So, first, I give credit to my parents for the significant role they played as involved community members.

At the same time, our family was active in the Roman Catholic Church. We went to Mass every Sunday and attended the required catechism educational programs regularly. As a child, I did not connect the two, but I suspect that my parents surely did.

While their civic work was focused on the common good, they could not uncouple themselves from a church that was a significant part of community life. Time passed and generations evolved; however, those teachings remain imbedded in the values that drive my belief

that people of faith must be part of social engagement because the business of justice and peace is central to our core Christian teachings.

Curiously, the question regularly comes up about why political involvement is the church's business. Social activism is part of the joy and cost of discipleship. It is from my place in the pews of the local church — in this beloved United Church of Christ that I discovered that the church has some business in all of this.

It is in the pews that I hear the scriptures read proclaiming that God is a God of justice. It is in the pews that it becomes vividly clear to me that we are responsible to one another. It is in the pews that I learned to shout out with courage.

What is the church's business in all of this — it may sound like a rhetorical question — but it is one we need to answer.

My faith has moved me to work toward the common good, which drove me to seek public office as a member of a school district board of education. The two compelling issues we faced were equal access for all children and adequate funding for schools, both of which have steadily deteriorated for decades.

When I was serving as the chair of the board, we were forced to close school three weeks early because of the funding crisis. It became clear to me at that time that our society was headed down a slippery slope, paying 10 times the amount of annual funding per child for juvenile detention centers than we did for public

education. Tragically, this pattern has worsened over time.

As a person of faith, I vote because I am convinced that Jesus walked among us to demonstrate what it means to love and care for one another. As a member of the community, I vote because I believe in the common good that is only achieved through an effective democratic process — one for which we yearn.

My faith and community life are as inter-connected for me as they were for my mom and dad. I miss them every day and promise to do my best to model their values that weave my Christian teachings with civic responsibility.

M. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister for Justice Ministries in the United Church of Christ.

## Diversity in Colleges and Universities

### Hopeful court will reaffirm our values

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The United States Supreme Court this week will hear arguments in a case that once again challenges the right of colleges



and universities to consider race as a factor in ensuring that all students receive the educational benefits of diversity.

In Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin, Abigail Fisher, a white student who was denied admission to the University in 2008, argues that her race was the only reason she was not admitted.

When race-based college admissions were outlawed 16 years ago in Texas, the state passed a law granting admission to the state's colleges to all students in the top 10 percent of their graduating class. Since then race-based admissions have been reinstated and the remaining slots now go to students who must qualify through a regular

admissions process that factors race into the decision.

When she applied to UT in 2008, Abigail Fisher was not a top 10 percent student and was turned down. Claiming racial discrimination, her argument directly challenges the landmark 2003, Grutter v. Bollinger Supreme Court case which ruled that "student body diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify using race in university admissions."

The National Urban League is among 70 organizations and individuals to file Supreme Court Amicus Briefs in support of diversity in the University of Texas case, more than a dozen Members of Congress; the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell; and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, America's premier legal organization fighting for racial justice.

The case will be closely watched by those of us in the civil rights

community who understand that centuries of oppression and decades of exclusion that still linger today require remedies that only affirmative action can bring.

It should be remembered that until 1950, African Americans were barred from attending the University of Texas Law School. In its 1950 Supreme Court victory, Sweatt v. Painter, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund made it possible for Heman Marion Sweatt to be the law school's first black student.

In its Fisher v. University of Texas Amicus Brief, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund states that "From 1997 through 2004, UT did not consider race in admissions. The impact was devastating."

Despite the fact that 13 percent of Texas high school graduates were African American, "at no point between 1997 and 2004 did African American students comprise more than 4.5 percent of the entering year class. Nearly four out of every five UT undergraduate classes had zero or one African American students."

Some progress has been made in recent years, but the numbers are still low and the University of Texas admits that it can and must do better. Debo Adegbile, the defense fund's acting president and director-counsel said, "In Grutter the Supreme Court recognized the significant educational benefits of diversity — not just for students of color, but for all students. A diverse college experience better prepares

students to participate in our Nation's civic life."

The balance of the court has shifted right since Grutter. But we are hopeful that the Supreme Court will reaffirm the nation's highest values by continuing its support of diversity in our colleges and universities.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington  
EDITOR: Michael Leighton

ASSISTANT TO PUBLISHER, PUBLIC RELATIONS: Mark Washington

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt

ASSISTANT TO PUBLISHER, OFFICE MANAGER/CLASSIFIEDS: Lucinda Baldwin

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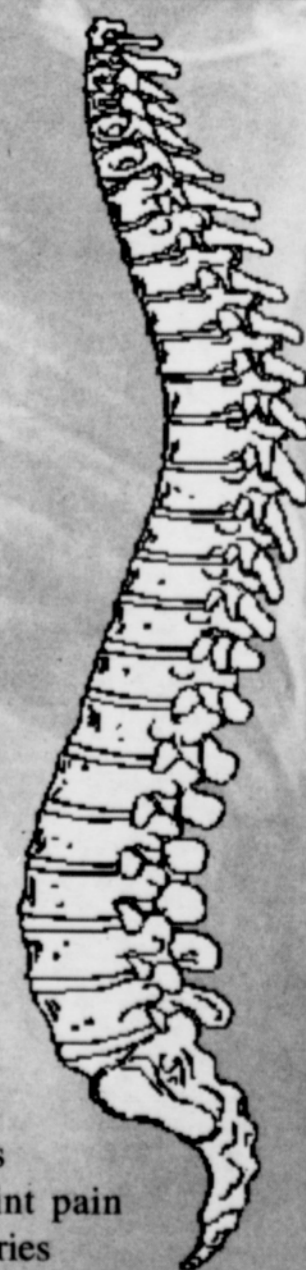
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news@portlandobserver.com  
ads@portlandobserver.com  
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