

# *HAPPY* **THE PEOPLE**

When Love Becomes Justice

*Marie D. Hoff, PhD*

**Foreword by Marcella M. Wilske**



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# Dedication

TO MY SISTERS AND MY BROTHER,  
with love, honor, and remembrance:

Lee Ann Hoff and Lee R. Hoff

and

Bernadine M. Hoff (RIP November 4, 2011)

James L. “Jim” Hoff (RIP December 12, 2010)

Kenneth M. “Ken” Hoff (RIP December 22, 2008)

# Acknowledgments

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I thank all my friends and family for giving me endless support. To the unknown millions who toil in the vineyards of the Lord, giving generously of yourselves in living the gospel of love, justice, and peacemaking, thank you for inspiration and motivation. You are truly the children of God.

The Holy Spirit brought courage and inspiration along the way.

Happy the people who acclaim such a king,  
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,  
who find their joy every day in your name,  
who make your justice the source of their bliss.

PSALM 89

FROM *LITURGY OF THE HOURS*,

WEDNESDAY OF THE TWENTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

# Foreword

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to live a happy and holy life—a righteous life? This is a question that has perplexed and challenged people of faith throughout the ages. The prophet Micah tells us that the righteous person—the person in right relationship with God and with all of God’s creation—is one who “acts with justice, loves tenderly, and walks humbly with God.” I do not believe that Micah’s use of such powerful action verbs is accidental. Called to be a prophetic voice in a turbulent world, Micah deliberately uses this type of terminology to remind us that we are called to be people who put our faith into action each and every day in the unique circumstances of our lives. Social action, especially on behalf of the poor and powerless, must be at the heart of who we are as people of faith—as covenant people.

Many Catholics generously put their faith into action by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, and providing other Corporal Works of Mercy that enhance the life and dignity of those in need. They are very familiar with the Church’s call to practice works of love and charity and embrace their calling enthusiastically. The call to practice biblical justice, however, is far less familiar. In their 1998 document *Sharing the Message of Catholic Social Teaching*, the United States Catholic Bishops acknowledge this fact when they write: “Far too many Catholics are not familiar with the basic content of Catholic Social Teaching. More fundamentally, many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith. This poses a serious challenge for all Catholics, since it weakens our capacity to be a Church that is true to the demands of the Gospel.”

For years, Marie Hoff and I talked about different ways to help others come to a better understanding of and appreciation for our Church’s social-justice teachings. What would be enticing? What would

be nonthreatening? What would enjoyable and fun? While I pursued this in the vineyards of parish and diocesan ministry, Marie put her academic background to work and produced *Happy the People: When Love Becomes Justice*.

*Happy the People* provides an introductory study guide for individuals, high school students, small faith communities, RCIA groups, and others who are eager to learn the basics of Catholic teaching about social justice. By linking Catholic prayer, worship, Scripture, and Church documents with justice principles and values, Marie shows how the social teachings of our Church are not some recent “fad” but are authentic teachings that have been—and continue to be—central to our Catholic faith. In an easy-to-read and enjoyable style, she shows how our social teachings are not meant to be seen as lofty, dry, theological ideals, but as practical “road maps” to help people of faith live a holy, happy, and righteous life amidst the complexities of everyday human existence and experience. Reflection questions are also provided to further stimulate personal discussion, sharing, and growth.

Rather than simply expounding on the various Catholic Social Teaching principles, *Happy the People* brings the Church’s call to biblical justice alive by providing practical examples of how all of us can better integrate justice into our prayer life and be those people of action we are called to be—people who live God’s call to justice in our families, in our places of work, in our parish communities, and in our civic and political life.

In *Happy the People*, Marie reminds us that both love and justice are ultimately about relationships—our relationship to God and with one another. Which brings me back to the prophet Micah. The holy and happy person, Micah reminds us, is one who lives in “right relationship” with God and with one another. This is what it means to be a covenant people. May your reading of *Happy the People* enliven your faith, enhance your understanding of justice principles, enrich your community, and lead you to new and exciting ways of being in covenant relationship with God, with those around you, and with all of God’s creation.

MARCELLA M. WILSKE, CHANCELLOR/PASTORAL CENTER DIRECTOR,  
ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BOISE

# Introduction

WHEN I WAS JUST SIXTEEN, a favorite teacher (Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, SSND) from my Catholic high school in western North Dakota sent me across the state to attend a workshop on Catholic social-justice teachings. It was a very long trip, and I don't remember anything about Fargo. What I do remember is the sense of excitement I experienced from the week-long "Chautauqua" with Father Louis Twomey, a well-known Jesuit from Loyola University of New Orleans. He was traveling around the country that summer introducing high school students to Catholic Social Teaching. I have carried my enthusiasm for the Church's teachings and my life's passion for justice ever since.

However, in those days, we were not so well taught what to do with the wonderful knowledge presented—how to get practical about taking action for justice. I thrashed around for years trying to find how to put these justice principles and values into action and integrate them with my basic Catholic faith commitments to prayer, charity, and service. This book was written with the goal of helping others gain an understanding of the Church's social teachings a whole lot faster than I did.

In this book I attempt to do three things: provide an introduction to the social teachings of the Church; relate these teachings to Scripture, prayer, and liturgical worship; and give some basic information on how to take action for justice, in conjunction with your own local parish, but also in your work and civic life.

As a beginning introduction to the social teachings of the Church, this brief volume can be read individually; the prayers and reflection questions in each chapter can help you deepen your understanding. It is also designed for a small faith community where you can pray together and gain enriched understanding through discussion and exchange of life experiences. It would also serve well for general par-

ish faith formation groups, for young adults, or for people new to the Catholic tradition, such as RCIA candidates.

An important understanding I have gained of justice as a Christian virtue is that it is grounded in Scripture and integrally linked to the worship and prayer life of the Church. This book takes a distinctive approach in linking the study of the Church's social teachings to Scripture and worship. Each chapter includes discussion of scriptural foundations and suggestions for scriptural readings related to the topic under review. Each chapter begins with suggested songs/hymns and beautiful prayers used at Masses throughout the liturgical year that express the chapter's main theme in more poetic form. Of course, if used in a group it is quite all right to substitute or supplement with other relevant prayers or hymns.

Each chapter includes a brief introductory narrative, followed by a summary of a major social-teaching document that addresses the theme of the chapter. It is my hope that you will be motivated to seek out and read some of the original messages written by the popes and bishops over the past 125 years of modern Catholic social-justice teachings. The questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each chapter are intended to stimulate and guide your deeper exploration of the ideas presented; you may well come up with better questions of your own to pursue.

The reference list is supplemented with a few suggestions for additional readings on various facets of justice discussed in the book. The appendices include additional resources to help you with your study and action for justice, such as books, films, and contact information for Catholic organizations.

I sincerely hope my efforts in this book will save you the many years of struggle I had, that it will assist and enliven your commitment to incorporating justice into your Christian practice of prayer, family life, civic participation, and daily work.