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Remarks to the Interfaith Leaders Council on Proposal 2 Delivered Tuesday, 12th September 2006

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A scholar of the law approached Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life (Lk. 10:25 ff). He knew the answer, for when Jesus asks him, the scholar quotes Deuteronomy 6:5. One must love the Lord God with all one's heart, with all one's being, with all one's strength and with all one's mind. And one must, we must, love our neighbor as ourselves. "Do this," Jesus says, "and you will live." When the scholar asks who his neighbor is, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. He teaches that we're to act in a neighborly fashion toward whomever we meet in need. This is what it means to "love my neighbor as myself." And it's a matter of life and death ("Do this, and you'll live.").

Putting God's loving word into practice is clearly about relationships. We can talk about that in another way. We can and should talk about justice. Justice is about right relationships. Literally. The word "Justice" comes from the Latin word "jus," which translates "right." As Christians, we look to our experience of Divine Justice to guide us in our efforts to live justly, both individually and communally. We see in God His willingness to make right our relationship with Him, made so wrong in that original sin described in Genesis. He does for us through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ what we could not do for ourselves. He heals the breach, the rupture, in our relationship with Him. We find it hard, if not impossible to fit this into human categories of justice. God insists on our dignity, our worth, even when we don't claim it for ourselves, and, unsurprisingly, when we don't acknowledge that dignity in one another.

But we have that dignity, and as Christians, we believe every person has it, regardless of his or her race, gender, place of origin, socioeconomic

background. St. Paul makes clear that, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free person, male nor female (Gal. 3:28). Every person has dignity, worth, value in God's eyes.

Every reasonable person knows that our nation has supported injustice in our past. Most would agree that we continue to bear the burden of prejudice and racism. We continue to feel the results of these injustices from the past in the present. These are not only individual's decision which led to injustice (to own or not to own slaves, for example), but communal as well. Injustice was woven into our society's fabric: the Dred Scott decision in the Supreme Court, the denial of the right to vote based on race or gender, and Jim Crow laws. These are only a few examples.

Affirmative action is a means, the best means available, to address the continuing effects of injustice. It's not enough to tell people who've been held back through prejudice or racism, injustice in whatever form, "Okay, you can participate now. Everyone else has had a head start, but you might be able to catch up." That would be to apply human justice. As followers of Jesus Christ who have experienced God's merciful justice, we're called to imitate that which we've received. Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear that we have a special responsibility to those who've suffered, those pushed to the margins, those whom society, our society has ignored. We must act in a neighborly way toward whomever we see in need.

We must love our neighbor as our selves in order to live. The justice with which God treats us requires it.