

## You can take the girl out of Beacon Street But you can't take Beacon Street out of the girl.

by Barb Ballenger

It's hard for me to believe that only two and a half years have passed since I moved away from Cleveland. Before then, I had spent nearly eight years – most of them full-time – working with Beacon Street. Life was a rich and dizzying mix of Confirmation retreats, church pot-luck dinners, religious education programs and Sunday-morning worship services.

When we moved to Baltimore so that my husband Jess could do post-doctoral work at Johns Hopkins University, I joined the staff of the Community Engagement Department at Catholic Relief Services. My job was to write educational materials that helped Catholics in the United States advocate for U.S. policies that improve the lives of poor people overseas. It was a far cry from climbing on Bob's shoulders to perform the story of Zacchaeus. And it made for some interesting conversations when people asked me what I had done before joining CRS, the international relief and development arm of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

But in truth the last two years have been a fascinating and fruitful synthesis of all that came before. My degree work in pastoral ministry, my years with Beacon Street, and my involvement with the Cleveland Nonviolence Network and the InterReligious Task Force on Central America blended well with these new efforts in legislative advocacy and agency work. I learned how to write a legislative action alert and developed one mean Power Point demonstration. And on more than one occasion, a CRS function began with "Make Some Room" -- song, dance and all.

But mainly, a world that I thought was already pretty broad, got even bigger. Intellectually,

I already knew that about half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day – the U.N. designation for poverty. I already knew that the call of discipleship meant trying to do something about it. What I didn't realize was how much power – and responsibility -- the U.S. citizen has to make a difference in the world.

As residents of a powerful democracy and the world's wealthiest nation, we not only have a vote at election time, we have ongoing access to people who make decisions that impact the rest of the world. Elected officials must respond to their constituents' phone calls, letters and visits. They must – and pretty much do – explain their actions.



And when a large and coordinated group of people begin to push for specific legislation – be it for funding for measures that halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, canceling international debt, or making sure trade agreements benefit the poor – elected officials tend to take notice. Not every effort is successful, but I really do believe that acts of advocacy and the practice of global solidarity can change people and do strengthen communities.

My job with CRS was to help convince