

Good News in Taxing Times

By Carol Masters

The curious case of the Community of St. Martin. While most people are complaining about the price of gas, this community is actually taxing itself for driving. But why? Carol Masters explains this, and another effort her community is making with a focus on taxes and a belief that extraordinary times call for extraordinary efforts.
—editor's note



Photo credit: Janet Dahlem

WAMM members Kaia Svien and Polly Kellogg bring the cost of war message to Occupy Minnesota, where WAMM maintains a presence. They call for elders to support younger people in the movement.

Many of us miss St. Martin's Table, a bookstore and vegetarian restaurant, gathering place for many peace groups for over 25 years, that closed last December. It provided a community witness and served as an action center of the Community of St. Martin, an ecumenical Christian community committed to nonviolence and social justice. But there is good news: Although St. Martin's Table is gone, the Community of St. Martin's (CSM) remains and continues its work.

Grassroots Gas Tax: CSM is six months into a year's experiment with a voluntary gas tax, in an attempt to drive less, reduce carbon footprints, and support organizations that advocate for political change around climate change, global warming, and alternative transportation issues. Here's how it works: Families keep track of gallons purchased and each decides the amount per gallon they will "tax" themselves. First quarter's proceeds went to Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, which began in 2004 as Congregations Caring for Creation. MNIPL gives guidance to

Minnesota's faith communities, addressing climate change by promoting energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy sources. The second quarter's tax went to Transit for Livable Communities, which promotes a balanced transportation system that encourages transit, walking, bicycling, and thoughtful development. Gas taxes for July-September will go to 350.org

MNasap: Minnesota Arms Spending Alternatives Project (MNasap) is another new project of CSM. Drawing on the National Priorities Project for information, the grassroots project reveals that Minnesota taxpayers' share of U.S. support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is \$8.4 billion for the two-year period that the state experienced a \$5 billion budget shortfall. Imagine what budget needs could be fulfilled with that money! The project's goal is to shift priorities away from military spending and toward funding human needs. Participants will work to introduce resolutions at every level of state government and civic life that calls for such changes. The group within CSM ministry that is developing MNasap has hired an experienced organizer. Website: MNasap.org

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