

VOICES

SUMMER > FALL 2012

“Make Something Bigger Than Just Us...”

Voices from the JustFaith Ministries Community in Monroe, Louisiana

In 2005, when Ab Elias was asked by his wife, Elaine, to participate with her in the 30-week JustFaith program, it was about the last thing he wanted to do. Elaine had attended a talk by Jack Jezreel in Monroe, Louisiana, and was aglow with excitement for the program and its possibilities. Ab had stayed away from Jack’s talk because he “didn’t want to be disturbed.”

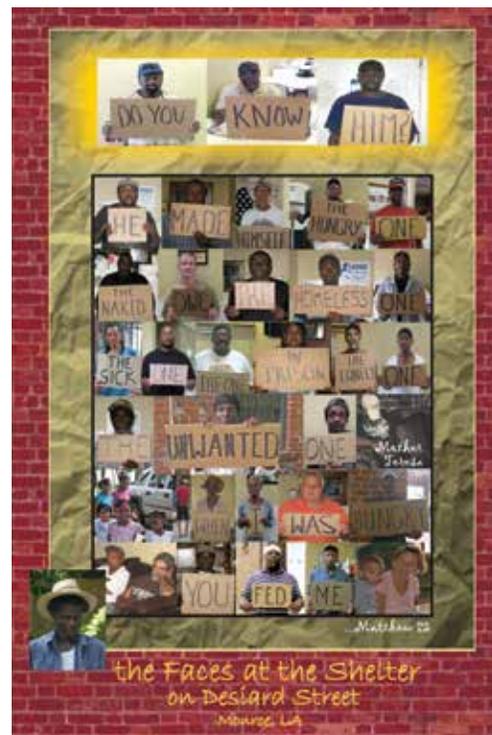
After all, he had so many reasons not to participate in the 30-week JustFaith program: he had vacations planned; he was a very busy physician and an avid woodcarver, hobbyist and golfer; and he “didn’t want a weeknight occupied and played out by someone else.”

Almost dragged to the first session, Ab recalls that he pushed back with strong opinions on what he heard. He considered himself highly literate in the scriptures, and he bristled at what he considered “out of context” application of scripture. But he stuck with the program and through the work of the Spirit, he was “hooked” by session four. His “life has never been the same since.”

Ab and Elaine were part of the first-ever JustFaith group to form at Jesus the Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Monroe, in 2005. A few years later, St. Pascal’s parish in Monroe started its first group and since then, intra-parish groups have formed to include

Little Flower and Our Lady of Fatima. Nearly 80 people have participated in one or more JustFaith Ministries (JFM) programs in Monroe. For the people of Monroe, it is clear that the Holy Spirit, moving through this process, is what feeds them. The same Spirit enables and empowers them to nourish each other.

Many of the early JustFaith program participants were self-described “social justice junkies.” They understood the call of Catholic social teaching and the charge to address what the Catholic Church refers to as “social sin.” Through participation in JustFaith and other JFM programs, though, they came to an even greater understanding of this idea of social sin and were able to consider more deeply the why of poverty and the importance of engaging social justice issues. Cindy Smith found inspiration in the fact that JustFaith Ministries programs demand that we go beyond giving money, and always, always ask, “Where is the justice?”



Collage poster created for the Desiard Street Shelter to raise funds for the facility. Credit: Lynda Cookston, Elaine and Ab Elias, Lynda Gustafson and Rick Lebrun.

JustFaith Ministries programs demand that we always ask, “Where is the justice?”

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

Bread for the World

Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Catholic Relief Services

Pax Christi USA

Did You Know?

JustFaith Ministries programs have been facilitated in over 3500 groups throughout the United States since 2001. We thank those who share in our work.

Women of Faith Take a Stand on Maternal and Child Nutrition

by Nancy Neal,
Associate for Denominational Women's Organization Relations at Bread for the World

As we near the 2015 deadline for reaching the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, a new movement has emerged that will greatly improve our chances of reaching the goals of eradicating hunger, improving maternal health, and reducing child mortality. The 1,000 Days movement aims to improve nutrition for women and children in the 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday. By improving nutrition, children have a better chance of living beyond the age of 5. They have a better start to life as they develop stronger and healthier bodies and minds. We can stop the cycle of an undernourished child growing up to be an undernourished girl, giving birth to another undernourished child.



Somali Woman and Child
Photo courtesy of Laura Sheahan, CRS



You probably know these 1,000 days are critical. But think about this: Research shows

Those interventions include:

- increasing intake of micronutrients for pregnant women, new mothers, and young children;
- promotion and support of improved feeding practices such as exclusive breast feeding for infants up to 6 months and appropriate complementary foods for older babies and toddlers;
- improving sanitation and hygiene practices including hand-washing and access to clean water; and,
- treatment of infectious diseases including diarrhea and malaria.

In response to the *Lancet* article, the Scaling Up Nutrition movement emerged. This is a technical movement of research institutions, donor organizations and governments, civil society, corporations, and recipient country governments that has coalesced to resource countries where stunting and under-nutrition are common. Out of this technical movement came the 1,000 Days partnership, which is a popular movement to build public pressure for the U.S. government to take a leadership role in the international community by funding and developing programs that focus on improving nutrition for women and children in the 1,000-day window. Programs run by the United States, including Feed the Future (FTF), the

In 2008, a series of articles in the *Lancet*, a prominent British medical journal, argued that addressing nutrition in this critical 1,000-day window is the most cost-effective way to end hunger around the world. They offered a series of simple, inexpensive interventions that, if implemented, could make an incredible difference for women and children – particularly in the 36 high-burden countries where stunting and under nutrition are the most prevalent.

become more cohesive as a community. “It’s not just ‘MY church’ or ‘YOUR parish,’ the gift is in realizing that we need to pull it all together and make something bigger than just us. That’s the work we are called to do and how we are called together.”

The Monroe grad group consistently puts themselves “out there” in their communities, communicating at any time and in every way available: newsletters, bulletins, liturgy

announcements, pulpit testimonies and so on. Aware of the full range of JFM programs, they are able to discern what could work for this or that group. They also note that JFM offerings can be tailored to fit within specific time frames or in specific locations in order to meet people in various stages of their faith journey. As a result, they emphasize the “deep” 30-week program and also successfully host JustMatters modules and Engaging Spirituality. Youth and young adult connections are now being explored as well.

The fruit of these efforts is made visible in the sense of community and shared mission that has developed in Monroe. Ab Elias is hooked. He says that “his whole life is changed.” He still has his hobbies, but most evenings he and Elaine are out doing the work of the gospel. Ab’s experience with social mission blossomed with JustFaith, his first real taste of a small faith community. “It is the only way to go. It is the only way we can make change happen.”

The presentation given by Jack Jezreel in 2005 started a “life changing train of events that continues to this day,” says Barbara Beiersmith. “Not only are our lives different and immeasurably richer because of our JustFaith Ministries experiences, but the lives of many others have been touched as well.” She adds, “We thank God for JustFaith Ministries – a community that shares our beliefs.”

The train that stopped in Monroe makes regular stops in hundreds of other places around the United States, and people continue to climb on board, knowing it is the place to begin a whole new life-faith journey. According to Kathy Asmussen, it is a good way to “meet people where they are at and let the adventure begin!”

The fruit of these efforts is made visible in the sense of community and shared mission that has developed in Monroe.

changes of leadership leading to less endorsement or promotion, especially “from the pulpit;” and misconceptions about social justice.

So how have the JFM grads in Monroe engaged so many people and so many activities? Every year they start with a strong, multi-parish core of JFM grads who gather and decide how to promote JFM programming and the formation of groups. Kathy Asmussen, staff member at St. Pascal, acknowledges that within a single parish or congregation, there are a limited number of groups that will form, which makes it necessary “to pool together” across parish lines and form groups wherever and however it makes sense. According to Kathy, JFM programs allow them to “bloom” and

Barbara Beiersmith found in the JustFaith program a way to build a community with a common bond. Social justice work is “no longer the lonely pursuit that it had been.”

Clearly a great deal of energy is unleashed by the JustFaith Ministries community in Monroe. Those involved find themselves continually renewed and inspired by each other’s projects and their work in the community, not to mention the power of their “collective” journey. “The doing isn’t so much what keeps them going, but the sharing,” says Ed Beiersmith. Lasting friendships fuel this community, which is enriched in its coming together.

JustFaith grads are doing great things in their communities, but as Ab stated with such determination, it is no easy task to get people to commit to a 30-week program. People from around the country, including JFM graduates, have offered obstacles such as: personal time limitations or restrictions;

“You will know them by their fruits”

The accomplishments and community engagement of this collective of JFM grads is impressive. Here are just a few of many ways they are “walking the talk” in Monroe:

★ **St. Pascal parish hosts a local chapter of Family Promise, a national ecumenical program that helps homeless and low-income families achieve sustainable independence. Individuals who qualify are taught both job skills, such as filling out an application and interviewing, and life skills, such as how to apply for social services, preparation for getting back into a home and financial planning. (See www.familypromise.org) The parish also provides housing in a renovated school building that serves as transitional housing for “graduated” families until they are ready to move into their new residences. Monroe area JFM graduates are involved in cooking, spending the night, getting kids to school and trying to make the transition as comfortable and “homey” as possible.**

★ **The first Saturday of the month, Monroe JFM graduates help feed and gather with homeless people at the Desiard Street Shelter in Monroe; youth groups are also involved. An Episcopal priest involved with the shelter was so inspired by the JFM grads whom he encountered there that his church is now considering JFM programs.**

★ **One Monroe JustFaith immersion experience led to graduate involvement with New Light Baptist Church, which is located in a low-income neighborhood. New Light Economic Empowerment Corporation (NLEEC) focuses on neighborhood revitalization, cleanup, and, most importantly, identifying neighborhood properties that are available and ready for renovation or to repurpose for low-income occupants. (See www.newlightmonroe.org/NewLightNLEEC.htm)**

★ **After completing the JustMatters module “God’s Creation Cries for Justice,” one Monroe JFM graduate was selected to be an Ambassador for the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. Now he serves as an advocate and teaches about the critical importance of care of the environment.**

★ **Two Monroe JFM graduates serve as board members of The NOVA Workforce Institute of Northeast Louisiana. NOVA staff members serve as job intermediaries who identify and connect the workforce needs of employers with training opportunities and residents seeking living-wage employment and benefits. Over 200 minimum wage workers in Monroe have completed the NOVA program, giving them skills to acquire a living wage job. (See http://www.novanelo.org/)**

Now, more than a year later, women around the country are pledging to have “1,000 Conversations” about maternal and child nutrition in 1,000 days. They are spreading the word to faith communities, organizations, and government leaders that proper nutrition for mothers and young children in this critical window is essential for giving children a good start to life. They have also created a website (www.bread.org/go/1000days), a “1,000 Conversations Kit,” and three online briefing papers on nutrition and health, women’s role in providing good nutrition for their children, and the importance of good nutrition in food aid.

At this time, the U.S. government is considering difficult budget cuts, but reducing funding for programs that help poor women and children is not

an effective means to reduce the federal deficit. These programs make a huge difference and cost very little. U.S. foreign assistance that goes toward alleviating poverty accounts for only 0.6 percent of the entire U.S. budget. Programs that encourage simple, low-cost techniques such as breast-feeding, therapeutic feeding, and vitamin supplements can save millions of lives – and even increase a country’s gross domestic product by up to 3 percent. There is a lot of momentum around the world on this issue. Now is not the time to reduce funding.

We have an incredible opportunity at this moment to really make a difference for millions of women and children around the world.

Please be part of this movement!

>>**Join** the conversation by visiting www.bread.org/go/1000days or contacting Nancy Neal at nneal@bread.org.

>>**“Like”** the Women of Faith for the 1,000 Days Movement’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/womenoffaith1000days.

>>**Share** stories about your conversations, learn about updates in the movement, and connect with others who are engaging in conversations.

A New Pentecost for the Catholic Peace Movement in the United States

by **Sr. Patricia Chappell**, SNDdeN, Executive Director of Pax Christi USA

Pax Christi USA

www.paxchristiusa.org

*“If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”
(Galatians 5:25)*

I write this in late May, as Pentecost is upon us, and what comes to mind – and perhaps this is the case with many Christians – is a somewhat confusing story of wind, fire and the breath of God. As the designated faith leader in my family, not by choice but because of being the only one in religious life, trying to respond intelligently and simply to inquisitive great nieces’ and nephews’ questions about Pentecost is a challenge – particularly when trying to save face in front of my mother.

Though I was not thinking of it at the time, Pax Christi USA has helped me better understand the significance of the liturgical calendar in the context of the daily lives of average people seeking answers to difficult questions, both within the Church and in society. My response at that moment was that at Christmas the Spirit comes upon Mary and grows into the person of Jesus Christ. In Pentecost, the Spirit comes to us and grows into the body of Christ. To the young ones, who experience Baptism in the parish and are receiving their First Communion, the signs of Pentecost that bring new beginnings are real and tangible.

In promoting the peace of Christ, we are challenged at Pentecost to a renewed confidence and hope and a re-commitment to the spirituality of nonviolence. Locally and regionally the United States is confronted with military action on several fronts; partisan politics and obstructionism appear to be the norm. Economic and social uncertainty and the war abroad have fueled a war at home. Renewed racial tension is brewing throughout the country because of how politicians, interest groups and the media spin the challenges faced by our nation. People of color, particularly from the

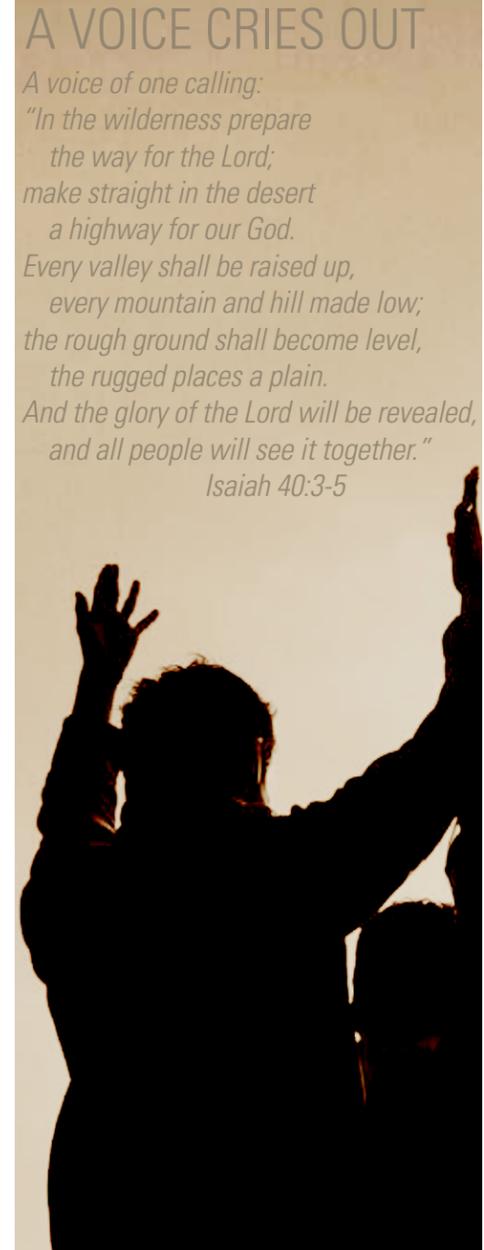
Middle East and South Asia, are feared because of September 11. Latino/as are targeted because they might be undocumented and are labeled criminals in addition to being seen as a contributing factor to this country’s economic woes. Needless to say, our African American sisters and brothers have once again become victims of history and the economy. Racial profiling, low employment rates, arrests and imprisonment, and educational cuts that have a major economic impact continue to affect educational attainment levels and maintain the cycle of poverty at a disproportionate rate compared to other groups. Unfortunately, these fears are fueled by misinformation, personal opinion and by emotional responses to difficult challenges. Even facts and research are suspect and misrepresented.

Realities facing society and local communities have also had an impact on PCUSA’s network. Our

national staff and the Pax Christi USA National Council, in conversation with individual members, local groups, and Pax Christi regions, are assessing PCUSA’s relationships and vision in light of the recent restructuring within the organization. The move of the national headquarters from Erie, Pennsylvania, to Washington, D.C. has created a new opportunity and a revitalizing enthusiasm due to new staffing, the physical location of the national office, and a strategic initiative that has been well received by local and regional leaders in the grassroots, as well as from veteran members of the national and international peace movement.

PCUSA is embracing new direction and creativity and building relationships within and outside the traditional dominant culture to help affirm and broaden our peace ministry in a more inclusive manner. We are seeking to invigorate the organization as we seek to become a more deliberate and culturally diverse peace movement. It is a new Pentecost for Pax Christi USA.

As part of PCUSA’s commemoration of its 40th anniversary, 1972-2012, an important step has been taken to help the process toward reaching



A PROPHETIC VOICE

Prophets stand at the edge seeking a deeper, truthful affirmation. *They point out all that is not, as they point to all that could be.* *And rather than telling us what to do, they show us how to care.*

Who are the prophetic voices in our time? *Whose voices go unheard?* *How do we discern God’s voice from all the noise, inside and out?*

What Word from God needs to be spoken, cried out, in our world?

Prayer invites God’s presence to suffuse our spirits, God’s will to prevail in our lives.
Prayer might not bring water to parched fields, nor mend a broken bridge, nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, rebuild a weakened will.
Who rise from prayer better persons, Their prayer is answered.

(Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman, inspired by Abraham Heschel)

A PRAYERFUL VOICE

True prayer draws us more deeply into this world and heartfelt engagement of this world leads us to prayer. In prayer we recognize that real transformation comes not from what we do, but from what God is doing to us and through us. The way we see and encounter reality is as important as what we do with it.



Pax Christi USA organized religious leaders and Nobel peace laureates to protest the war in Iraq in 2003. Left to right: Bishop Gumbleton, Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Mary Robinson, Pat Clark, Daniel Ellsberg, Jody Williams

Back on Their Feet in Burkina Faso

by Kimberly Mazyck
Church Relations Manager, Catholic Relief Services

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country in West Africa's Sahel region, just south of the Sahara Desert. With most of the economy supported by agriculture, Burkina Faso is vulnerable to natural disasters and to changes in world commodity prices. Additionally, recurring droughts and flooding have led to food shortages and challenges. The people of Burkina Faso, called Burkinabé, are hard-working, but poverty and natural disasters have made it difficult for families to meet basic needs.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) began working in Burkina Faso soon after it gained independence from France in 1960. CRS was the first nongovernmental organization approved by the government. In the early years, CRS provided humanitarian and food aid. In 1962, CRS started providing education assistance, especially school feeding. CRS has continued to provide, often through the school system, humanitarian and food aid as well as emergency response following the severe droughts and floods in the 2000s.

As I prepared to visit Burkina Faso and Mali last year, I found that my greatest challenge when I mentioned my trip was that no one had any idea where I was going. Some people mistakenly heard Bali for Mali and began inquiring about the amenities of my exotic resort. As I corrected the confusion, I had the distinct pleasure of sharing my excitement about visiting West Africa for the first time. I was eager to share everything I had learned from my research.

When I would first share the name of the capital city in Burkina Faso, people would pause and usually ask me to repeat the name. Some laughed and cast a look of suspicion as if I had just concocted a name to fool them. Ouagadougou (pronounced Wagadugu) is the capital of Burkina Faso. I also learned that the name Burkina Faso means "Land of People of Integrity." I must say there has never been a more truthful definition. Many of my colleagues and friends who had traveled to Burkina Faso emphasized the incredible sense of hospitality that I would experience. I may have dismissed this notion, but I quickly understood upon my arrival.

Last September, along with 11 others, I arrived in Ouagadougou ready to experience this place that I had spent months imagining. Now, it is forever lodged in my heart. As a delegation of CRS's U.S.-based partners, we visited several projects in Burkina Faso that represented a response to floods and food shortages. We also had the opportunity to see the Church responding to other needs of the Burkinabé. It was during this trip that I experienced a clear sense of Jesus's answer to the question, "...and who is my neighbor?"

After arriving in Burkina Faso, we traveled to Kaya, northeast of Ouagadougou, known as a center for weaving. My research and expectations did not prepare me for the work, the dedication or the hospitality we experienced in the Diocese of Kaya. Here is where I saw the tenet of Catholic social teaching known as the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable lived out in CRS programming and its approach to working with people living in the diocese.

Upon our arrival in Kaya, we were welcomed by Bishop Kaboré. We learned of his commitment to education and his sense of the needs in Kaya. We visited a range of programs to see how the Catholic Church was responding to the effects of a flood in rebuilding homes, distributing food and working with households to plant crops like rice in an area that habitually floods.

The group was astounded when we visited a center that hosts young girls fleeing forced marriage. Here the church protected the girls, created a community for them and taught them life skills. As I sat and listened to a young nun describe the circumstances



Photo courtesy of David C. Aguiard, Catholic Charities, Baton Rouge

we reach out to care for our neighbors until they can stand on their own and we are all empowered by this show of mercy and solidarity



Photo courtesy of Fr. Patrick Delahanty

great division and misunderstanding in our country and throughout the world.

As a generous and faithful leader of the Catholic peace movement, you are invited to join us in this process, to attend a regional dialogue happening near you (see our website for dates and sites), to extend support, and to collaborate in moving Pax Christi USA into a new era and a new Pentecost. The mission of peacemaking and community-building is a constant challenge and your partnership is integral to the success of the mission. We are grateful for the witness of our members who have participated in JustFaith Ministries programs, and we invite all JustFaith Ministries graduates to join your voices to ours and help us strengthen our ability to witness to the peace of Christ in our world today.

Visit us on the web at www.paxchristiusa.org.

- an opportunity for the national office to better comprehend regional and local realities experienced by the Catholic peace movement;
- collaboration and solidarity-building to better work as one united movement implementing Pax Christi USA's four initiatives, given the local and regional realities;
- community-building among the membership and doing outreach among our friends and neighbors on the issues, particularly among people of color; and a renewed awareness that will keep us attuned to the signs of the times and build on the commitment to serve the broader Church in a more strategic general plan.

In the spirit of Pentecost, Pax Christi USA is being a protagonist in inviting our regional and local leaders, our allies, and our supporters to join us in prayer-study-action by sharing their perspectives, their gifts, talents and treasure to assure continued growth and maturity of the national Catholic peace movement. Solidarity is needed at this time of

our new vision. Members of the national staff and the National Council now better represent the face of the Church in the United States. Our staff and council members are highly qualified activists and faith leaders who bring new talents and perspectives to provide leadership and to respond to our internal and external challenges in a strategic and inclusive manner. PCUSA has begun to build bridges within the full body of Christ and our national leadership team is inviting the regions, local groups, long-time and prospective members, and our allies to join us as partners and collaborators in implementing a new initiative that promotes dialogue, comprehension and collaboration in solidarity with all levels of PCUSA's network.

The new initiative promotes the following:

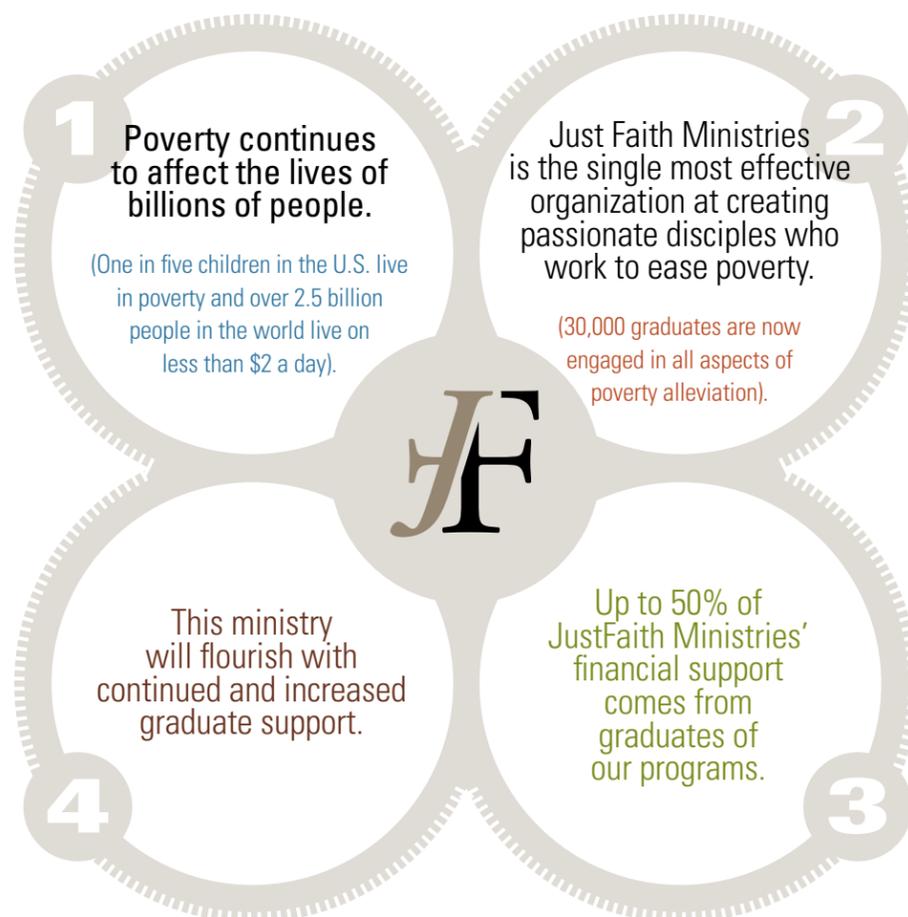
- dialogue within our movement to help it become more sensitive to the challenges of inclusion;

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Reasons Why Graduates Feel it is Essential to Donate to JFM

So, if you want to stretch your donor dollar, if you want to produce the next generation of committed volunteers and faith-filled doers and givers, if you want to help people in poverty – near or far – then a donation to JustFaith Ministries is the most efficient means possible to accomplish your goals.

To send your gift, use the enclosed envelope or click on the Donate tab at justfaith.org.



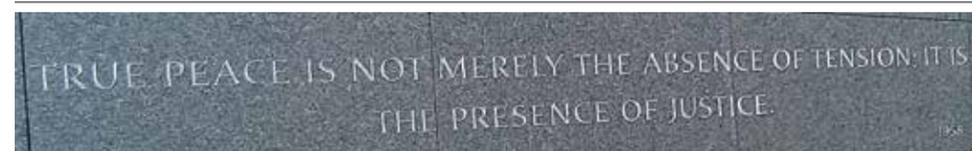
under which many of the girls arrived, I looked around at my traveling partners and noticed that I was not the only person moved to tears. Some of the girls were very young, but I learned that they were also extremely courageous and had taken extreme risks to leave the homes of their families or new husbands to find refuge here. Just like the Good Samaritan, the nuns were not just attending to the girls' obvious wounds; they were prepared to make sure they nurtured the girls until they were able to stand on their own. The nuns worked to teach important life skills that will enable the girls to support themselves.

In this area of Burkina Faso, known for its weaving as noted above, we were treated to a display of the beautiful batiks and woven fabrics the girls had created. It was then, when they showed us the cloths they had made, that we began to see smiles and witness how their healing had begun.

Here is where I understood something true for CRS and its work around the world: CRS and its partners are moved to compassion by what we witness. In our response, we reach out to care for our neighbors until they can stand on their own, and we are all empowered by this show of mercy and solidarity.

Many of the projects we saw in Burkina Faso are made possible by people's support of CRS's Rice Bowl. During Lent 2013, there will be many opportunities to experience Burkina Faso as a number of us did last September. Burkina Faso will be a featured country of the CRS Rice Bowl, so there will be opportunities to learn more about this amazing country, its culture, its food and how people have begun to stand on their own.

To learn more about CRS's work in Burkina Faso, visit <http://crs.org/countries/burkina-faso>. To learn more about the CRS Rice Bowl, visit orb.crs.org.



JustMatters

Issue based formation.

NEW: JustFaith Ministries has just released a new module titled **Sanctity of ALL Life**. This module, created by the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty, begins with the Catholic Church's teachings on the worth and dignity of all human life and moves to a more in-depth focus on the death penalty. It ends with a call to action, providing a comprehensive list of opportunities and contacts for engaging life issues such as abortion, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, torture, and disability.

NEWLY REVISED: JFM also just released a revised version of the module **Crossing Borders: Migration, Theology, and the Human Journey**. Fr. Daniel Groody, CSC and Mary Miller reviewed hundreds of evaluations from past participants and facilitators and created the revised version. The module focuses on finding common ground in the contentious and complex debate around immigration, an issue that is reshaping the cultural, economic and political landscape of the planet.

COMING SOON: A revised version of **Climate Change: God's Creation Cries for Justice**
POPULAR MODULES: *Just Peacemaking Initiative: The Challenge and Promise of Nonviolence for Our Time (with Pax Christi USA)*

Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good

In the Spirit of St. Francis and the Sultan: Muslims and Christians Working Together for the Common Good

JusticeWalking

A journey of being rooted and grounded in love.

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAMS

Launched in 2010 as College JusticeWalking, the young adult version of the JusticeWalking program is **JustFaith Ministries' fastest growing program.**

We've been thrilled to be able to expand our ministry to include this important sector of the church. We were helped in large part by a generous grant from the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, which enabled us to waive or reduce registration fees for young adult and college JusticeWalking groups. Equally important were the many JFM graduates who shared about the program with young adult and campus ministers in their areas, and who in some cases even organized and facilitated groups themselves!

To continue to ensure that the JusticeWalking program is accessible to young adult and campus groups, we are introducing a "pay what you can" registration option for groups that cannot afford to cover the \$200 registration fee.

Contact our office for more information: justicewalking@justfaith.org or 502-429-0865.

LOOK FOR JFM AT EVENTS THIS FALL

Reform and Renewal: Vatican II after 50 Years
 Washington, D.C. – Catholic University of America
 September 26-29, 2012

Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering
 St. Louis, MO
 September 30-October 2, 2012

Retreat – STILL IN THE STORM: Engaging Spirituality for Times Like These
 Danville, CA – San Damiano Retreat Center
 September 29th, 2012
 Led by Joe Grant, JFM staff

National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCYM)
 Orlando, FL
 November 29 – December 1, 2012
 Jack Jezreel will be a keynote speaker

CCHD: A Catalyst for Economic Development in Low-Income Communities

by Donna Grimes,
 Poverty Education and Outreach Manager

Roosevelt Pratt is a successful entrepreneur and two-time refugee who entered the U.S. by way of Liberia and the Ivory Coast. Once a street vendor at the corner of 5th and South Grand Streets in East Springfield, IL, Mr. Pratt now owns a commercial complex, Fashion Afrique and the Center for Cultural Integration and Minority Empowerment, that covers half a block.

In addition to a store, Fashion Afrique houses a school for teaching Swahili, French and other languages. It serves as a cultural hub for African dance and drumming classes and showcases the work of local artists and performers. Proceeds from fair trade sales of authentic African clothing, jewelry and crafts benefit indigenous artists and charities like Kings Kids, an AIDS orphanage in Kenya. It's a synergistic mix of retail, community development and empowerment initiatives. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) helps Fashion Afrique and other enterprises remain viable community assets and provides micro-loans that generate exciting new businesses.

East Springfield, IL, is largely an African American community and has many low-income residents who have cultivated leadership and community development skills through another CCHD-funded organization, The Springfield Project (TSP). Over the

years, the Diocese of Springfield and CCHD have supported various TSP empowerment initiatives with almost \$400,000 in grants.

Springfield community leaders are determined to improve the local economy, help families rise from poverty and enhance the quality of life by increasing the community's assets. With the full support of the town's Chamber of Commerce and Black Chamber of Commerce, residents came up with a wealth of creative ideas for improving their local economy and providing needed goods and services. Ultimately, TSP developed a micro-financing plan that would enable new business ventures to emerge and provide loan opportunities to existing businesses in need.

When prospective entrepreneurs and neighborhood businesses were unable to obtain conventional financing needed to execute the micro-financing



Fashion Afrique Owner, Roosevelt Pratt and University of Illinois Business Students, February 2012

Catholic Campaign for Human Development

www.usccb.org/cchd

plan, TSP Executive Director, Timothy Rowles, applied for a CCHD economic development grant. CCHD's grant to TSP has resulted in numerous success stories, like Mr. Pratt's.

Today, the TSP economic development project includes more than 30 enterprises such as Affordable Pet (grooming service), All in One (janitorial and car detailing), Perfect Pitch Baseball School, Flawless Kutz (barber shop turned barber college), Pinnacle (a debt collection agency), L&M Gymnastics (school) and much more. Tim Rowles affirms a 90% success rate on TSP micro-loans to businesses like these. You can learn more at www.thespringfieldproject.org.

In Boston, many Brazilian immigrants, mostly women, support their families by cleaning houses. Typically hired as helpers to other immigrant house cleaners, they often are overworked, mistreated and exposed to hazardous substances for very low wages.

Monica Chianelli, a volunteer with the Brazilian Women's Group (BWG), was a house cleaner. Like others, she suffered from severe allergies, muscle and body pain and extremely low energy. Monica participated in a Live Well project sponsored by Tufts University where she learned to replace commercial cleaning products with natural ones. The green cleaning products were just as effective, but were less harmful to the body and the environment.

When her allergies and pain vanished and her energy returned, Monica shared what she learned with fellow BWG members and in 2008, with the help of CCHD economic development funds, the Vida Verde Women's Cooperative was born. Building on Monica's experience and knowledge, they created their own natural cleaning products, which were tested and approved as safe and effective by the University of Massachusetts-Lowell Toxic Use Reduction Institute.

The CCHD economic development grant helps pay the salary of a full-time coordinator for the Vida Verde. Members make decisions democratically. They reinvest 5% of their earnings to cover co-op expenses. They schedule clients so that new co-op members make as much as older members. Thus, the 23 members clean 1-2 houses a day, depending on the size, and earn about \$2500 per month. Although the Vida Verde Cooperative is not able to provide health insurance, they have found a creative way to assist members who cannot work due to illness. A member substitutes for one who is sick and gives that person 25% of the earnings.

Though news spread quickly about the health benefits of using natural, non-toxic products and the rewards of working for oneself, membership is not automatic. Joining the co-op requires training in green cleaning techniques and products and a personal commitment to the organization's dual objectives, which are: (1) economic development

that stabilizes income and builds assets, and (2) self-empowerment of vulnerable, immigrant women that strengthens their families and community.

Ruth Alves is another member of Vida Verde. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2003 and learned about Vida Verde through a friend who in 2008 invited her to join. Ruth sets her own schedule. Being her own boss allows her to go to school and take care of personal business. Best of all, Ruth is no longer subjected to exploitation on the job, and clients whose homes are clean and less toxic are happier.

The Brazilian Women's Group and Vida Verde empower members in multiple ways. They attract resources needed to develop English, computer literacy, business and marketing skills. Perhaps just as important, the project provides opportunities to advocate for the needs of immigrants in the Boston area and nationwide in coalition with the National

Domestic Workers' Alliance, Jobs with Justice and other grassroots organizations.

Ruth recently spoke at her town's May Day program urging Brazilian immigrants to voice their concerns. According to BWG's Executive Director, Heloisa Maria Galvao, hearing BWG members like Ruth speak in Portuguese about justice and worker's rights inspires them to advocate for better treatment and wages, despite their less than fluent English or modest beginnings. Learn more at www.verdeamarelo.org

CCHD funding has served as a catalyst for hundreds of anti-poverty efforts throughout the country; learn more about CCHD and its economic development grant program by visiting www.usccb.org/cchd.

This issue's cover story about the wonderful people of Monroe, Louisiana, is one great example of what it means to be a people of faith and heart.

When I read stories like theirs, I am struck both by the miracle and gift of human change and the important choices that people can make out of love and care. Those choices, by the way, are not other-worldly, astonishing, or dramatic. Most of the time, as the article makes clear, love gets expressed in ways that are quite doable, feasible, HUMAN.

Knowing personally some of the people of Monroe described in the story, I can say this about them: they are, in many ways, absolutely lovely and inspired people who have made very important choices. Another way to describe them is that they are very ordinary people doing ordinary things with great care in a kind of unassuming way.

It seems to me faith and love are like that – sometimes they look and feel extraordinary and sometimes they look and feel so very ordinary. It seems to me the Good News is that all people – all of us ordinary people living in our very ordinary parts of the world – can be a part of God's big body of work.

Drawing from what I know of the witness of the Monroe JustFaith community, here are some characteristics that I find instructive.

First, there is a kind of constancy underneath their activities that is humble but effective. Some of the people of Monroe are exuberant and charismatic; others are steady

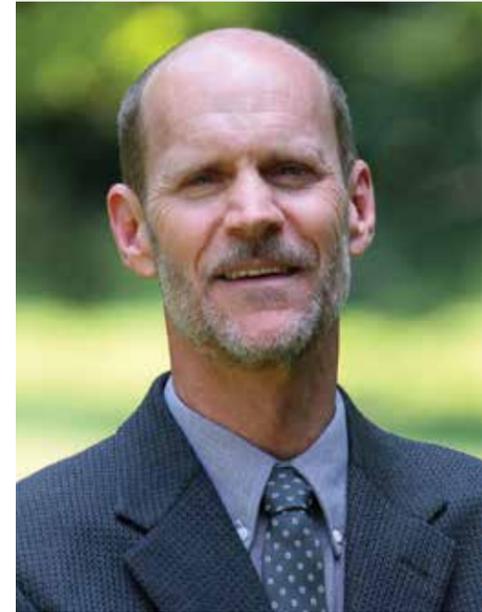
and unflashy; but, regardless, their work is consistent, untiring and deliberate. Talk is fine; doing what they said they were going to do is even finer. They make plans, execute the plans, and then talk about what's next. To paraphrase the familiar lesson, it's not the exceptional things you do once in a while, but the ordinary things you do every week.

Second, they seem to be very connected. I don't know if it is southern affability or just good instincts, but they do a lot of their work together and, even when they don't, they are staying in touch at their parishes and in small groups. They do both big and small projects that allow lots of people to be a part of the beehive of activity (with lots of potlucks). Lesson: we are a species that was made to "bump into each other and laugh," to adapt a line from Hafiz.

Third, they seem to know they are "called" to this work. While Monroe is not New York City, they certainly have a sense of urgency. People are counting on them. Hungry kids are counting on them. God is counting on them. Faith helps us see with new eyes and those eyes draw us into the world's emergencies, local and distant. New eyes also help us see old realities with a broader perspective that asks questions in the name of those who have been excluded and left behind. We are necessarily part of God's

Notes

From Jack



work. People in Monroe are not sitting around and wondering whether or not they can be helpful.

So, let us take careful note of Monroe, a place that is both quite extraordinary and so wonderfully ordinary, and give thanks for their precious witness that brings life to their community and shines a light that can help the rest of us see and act.

Jack

Engaging Spirituality

Live deeply. Love broadly.

"While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them." – Luke 24:25

Amid the storm of debates and divisions swirling around us, where do we find breathing space to listen with our hearts, to share from the heart, and to discern the movement of the Spirit in our time?

Engaging Spirituality Process Take the World to Heart

"I experienced the opportunity of sharing intimately on a very authentic, personal and spiritual level – as I imagine I could do if I were face-to-face with Jesus, carrying on conversations about what really matters."
– ES Participant

If you're deeply concerned about our world, longing to lead a compassionate-contemplative life, it's not too late to convene an Engaging Spirituality (ES) group.

We continue to enhance our 21-session process with rich spiritual content. This fall we are also introducing a pilot program entitled BELONGING (seven sessions and an immersion) designed for Protestant and ecumenical groups.

For more information contact Tricia or Joe at JustFaith Ministries: 502-429-0865 spirituality@justfaith.org
Visit our web page to check out the introductory video and our training webinar:
<http://justfaith.org/programs/engagingspirituality.html>

JustFaith

Deepen your faith.
Live the Gospel.

"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you..." – Luke 14:13-14

Do you long to lead an extraordinary life of compassion?

The JustFaith program asks you to consider this question with a small group of your fellow spiritual pilgrims as you journey through the scriptures and the Christian tradition of loving and serving our neighbors.

Offered in hundreds of churches and parishes across the country, the JustFaith program provides a lively and challenging encounter with the faith tradition that changes lives, inspires compassionate witness, and transforms the world through modeling the love and justice of God in Jesus Christ. So ask yourself: How can you honor the call to be linked with God's vision of justice and reconciliation? Will you help transform the world through love and service – and be transformed in the process? **Get more information on the JustFaith program at www.justfaith.org/programs/justfaith.html**



JustFaith Ministries provides an email network called **GradNet** to allow JustFaith Ministries graduates to stay connected.

To join, send an email to GradNet@justfaith.org

Be sure to give your name, the year you graduated and the parish where you completed a JustFaith Ministries program.

If you have comments, ideas or suggestions for an article, or if you would like to share digital pictures of JustFaith Ministries groups in action, please contact: david@justfaith.org

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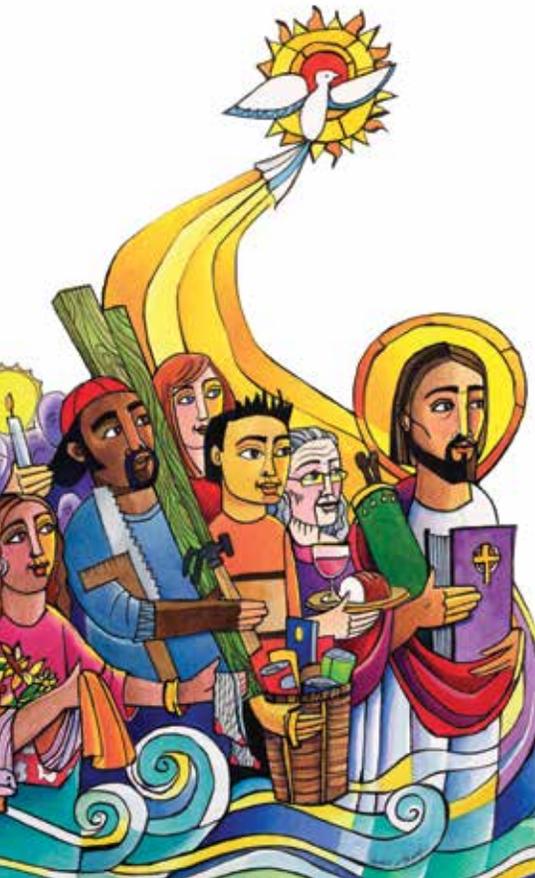
OUR MISSION

JustFaith Ministries forms, informs and transforms people of faith by offering programs and resources that sustain them in their compassionate commitment to build a more just and peaceful world.

“Participating in the Crossing Borders module was very informative for me. I saw myself as a ‘privileged’ immigrant, one in the U.S. for political reasons. I was offered everything and welcomed with open arms. Now I see how ‘economic’ immigrants are unfairly treated.”

— Joe Bernal, Cuban American

GoodNewsPeople



A journey to deepen our faith, strengthen the bonds of community, and live out the gospel call to be good news people.

ANNOUNCING: A new program from JustFaith Ministries.

The GoodNewsPeople Program!

GoodNewsPeople is a dynamic 14-week process (seven sessions in the fall and seven sessions in the spring) engaging sacred scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, readings and reflections, virtue formation and Catholic social teaching.

Through GoodNewsPeople, parishioners will engage in a process designed to broaden their sense of discipleship, deepen their prayer life and spirituality, and connect them to the life-giving work that addresses the needs of their neighbors.

The GoodNewsPeople Program is a great way to respond to the Church’s call for the New Evangelization and a wonderful way to celebrate the Year of Faith!

Deeper Faith + Love in Action = Good News!

Encourage your parish to become one of the first “Good News” parishes in the country. For more information, please go to: <http://www.GoodNewsPeople-jfm.org>