

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

BY BETH GRIFFIN

“This is the entry point to the compassionate heart of Christ. It’s the personalization of the gospel question, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”

That’s how Paul Popernack of St. Francis of Assisi parish in Derwood, MD, summarized his experience with the JustFaith and Journey to Justice programs that help parishioners become actively involved in Catholic social teaching.

Journey to Justice was established early in the Catholic Campaign for Human Development’s (CCHD) history to help economically advantaged people understand the circumstances that create poverty. In their 1970 resolution creating the Campaign, the bishops envisioned “a conversion of heart, a growth in compassion and a sensitivity to the needs of their brothers [and sisters] in want.”

Acknowledging that the process is as important as the destination, the Journey to Justice program is a retreat that includes study, prayer, and a day-long visit to a CCHD-funded project. In recent years, CCHD has partnered with JustFaith Ministries to offer the Journey to Justice immersion experience as part of the 30-week JustFaith exploration program.

“Journey to Justice Day is one of the pinnacle experiences in the JustFaith program,” said Paul. “Everything we have been reading and discussing works toward it—and everything that follows flows out of it.”

Making It Real

On a recent weekend, parishioners in the Archdiocese of Washington who are participating in JustFaith spent their Journey to Justice Day at one of four CCHD-funded projects in and around the District of Columbia. The JustFaith program in a parish typically has 7 to 14 participants. On the recent weekend, all of the parish groups came together before each group divided up to visit the projects. “It’s inspiring to see other people on the journey,” said Paul, “and as a parish group, we were able to learn individually about programs and share our understanding later.”

One group visited the Rebecca Project for Human Rights, which helps prison inmates and their families to advocate on public policy regarding incarceration and addiction. “We had the opportunity to meet, interact, and share a meal with the men and women of Rebecca Project, to connect with them on a human

(continued on page 3)



Photos courtesy of JustFaith

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend of CCHD:



Springtime is always a busy season at the Catholic Campaign for Human Development's (CCHD) national office and is so this year as well. This month finds us welcoming new college-age interns who will come to Washington, D.C., for an orientation before beginning work with diocesan CCHD offices and funded groups. The intern program is an important component of CCHD's education mission. We also offer prayer resources and experiential learning opportunities like the Journey to Justice retreat process that is featured in this newsletter.

In addition to bringing transforming experiences into dioceses and parishes, your support of CCHD helps fund community organizing and economic development projects. Later this month, our committee of bishops will meet in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to make grant allocation decisions for the next grant cycle. We expect to award over \$9.5 million in grants for 2007-2008.

This is also a season of transitions—organizational and personal—here at the Campaign. As a result of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) reorganization plan, which was approved by the bishops last November, CCHD's major components of grant-making and education will be located within a new Human Development, Justice, and Peace Department. The promotional activities to support the annual Appeal in parishes will be situated within a new Office for National Collections. The reorganization will be completed this year, and the new structure will be operational on January 1, 2008.

On a personal level, this will be my last Director's message for our quarterly newsletter, because I will complete my term of service and transition to retirement on July 1, 2007. I am deeply grateful for the many blessings I have received and for the opportunity to serve the bishops and CCHD during the past 37 years. CCHD has been a great gift to our Church and to the hopes and aspirations of so many of our poor and low-income brothers and sisters. Through your prayerful and financial support, you have enabled our Church to take her stand beside the poor. On their behalf, I express profound thanks for all that you have done. Paraphrasing St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, I pray that our God who has begun this good work will bring it to fulfillment.

Gratefully yours in Our Lord,

Timothy F. Collins
Executive Director
Catholic Campaign for Human Development

WHAT IS CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the Catholic Campaign has contributed over \$280 million to more than 7,800 low-income led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so that CCHD's investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between poor and non-poor persons.

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(continued from page 1)

level and listen to their stories,” said Paul. “We were impressed, awed, and humbled, and I was thinking that if I were in their situation, would I have the strength to do what they are doing?”

“The point of the visits is not to *do* for people, but to be with them and support them in the ways they want to be supported and follow their lead,” said Sharon O’Brien, from Church of the Resurrection in Burtonsville, MD. Her group visited the National Coalition for the Homeless. “We met three formerly homeless people, and I had the sense that among them there is the wisdom, the strength, and the skill to change the system.” One of the speakers, she said, started a nonprofit organization devoted to housing, and another edits a newspaper sold by homeless people.

“It was obvious how ignorant I have been of the homeless situation,” said Sharon. “These issues are complex, and it’s not just about a bed. There’s no easy solution, but there is hope. It takes a combination of action and study.”

Cindy Goldberg said that her group from St. Peter in Olney, MD, “came away from that day with a true ‘aha!’—now we get what it’s about.” She added, “The whole idea of ‘social sin’ was an enlightening thing for our group.”

Cindy visited Casa of Maryland, an organization that is working to get labor laws associated with living wages and just working conditions applied to domestic workers. “So many of these women are fearful of their employers. They are afraid that they will lose their jobs if they ask for an evening off to attend a social event.”

Partnering for Social Change

“JustFaith and Journey to Justice make a good partnership,” said Donna Grimes, CCHD Education Specialist. “JustFaith tries to put a face on poverty and various social justice issues and Journey to Justice is a way to make it a practical experience. We’re taking people beyond the books and discussions to challenge themselves and ask what the words mean in a real sense.”

To date, hundreds of parishes across the country have participated in Journey to Justice. In the past few years, most of the participants have been associated with the JustFaith program. JustFaith Ministries was started by Jack Jezreel when he was serving as a parish social minister in Louisville, KY. There, he observed that “most adult Catholics feel ill-prepared and uneasy about engaging in the discussion and/or effort to



address social need. It seemed to me that the problem had something to do with conversion . . . which includes recognition of our shared responsibility to one another.”

Jack created a long-term process modeled on the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). It includes at least 30 weekly meetings of small groups, with access to substantive education, good speakers, and the opportunity to discuss the materials thoughtfully. The curriculum is based on Catholic social teaching and the Church’s tradition of care for the vulnerable and willingness to offer historical witness. The Journey to Justice visits to CCHD-funded projects give the participants an opportunity to meet and interact with people who are seeking justice for themselves or others.

Personal and Communal

The experience of the Archdiocese of Washington is representative of the interest and commitment that CCHD has seen in parishes participating in JustFaith and Journey to Justice. Christian Wainwright, the CCHD Director for the Archdiocese, said that parishes that have used the JustFaith program have experienced an increase in the depth of their social outreach. “We underestimated what people were willing to commit to,” he said. Parishioners have become involved in refugee resettlement and programs for the disabled. Chris said that at least one person changed careers as a result of the program.

For some, the “conversion” is expressed by becoming more deeply involved with the life of the parish. Paul (of St. Francis of Assisi parish) said, “I was floundering before, but I am more open to parish opportunities now. My own prayer life is much deeper and richer, and I no longer watch the news in the same way—because I’ve had a glimpse and I’ve been welcomed into the lives of these people.” He added that the Journey to Justice visits to CCHD groups give flesh to the books read during JustFaith. “It is physically and spiritually real. You are there in an actual situation where people are being empowered and helped. You are touching the

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)


hand of a person you have seen in a video. It's real and not theoretical," he explained.

The effect of the program is both personal and communal. Karen Simon, of St. Camillus parish in Silver Spring, MD, said, "The experience breaks down stereotypes and develops a heightened awareness of injustice. There's a ripple effect, especially in families."

Participants from the JustFaith program now offer hospitality after three Masses each Sunday. "We serve fair-trade coffee and the proceeds go to Heifer Project International," she explained, and admitted to being "a little disappointed that we are not doing more."

But, as Paul from St. Francis of Assisi parish said, "We are each called to be who God knows us to be and we are called to be fully us and fully alive. People may not travel to the other side of the world, but may have their greatest



impact in their own household. It's about being open to change your heart and uniting it with Christ." 

To learn more about CCHD's education programs, visit www.usccb.org/cchd/education.shtml or contact Donna Grimes at 202-541-3372. Explore the JustFaith programs at www.justfaith.org.

The CCHD Education Mission

The 1970 Resolution on the (Catholic) Campaign for Human Development states:

"A second major goal of the Campaign for Human Development is educational. The poor have not chosen poverty. . . . We hope through the Campaign for Human Development to impress these facts on the non-poor and to effect in them a conversion of heart. . . ."

The mission directs CCHD to address the root causes of poverty through **transformative education**.

The CCHD education program uses three main strategies to meet the vision of the 1970 Resolution and the CCHD mission:

1. Share information on CCHD and on poverty in the United States
2. Share resources that connect Catholic social teaching and CCHD
3. Offer trainings that help develop transformative relationships and provide opportunities to help "break the hellish cycle of poverty" in the United States

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can donate your time, talent, and treasure to CCHD in many ways. Consider supporting CCHD with a stock donation or a matching gift from your employer, or remember CCHD in your estate planning. For more information about CCHD, or to discuss ways to support our mission, contact Mary Mencarini Campbell at 202-541-3365 or mcampbell@usccb.org. Visit our Web site at www.usccb.org/cchd and explore the state of U.S. poverty at www.povertyusa.org.

WHERE'S MY MONEY GOING?

All CCHD funds received are used solely for the support of CCHD's anti-poverty mission. CCHD abides by the charitable standards set by a leading donor advisory service. Our funds are divided as follows: 89% is assigned to CCHD's core program mission of community empowerment, economic development, education programs, and supporting services; 3% is allocated to coordinate the annual appeal; and 8% is assigned to administrative costs.

We thank you for helping to break the cycle of poverty through your ongoing support for CCHD.