

High School Teens Take on a Troubled World

By Robert Barnell, a student at Indiana University

There are reasons why teenagers are skeptical. Differing perspectives on religion, politics, and morality are competing in our minds. Reports of violence, poverty, disease, and environmental abuse demoralize us daily. On top of these frustrating, complex realities, personal struggles often depress us further. We look to our Church for clarity, and sometimes we leave feeling even more discouraged.

“How can faith help our troubled world?” we ask. For those who really desire to care about our world, Justice-Walking (J-Walking) offers a much-needed alternative. This youth version of the JustFaith Program helps teenagers understand how closely connected we individuals are with everyone else in the world—and how faith can empower us to be the difference Jesus calls us to be.

As Evan Fowler, a student at Manual and member of St. Margret Mary parish, explains, “*J-Walking opened my eyes to issues that, before, I didn’t know existed or affected my life. I realized that other people needed more prayers than I did.*”

In fact, the oppression of our sisters and brothers across the globe hinges on our own everyday choices. Humility and faith become not only relevant but vital in living responsibly and peaceably among our world of injustice and suffering.

These realities can really disturb us. Sometimes we further reject religion, but often enough we find the strength to keep believing that God cares about humanity. This is the type of faith that builds the peaceful, just Kingdom of God.

J-Walking asks a great deal of young people. It invites us to undergo the transformation needed to live the Gospel. This conversion of heart is exactly what our world needs, and so Jesus calls us to it.

J-Walking groups meet regularly for three to six months with people who live on the fringes of our communities, such as our neighbors who are poor, homeless, mentally disabled, or elderly. J-Walkers also accept the challenge of periodic spiritual practices that upset their lifestyles. These include making time for prayer; deliberately spending time with people, limiting the excessive consumption of every kind; reconsidering how we view food and culture; and divesting ourselves of distracting activities and divisive attitudes.

The small group setting helps to restore a sense of community and foster global solidarity. Jacob Williams, a parishioner at St. William and a recent graduate of St. Francis High School in Louisville notes, “*J-Walking shifts your focus to people around you. Not only does it make you more present to people around you, but it also makes others more visible to you, so you can start to form relationships, instead of judgments.*”

Our world is filled with people who profess to be Christian, but do we really take seriously Jesus’ call to love others? This discrepancy between what we claim and how we live is often the source criticism leveled at religion. But when we take our Church’s social teachings to heart and follow Jesus, faith overcomes fear, sustaining us with hope as we face our troubled world.

Many of us young J-Walkers come to this process filled with doubts, but along the way we rediscover the truth in Jesus’ message and the teachings our Church has modeled on it. J-Walking reminds us of the Gospel call to seek justice, through our everyday lives, so that we can BE a world of peace.

JusticeWalking is a “Prophet-Raising” process for older high school teenagers.
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