

JustFaith creator to be honored in 2006

By MARNIE MCALLISTER
Record Staff Writer

Jack Jezreel is sure he doesn't belong in the company of Sister Helen Prejean, author of the book *Dead Man Walking*, or the late Msgr. George Higgins, the so-called labor priest.

Both religious leaders are past recipients of the Harry A. Fagan Roundtable Award for social action leadership. And Jezreel has been named the 2006 recipient for his work in creating JustFaith, a parish-based formation program for social ministry.

The award is named for the co-founder of Roundtable,

Jack Jezreel will receive in February the 2006 Harry A. Fagan Roundtable Award for social action leadership

a national association of Catholic diocesan social action directors. It will be presented at the annual Roundtable Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C., in February.

Jezreel describes the Roundtable award as the

"Oscar" of social ministry. And he doesn't think the honor belongs to him.

"In my opinion, this is a de facto award for JustFaith," said Jezreel in an interview. "I haven't done anything extraordinary. But JustFaith has. It has given a lot of people involved in social ministry new hope."

The cause for hope is evident in JustFaith's growth since its inception in 1989 — especially in its record enrollment this year of 3,000 people in dioceses around the United States. This year, six parishes in the Archdiocese of Louisville are holding

JustFaith programs.

Jezreel developed the 30-week program in 1989 at Louisville's Epiphany Church, where he was the parish's minister of social responsibility. It started as a program to encourage Epiphany parishioners to become more active in social ministry. Soon, Jezreel's idea for a long-term formation program with hands-on ministry experience, retreats, guest speakers and other activities began to spread.

"JustFaith provides an opportunity for people to explore the part of their faith
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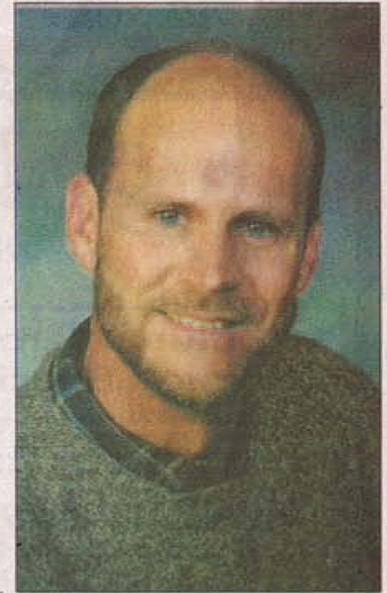


Photo Special to The Record

Jack Jezreel developed JustFaith, a parish-based formation program for social ministry, in 1989 when he was minister of social responsibility at Epiphany Church.

Jack Jezreel, creator of JustFaith, will receive social action award

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tradition that is largely unfamiliar to them," he said with reference to social ministry. "There's a line that goes, 'Catholic social teaching is our best kept secret.' JustFaith tries to make that false" by educating Catholics.

"To that end," he said, JustFaith aims to communicate the Gospel message that says, "When people come face to face with Christ it changes them, calls them beyond themselves and draws people to each other."

In 2000, JustFaith started eradicating that secret of social teaching on the national level and formed a partnership with Catholic Charities. Jezreel serves as the executive director, and three other staff members help him run JustFaith from their homes in Louisville.

More than 7,000 people nationwide have now completed the program. And nearly every year enrollment has grown, he said.

Jezreel attributes the program's growth, in part, to fur-

ther expansion in its partnerships. Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development — both organizations under the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops — have joined Catholic Charities in partnership with JustFaith.

That means the program is able to share in these organizations' funding, support services, personnel and promotion, Jezreel said. And JustFaith is being made a part of the organizations' strategic plans, he said.

JustFaith programming also is expanding this year to include a pilot version for teenagers called Justice Walking or J-Walking and an advanced program for adults called JustFaith II.

J-Walking is being coordinated by Joe Grant, a former youth ministry consultant for the Archdiocese of Louisville. He has developed a youth-friendly version of JustFaith for high school juniors and seniors that encourages them to "jay-walk" — to go against the flow.

JustFaith II is being piloted

locally this year for those interested in being trained and developing skills for social ministry. The program includes such topics as community organizing, justice education and strategies for engaging parishes in social ministry. Participants take part in a nine-month internship in which they engage weekly in a particular area of social ministry.

Jezreel said he's encouraged in the JustFaith ministry as he sees former participants making changes in their lives. Signs of change are evident in "how they raise their kids, how they spend their time, how they shop," he said.

"Those changes look like more deliberate actions, engaging in the lives of our brothers and sisters in a broken, vulnerable or abandoned place," he said. "People are making more time in their schedules to be involved, more places in their checkbooks to be more generous."

For more information on JustFaith, visit the Web site at www.justfaith.org.