

# The Catholic Telegraph

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## St. Francis' JustFaith wins Pentecost Award

'The world calls for and expects from us simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, especially towards the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility. . . Without this mark of holiness, our word will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern man. It risks being vain and sterile.'

— Pope Paul VI

**By Lenore Christopher**

DAYTON DEANERY — It's satisfying for writers when people call to express their gratitude or affirm that the published words were in fact true. That's what has been happening since JustFaith articles started appearing in the Catholic Telegraph.

The JustFaith process works. That's what was said last August and that's what St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Centerville, this year's recipient of the Pentecost Award, will tell you today.

The Pentecost Award is given annually in the form of a scholarship of \$1,000 to a parish or individual in recognition of an outstanding evangelization effort. Award proceeds are to be used for ongoing evangelization formation and training, such as attendance at an evangelization conference or workshop or possibly to conduct a parish mission with an evangelistic theme.

But how do you honor a JustFaith evangelization effort when JustFaith is not a story of one leader or even a parish committee? JustFaith is a transformation of the parishioners' faith lives. So the story is best told — the honor best exercised — by citing examples of parishioners' activities after they have been exposed to JustFaith.

For those unfamiliar with the process, JustFaith is not a 30-week study about specific social action issues. It is about conversion and value classification, explains Cori Thibodeau, regional director of the Catholic Social Action Office, which promotes the process. After the training, people simply start making different life choices and that is



CT/Lenore Christopher

**Mac Johnson and Kathleen Kammer gather their JustFaith materials. One of their goals is to encourage other parishes to form JustFaith groups.**

what has been happening at the Centerville parish and everywhere JustFaith exists.

"St. Francis has been a leader in parish social ministry and their success with the JustFaith program further demonstrates their commitment to social justice," said Thibodeau. "I have worked closely with the parish for the last two years and have witnessed them not only work hard to involve their own parishioners, but also encourage and support other parishes wishing to develop their social justice efforts."

Thibodeau describes St. Francis as a "model faith community and a gift to not only our archdiocese, but also to our world."

Here is what's happening:

St. Francis people have been involved in agriculture issues and prison ministry, said Thibodeau, so JustFaith members purchased shares in the organic Eat Food for Life cooperative farm in Darke County to give food to Mercy Manor, a residential home for women who have been released from prison.

Parish staff members in social mission, Mac Johnson and Kathleen Kammer, say many "social ministries of love" have developed as a result of JustFaith. The St. Francis' St. Vincent de Paul Society has doubled in size and there is an increased prominence of the Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Lenten Rice Bowl collection.

Global Aware house parties that promote fair trade for coffee and mission-related crafts have been organized and the parties include a new participatory educational game provided by CRS.

A parish twinning local workshop and project has been initiated and a new parish grant-making committee established.

At Incarnation, JustFaith participants, aided by the combined leadership team of Marilyn Porcino, Brenda Tibbits, Incarnation staff, and Johnson and Kammer, were part of the leadership team that took part in the Cooperative for Education mission trip project, which provide textbooks and educational supplies to schools in Guatemala.

On a more personal level, parishioner Suzanna Power discovered, on a St. Vincent de Paul home visit across the street from the church, a family whose basic survival needs were not being met. She was instrumental in providing parish assistance. The experience encouraged her to lead a new JustFaith group and continue her work with the St. Vincent de Paul conference.

JustFaith participants and Vincentian leaders are investigating the development of a local "Voice for the Poor" initiative. The national project seeks to uphold Catholic social teaching by researching, validating, documenting, advocating and promulgating issues related to the condition of the poor and disenfranchised.

Parishioner Gene Feshkens, purchasing manager for a local chemical company, as a JustFaith participant, visited Workplace Reconnections. The Miami Valley ministry is dedicated to helping workers in employment transition. It helps ex-offenders seeking economic and personal stability by developing new employment opportunities. Feshkens is helping to create new job opportunities through small business development.

"St. Francis' work with the JustFaith process really illustrated the three goals as outlined in the United States bishops document on evangelization, Go and Make Disciples," said Curtis Kneblak, assistant director for evangelization with the Office of Religious Education.

The first goal "speaks of renewal and conversion"; the second, "invitation"; and the third, "transformation of society." What spoke highly to the selection committee, he said, was the emphasis on personal conversion to the social mission, the integration of personal spirituality and the enthusiasm fostered among St. Francis and neighboring parishes in the past two years.

"Transformation seems to be the word that best describes what is happening at St. Francis Parish through the JustFaith process," he said.

St. Francis' efforts for "renewal" began with various adult formation events, which focused on the charity and justice directives of the Gospel and encouraged parishioners to take part in the process:

- In October 2001, 75 people attended an evening with Jack Jezreel, founder of JustFaith. The first JustFaith group was formed to discover the social mission of the church and those participants volunteered to lead the new session the following year.
- In August 2002, St. Francis was a co-sponsor for another gathering with Jezreel at Incarnation. Five groups were formed between the two parishes.
- In June 2003, Jezreel will be in the archdiocese for two evenings each in two locations, St. Albert in Kettering and Good Shepherd in Cincinnati. St. Francis is one of the co-sponsors of the greater Dayton-based evenings.

To fulfill the goal of "invitation," St. Francis parishioners are inviting people to share a light supper and inspirational talks with Jezreel, inspired by Gospel stories of inclusive meals. New parishioners, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults participants and their sponsors as well as social agency representatives, donors and volunteers are also being invited.

The goal is seeing parishioners' commitment to social justice, a result Jezreel confirms wherever JustFaith is initiated. Speaking about the first formed groups, Jezreel wrote in his program material, "Well before the end of the first year program, people who previously had been only marginally involved or interested in social ministry were now on fire with commitment. In the months and years that followed the end of the program, these people became the movers and shakers of social ministry . . . ."

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### **A Message from the Editor - Tricia Hempel**

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