

Justice **WALKING** *Just FAITH*
A Discipleship Journey with High School Students

COORDINATOR GUIDELINES 2011-2012

This document outlines the responsibilities of JusticeWalking coordinators and provides coordinators with helpful guidelines for group process and dialogue. While this document is intended to provide guidance to coordinators of the program, it can also serve as a helpful tool for individuals discerning whether or not to serve as JusticeWalking coordinators.

Although JustFaith Ministries materials are copyrighted, this document may be copied and forwarded without permission

JustFaith Ministries
P.O. Box 221348
Louisville, KY 40252
(502) 429-0865
www.justfaith.org
justicewalking@justfaith.org

In partnership with:



With additional support from:  Catholic Charities USA.

JustFaith Ministries works in cooperation with the partner organizations listed on this page and receives over half of its funding in the form of charitable contributions from program graduates.

Coordinator Guidelines 2010-2011

Part One: Responsibilities of JW Coordinators

<i>Spiritual Guidance</i>	3
<i>A Word about Language</i>	4
<i>Tasks of Coordinators</i>	4 - 5
<i>Co-facilitating</i>	5
<i>Planning Retreats</i>	6
<i>The Public Dialogue Session</i>	6 - 7
<i>Implementing J-Walking Sessions</i>	7 - 8
<i>Promoting a Safe Environment</i>	9
<i>Creating an Advisory Group</i>	9 - 10
<i>Summary</i>	10

Part Two: Guidelines for Group Process and Dialogue

<i>Move from Head to Heart</i>	11
<i>Listen from the Heart</i>	11
<i>Establish Ground Rules</i>	11 - 12
<i>Be Inclusive</i>	12
<i>Intervene When Someone Dominates</i>	12
<i>Respond to Personal Crises</i>	12
<i>Mediate Adult Contributions</i>	12 - 13
<i>Promote Dialogue</i>	13
<i>Stay in the Circle</i>	13
<i>Group Conflict</i>	14
<i>Embrace Gospel Challenges to Political Realities</i>	14 - 15
<i>Get to the Heart of the Matter</i>	15

*The adapted Scripture quotations contained herein are from the new Revised Standard Version Bible Catholic Edition, copyright © 1993 and 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission.
All rights reserved.*

Part One: Responsibilities of JusticeWalking Coordinators

Spiritual Guidance

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4–7

Thank you for choosing to be a JusticeWalking (JW) coordinator. If you have already journeyed with young people in ministry, you know that this is a sacred trust and a life-giving experience. As you accompany young people through J-Walking, you will be inviting and encouraging a new generation of disciples to shoulder the yoke of the Gospel dream of justice and peace.

Above all else, J-Walking is a spiritual journey and every journey involves preparations, the gathering of resources, and focusing our energies. Before reading this document, take a few moments now to prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.

If possible, share this ritual with the other adult who will be coordinating your J-Walking group with you, then read and discuss this document together.

(You will need a candle and a Bible)

- Light a candle, enter into silence, and become aware of your breathing, attentive to the subtle presence of the Spirit that lives within you.
- Open the Bible at 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, and slowly read out verses 4 to 7.
- Again enter into silence. Allow the misgivings, concerns, or anxieties you might have about J-Walking (*the tasks ahead, your gifts and limitations, the young people you have invited into the process...*) to surface in your mind and heart.
- If you are praying alone, name each of your concerns silently, ending each concern with the ancient prayer, “*Veni Sancte Spiritus*” (“Come Holy Spirit”). If you are gathered with others take turns naming your concerns and praying the response together. Consciously hand over your concerns to God’s compassionate Spirit and for the time being, let them go.
- End with this passage from the Gospel of John:

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.
John 14:26–27

J-Walking made me reconsider what I believe, why I believe it, and how it calls me to live. J-Walking showed me the gap between our beliefs and our lives...and I’m challenged to set an example of faith that follows the Gospel more genuinely.

Robert Barnell

A Word about Language

Every creative endeavor crafts its own unique language, and these are the key terms in the JusticeWalking lexicon:

- ***J-Walking*** — an abbreviation for JusticeWalking, a prophet-raising process with younger people.
- ***J-Walker*** — a participant (adult or youth) in the J-Walking process. J-Walking creates small faith communities with older teenagers (16–18 years) and adults.
- ***JW Coordinator*** — one of a team of two adults responsible for overseeing a J-Walking group.
- ***Co-Facilitator*** — a young J-Walker who has signed up to facilitate a J-Walking session as part of a team (one coordinator and one co-facilitator).
- ***Social Service Agency*** — a local community agency (e.g., nursing home, soup kitchen, shelter, etc.) that has agreed to be in relationship with the J-Walking group for the duration of the process. Every other J-Walking session takes place at this agency.

Tasks of JW Coordinators

J-Walking coordinators share responsibility for overseeing the entire J-Walking process and commit to being full participants in all elements of the process.

In addition, coordinators have the added responsibility of getting a J-Walking group up and running. The *Getting Started* document provides coordinators with a step-by-step guide for starting a group. You may request a copy of the *Getting Started* document from the JustFaith Ministries office: justicewalking@justfaith.org or 502-429-0865.

Once the group is established and begins to meet, JW coordinators share responsibility for the following:

- Co-facilitating prayer, dialogue, and preparation with the younger J-Walkers in your group.
- Listening attentively and welcoming insights from all J-Walkers, with special attention to those who appear less engaged in or uncomfortable with the process.
- Serving as spiritual mentors while being full participants in all the elements of the J-Walking process.
- Encouraging dialogue and participation throughout the process.

The following imperatives for prophetic ministry can be useful tips for coordinators:

Name the people involved!

Make sure J-Walkers and those you encounter at the social service agency are introduced, welcomed, and called by name.

Pay attention to the peripheries!

Seek out those who seem to be on the outside of the process, those who are quieter, and gently invite everyone to participate.

Respect the authority of everyone's experience!

Affirm those who contribute, ask clarifying questions, and invite others to respond or participate.

Be attentive to the signs of the times!

Invite J-Walkers to respond to what they are seeing and hearing in the world, through the fruits of the process and the relationships that develop at the service agency.

Always be inclusive!

Make a clear effort to include all voices, especially those that tend to be marginalized. Gently but firmly balance talkers and thinkers so that no one, older or younger, dominates the process.

Be rooted in prayer!

Be a model of attentiveness, reverently giving and receiving the wisdom and challenges offered by the members of your J-Walking group.

Co-Facilitating

The J-Walking process is divided into three stages. J-Walking materials are comprehensive and include session outlines, directions for co-facilitation, prayers, journal readings, supply lists, resource pages, and reminders. Program materials are provided electronically to coordinators upon registration.

J-Walking is structured so that older and younger participants share the facilitation of sessions. Ideally each session is co-facilitated by a team of two people, one adult and one younger J-Walker. Participants sign up for co-facilitation during the opening retreat.

Since J-Walking is a co-facilitated process, each session comes as a separate document. JW coordinators are responsible for forwarding these outlines to the appropriate adult-youth teams assigned to co-facilitate each session. JW coordinators should read the materials thoroughly, with special attention to the directions, supplies, and preparations for each session.

I gained a better understanding of the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity. This process took it out of the classroom and put me at the same table with folks living on the margins. Making this journey with a group committed me to getting out of my comfort zone. It definitely put me at intersection of prayer and action.

Paul Carlson, JW Coordinator

Planning Retreats

J-Walking exposes young people to an “engaged” spiritual life. Prayer and reflection are integral elements throughout the process. Three retreat experiences are incorporated into J-Walking: the opening (overnight) retreat; the commissioning (one-day) retreat; and the JusticeWalking Pilgrimage—a two-day (weekend) immersion. Retreats are vital to the experience and each fulfills a unique purpose. Any attempt to bypass or shorten these retreats will seriously impact the quality of the J-Walking experience.

Opening Retreat: Doers and Dreamers

This first event is designed to deepen trust and build community within the group. Faithfulness to the J-Walking commitment will depend directly on the quality of the community that is built among participants. This initial retreat explores our baptismal call to live prophetic lives and confirms J-Walkers’ commitment to the community.

JusticeWalking Pilgrimage

This mobile experience takes place midway through the process and challenges participants to take their faith into their local streets, encountering social realities as pilgrims in search of compassionate justice. J-Walkers develop an itinerary of local sites to visit, and the reflection process invites them to internalize and localize the quest for Gospel-justice.

Commissioning Retreat: Living Under the Influence of Justice

This concluding event highlights the growth that has occurred over the whole process. The ritual elements of this retreat identify J-Walking as a rite of passage into Gospel-adjusted living. Advisors, mentors, and family members participate in the commissioning ritual. In the company of this supportive community J-Walkers are sent out, with hearts set on God’s restoration, and lives oriented to Christ’s compassionate example.

Combined, these three retreats offer a multidimensional experience that includes invitation, integration, and commissioning into Gospel living.

The Public Dialogue Session

The third and final step in the J-Walking process begins with a public dialogue. Family, friends and supporters are invited to this two-hour session. J-Walkers craft brief presentations that express their own struggles and testify to their experiences of transformation. Groups are invited to incorporate music, visual arts, ritual, and storytelling as vehicles for communicating their message. Since JW coordinators are full participants in the process, they are expected to testify along with their younger companions. JW coordinators will need to plan ahead for this public session, with attention to the following details:

- Make sure the group is aware of scheduled date for the public presentation.
- Offer direction to group members as they craft their presentations.



- Identify a space if the regular J-Walking room cannot accommodate a larger group.
- Help J-Walkers promote the public dialogue event.
- Facilitate setup, snacks, and cleanup.

The public dialogue session offers J-Walkers an opportunity to creatively share their experience with a wider audience. They facilitate short dialogues that engage their families and community in their struggle with realities of injustice and Gospel-based responses. This session provides an opportunity to celebrate the creativity and prophetic voice of J-Walkers.

Implementing J-Walking Sessions

The Three-Step Pattern

The J-Walking process is divided into three steps, with four sessions in each step. Individual sessions can be scheduled at weekly or every-other-week intervals. All sessions are two hours long and the process follows this pattern:

First Meeting	A theme is presented followed by reflection and dialogue
Second Meeting	(<i>at the margins*</i>) A shorter thematic presentation and dialogue
Third Meeting	A theme is presented followed by reflection and dialogue
Fourth Meeting	(<i>at the margins*</i>) A shorter thematic presentation and dialogue

**Every-other session takes place at the social service agency. Directions for these sessions at the social service agency are outlined in a separate document entitled "Meeting at the Margins."*

Each JW session has four distinct movements (*gathering, listening, sharing, and sending*) and includes the following components:

- opening rite
- praying the news
- presentation of the theme
- contemplative dialogue
- challenges and applications
- announcements and reminders
- closing ritual

Journal Reflection

Maintaining a prayer journal is an important J-Walking discipline, and participants are expected to bring their J-Walker Journal to every session. Starting with the opening retreat, J-Walkers receive the J-Walker Journal that includes spiritual readings, social teachings, directions, and questions. Between sessions, J-Walkers are expected to spend ten minutes a day in prayer with their journals. Co-facilitators remind participants of their commitment to journal keeping and J-Walkers share their journal reflections at each session.

The Prayer Cloth

Each J-Walking group creates a prayer cloth using a piece of light-colored cotton fabric-roughly 4 feet by 4 feet. This cloth is incorporated into every session. Spread out in the center of each session, it opens a sacred space for contemplation and dialogue. During the



initial family meeting, the cloth creates a focus area for the symbols. (For more on the family meeting, please see the “Getting Started” document.) At the opening retreat J-Walkers seal their commitment to the process by signing the cloth. It travels with the group to the social service agency and on retreats, serving as a focal point for prayer and reflection, and a visible reminder of the covenant to walk faithfully through the process. J-Walkers decorate the cloth with prayers, insights, and the names the people they encounter. In this way it becomes an illustration of their journey into Gospel-based living. Specific directions for using the prayer cloth are included in the session materials.

Preparing for Each Session

JW coordinators should take the time to review materials for every session in order to be familiar with the flow of the process. Everything needed to co-facilitate each session is clearly outlined in the materials. Since J-Walking gatherings are co-facilitated by youth and adults, co-facilitation teams need to meet before the session to review the materials, delegate tasks, and identify the necessary supplies. *To avoid adding meetings between sessions, encourage designated co-facilitators to meet before or after the preceding week’s J-Walking session.*

Incorporating Spiritual Practices

J-Walking operates from a paradigm of conversion—recognizing that the Gospel asks us to “turn our lives around.” Both younger and older J-Walkers are urged to examine the way in which they live their lives in order to embrace “the abundant life” in response to the Gospel message, and in the light of the needs of God’s people.

During the first and third sessions of each step, co-facilitators introduce a spiritual practice to the group. The six practices are outlined in the session materials and developed in the J-Walker Journal. These disciplines help J-Walkers apply a spirituality of Gospel-based living directly into their daily lives. Practices like: making space for silence; eating simple meals; fasting; reorienting relationships; and maintaining few possessions are outward signs of an inner desire for a reorientation of our lives. Allowing God’s compassionate justice to act on us, the practices remind J-Walkers that Gospel justice begins in our hearts and is expressed in the everyday choices of life. Guidelines on how to introduce and integrate the spiritual practices are included in the J-Walking materials.

Making Space for Community

God’s Reign breaks out where connections are revered, community is deepened, and relationships blossom into faithful friendship. J-Walkers are invited grow from an interest group into a faith community, and eventually to become a community of friends. Since this is an intensive, guided process, it is crucial to build in additional informal gatherings where J-Walkers can relax, express their creativity and be spontaneous together. Encourage young people to suggest venues and organize events in which they celebrate and connect with one another on a regular basis. Gospel transformation happens only in community. In our over-full lives, finding and forming a dedicated community of faithful friends is a daunting but rewarding challenge.



Promoting a Safe Environment

A healthy and trusting environment for younger and older J-Walkers is crucial. JW coordinators must become familiar with the liability policies implemented in their own dioceses. Those new to ministry with young people can contact their diocesan youth office about policy guidelines. There may also be the expectation to attend diocesan safe environment trainings.

*It is **imperative** that all JW coordinators undergo background screenings before they begin meeting with the young participants.*

J-Walkers who are younger than eighteen years old are minors under the law, and parental permission is required before they can participate in J-Walking activities. Templates for permission and medical release forms are attached to the *Getting Started* document, as well as retreat and pilgrimage documents. Though it is impossible to eliminate the risks in ministry, it is possible to minimize them.

These common-sense tips can reduce the potential for needless risks:

- ***Foster an open relationship with the parents of J-Walkers.***
Inform parents when problems arise and keep family contact numbers available.
Make sure parents have a contact number for the J-Walking group.
- ***Keep a file copy of all permission slips.***
During activities away from the school or parish property, travel with signed permission slips.
- ***Never plan to be alone in a private or secluded place with a young person.***
Ask families to assist with transportation and avoid being alone in the car with a young person.
- ***Maintain clear boundaries concerning language and behavior.***
Mentor friendship is different from peer friendship.
- ***Pray for the young J-Walkers in your care.***
As God's children they have much to teach adults who know how to listen and walk with them.

Creating an Advisory Group

Developing a support network will deepen the impact of J-Walking. If you are unfamiliar with the challenges of ministry with young people, advisors who are parish and diocesan youth ministers or teachers can provide the necessary expertise. It is easier to create and maintain a relatively small group of advisors (four or five individuals). When approaching potential advisors, share these points:

- This group is consultative only.
- Advisors commit to a maximum of three (one-hour) meetings: an initial meeting before the process begins, one meeting mid-way through the process, and a concluding meeting when J-Walking is over.



- Meetings are informative, prayerful, and led by the JW coordinators.
- Advisors share in the J-Walking process by contributing their experience and insights.

A simple and consistent format will reduce the need for additional planning:

1. Opening prayers (use a prayer, ritual or symbol from the J-Walking materials).
2. Sharing the Good News (share insights or stories from the process).
3. Issues and Challenges (identify challenges or problems and invite input).
4. Upcoming Activities (discuss the calendar of events).
5. Shared Prayer (invite advisors to share reflections, name, and pray for J-Walkers).
6. Closing (use a journal reading or reflection from the materials as a blessing).

The greatest challenge in J-Walking is finding a way to work around the busy schedules of high school teens. If possible make use of the JustFaith graduates in your area for support. Invite them into the dialogue session and closing commissioning. Connecting young J-Walkers to this wider community was truly meaningful.

Patsy Carlson, JW Coordinator

Summary

“Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” Matthew 11:28–30

As a JW coordinator you will play a pivotal role in the J-Walking process. Coordination will be made easier when you enter into the process wholeheartedly, follow the directions, and make careful preparations.

Recall the lesson of the yoke. A yoke implies shared burden—for we do not carry out the challenges of Gospel faithfulness alone—and there is another load-bearer who walks with us. Prayerfulness is the most valuable form of preparation, and God’s Spirit works on us and through us, even when we appear ill-prepared or disorganized. Fostering openness to the guidance of this Holy Spirit cannot be underestimated, for it is this Spirit (already present in the lives of the J-Walkers) that is broken open in the J-Walking process. In the end, it is the Spirit that affects transformation and enables us to embrace Gospel justice as a way of walking in the Reign together.

Being a JW coordinator is demanding yet it is ultimately joy-filled and life-giving. There are surprises in store for those who dare to walk in the company of young people. Be ready to be changed, to celebrate life with a lighter heart, as you taste God’s readjusting love expressed in the energy and passion of young disciples. Know, too, that by walking into the margins you will be sharing the heritage of Catholic social teaching. In doing so you will be challenged and changed.

In the end, we at JustFaith Ministries hope you will come to experience that JusticeWalking is about falling in love with life by freely entering into life-changing and life-affirming relationships.



Part Two: Guidelines for Group Process and Dialogue

“And it happened that as they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, ‘What are you discussing as you walk along?’” Luke 24:15–17

Misunderstandings and communication problems arise in every group process. If you are dealing with persistent problems, contact Noelle Tennis Gulden (justicewalking@justfaith.org) at the JustFaith Ministries office: (502) 429-0865.

Move from Head to Heart

J-Walking sessions lead participants from sharing to reflection, from reflection to dialogue, and from dialogue to prayer. Beginning with symbols and questions that encourage listening and sharing ideas, J-Walkers gradually move into deeper places, listening and sharing from the heart. JW coordinators will find a variety of dynamics for sharing, as well as questions, prayers, and other tools for dialogue. It takes time and effort to build trust and create an environment conducive to the deeper listening and heart-sharing we call dialogue. When co-facilitation teams follow the guidelines, the process should flow naturally. As the sessions progress, J-Walkers fall into the pattern of sharing, reflection, and prayerful dialogue. Co-facilitating the sessions will involve initiating the process, keeping everyone focused, being attentive to time, and making sure that all are included. There may be times, however, when more direct assistance or even intervention is needed.

Listen from the Heart

As a JW coordinator, your presence of heart and mind will set the tone for open and heartfelt dialogue. Keep in mind that a listening attitude, which generates a deeper and broader understanding, is always more fruitful than debating points. Your greatest asset is your ability to listen openly. A gentle listening presence, which encourages participants to freely express their own experience, demonstrates how J-Walkers reverence everyone in the circle. By openly listening you validate the experience of J-Walkers, recognizing that we are all always on the road to conversion.

Establish Ground Rules

A set of agreed-upon rules gives co-facilitators a benchmark to return to when misunderstandings need to be resolved. Inviting everyone to contribute to the guidelines builds ownership and trust within the group. Use the following axioms to create your own ground rules:

*Listening to others is a form of prayer.
Silence speaks volumes—respect it!
Leave room for other voices.
Only God is allowed to judge.*

*Share your truth with kindness.
Speak to build up rather than to tear down.
Try to understand rather than be understood.
Dialogue is an end in itself.*

Be Inclusive

Keeping everyone involved and making space for talkers and thinkers to listen and share will be a constant challenge. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- End dialogues with questions like: *“Is there anyone who has not spoken yet that would like to share?”*
- Instruct J-Walkers to take turns when responding to a question or giving feedback.
- Offer this comment: *“Our time is limited, and we need to hear from everyone who wants to share.”*
- Gently invite the quieter voices to share.
- Observe body language and notice when someone is ready to contribute.
- Invite J-Walkers to pause and make space for those who need to think through their thoughts before speaking.

Intervene When Someone Dominates

The following are helpful responses when one person is dominating the conversation:

- *“Thank you. Now we need to hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet,”*
- If someone is talking nonstop, gently interrupt with a comment like, *“Let’s remember our ground rule about making space for everyone to talk.”*
- Acknowledge people as they indicate they would like to share, so that the speaker knows others are waiting to enter the dialogue.

Respond to Personal Crises

At any time throughout the process one or more of the J-Walkers may be dealing with personal problems. It is natural and appropriate that such situations are raised during sessions. It is also important for the other group members to respond with concern and support. However, when a personal crisis takes precedence over the group, it can threaten the process itself. In such cases coordinators should intervene directly and, taking the individual aside, help that person to deal with the situation.

Mediate Adult Contributions

Older J-Walkers play an important role in the process; their contribution is invaluable, and should be respected and included. However, young people often become submissive and

can easily be silenced by a dominant adult voice. Empowering young voices to speak their truth will necessarily involve challenging adults to monitor their contributions.

Promote Dialogue

J-Walking is not a format for theoretical discussion or debate. It is a contemplative process in which participants share personal insights and struggles, in order to understand more clearly God's presence in the world, and God's call in their lives. No doubt diverse and changing views will be expressed. Debate for the sake of seeking consensus or resolution is neither necessary nor appropriate. While J-Walkers will be accustomed to discussion, they may have limited experience with dialogue. Help the group learn the art of dialogue by becoming familiar with the following distinctions between discussion and dialogue.*

<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Dialogue</i>
<i>The individual's goal is often to bring others to his or her way of thinking.</i>	<i>The group's goal is to explore and expand understanding of a topic and incorporate varied perspectives.</i>
<i>Individuals present and defend different views.</i>	<i>The focus is on listening to one another, putting aside one's own views in order to fully listen to others.</i>
<i>There is a search for the best view to support a decision or action.</i>	<i>There is a free-flowing exploration of the complexities of an issue.</i>
<i>There is a back-and-forth discussion of differing and often opposing views.</i>	<i>People are not primarily in opposition, but looking for deeper insight and clarity.</i>
<i>Controversial topics often become sources of tension.</i>	<i>Controversial topics become discussible because participants are seeking to increase their understanding and because they care about each other.</i>
<i>There is a constant flow of conversation with someone always speaking.</i>	<i>The pace of the conversation varies with times of silence for thinking and absorbing what has been said.</i>

*Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 239–43.

Stay in the Circle

Body language is an important indicator of the trust and comfort level in a group. The overall dynamic for J-Walking sessions is that of a circle in which all participants are in clear view of one another and at the same eye level. If necessary, remind everyone to maintain the integrity of the circle, with no one seated outside, behind, or above the rest. Whether they are sharing, facilitating, presenting, or listening, J-Walkers should respect the subtleties of this circular, inclusive dynamic. The public dialogue session represents an exception to this rule since this involves a presentation to a larger group.

Group Conflict

Conflict is not necessarily negative. Differences in perspective provide J-Walkers with opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of reality. Opposing viewpoints and the resulting tension they create can be “holy ground.” Allowing for this sacred space involves some risk. Therefore, it behooves us to know how engage this risk so that a conversation can remain centered on positive disagreement rather than negative confrontation. Here are some suggestions:

- Remind everyone that the goal of dialogue is neither to create consensus, nor to win people over, but to welcome each other’s diverse experiences and insights.
- Remind participants to be respectful of one another and mindful of each other’s well-being as we think about what we say and how we say it. It can be helpful here to revisit your group’s ground rules (see pg. 12 of this document).
- Remind yourself that it is important for participants to learn how to cope with difference of thought and opinion, and that doing so prepares their minds for openness and conversion.

Embrace the Gospel Challenges to Social Realities

“A church that does not provoke any crises, a Gospel that doesn’t unsettle, a word of God that doesn’t get under anyone’s skin, a word of God that doesn’t touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what Gospel is that? The Gospel is courageous; it is the good news of him who came to take away the world’s sins. Neither the church nor the Gospel can be monopolized by any political or social movement.” Oscar Romero

On the road to Emmaus, the two disciples struggled to make sense of the political realities and consequences of Jesus’ execution. In a similar way, J-Walkers wrestle with the challenges of adopting Gospel attitudes and perspectives in the face of current realities and the needs of the poor and marginalized. There may be times when J-Walkers, or their families, express concerns that the process proposes a direct challenge to some current political perspectives. This is not surprising since J-Walking deals directly with the message of justice and peace found within the Scriptures, the tradition of Catholic social teaching, and the practical implications of our Church’s social mission. These reflect the content of our faith and our response to the invitation of Jesus Christ. All of these are linked immediately to the life of the Church as it relates to the poor and marginalized, and what our faith tells us about their reality.

J-Walking materials are specifically crafted to illuminate and expand upon Catholic social teaching and the Church’s social mission. The books, prayers, and dialogue questions draw from, or speak to, these related traditions. Some of the material may be critical of certain policies, structures, or practices, but this criticism is based on the impact these have on those who are poor and marginalized in our world, not on partisan views. If participants are uncomfortable with an author’s perspective, the dialogue questions, or the realities they encounter at the social service agency, it is helpful to ask:



- What is being said about the realities of the poor and marginalized and the implications of the Gospel message?
- How does this perspective, prayer, or reading relate to Catholic social teaching?
- How do the questions and activities connect with Scripture, Church tradition, or Catholic social teaching?
- What other just and compassionate responses might be justified based upon the Gospel message and the values of Catholic social teaching?

Get to the Heart of the Matter

J-Walking is a hands-on experiment in Gospel living that connects young people to realities of injustice and the social implications of our faith. Throughout the process J-Walkers are dissuaded from keeping the experience at a distance. Encourage everyone to personalize their experience and focus on the people they are encountering rather than discussing objective realities. Naming the people they encounter and using “I” statements when sharing insights will keep J-Walkers grounded in their shared experience. Through the spiritual practices, the relational encounters, and the public dialogue, J-Walkers are challenged to take the Gospel message to heart, and learn to see their lives and the world from another perspective. Encourage J-Walkers to ask friends, family, and members of their parish and school communities, to hold them in prayer, that they might get to the heart of the Gospel and allow the experience to reform their own hearts.

J-Walking inspired me to do my part in building God’s kingdom. To start, I can live more simply and be more aware of the connections between me and the rest of God’s children around the world. It can seem impossible to save our world from injustice and save ourselves, the Church, from losing sight of the Gospel, but J-Walking gave me faith that with every conversion to just living we are a step closer to heaven on earth.

Robert Barnell