

# The Net Worker

JUNE 2009



## LOOKING AT THE WORLD WITH JUSTFAITH GLASSES

By Eileen Hanrahan

I would imagine you are like me - you hear of a problem -- and you want to help. Whether it is the difficulties of people in our own country, such as those displaced by Hurricane Katrina, or those afflicted by destitution and hunger in Africa, you feel for those who suffer. I write a check, and I feel good that I have helped. But I have always wondered -- is that all I can do? Is that the best I can do? Is God calling me to do more? And now, thanks to a ministry called **JUSTFAITH**, I also wonder -- why are these circumstances happening that cause injustice and suffering in the first place?

The church teaches that there are two different ways to assist others -- direct outreach, and social justice. As Christians, we are pretty good at the former. When we hear of a problem, we are usually quick to lend a hand. Whether it is a food drive or a clothing drive, we do what we can. Or maybe a neighbor needs us and we lend a hand. And when we do, most times we receive gratification. It feels good to help. We either see the person we have helped, who gives us a smile and is grateful, or we may even receive a thank you card in the mail.

Helping in the vein of social justice is a little more tricky. The good news is, as opposed to direct outreach that only helps a few others, our efforts to make a fairer world in which we live have the potential to help many, many people. Trying to figure out why there is injustice in certain situations and what we can do about it is a challenge in and of itself, and even when we help, sometimes the fruits of our labor may not be seen for months or years, and sometimes leaves us to wonder if we have made a difference at all.

For myself, I have always known I can do more, but never could really put my finger on what or how. So when **JUSTFAITH** was offered here at St. Peter's I was immediately called to it. Do not get me wrong, it is a commitment. It's a thirty week immersion experience, filled with reading assignments, retreats, and "border crossings". According to the **JUSTFAITH** mission statement; this ministry aspires to "enable people of faith to develop a passion for justice, to express this passion in concrete acts of social ministry, and to expand the work of social ministry in their faith communities. **JUSTFAITH** Ministries creates and supports faith formation processes and resources that emphasize the Gospel message of peace and justice, Church social teaching and the intersection of spirituality and action."

**JUSTFAITH** is a process that intentionally leads the learner to become more aware of the issues, and become familiar with the stories of the people that suffering. But it is so much more than that. It is more than just a class. It is more like experiencing a conversion of the heart, or a transformation. I kid with others in the group that it's similar to seeing your world through "**JUSTFAITH**" glasses. During this year, my family and I vacationed in Jamaica. I was not in the country five minutes when I was questioning myself about not only the poverty that I witnessed, but also the circumstances that must have caused it. I noticed both the beauty of the country and the thankfulness of most Jamaicans I met, but also I noticed things that I would have never even

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thought of before such as the infrastructure of Jamaica. There was no way for the people to travel easily; their bus system seemed antiquated or nonexistent. There were two different worlds in Jamaica, the one for the tourists and the one for the Jamaicans. They seemed like polar opposites. Although every Jamaican I met thanked us for visiting, I couldn't help but wonder if the tourism we brought was a help or a hindrance to their situation.

And it is not about those people in a far away country and us in the United States. We are all human beings that live on the same planet at the same time. If we believe that we are all made in the image and likeness of God, and he is our father, doesn't that make all people our brother and sister? If one of my blood relatives was ever living in an impoverished state I would not hesitate to help them. I know we cannot alone help every person individually that suffers from some type of oppression by ourselves, but we should open our eyes to see what we can do. And I have **JUSTFAITH** to thank for helping me do just that. I do not claim to have the right answer. I guess that's the difference **JUSTFAITH** has made in my life, I may not know the answers but I know I am asking the right questions.

Every Easter season I am challenged by the reading from the Acts of the Apostles. It states that during the time after Jesus' crucifixion, the members of the community that had possessions such as property or houses sold them and gave the proceeds to the Apostles who distributed it to the community according to need. I always ask myself, could I do that? If I were in that situation, would I have the courage to sell everything for the good of the whole community? Would I put some money under my pillow first before giving it to the Apostles? What would happen if we all had the courage to do that today, would it solve the world's problems?

The fact of the matter is, everything we do has an impact in some way or another. The time we wake up in the morning, what we wear, what we eat, where we go, how we get there, what we do for work or play, what we buy, where we live and how we vote. Everything carries a consequence, for good or for bad. And if we don't try to change the injustices that we are living with, doesn't that imply that we agree with the state of affairs? Our mere presence and how we live will make this world a different place. I do not know what the future has in store for me personally, but I do know from experiencing **JUSTFAITH**, I will live in a different manner, trying to make a difference in some form, and I have certainly become more aware.

This is my experience from **JUSTFAITH**. Myself and the other participants were led by the Holy Spirit, and by our (fabulous and very wise) facilitator, Mary Bertani.

**I know we cannot alone help every person individually that suffers from some type of oppression by ourselves, but we should open our eyes to see what we can do.**

By journeying together, we learned each others stories, and debated about topics as they arose. It reminded me of my family convening around the dinner table. Topics would arise, and before someone spoke, you knew how they would feel and have an idea of what they would say. We recognized that, because we did not the share the same history and experiences, our take on issues would vary. We respected that. We are all in the process of transforming our words into action, and discerning individually how to use our journey to make a difference in some meaningful way for us. We have formed a community that intends to support each other for our journey that lies ahead, however similar or different they end up to be.



# Jesus Christ ! Can't you See Me? Jesus Christ!

By Mary Bertani

Last year at this time, in an attempt to make JustFaith known in the parish, I wrote about my chance encounter outside Lincoln Center with a homeless beggar. Caught on a traffic island with him, I couldn't avoid his eyes as I tried to avert mine. And that's when he shouted, out of despair, or in Christ's own voice more likely, Jesus Christ, can you recognize me? Won't you even look at me?

I went on to write about how haunting and transforming an experience that had been, one which eventually led me into agreeing to introduce JustFaith into the parish.

What is JustFaith? It's an intensive formation program for people who want to understand the church's social teachings and its implications for living out our faith lives.

But it goes beyond understanding – its aim is to change our hearts – we who live such privileged lives and perhaps never stop to think why that's true for us and not for 80% of the world's population – we who feel overwhelmed by the poverty and destruction of lives and of the earth and who can't begin to see how that could be stopped. JustFaith says it can!! And it provides the tools and the contacts!

To participate is a challenge – I won't kid you. It was a challenge for me and for those who participated in the first class. They'll tell you that in their comments below. But sometimes, we need a challenge – and a 30 week commitment, with reading (yes, reading!) and discussion, and listening to speakers, and most of all, meeting the people who have so much less than we and hearing their stories – that's certainly a challenge. But it may be the voice of Jesus calling to you, as he did to me, in the face of the "least of these."

I hope you'll read and be enriched by the testimonials that follow. And if you're thinking about joining, talk to those who took JustFaith. They faced the same obstacles as you – and something ... **Someone ... drew them in.**

## Why not find out?



**The information session is in the  
Parish Center, Wednesday, June 24 at  
7:30. Let me know you're coming at**

**202-262-4636 or mbertani@verizon.net.**

# JustFaith TESTIMONIALS

*Brian Hammel: I have come to the realization that the Jesus, the God-man, did not give up the best seat in the universe, next to his Abba, His Father, take on this imperfect body, pick out twelve followers who denied and deserted him, was spit at, beaten, whipped, stripped naked to be shamed and nailed to a cross, just so I will go to church on Sundays. That is not the quid pro quo that Jesus had in mind. JustFaith has engendered in me a calling, a mandate, to be a voice for those whom no one hears, and eyes for those whom no one sees.*

*Pui Ng: At home I clean regularly. I enjoy the tasks and I'm satisfied with what I do. But one day I happened to clean with my glasses on – and could clearly see the dirt and dust that were "unseen" before. At church, I participate in a number of ministries; I enjoy them and have been satisfied with what I do. But after the JustFaith program, I now see the world with a "new" pair of glasses – I not only see the situation of the poor and marginalized in clearer focus; through Christ's love I am able to feel more of their pain, hunger, and needs. They are God's children just like we are. Learning the church's social teachings has added urgency to my call to follow Jesus – to feed the poor, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and visit those in prison.*

*Bob Bertani: The seasons of JustFaith moved me from the heat of anger, through the cold of misunderstanding, into a springtime of a new way of thinking and seeing. I read newspapers and listen to talk radio and TV differently now; I see the world and politics in a new way. Words like "illegal aliens" and "the homeless" have taken on a whole new meaning.*

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# JustFaith

TESTIMONIALS

***Patty Halsall:** JustFaith challenged the way I have been living. As a result of the experience, I look with different eyes. I can no longer just sing the words to the hymn, "We are called to act with justice." JustFaith has given me the inner spirit and the tools to do as Jesus asked of us.*

***Joanne Mitchell-George:** Have you ever met someone or passed a person on the street and made a quick judgment about them? Then sometimes, when you know someone's story, it changes your perspective. JustFaith is about knowing someone's story. Through prayer, reading and discussion, you come to learn about yourself and others. Through books, films, speakers, and field trips in which we got to meet undocumented workers struggling to work and live here, working poor families living in a shelter because of unfortunate circumstances in their lives, people in Newark and Jersey City who just want their schools to provide a decent education for their children, JustFaith challenged us to think about others with compassion rather than indifference.*

***Mary Carter:** So many of us are horrified by the many social injustices that exist in our world, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of it all. We just withdraw into our own little worlds. JustFaith can give you the tools to be an effective agent for change. You also learn, probably for the first time, just what the social teaching of the church really is. Don't be afraid of the 30 weeks – ask anyone of us "graduates" and we'll tell you it flew by. You'll read interesting books, see powerful videos, and listen to those already working in justice and outreach ministries as well as to those struggling to survive with dignity. Your comfort zone WILL be challenged, and you'll find yourself longing to bring about the kingdom that Jesus had in mind.*

***Paul Kazanecki:** JustFaith has increased my level of interest in the social teachings of the Catholic Church and has led me to identify with those adversely affected by the indifference of government policies and human weakness. It has helped tear away some of my complacency and security and caused me to seek new ways to address some of the struggles that so many face here in Bergen County, in New Jersey, in this country and in this world. In our busy lives, it's easy to show little or no concern for the plight of people we read about in the news, see on TV, or drive by on our way to work or to the mall. JustFaith makes it more difficult to look the other way or to do nothing.*

***Mary Donohue:** For the past 30 weeks, 15 parishioners committed themselves to a new course of study called JustFaith – that is, Faith with Justice. If you enjoy reading and informed lively discussion; if you dare to dream that poverty and injustice in our world CAN end if enough good people determine for change, we, the graduates of this first year, invite you to take an extraordinary journey. We promise that you will grow in awareness of God's presence in each other and in every human being, whoever and wherever he/she may be. I see our own journey this year as something sacred: we have expanded greatly our sense of "neighbor" and the eyes of our hearts have been opened. Don't be intimidated! Consider taking*

Interested? JustFaith begins Wednesday, September 16 and continues through 30 weeks. There are two Friday evening/Saturday retreats, and four on-site visits. To learn more come to the Information Session -- Wednesday June 24, 7:30 p.m. in the Parish Center, speak to any "graduate," or contact mbertani@verizon.net or 201-262-4636.

J u s t F a i t h

## PORTRAIT BY A NEIGHBOUR

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

Before she has her floor swept  
Or her dishes done,  
Any day you'll find her  
A-sunning in the sun!

It's long after midnight  
Her key's in the lock,  
And you never see her chimney smoke  
Till past ten o'clock!

She digs in her garden  
With a shovel and a spoon,  
She weeds her lazy lettuce  
By the light of the moon,

She walks up the walk  
Like a woman in a dream,  
She forgets she borrowed butter  
And pays you back in cream!

Her lawn looks like a meadow,  
And if she mows the place  
She leaves the clover standing  
And the Queen Anne's lace!

Life is short, and summer is shorter. I wish you a season of "a-sunning in the sun," "walking in a dream," and many other pleasures of way-laid chores.

Pam Lobley