

Just FAITH

What is *JustFaith*?

JustFaith offers an opportunity for parishioners to experience a spiritual journey into compassion. Most of us long to be a generous and compassionate people. However, the opportunities to explore our tradition's Catholic social teachings in a deliberate and engaging way have largely not been available. *JustFaith*, now offered in hundreds of parishes across the country, provides a lively and challenging format to read, view, discuss, pray, experience and be formed by the justice tradition, which changes lives, inspires faithful witness, and transforms the world through love and service.

Our Catholic faith and biblical tradition extend an extraordinary invitation to each of us and to our faith communities to become agents of God's compassion and healing in a wounded world. The Good News of Christ is both a comfort and a promise for the poor and, at the same time, a call to those of us who are not poor to be linked with God's vision of justice and reconciliation.

Participants are also afforded the privilege of becoming community with other participants and sharing a journey of faith and compassion that is both life-giving and challenging.

Do participants need to have previous social justice experience or knowledge?

No. People benefit from *JustFaith* if they have been involved in social ministry for a long time or if they are newly interested. Testimonies from around the country attest to the fact that both experienced and inexperienced participants have derived great benefit.

What does the *JustFaith* program entail?

JustFaith involves groups of about 15 people, who meet for 30 weekly sessions, two weekend retreats and four Saturday immersion experiences. Overall, this adult formation process extends over 8 months and uses the best of adult education practices including books, videos, guest speakers, discussion, prayer, retreats, immersion experiences, and community building.

Does it cost anything to participate in *JustFaith*?

The books cost approximately \$140/person and are paid in installments.

How Do I Sign Up or Get More Information?

- Contact: Mary Lee, 703-924-6279, MaryLee74@hotmail.com, George Alexa, 703-425-2581, Alexa@mris.com, or Joe Pettit (703) 455-4937, pettit@georgetown.edu.

Ask Me About JustFaith: Stories from Nativity Parishioners

An insert in the May 16th *Nativity Bulletin* contained highlights of the JustFaith program which will run most weeks during the coming school year from late September to mid-May. The Nativity parishioners below have completed the program and would welcome phone calls or emails to discuss their experiences and answer questions you might have. Give one or more a call.

Jim McDaniel, 703-455-6874, at jimmcdaniel@me.com

After spending the last 10 years working with Nativity's Operation Starfish® and the international charity, Food For The Poor, I began the *JustFaith* program with a question as to whether it would be of value, since I already had "hands-on" experience with poverty. I quickly realized that all that experience did not help me understand the root causes of poverty. I knew what poverty was, but I didn't know why poverty exists. *JustFaith* gave me that broader understanding of the history, the basis, and the systemic nature of poverty. The experience also introduced me to the full range of Catholic social justice in the areas of immigration, wage and labor issues, housing, homelessness, etc. I now feel that my work on behalf of the poor is more balanced and well-grounded. The best aspect of the *JustFaith* experience is meeting and sharing with the wonderful, good-hearted people I now count as my friends.

Jerry McEnerney, 703-440-0111, jxmccenerney@verizon.net

JustFaith presented a view of the Church I haven't normally experienced at Mass. Through study, prayer and action, my eyes have been re-opened to a truer meaning of Mercy and Justice. I learned about institutional and industrial processes that can both harm and help our community, that we have a responsibility to hold our institutions accountable. I learned that our poor are a lot more like us than we think, that we have an unconscious desire to keep the poor out of our lives, that there is a strong link between poverty and mental illness, that interacting and sharing with these people brought me closer to Jesus, fostered grace and joy, and ultimately transformed me.

Donna Lipresti, 703-644-2398, dlipresti@cox.net

I was interested in learning more about Catholic teachings on social justice, how churches and organizations were involved and in finding ways I could become more active. I feel very blessed in my life and wanted to give something back. *JustFaith* provided me with ways to help others, meet wonderful people to help me on this journey and it gave me more of a global social awareness and sense of responsibility. I've grown and am still growing!

Katie Scully: 703-690-9379, SKScully@aol.com

Two years ago I turned 40 and had a little mid-life crisis--questioning many things and yearning for more--asking, there has to be more to life? The *JustFaith* flyer from church kept appearing around my house and I thought--why not, I could use some help in trying to live the Catholic way in our world today.

Little did I know it was going to change my life in many wonderful, fulfilling ways. *JustFaith* has brought me renewed purpose and has broadened my horizons to the hurting world around me. The readings, reflections and group time taught me to be more prayerful, and helped me to learn how to listen to God and the plans He has for my life. This has brought me some amazing experiences that have taught me what He meant by 'the abundant life'.

Bill Hall, 703-644-4689, hall_william@bah.com

I took the course on the personal recommendation of a friend and I am glad that I did. I wasn't sure what the course was or how I would respond. Studying issues from the viewpoint of the "oppressed" was really eye opening to me. I met some good people, expanded my view of social issues, and found all the sessions intellectually and spiritually engaging. I would be more than happy to talk to anyone who is interested about the program.

Jeanie Wood, 703-569-6676, jmwood777@cox.net

As a co-facilitator of a Nativity *JustFaith* group, I found the program to be a well-constructed, very creative course. Through its beautiful symbolic prayers, informative readings and videos, lively discussions as well as practical experiences in helping others, it has deepened my awareness of the needs of the poor and vulnerable here in Fairfax County and the rest of the world too.

One of the early readings is the book, *Amazing Grace*. It is a shocking revelation of the crushing cycle of poverty in the Bronx. It made me aware of my own easy life and angry that others are trapped and limited by circumstances beyond their control.

My group, which continues to meet, has become a team, a small community, bonded and ready to continue working together on social justice issues such as poverty, hunger, immigration reform, affordable housing and helping to promote justice through legislation.

If you really want to put your faith into action *JustFaith* is just what you need!

Nativity Parishioners' Experiences with JustFaith - continued

Nuala Cohen, 703 425 6851, nualad74@gmail.com

For me *JustFaith* was thought provoking, challenging & invigorating. I was so proud to learn about the seven principles of Catholic social teaching and the work the Church is doing locally and globally. Through *JustFaith*, I became aware of what my responsibilities are as a Catholic citizen. I have been introduced to a great group of people here at Nativity and in other groups I have become involved in as a result of *JustFaith*. *JustFaith* pushed me out of my comfort zone and made my life more meaningful. Just try it. You won't look back!

Eileen Thompson, 703-451-8626, eileen.thompson1@gmail.com

When I undertook the *JustFaith* course with my husband Phil, I found my expectations immediately exceeded. There was lively interaction spurred by well-chosen readings and powerful videos.

A solid structure fostered the respectful airing of diverse viewpoints. Prayer was central to the experience - it nurtured us as individuals and fostered our bonding as a group. Guest speakers and "Border Crossings" showed us some of the ongoing ministries of active Christianity in our own community. Today many *JustFaith* grads continue working with these ministries and are richer for our efforts.

JustFaith can be an important part of anyone's ongoing growth as a Catholic trying to live the gospel and positively impact the world. I have just completed the Engaging Spirituality course of *JustFaith* Ministries and look forward to further study and engagement in committed Christianity.

Karen Even, 703-250-4581, kdeven@prodigy.net

JustFaith is like turning on a light in a room, illuminating dark corners that were always there, but not seen. It is learning that there are answers to "But what can I do?" right here in Virginia. It is believing that we are ONE human family, each individual a beloved child of God. We have so much in this country and others have so little. When we learned of the Fair Trade model in *JustFaith*, it was obviously something we could do right here in our parish to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world. The enthusiastic support of our fellow parishioners for Fair Trade (<http://www.crsfairtrade.org/>) is a continued blessing.

George Alexa, 703-425-2581, alexa@mris.com

I would recommend *JustFaith* to every member of the parish. But I would warn you that after you complete this marathon, you will see faith come alive in ways you never knew existed. You will walk around with a bounce. Your spouse will see love in you as it should be seen.

Yes, I am most grateful I signed-up for the *JustFaith* program when it was first offered at Nativity a few years ago. I was new to the parish and didn't want to be "lost" in the crowd of a big parish. My last parish was 300 families and I knew most of them. Nativity offered a bigger challenge as it had more families. But could I afford the time as I was quite busy? Lots of readings were required and the weekly meetings were certainly going to be a problem, or so I thought. Then there's Father Martin. His sermons were on social justice issues taken from the Gospels and through his voice I could hear the Lord calling me to step up to the plate.

Linda Lenertz, 703-455-2006, lin.lenertz@aol.com

JustFaith is truly one of the most rewarding experiences you can give yourself. If you have this gnawing feeling inside "what can I do to make a difference" or "how can I give back a bit for all my blessings" then this is the program for you! My life has taken some amazing turns as a result of the people I have met, Issues and books we have explored together. I feel very privileged to have had this opportunity which has deepened my spiritual life, broaden my horizons' and taken me places I was totally unaware of.

*For a copy of this information you may pick up a copy from the **JustFaith** shelf of the table between the doors on the left as you exit the Church lobby or by going to the "Community Outreach" page on the parish website:
<http://www.nativityburke.org/parish/CommunityOutreach.php>*