Area parishes put the seven key themes of Catholic social teaching into action

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By Eileen Connelly, OSU and David Eck

The right to life and the dignity of the human person

ARCHDIOCESE — The Archdiocese of Cincinnati’s Catholic Collaborative on Darfur offers many opportunities for parishes and individuals to learn and take action.

In 2006, representatives from 27 area parishes, including St. Monica-St. George, Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), St. James of the Valley, and St. John’s in West Chester, selected this issue to focus on throughout the year, explained Sherrie Heyse, an IHM parishioner who serves as chairperson for the collaborative task force on Darfur.

The group has since become part of a local interfaith (Catholic, Jewish and Muslim) organization — Greater Cincinnati Advocates for Darfur.

Among the activities the group has been involved in are a well-attended interfaith prayer service, promoting awareness, letter-writing and fund-raising. They also advocated for the passage of the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act. In addition, leaders from the parishes involved have met with Reps. Steve Chabot and Jean Schmidt to demand great U.S. involvement in response to the genocide.

In May of 2007, the task force helped organize a local rally against the genocide. More than 400 people came together for the event, which was held on Fountain Square. Among those present to lend their voices were Nick Clooney, a strong activist for Darfur, Cincinnati Mayor Mark Mallory, and refugees from the war-torn area. The rally concluded with a march to the National Underground Freedom Center and prayer service.

Last fall, the group took part in the Dream for Darfur Olympic Torch
Relay, which visited more than 30 cities, including Cincinnati, and called on China to use its influence over the government of Sudan to end the genocide. Representatives from the collaborative were among those who gathered at the University of Cincinnati beneath the symbolic torch to hear speakers and to pray. A torch was then displayed at area parishes as a way of promoting continued awareness, Heyse said.

The task force continues to keep busy. Heyse maintains an email list and sends out calls to action to keep people informed on the ever-changing situation in Darfur and urging them to keep in contact with political leaders.

Catholic Relief Services is on the ground in Darfur and is one of the primary aid distributors. The people there need to be able to access aid from the U.S.

Heyse said an education event is planned for August at Xavier University in conjunction with the Center for Holocaust and Human Education. She urged local Catholics to take advantage of opportunities to educate themselves on the Darfur crisis, to write letters and to pray for the people for whom violence, hunger and insecurity are daily realities.

"We have to keep the issue on their radar screen and encourage our legislators to keep voting for aid. Catholic Relief Services is on the ground in Darfur and is one of the primary aid distributors. The people there need to be able to access aid from the U.S."

Catholics should be concerned about Darfur because "it really is a respect life issue," Heyse said. "When you talk about mothers there who see their children killed right in front of them, babies dying from a lack of food and women and children running from burning villages, that’s as much an issue to me as any respect life matter. Imagine a Darfurian woman, whose husband has been shot, who then has a miscarriage because she’s had to walk across a desert with no food or water, carrying a small child. That’s certainly not the way God intended us to respect life."

For more information about the situation in Darfur and ways to help, visit http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/socialaction/darfur.html.

At Mary, Help of Christians Parish in Fairborn, social action for the right to life and dignity of every human
encompasses a broad spectrum of activities — everything from encouraging recycling to counseling a woman with a crisis pregnancy.

The parish’s social actions committee, promoting a consistent ethic of life, consists of about 10 different parish ministries that work interdependently. Ministry chairs meet monthly to update each other on specific events, offer assistance and discuss ways to increase parishioner involvement in social action, said Pat Banaszak, who heads up a parish-based women’s network.

In addition to the women’s network — which promotes abstinence, the respect of life and works with those in a crisis pregnancy — some of the interrelated ministries include Weavers of Justice, environmental awareness, Operation Rice Bowl and Liturgical Crossing.

Though the parish has been involved in social action for about 20 years, the ministries have become more cohesive over the last five.

"Working together we’re so much stronger," Banaszak said. "It works well in our parish. When we’re doing a fund-raiser for one, we all know and we all support each other."

In the women's network, for example, volunteers help women empower themselves, work with relationships so they can avoid future crisis pregnancies and encourage them to have their babies.

All the ministries work at the root causes of the problems.

"We’re not just putting a band aid on their problem," Banaszak said.

In another instance, the committee held a workshop for volunteers who work with the poor. The curriculum trains volunteers to teach skills necessary for rising out of poverty and into a better life.

"We want to cover the whole family and raise those families that are at the level of poverty to become empowered," Banaszak said. "We want to take care of the environment. That’s a major part."

To that end, environmental ministry plants a parish garden each spring and provides the harvest to the poor. They also do highway cleanup and promote recycling throughout the area.

Weavers of Justice is a collaborative made up parishes in the Dayton Deanery that targets a specific community issue. The collaborative is currently working on homelessness in Dayton.

A Liturgical Crossing ministry connects the parish with St. Benedict the Moor Parish in Dayton. The arrangement allows the parishes to learn about each other’s cultures.

Susan Takacs, a 22-year Mary, Help of Christians parishioner, said that Catholics in the various social action ministries become stronger when the ministries work together.

"I think it makes us more community," she said. "It makes us appreciate each other’s talents. We appreciate other people’s viewpoint, people from other lifestyles."
ARCHDIOCESE — For years, Pat Youngblood, a member of St. Vivian Parish in Finneytown, searched for the best way to put her faith into action and address the injustices in her local community.

She found the opportunity through the AMOS Project, a faith-based coalition comprised of more than 40 urban and suburban religious congregations. The group, which takes its name from the prophet Amos, who urged the practice of justice and loving kindness, works to address many issues in the Greater Cincinnati area, including drug use, racial division, poverty, unemployment and the lack of adequate housing. The AMOS Project is an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation, a network of 45 grassroots organizations in 16 states.

Youngblood became involved with the AMOS Project when Father John Filippine, the late pastor of St. Vivian, asked her to serve as a member of the parish’s AMOS core team.

"Each individual member congregation of AMOS works on issues in their own community, but is also part of the action of the larger group," Youngblood explained. "We work together to come up with systemic solutions for injustices in our area, especially those that effect people who can't speak for themselves, economically and politically."

The core team at St. Vivian’s holds listening sessions where parishioners...
can express their concerns about various issues. One area of concern for elderly parish members has been health insurance, Youngblood said, so the core team took the issue to the larger AMOS group. It then became a topic for one of the group’s public meetings and a task force was formed to address the issue. The core group at St. Vivian’s was also involved with holding a public meeting to address concerns regarding low student test scores in the Finneytown Local School District. The school district has since been able to improve its test scores, said Youngblood.

Her involvement with the AMOS project also led to service as co-chairperson of a housing task force formed to address the foreclosure crisis in Springfield Township and in Greater Cincinnati as a whole.

"Issues like this have an impact on the entire community," Youngblood said. "Homes are abandoned and closed up, then people ransack them. Look what this is doing to housing values in our neighborhoods."

Issues affecting young women have been of particular interest to Youngblood. As a result, she also served on a youth crime and drug task force formed in response to the concerns of social workers that there are few local facilities geared toward evaluating young girls who end up in the court system. "These are girls that are only in the system because of issues at home, not because they did anything wrong," Youngblood explained. "As I woman, I’m concerned about the welfare and future of these young girls."

The task force, she said, along with area social workers, was pleased when the Hillcrest School, managed by Hamilton County Juvenile Court, opened a 12-bed unit for girls in 2004, offering a comprehensive psychological assessment that assists the court in dispositional planning.

In May of 2006, AMOS joined other Gamaliel Foundation affiliates from Cleveland and Youngstown in convening a meeting of 200 faith and civic leaders from throughout the state to examine the challenges and solutions to the plight of Ohio’s cities and older suburbs. Numerous local officials participated, joining the Ohio Gamaliel affiliates in the emergence of a cooperative effort between urban officials and the faith community to have a stronger voice in the state capital. Locally, AMOS continues this work by expanding its outreach to the mayors of Cincinnati’s "First Suburbs," communities that are racially and economically diverse, yet subjected to state and local policies which threaten that diversity. AMOS is also attempting to build new relationships that will ensure stable, integrated communities.

The group’s most recent victory was winning the inclusion of low-income and minority workers in the contract for the Banks construction, an $800 million public project planned along Cincinnati’s riverfront. Through AMOS’ efforts, two African Americans were added to the project’s oversight board and were able to renegotiate the contract to include AMOS’
demands. AMOS is also continuing its efforts to advance workforce development and job opportunities for minorities and low-income people, Youngblood said. "I'm part of AMOS because I think this group has such great potential," she noted. "If you can get religious congregations to come together to work on issues in their community, it creates power. That's how injustices are corrected. I would encourage other parishes to get involved in AMOS to develop organized systemic solutions to address the concerns in their communities."

Each fall, the members of Justice Action Mercy (JAM) in Springfield begin a comprehensive listening process in their congregations to determine systemic community problems that need to be addressed. They talk to people in the local churches. They listen. They document and compile data on problems the congregants feel negatively impact the community and the poor.

At an annual assembly in January, the JAM members vote to determine the problems to be worked on. Committees are formed and they research the problems and ways to address them. By spring the issues have been identified.

Each May at an action assembly, JAM challenges appropriate targets, those who have the power to initiate change, to work with them to address and resolve the issues. Examples of systemic targets are corporate heads, public officials, and legal officials.

JAM, which was founded in 2000, is made up of 16 churches in Springfield, representing a variety of faiths.

"It's a faith-based, grassroots organization that holds systems accountable to do justice," said Carolyn Patton, a parishioner at St. Raphael/St. Joseph Parish in Springfield and a board member of JAM. "Participation in JAM is a way to live out aspects of Catholic social teaching.

"It is an ecumenical organization, and it has a premise that what is one person's problem is everyone's problem," Patton said. "What happens to you happens to me because I care about you is an important philosophy of the group."

Over the years, the group has developed issues to tackle crime, transportation, slum landlords and is working with county officials to create a drug court.

Several years ago, JAM targeted a national grocery store chain that has several stores in the area, including one on Springfield’s urban south side. That store wasn't as well maintained as others in the city, didn’t have the same variety of the goods and wasn’t very appealing, Patton said.

As part of the action plan to address the issue, JAM members surveyed shoppers at the store, compiled the information, and met with corporate officials.

The company responded and made obvious improvements to the store and the goods sold there.
At JAM’s most recent action assembly, the group opted to push for the creation of a drug court and access to jobs through increased public transportation in Clark County. More than 500 people attended the meeting and signed hundreds of post cards urging the judicial system to take initial steps to start the court and meet with a JAM committee by the end of May.

The cards were delivered to a judge’s office and others were mailed in, said Marilyn Demma, an original JAM board member and St. Joseph/Raphael parishioner.

"You want to demonstrate the power of the organization to make change happen," she said. "We are surfacing the kinds of problems that people understand exist in the community and assign a committee. It researches that problem and discusses a winnable issue."

In a past action campaign, JAM developed cards that residents can use to anonymously report crime hot spots to police. It was an immediate solution to an issue.

"Everybody likes to be a winner," Demma said. "Everybody likes to be on a winning team. In addition to bringing about a more just community, you are also building an enthusiasm and a commitment for doing justice work."

Faithful citizenship: Rights and responsibilities
It’s only fitting that Sister of Notre Dame Maria Francine Stacey works out of a former school building, because education is part of her mission.

As director of the archdiocesan Dayton Hispanic Ministry, Sister Maria wants to change the perception some people have of immigrants while acknowledging a need for immigration regulation.

"We need to see it as a global issue," she said. "People are suffering because of greater issues than what we can see sometimes."

Despite some opinions, immigrants do pay taxes, want to assimilate into American culture, want to learn English and aren’t a drain on our medical system, Sister Maria said.

At the same time, immigrants experience heartache in leaving their family behind to seek a better working opportunities across the border.

"They are doing it for their children," Sister Maria said. "The separation of the family is very difficult for them."

In the northern areas of the archdiocese, immigrants come to work on the farms and in a tomato processing plant. There are dozens of immigrant families in some of the northern counties. Immigrant workers are also found in poultry and other plants across the archdiocese.

American immigration reform should accommodate immigrant workers, who are a key part of our country’s future, Sister Maria said.

"We can’t keep defending a law that is broken and ignoring the person that is suffering because of it," she said. "When we really look at it, that person is vital to the economy of our country."

From a large office and workspace at Holy Family parish in Dayton, Sister Maria and her volunteers minister to Hispanics, doing everything from providing sacramental preparation to assisting with employment.

Providing Spanish Masses and traditional Hispanic services — such as a Three Kings Celebration in January and acting out the Passion during Lent — help keep immigrants connected to their faith in this country.

"The faith is overwhelming for these people," Sister Maria said. "We try to worship with them in a way that is traditional for them. (We) do things that were part of their faith experience in their country."

Spanish Masses are also offered each weekend in the northern areas of the archdiocese.
"If they pray in Spanish, that’s how they talk to God," said Nelda Schwab, a volunteer with the Dayton Hispanic Ministry. "It’s a foreign language if they have to speak in English."

Other services of Hispanic ministry include English as a second language classes, health issues, integration into schools.

On a recent day in her office, Sister Maria spoke with a Hispanic immigrant in rapid-fire Spanish, and then turned her attention to an English-speaking visitor.

"She does a fantastic job," Schwab said. "She is tireless in it. She is so present to the people and so caring."

In Cincinnati, Margaret Singer of Su Casa has developed a play on immigration that illustrated how immigrants come to our country. A number of parishes, including St. Bartholomew’s, St. James in White Oak and St. James in Wyoming, St. Mary in Oxford and Immaculate Heart of Mary in Anderson, have hosted events to educate parishioners about immigration issues. For more information on these parishes and programs, contact the archdiocesan Catholic Social Action Office at 513-421-3131.

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One parish’s immigration lesson

WASHINGTON — Father Cathal Gallagher is bringing his parishioners in rural South Dakota an unwelcome lesson in the fine details of U.S. immigration law.

Father Gallagher, 58, a Columban missionary, went to the state a decade ago at the invitation of Bishop Robert J. Carlson, then-head of the Diocese of Sioux Falls, S.D. The Irish priest currently is pastor of parishes in three prairie towns. After spending 22 years working in Japan, Father Gallagher was surprised by how taken he was with South Dakota. As soon as he was eligible, he applied for permanent U.S. residency. Five years ago he was told that his "green card" was approved and would arrive within two weeks, only to learn much later that his application was actually denied.

Now, unless the Department of Homeland Security office of Citizenship and Immigration Services can be persuaded to reverse its denial of his application, Father Gallagher will have to head back to Ireland by July 1.

He’s had a seven-year adventure in the U.S. immigration system, with help throughout the process from the Sioux Falls Diocese and a Washington-based attorney with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, known as CLINIC.

Anne Marie Gibbons, director of CLINIC’s program for religious worker visas, said it’s common for someone’s visa that authorizes him to live and work in the U.S. to expire while he’s waiting to hear the results of an application for another visa or for permanent residency.
Gibbons said religious workers are especially prone to out-of-status problems because, unlike other categories of workers or family-visa holders, they are not permitted to submit simultaneous applications that might protect them from a lapse in coverage.

Patti Ward, a St. Thomas Aquinas parishioner, says Father Gallagher’s immigration problems have been eye-opening for the community.

"None of us has ever been involved in immigration problems," Ward said. "Some people don’t want to understand. They’re just mad."

Not only are they angry that their beloved pastor may have to leave, but some see the Latino immigrant workers at nearby dairy farms and factories and make comparisons, said Ward.

"They don’t understand how (the Latinos) can be in the U.S. and Father can’t," she said.

Father Gallagher, however, said that "here in the Dakotas' people’s eyes have been opened that No. 1, you don’t have to have a Hispanic face or speak Spanish to have immigration problems, and No. 2, the government system isn’t working as it should." — CNS

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*A groundbreaking ceremony for the new Clermont County Homeless Shelter was held in April. SALT, the joint parish social action commission for St. Andrew/St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parishes in Milford, took an active part in soliciting funds for construction by writing letters to the churches of Clermont County. The shelter will serve the homeless, giving them a "hand up" until they can find a place to live and a job if needed. Members of SALT are pictured with the executive director and coordinator of Clermont County Community Services, a non-profit agency that manages the shelter*
Faithful Citizenship: Parishes reach out to those in need

The option for the poor and vulnerable is demonstrated in myriad ways

ARCHDIOCESE — Three parishes that comprise a single pastoral region are reaching out to those in need both in the parishes and in the community as a whole.

The parishes, Corpus Christi, Queen of Martyrs and Our Lady of Mercy in Dayton, have separate St. Vincent de Paul conferences serving those in need locally.

"The challenge is for them to be able to help with the increasing calls that we have," said Pam Long, lay ecclesial minister of evangelization for the parishes. "We get many, many calls for assistance."

In addition, Our Lady of Mercy and Corpus Christi support Assumption Food Pantry, while Queen of Martyrs assists the Northeast Food Pantry, which is operated by a group outside the parish.

In another unique project, Our Lady of Mercy helps match parishioners who have used appliances and furniture with those who need such items. Basically, parishioners who have items to give away call the parish, which tries to arrange a match.

"It’s a free clearinghouse," Long said. "The person who receives it is asked to come with friends who have a truck and be able to move it. The idea is to keep as simple and as free as possible."

The pastoral region is also active in bringing the Eucharist to Catholics at Riverside Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. Parishioners take holy Communion to the nursing home three weeks a month, and the pastoral region has Mass at the center monthly.

A parishioner who lives at Mercy Siena Retirement Community also takes Holy Communion there after daily morning Mass.

The parishes have also worked on homelessness in the area through the Weavers of Justice coalition and have had visitors speak on the issue, taken a stand against the death penalty, have been active in fighting payday loans, and are active in Leaders for Equality and Action in Dayton, an interfaith group.

Another ministry serves people who have lost a spouse.

"It’s really a wonderful thing where people are looking out for one another in a variety of ways," Long said.

In order to help those directly in their local faith community, a new program will help parishioners who need a ride to Sunday Mass get there. The pastoral region is making plans to rent a Chaminade-Julienne High School bus to provide transportation to Mass.

Parishioners have been trying to give
rides to those who need it, but logistics made it difficult, Long said.

Some of those parishioners in need of transportation have been immigrants, including a number of Sudanese families who have moved into the community.

"We have to use whatever we can to help them participate in the Eucharist," Long said. "That often is what sustained them when they were fleeing their country or were in exile waiting for immigration to the United States."

It's important to evangelize people who really want to go to Mass, she said, adding the elderly parishioners can also take advantage of the transportation.

"That's another way that we show a preferential option for the poor," Long said. "People come to understand the very basic needs of folks that are currently in their midst and what they faced in another part of the world. It brings home the sense of global solidarity."

The members of St. Andrew and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parishes in Milford have found a meaningful way to collaborate and put their faith into practice through their joint Social Action Leadership Team (SALT).

According to Jerry Braun of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, SALT was formed after members of both parishes took part in Just Faith, an in-depth adult faith formation program designed to deepen understanding of and commitment to the Gospel’s call to build a more just society.

"We wanted to do something with the knowledge and background we gained from Just Faith, so we decided to form SALT and develop other activities related to social action," Braun explained. "Both our parishes had traditionally been involved in providing direct assistance in charity type things, such as helping with food, rent and utilities through St. Vincent de Paul, but little was being done on the justice side and we felt it was time to become active in justice issues at the local, regional, national and international levels."

SALT's commitment to working for justice is reflected in its mission statement, which reads, "In response to our baptismal call to share in the mission of Jesus Christ, we strive to empower our parishes of St. Andrew and St. Elizabeth Seton to develop a greater awareness of and participation in the social dimension of the church. To this end, we work in solidarity on behalf of the poor and vulnerable to bring about a more just, hope-filled, and compassionate society."

Among SALT’s goals is providing direct service to individuals, families or groups in need, especially those whose need is the result of structural injustice. SALT has developed a resource guide describing the agencies in Clermont County that support the poor and the vulnerable. Other examples include SALT’s support for the construction of new homeless shelter in Clermont County, along with rallying other area
churches to donate. Now under construction, the shelter is expected to be completed in the fall. SALT is also working with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, a response to homelessness that combines religious congregations with full-time professionals to reintegrate families into the community.

Another of SALT’s goals is to engage in and promote activities directed toward the change of unjust social problems. The group has sponsored educational activities on social justice issues and written advocacy letters to legislators. In conjunction with the archdiocesan Catholic Social Action Office, Social Action Commission and the Greater Cincinnati Parish Collaborative, SALT is holding "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility" hosted by Father Rob Waller, pastor of St. Andrew Parish, on July 12.

SALT is working for justice through the administration of its Empowerment Fund as well. According to Barbara Aluotto, director of religious education at St. Andrew Parish, the faith community, which supports the fund through a monthly collection, is "very generous with its support."

Nominations for grant recipients generally come from the SALT team, she said. The grants are designed to address the issue of poverty in two ways, Aluotto explained, by empowering a group or individual to break the cycle of poverty and raising awareness of the devastation of poverty and its roots. Grants from the Empowerment Fund have provided assistance at the local, national and international levels. One grant enabled an area man on a limited income to repair his tractor so he could continue to make a living. Another provided assistance for the House of Peace, an emergency shelter for female victims of domestic violence and their children.

The Empowerment Fund has also provided micro loans to small businesses in other countries, enabling the working poor to make strides toward economic independence. In addition, the fund has supported the ministry of a missionary in Africa and supplied computers for a school in Guatemala.

Aluotto feels the ministry of the SALT team enables members of both parishes to recognize that "we're all responsible for one another. It calls our faith communities to participation and the awareness that we must live in solidarity with the poor."

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**Dignity of work and rights of workers**

*July 4th, 2008*

By Eileen Connelly, OSU and David Eck
ARCHDIOCESE — Last Feb. 9, members of the JustFaith groups at four area parishes — Our Lord Christ the King, St. Columban, St. Margaret of York and St. John the Baptist in Dry Ridge — participated in a Journey to Justice retreat that raised their awareness about some of the issues that local day workers face.

During the retreat, held at Peaslee Neighborhood Center in Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, participants met representatives from the Cincinnati Interfaith Worker Center, which serves as the parent organization for the Day Labor Organizing Project and the Cincinnati Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform and provides extensive legal and human rights services for poor, low wage and immigrant workers.

Day laborers are hired and paid one day at a time, with no promise that work will be available in the future. They are frequently hired by employment agencies that specialize in contracts for manual labor in areas such as factory work, construction and manufacturing.

George Harris, a day laborer, and Don Sherman, executive director of the Interfaith Worker Center, were on hand to discuss some of the injustices they said were faced by laborers at the Rumpke Recycling Center in St. Bernard through a contract with a local temporary agency.

For example, the workers had to arrive at the unheated day labor hall an hour and a half early to learn whether they would have work for the day, then wait for transportation to the job site. In the past, the cost of transportation, along with an equipment charge for items such as work gloves, was deducted from the laborers’ pay of just seven dollars an hour. This has since changed after the passage of a motion by Cincinnati City Council, Sherman said. Workers were also subject to a long wait for their paychecks upon returning to the day labor hall, he added, resulting in them putting in a 10- or 11-hour day, but only getting paid for eight.

Steps have been taken to address such injustices, Sherman said, including the passage of another motion by city council that will require any contractor whose bid is accepted to handle recycling next year to pay a living wage of $10.80 per hour without benefits.

In addition, the Cincinnati Interfaith Worker Center has been the driving force behind an effort to establish a non-profit day labor hall, Sherman noted, and has worked closely with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio to secure a grant for the project, which would include additional training for day workers and seeking ways to help them secure permanent employment.

"We’re grateful to the JustFaith groups for listening and to those who made Rumpke know they were concerned about the treatment of the workers," Sherman said. "There have been real changes made because of the efforts of the Catholic community."

Participants found the retreat to be an enlightening experience. "I was unaware of what the day workers go through," said Peg Walker, who along
Just Faith coordinator at St. Columban’s last year. "The poor working conditions are intolerable, and it’s good to see they’re working on that. Changes definitely need to be made."

"It was a real testament to the challenges and frustrations that the workers face. You can imagine why they get frustrated and why they give up," added Carol Carlin, also of St. Columban Parish. "Events like the retreat are the most effective way to help people understand the issues. It’s important that we come face to face with those who are involved."

Roger Hoying, chair of the northern Catholic Rural Life conference, said the plunges give farmers the opportunity to share their own views on the issues.

"It lets them hear our side of the story," said Hoying, a dairy and grain farmer in Minster. "We treat the animals the best we can because if you don’t treat them well you don’t make a profit."

The rural plunges evolved from a similar program that immerses UD students in the urban city so they can experiences issues connected with living there, Cardilino said.

"One of the other really neat things that students talk about as a result of their rural plunge experience is that they are really moved by the strong sense of community that exists among the farmers up there," Cardilino said. "It’s a very, very different lifestyle. They appreciate the closeness of the community."

In the eastern part of the archdiocese in the St. Martin’s Deanery, the Catholic Rural Life Conference also advocates for the dignity of farmers, farm workers and others involved in rural life.

Last January, the conference held an event to enable interaction between local growers and buyers. In addition the conference is working to help those that want to begin a farming operations.

The conference was also active in lobbying for small farmers during the debate over the farm bill, said Pat Hornschemeier, chair of the group.

To the north, about a dozen students from the University of Dayton take part in semi-annual "rural plunges" that give them a taste of what life is like on a working farm. The students, some of whom have never been part of farm life, do chores, work with animals and tend fields.

The mission helps students understand the moral and social issues of farmers and farm laborers. Those challenges include a changing landscape, environmental issues, and a sense of where food comes from and that the food they choose to buy and consume is a moral choice, said Nick Cardilino, director of the Center for Social Concern at UD.

"(Hosts) really expose our students to so many of these important issues," Cardilino said. "There’s a lot of great reflecting on farm life and the kinds of issues faced by family farmers."
While there were some positives in the end version of the bill, such as more funding being made available for promoting local foods, the group was disappointed that the bill didn’t target more commodity subsidies to family farmers and young people trying to get into farming.

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**Solidarity through humanitarian assistance and fair trade**

July 11, 2008

By Eileen Connelly, OSU and David Eck

ARCHDIOCESE — There’s nothing quite as meaningful as helping others in need to bring a faith community together. That’s exactly what happened at St. Ann Parish in Groesbeck when parishioners raised funds for the Heifer Project during Lent.

Founded in 1944, Heifer International is a humanitarian organization that works to end world hunger. Through livestock, training and "passing on the gift," Heifer has helped more than eight and a half million families in 125 countries improve their quality of life and move toward greater self-reliance. Heifer helps build strong communities because each project participant agrees to pass on the gift of animal offspring, training or skills to another family in need.

HEIFER INTERNATIONAL/DARC KIEFEL

"Passing on the gift" is a Heifer International cornerstone. Participants give offspring of their Heifer provided livestock to others, in an ever-widening circle of hope. Here, a woman in Nepal passes on a goat in a ceremonial setting.
Diane Ferrier, director of religious education at St. Ann’s, said the parish first became acquainted with Heifer International last year when the school raised more than $2,000 for the organization. It seemed only natural to get the whole parish involved in another collection during the season of Lent.

The parish set a goal of raising $5,000 as part of Heifer International’s "Fill the Ark" program. Enthusiasm for the project was generated through announcements at Mass, notices in the bulletin and a "Fill the Ark" poster drawn by the children.

Parishioner response was overwhelming, Ferrier said. "It had to have been the Holy Spirit at work. I stood in the gathering space as people left church and some would just hand me $100 bills. Sometimes it was just a dollar, or the kids with their pennies and nickels, but every little bit helps. We raised $6,200. It was just phenomenal."

In addition, some families used ark banks provided by the organization. As they filled their ark-shaped bank with coins, they met the animals in Heifer’s Ark: an alpaca, bee, camel, chicken, cow, donkey, duck, fish, goose, guinea pig, horse, llama, pig, rabbit, sheep, water buffalo and yak. They learned how these animals help families through wool, honey and milk and in other ways. They also learned more about the environmental benefits of using animals wisely on a small farm.

After sending their check to Heifer International, the parish received a beautiful wood-framed plaque. It will be hung in the gathering space as a testament of how the project brought the parish together.

"I was so happy to see how many parishioners supported this effort," Ferrier said. "I think the appeal is that the project helps people helps themselves. It’s more than just giving them money. It provides a practical way to help people improve their lives and their communities."

In Dayton, an emphasis on fair trade at some parishes has helped promote solidarity with developing countries.

A few years ago, Cathy Magness, a parishioner at Ascension Parish in Kettering, was looking for a project to undertake as part of her studies in the archdiocesan Lay Pastoral Ministry Program (LPMP).

She took on a monthly fair trade sale, something that had been identified in a parish mission. The fair trade program guarantees producers of food and other goods a fair wage for their work. In addition to the monthly sale, fair trade products are available regularly through the parish.

"My goal was to not only sell the fair trade products but to continue to educate the parishioners," she said. "We’re doing it as part of Catholic social teaching."

Typical fair trade products at Ascension include coffee, tea and chocolate. The quality of the items is high, and fair trade promotes support of small farm cooperatives and ensures a fair wage.

"The money that’s paying for the product goes directly to farmers in
Third World developing countries to help support their families, build schools, increase their production," Magness said, "instead of the money going directly to large corporations."

The archdiocesan Catholic Social Action office, along with Catholic Relief Services, helps parishes get involved in fair trade. The program is not charity but simply a channel for a fair exchange.

"It guarantees fair wages, especially to the small farmers, the laborers, the artisans," said Laura Libertore, interim regional director of the Social Action office. "It frequently removes the (middleman) from the flow of trade. In some ways it guarantees that the people who actually produce get a fairer and better wage. They actually can make enough money to support themselves."

At Ascension, parishioners appreciate the quality of the products and the fact that they are helping developing countries, Magness said. The parish sells about $300-350 worth of goods in a typical month.

In addition, teachers at Ascension have incorporated fair trade into their lesson plans.

"Sales are increasing regularly and people come up and tell me about fair trade," Magness said. "I know that they’re more aware of it."

A larger fair trade sale, which involves people from multiple parishes, is held the second Saturday of each December at Bergamo Center in Dayton. That
sale features everything from unique gifts to gourmet food.

Several hundred people attend the one-day sale, which is managed by 80-100 volunteers. Last year’s sale, the fourth annual, generated about $30,000 in sales, said Cheryl Griffin, a parishioner at St. Albert the Great in Kettering and a committee member of the fair trade sale.

"It's not just a sale, but it's a place where people can come and hear about what social justice is," Griffin said. "We would have . . . an educational focus for the shoppers."

Faithful Citizenship: Caring for God’s creation

July 18, 2008

By David Eck and Eileen Connelly, OSU

Faith and the environment are inextricably linked

ARCHDIOCESE — One might not think of science and faith as being intertwined, but Marianist Sister Leanne Jablonski is working to bridge that gap.

Sister Leanne, director of the Marianist Environmental Education Center (MEEC) in Dayton, uses science and spirituality to promote lifestyles that are ecologically sustaining and environmentally just.

"We're taking the best science and using that to educate the faith community and the community at large to make ecological sustainable sources," she said. "It's one of our strengths as a center."

The center is based at Mount St. John in Dayton, where Bergamo Center is also located.

Through outreach presentations, workshops and visitors to Mount St. John and Bergamo Center, the MEEC touches thousands of lives annually. Topics include environmental education, climate change, ecology and spirituality and land stewardship. It is how the message of environmental awareness is spread.

"I think previous generations, their lives were intertwined in the rhythms of the land. They knew where food came from and understood the rhythms," Sister Leanne said.
"Humans aren't apart from (the earth) we are part of it."

Among the core strategies of the center are restoring the land at Mt. St. John back to its original state, keeping the ecosystems in balance. In the mid-1980s, a gravel pit from the construction of nearby Interstate 675 was left on the land, and restoration of the area was soon started.

CNS PHOTO FROM REUTERS

In 2005 Pope Benedict XVI told professor and students at Rome’s Sacred Heart University that even in today’s culture, it is “possible to merge faith and science.

"All we’ve got to work with is what we’ve got from the beginning," she said. "We’re responsible to be God’s (strength) in the beautiful earth we have been given and to care for it."

Other core strategies include helping people connect lifestyle decisions on social justice impact, fostering community, and collaborating within the Marianist family for education for sustainable living.

Founded in 1991, the center now has a full-time staff of three and hundreds of volunteers.

As part of her outreach, Sister Leanne talks about humans’ ecological footprint, reducing our consumption, and how that relates to Catholic social
teaching. Overuse of resources negatively impacts those in other parts of the world, for example. Lack of clean air and water affects human dignity.

So many of the sacraments and symbols of our faith — water, bread, wine, God's spirit in nature — are tied to the earth.

"We need to just live more sustainably," she said.

Members of St. Mary's Church and Catholic Campus Ministry in Oxford have come to recognize the connection between their faith and the environment through the efforts of the parish's Environmental Stewardship Committee.

Formed last October as a subcommittee of the parish's Social Justice Commission, its goal is to help parishioners explore the process of how our faith calls us to protect and preserve God's creation and address current environmental issues at St. Mary's and in the local community, according to chairperson Don Pestana.

The group began, he said, by familiarizing themselves with various Catholic resources related to the issue, including the U.S. Catholic Bishops' statement "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good." In addition, the committee has taken a close look at parish buildings to determine how to best implement environmentally conscious practices and conserve energy. It is an ongoing process, said Pestana, because the four structures were built between the 1920s and 1960s and have complex heating and cooling systems. One simple, yet meaningful, practice the parish may consider is the use of green cleaning products as are being used at the nearby Miami University's residence halls. A parish energy audit is also planned, he said.

The committee has engaged in a number of activities to help educate parishioners on the issue. This includes creating a display of materials on church teaching and resources that offer practical actions parishioners can implement in their daily lives. In addition, thought provoking quotes about the care of creation are regularly featured in the parish bulletin. Parishioners have also been asked to sign the St. Mary's Environmental Stewardship Pledge through which they commit to taking 10 practical conservation steps at home on behalf of the entire faith community. The pledge goal is 100 parish households, Pestana said, and, to date, 30 pledges have been signed. Parishioners have also been provided with a handout, adapted from U.S. Catholic magazine, that lists Scripture passages focusing on environmental stewardship, along with ways Catholics can live as good stewards, for example, using cloth grocery bags instead of plastic, walking or biking instead of driving and composting garbage. Also included are 10 spiritual ways to grow as good stewards, such as thanking God for the gift of the sun upon waking in the morning, spending time each day in nature, and preparing and eating a meal with others at home in a sacramental manner.
Pestana said some parishioners have also taken a class through the Cincinnati Earth Institute that they found helpful. Because it was lacking the Catholic social teaching perspective, members of the stewardship committee are developing a final chapter for the course materials to include prayers, the U.S. Bishops’ statement and various other faith-based resources. The committee also sponsored a talk by William Rauckhorst, a St. Mary’s parishioner and professor of physics at Miami University. Some 60 parishioners attended the presentation, "Energy Ethics in an Era of Global Climate Change and Peak Oil," during which Rauckhorst stressed the lead role that religious congregations must play in helping form both our individual and national conscience on energy and environmental issues.

Aided by the enthusiastic involvement of students from Miami University, the faith community of St. Mary’s is also examining these issues from a broader perspective as a charter member of Ohio Interfaith Power and Light. An affiliate of the Regeneration Project’s national Interfaith Power and Light campaign, its mission is to mobilize a religious response to climate change and to promote energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.

As a father, care of creation is a critical and very personal issue for Pestana, and he has been pleased to see the positive parish response to the committee’s efforts. "People are seeing that the little steps really do add up and it’s been great to see all the energy they have for this," he said. "I’ve had some profound spiritual experiences in nature and feel that the connection is vitally important. We need to recognize that environmental issues are a looming crisis and we need to address them now for the sake of future generations."