

Changing the world, one prayer, one cup of coffee at a time

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By Special to the Intermountain Catholic

Catholic social teaching rests on a firm belief in the sanctity of human life and the dignity of all human beings. Every day we see challenges to these beliefs. Immigration issues, nuclear weapons, war, and revolutions in the Middle East and Africa, al Qaida, abortion, capital punishment, terrorism, corporate greed, unemployment, children starving to death daily by the thousands, slavery, racism, sexism...the list is endless.

The institutional Church responds in a number of ways: Vatican statements, papers from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, massive relief efforts from Catholic Relief Services. But this article asks the simpler question: What can we, as individuals or small groups, do on a daily basis to help bring God's Kingdom of peace and justice to our world? After all, we can't change "The World" without changing our own little world first.

We have a lifetime journey ahead of us, but we must begin with small steps, steps we can take in our own daily lives. These can be as simple as purchasing "fair trade" items at the market, reminding people in our daily conversations that the value of an immigrant family is no less than the value of our own, recycling our trash, and reading articles about our Church's teachings on these important issues.

Maybe, just maybe, we can even change our world by simply enjoying a good cup of coffee. A couple of years ago I read an article in the Intermountain Catholic about a parish priest in Guatemala (Monsignor Greg Schaffer) who had organized a co-op of coffee growers in his parish to grow, harvest, package and market their own coffee. I did a little research and found that with the generous help of many, including his parents, the co-op members were able to buy their own land, build their own facilities and begin an incredible journey that would provide a living wage for the families involved. Instead of working for the American conglomerates at below-poverty wages, they were building their own farms and providing for their families. "Juan-Ana Coffee" has helped transform the Mayan community of San Lucas Toliman from the poorest of the poor into a thriving, growing community of over 650 co-op member families.

The "Juan-Ana Coffee" program benefits extend beyond the co-op families. It also provides one small step toward solving our immigration issues. One of the largest causes of immigration to America is the lack of employment opportunities in Mexico and Central America. Most immigrants would choose to stay in their own countries with their families if they could provide for them, if they could find work. "Juan-Ana Coffee" allows over 650 families to build meaningful lives where they live, where they want to live.

With the help of the Parish Peace and Justice Committee, parishioners at Saint Therese of the Child Jesus Parish in Midvale are able to purchase "Juan-Ana Coffee." It is excellent coffee, no more expensive than what you would pay for a pound of coffee at your neighborhood coffee shop. The best part is we know we are standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters at San Lucas Toliman, helping them

provide meaningful jobs, supporting their community and families, and helping them to stay in Guatemala, the place they choose to call home.

Wow, whoever thought that getting up on a Saturday morning, spending a few moments in prayer and enjoying a cup of coffee would change my own little world, much less change "The World"?

For more information on Catholic social teaching, buying coffee, and changing the world, check out www.USCCB.org (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops), and www.sanlucasmision.org.

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