

Dorothy Day is Pretty Cool
Mary Carlson

On September 1, 2010, I officially began my year as part of CFJ's FaithJustice Fellowship. Since then, I have found myself perplexed on more than a few occasions as to how I, a recent college graduate from Michigan, have ended up standing at the threshold of a path that I feel both terrified and enthralled to begin treading. How did I decide to dedicate a year to learning more about social justice, considering it was a phrase that barely ever passed between my lips before the summer of 2009?

Social justice is not something to which I had given much thought before the spring and summer of 2009. Although I had taken a college class in Catholic Social Thought and participated in a service-learning trip, I had little regard for the principle. Sure, Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day is pretty cool and feeding hungry people is swell, but I felt no personal calling to it whatsoever.

I had several conversations throughout my latter years of college with a close friend who participated in CFJ's LeaderworX program in 2007. He tried to talk me into applying for LeaderworX 2008 and I told him he was crazy. He played the role of the obnoxious best friend very well – so well that by November of 2008 I found myself e-mailing the WorX Programs Coordinator about the possibility of joining CFJ's Summer 2009 team.

Upon being accepted as a WorX Program Team Member for the summer of 2009, I was ecstatic for reasons I still cannot explain. There was something about living in community with other young Catholics, working with youth, and learning more about social justice that deeply and inexplicably appealed to me. And so, on June 11th, I jumped in the car of a fellow team member who also happened to be from Michigan, and off we went to New Jersey.

To say that my experience changed my life that summer is an understatement. During the summer of 2009, I experienced the closest community of people with which I have ever been a part. I recognized the face of Christ in the poor I served in

such a powerful way that I was brought to tears more than a few times. The kids who I was supposed to be teaching about faith and justice taught me more about the true, uncomplicated love of God than all the classes I encountered as part of my theology major. And most of all, the summer broke my heart and filled it with an ache for the poor and forgotten of the world.

After I said my goodbyes and came back to Michigan, I was terrified of becoming a complete hypocrite. I feared that after spending my summer talking to kids and community members about living in a way that recognizes the plight of the poor and seeks to be in Christ-centered solidarity with them, I would go home and change nothing about my life. Thankfully, this did not happen as I had feared. Although I was unable to volunteer as much as I wanted, I was able to continue the process of molding my mindset and lifestyle to reflect my newfound passions for social justice and solidarity. One aspect of this involved my decision to complete a year of service after graduation. Without a doubt, this is where God sent the biggest surprise my way.

After considering one program and then jumping whole-heartedly into another, I found myself in need of a recommendation letter. I emailed CFJ's Brian Covino to request a letter and received an e-mail shortly thereafter stating that he would not only give me a recommendation letter, but that CFJ wanted me to restart its year-round volunteer initiative, as a CFJ FaithJustice Fellowship Volunteer. Not exactly the response I was expecting! All I remember from reading that e-mail is that I was struck into such a shocked silence that my best friend had to finally come up and read the e-mail herself after asking me about 20 times what it said.

Sometimes I still find that shocked silence resonating inside of me – moving across the country to volunteer for a year certainly takes some adjusting! And despite the fact that it's a very difficult adjustment at times, I know without a doubt that CFJ is my home for the year. I am blessed to be surrounded by a community of people who share my passion for the Catholic faith and vision for a more just world grounded in

God's love. It is truly a gift to have the opportunity to have an entire year to serve, grow, and learn, and I could not ask for a better organization than CFJ with whom to spend it.

Reprints of this article are permitted. Please cite the CFJ Newsletter in any reprint or usage and inform CFJ of its use. For communications regarding reprints of this article, please email bradley@faithjustice.org.

The Center for FaithJustice is a 501(c)(3) organization with the mission of providing transformative experiences of faith in action through a passionate commitment to service, peace and justice.