

What Is the Center for FaithJustice About? **John M. Bradley**

What is the Center for FaithJustice about? We could start to answer the aforementioned question by discussing the numerous programs created by the Center for FaithJustice, such as the community service, justice education and faith development experiences known as the WorX programs; the training and resourcing of lay ministers in our Ministry Advancement & Pastoral Support project; the full-time volunteer program, FaithJustice Fellowship; the SOFIA workshops and presentations encompassing theology, community building and/or service and justice. But the unifying idea behind all of these projects (as well as others under development) is truly what CFJ is about, and that is, we are focused on bringing about "right relationships." What do I mean?

There are two key words in our name, "Faith" and "Justice." Let's deal with the last one first. The word justice conjures up different visions for various people. For some, the scales of justice, along with a picture of an old judge in a black robe deciding the fate of an accused, immediately pops into their heads. For others, the mention of justice takes them back to Boston Harbor, Valley Forge, and Independence Hall, when the desire for political rights resulted in a war with the British. And for still others, justice means the struggles throughout the developing world for a restructuring of economic and social orders. Each one of these conceptions of justice involves at their essence a consideration of how people are to be in relation to each other. Thus, when we say that we at CFJ are committed to educating for justice, we are announcing that humanity is in continual need of understanding how to be in right (good, virtuous, equitable, just) relationships and that we are dedicated to help bring about those relationships. This vision of justice is all encompassing -- it leaves no person or social group on the



outside (as St. Paul told the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek ... slave nor free person ... male nor female...") and it sees every action as filled with an opportunity to do justice. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge shares this perspective when, as related by Kathleen Norris in Amazing Grace, he bridges the disciplines of poetry and religion: "Both prevent us ... from remaining in our 'own narrow sphere of action, and [our] own individual circumstances ... They bid us, while we are sitting in the dark at our little fire.... struggling with darkness, [to announce] that light which shall be common to all.'" The pursuit of justice is the journey of uniting our lights with the lights of billions of others -- to be in good and mutually beneficial relationship with each other.

As for the first term, Faith, it is in many ways indistinguishable from this understanding of justice. Faith, too, is about right relationship. The central focus of that dynamic is our relationship with God, but such a relationship undeniably must entail a change in our relationship with people. Faith is perhaps a more mysterious term than justice, but as Catholics, we are deeply immersed in mystery -- when gathering at the Eucharistic table to celebrate the real presence of God, while affirming Christ as both human and divine, by professing that Christ rose from the dead. Many of us struggle with these mysteries, and yet still we try to be people of faith. What we are engaged in is the ongoing attempt to be in relationship with something we don't fully understand and will never completely comprehend. Is that crazy? I think not. Who among us fully understands our best friends, our spouses, our children, our parents? And yet we remain in relation with them and strive to know them better. And this is what led us at CFJ to adopt the Trinity symbol as part of our logo. The Trinity is an articulation of a relationship, itself a mystery: God's three persons -- parent, child and spirit -- inviting us into relationship.

I presume, then, that we could have called the Center for FaithJustice the "Place Where Right Relationships are Forged," but it's a bit long. With your participation and support, CFJ is creating the conditions (the programs, the partnerships) for individuals and communities to reach beyond themselves, to serve and thus to begin

building relationships with the stranger, the abandoned, the forgotten poor. So call us whatever you want, just call on us.

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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.