The Parish is Where the Church Lives

Building a just society isn't easy. Just ask Sister Joan Jurski, OSF, Director of the Office of Peace and Justice, Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina. Her job is to help make Catholics aware of the Church's teachings in the areas of charity, justice and peace.

To do that means traveling the eastern half of North Carolina—54 counties, 96 parishes and 500,000 people. She gets her greatest joy working in parish social ministry helping create committees to identify and take action on peace and justice issues because, as Sister Joan says, "it's in the parishes where the real work gets done." Sister Joan left the traditional classroom 18 years ago and has been teaching in a different way ever since. It was a real culture shock going from a high school in suburban Detroit to rural North Carolina where more than half the parishioners speak Spanish, but she has made the transition and is now an avid Tar Heel.

Her job is to provide the resources parishes need to become involved in issues of charity, justice and peace. She makes presentations and conducts conferences on social teaching that promote life and dignity. She produces a newsletter (in English and Spanish) that parishes can use in their weekly bulletins and has a website where parishioners can go to get support materials.

"Justice isn't comfortable for a lot of people," said Sister Joan. "Helping them connect their faith with political issues like immigration and the death penalty isn't easy, but it is something that needs to be done. I take great satisfaction in seeing my nudges turn into action. This isn't my job. This is who I am."

And her work "of joyful servanthood among all people" is being noticed. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) named Sister Joan the 2009 Diocesan Director of the Year. She went to Washington D.C. in February to receive her award and told the gathering that the CCHD is one of the most effective evangelization efforts of her rural diocese. This is often the first place people meet Catholics and their encounter comes in the form of providing financial assistance to help them improve their lives.

Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words.
– attributed to St. Francis of Assisi