

December 2008

## Highlights of this Issue

### Holidays, Materialism, and Social Justice



- This issue of the NACYML News looks at some of the issues surrounding the holidays and how they relate to our Christian faith and every day living.
- The holiday season can be extremely busy and hectic, but we hope that you are able to find a few quiet moments to settle back with a cup of tea or hot chocolate and enjoy the contributions to this month's issue.
- The entire NACYML Leadership Team and Communications Coordinating Committee wish you a blessed Advent and Christmas season, and may the Lord continue to bless each of you and your ministry. Thank you for being a part of NACYML!

#### Facing the Holidays

Holidays are about people. How can we face the people we love, and some we are called to love but have a hard time liking on a regular basis? Consider seeing them as the image of God that they are created to be. Whether or not Uncle Bill, who pokes fun at your pretend job, is your favorite person to encounter, he is a child of God and should be loved and appreciated as such.

[Read more of Katie's article...](#)

#### Helping Youth Respect and Defend Human Dignity

The identity question is one that practically all young people deal with. Our consumerist society is ready with an answer: that identity is the newest fashion of clothing, the most high-tech cell phone, or the number of friends one has on Facebook. Are we ready with an alternative answer? One important element of the Church's answer is this: people are more than what they have, what they produce, and what they do. Their identity is

#### From the Chair



Our family went to see the movie [Wall-E](#) recently. The movie opens with a scene of a deserted landscape. In this futuristic world, piles of discarded goods tower over buildings. It is the job of Wall-E, the title robot in the movie, to compact this trash into neat cubes. In the process, we learn that certain items capture Wall-E's attention and he collects these treasures to keep for himself. It becomes apparent later in the movie that it was the excessive consumerism of humans that resulted in the need to leave earth, literally, to find more space for their stuff. Seven hundred years after the last human has left earth, Wall-E has not made a dent in the compacting of the trash left behind.

[Read more of Mary's article...](#)

#### Some of the Benefits of NACYML Membership

During the low points in my career as

rooted in an inherent dignity based in the fact that all people are created in God's image. As the church's ministers to young people, we must teach young Catholics to value every human person for what he or she is—a beloved child of God—not what he or she has.

[Read more of Jill's article here...](#)

### Food Fast from Catholic Relief Services



According to [Business.com](#), there will be approximately 33.5 million teenagers in

the United States by the year 2010. This group of teenagers averages \$158 billion per year in disposable income. And the marketing industry is well aware of these facts. This kind of disposable income can lead to excessive consumerism. How can we as Catholic youth ministry leaders help teenagers understand how to live responsibly in a materialistic society?

[Read Kyle's recommendations here...](#)

### More and Bigger

We live in a culture and at a time when the road to happiness often means, buy more and buy bigger. More stuff, more alcohol, more food, bigger trucks, bigger hard drives, bigger houses, etc.

It is not the first time that a culture has been distracted by the belief that more stuff equates to more happiness...

In our education outreach with schools and detained youth, we teach the following financial goal: how do I live a simple life where I am not worried more about my possessions and my debt than I am about my relationships and living a meaningful life?

[Read more of Jerry's writing...](#)

a youth minister, I have felt the discouragement and sense of defeat that comes with having a vision for the young people of my parish that is not shared by those around me. NACYML has provided me with a link to a national network of youth ministers who share a common vision of what youth ministry can and should be in my parish and my neighboring parishes. My active involvement in NACYML has opened the door to participation in youth ministry at the national level...

[Continue reading Dean's article...](#)

### Recognizing and Challenging Extreme Materialism

How do we help young people realize how privileged and unjust the lifestyle of our nation is,



especially when that is what they see all around them? How do we help them become more person-oriented and less thing-oriented, less tied to consumerism and more committed to service of others?

[Continue reading Jim's article ...](#)

### The Musings of Michael Warren

Mike Warren has been in the kitchen for a long time, always inviting youth ministers to join him at the table for a nourishing feast of insights and life-centering conversation about what it means—for adults as well as teenagers—to be faithful followers of Jesus in our day and time.

Three decades ago, when the entire field of youth ministry was taking a 'developmental journey' with teenagers, the voice of one crying in the wilderness proclaimed, 'Pay attention to the social contexts of youth, to the cultural scripts we give them, to the ways they are manipulated by the media, the marketers, the military!'

[Read more of Mike's musings...](#)

*A Picture Is Worth...*

Articles in this newsletter correspond to the Core Competencies detailed in the National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers.


Look for the symbol in the article that indicates which core competency the article addresses.

To learn more about the standards, see the [resource page](#) which is always accessible from the newsletter navigation bar. It provides a summary of the core competencies and the specialized competencies for youth ministry leaders.





### Print the Newsletter!

Two print options offer streamlined process for printing *NACYML News*.

- Use your browser's print function or click on the  "Print this page" link at the bottom of the right-hand navigation column to print an individual page.
- Print the entire issue by using the link below. This will open a single PDF document made up of "printed pages" of each article in order. Or, download this PDF to your computer by right-clicking the link and selecting "Save Target As..." With the PDF file open, click the printer command in the Adobe Reader interface and the entire issue will be printed.



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## From the Chair

by Mary Mueller

Pastoral Associate for Youth Ministry

Good Shepherd Catholic Church, Shawnee, Kansas

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It is a Thursday as I drive to the office, and consider this column. Along the route to the parish, my eyes are drawn to the numerous signs at nearly every corner. Hand lettered, computer generated, or purchased at the local value center, each sign loudly proclaims the same information: Garage Sale/Yard Sale/Moving Sale!

The commute continues past multiple storage facilities—places where people who have more stuff than they have space for at their house or apartment often rent space for extra storage.

When our parish buildings were recently expanded to include a community center and gym, one of the top priorities was storage space!



*Why do we have so much stuff?*

### How Much Do We Need?

Our family went to see the movie *Wall-E* recently. The movie opens with a scene of a deserted landscape. In this futuristic world, piles of discarded goods tower over buildings. It is the job of Wall-E, the title robot in the movie, to compact this trash into neat cubes. In the process, we learn that certain items capture Wall-E's attention and he collects these treasures to keep for himself.

It becomes apparent later in the movie that it was the excessive consumerism of humans that resulted in the need to leave earth, literally, to find more space for their stuff. Seven hundred years after the last human has left earth, Wall-E has not made a dent in the compacting of the trash left behind.

We are encouraged, as are the characters in the movie, to buy more in order to save more, to stock up so as not to run out, to super-size our purchases. We learn that newer is better and replacement is preferable to repair. We are, as a culture, driven to consume and collect.

### Are Our Ministries Different?

I am tempted in my ministry with young people to assume I need more than I do. If I have more, I will be able to better compete with the church down the street. What resources are available to me? What is the newest technology to impress? How can the youth room be better, bigger, more comfortable? What prizes will I give away this week?

The notion that young people are drawn to 'stuff' permeates even our well-intentioned efforts to evangelize and minister. Conspicuous consumption and rampant consumerism are visible elements in the lives of our youth. Do we, as youth leaders, inadvertently play into the need for more, better, and newer in order to succeed? I know that I do at times.

### Far-Reaching Consequences

The consequences of our actions and purchasing habits can be far reaching. In a message to those gathered at Sydney Harbor for a World Youth Day event, Pope Benedict XVI said, "Perhaps reluctantly, we come to acknowledge that there are scars which mark the surface of our earth—erosion, deforestation, the squandering of the world's mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption."

Where are we going with this need to own and consume? Is the Wall-E movie prophetic in its gentle message?

Materialism and consumerism are challenging topics for all of us. The need to analyze and challenge our culture calls us to a deeper level of self-analysis and criticism. As we work to engage and enlighten our young people and ministries, we will be personally challenged.

I know I will not be stopping at any garage or yard sales on the way home. My storage cabinet is full!

And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15)

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## *NACYML Membership Really Does Have Benefits*

*by Dean Diomedes*

*Youth Ministry Coordinator*

*St. Linus Church, Norwalk, California*

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Four years ago, when I received the letter soliciting charter members for the [National Association of Catholic Youth Ministry Leaders](#) (NACYML), I thought, “Hey! Sure. An organization designed to promote the profession and practice of youth ministry? I can get behind that.” I wrote my check, mailed it, and waited for my membership card. I never expected to participate any more than that, and was not sure I even wanted to. I was happy to support whatever work the organization was doing even if I had never heard of the six letter acronym before.

### Testing the Water

Two years ago, for the first time, I attended the [National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry](#) (NCCYM) held in Las Vegas and what I recently learned was the second NACYML membership meeting. I had been a member for two years, and had even participated in the first discernment team to select new members of the leadership team. However, beyond being able to recognize the mission of the organization, I still was not quite sure what the organization did.



### Jumping In

By 2006, I had heard the names and recognized some of the key people in the organization and was delighted to be able to put faces to those names at the membership meeting. It was my hope to gain more understanding of what NACYML was and what it did by attending the membership meeting. Looking back at my notes from the day, the one comment that stands out most is, “I want to support this, but what are the benefits”?

I have also heard my colleagues ask the same question, and believe others have asked it as well. I now sit on the NACYML Leadership Team, and it is a question we continue address—for both the existing membership and as a tool to attract new members.

### Are there Benefits?

Of course there are! They are listed on NACYML website. Can they be measured? Yes, they can. Recently, members were able to save twenty dollars on the registration cost of NCCYM. In my own archdiocese, discounts are offered to members on registration for various events and trainings.

I submit, however, that there are greater benefits than these that I had not considered when sitting in the ballroom at the Riviera during the NACYML membership meeting two years ago. By simply saying ‘yes’ to several, increasingly more challenging invitations (Not only do I sit on the leadership team, but I also chair the publications committee, which is tasked with overseeing the production of this newsletter.), I now have a role in a national organization that supports my profession. I also have developed meaningful and spiritually rich relationships with the other members of the leadership team.

### Shared Vision Engenders Support

During the low points in my career as a youth minister, I have felt the discouragement and sense of defeat

that comes with having a vision for the young people of my parish that is not shared by those around me. NACYML has provided me with a link to a national network of youth ministers who share a common vision of what youth ministry can and should be in my parish and my neighboring parishes. My active involvement in NACYML has opened the door to participation in youth ministry at the national level. If it was not for my involvement, and the opportunity to see the people I have come to know through my recent experiences as well as those whom I have been working with via conference call and e-mail the past few months, I do not know that as a southern California native I would be able to say that I was looking forward to being in Cleveland in December. However, with this past National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry in Cleveland, I can now say that the warmth and hospitality of our membership meeting far outweighed the chill of the temperatures outside. I am thrilled to have been there, and to have had the pleasure of meeting so many NACYML members in person.

Thank you to all of the members that attended NCCYM and the membership gathering!

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## *The Simple Life and Gospel Living*

by Deacon Bob Killoren  
 Diocesan Scout Chaplain  
 Diocese of Columbus, Ohio

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The [Lives of the Saints](#) volumes are filled with the biographies of very special people who chose to follow Christ in simplicity, meekness, and poverty, but none more so than St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis lived 800 years ago, so compared to



our standard of living today everyone was living a simple life. After all there was no electricity, automobiles, cell phones, or Internet. But by 1200 A.D. standards, his was not a simple life—but rather a life of luxury. He came from a wealthy family, he liked to party, and sought adventure at every turn. But after experiencing war, imprisonment, and a near-death experience, things began to change for him.

The Scripture passage that St. Francis says truly changed his life is from Matthew's Gospel. Jesus sends out his disciples to preach that the kingdom of God is near. He tells them not to take gold or silver or copper for their belts, no sack for the journey, nor a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick (Matthew 10:9-10). St. Francis took Jesus' words literally, and this became the way he dressed and traveled everywhere. He became so enamored with the simple life that a friend once asked him if he would marry. He said, "Yes, a fairer bride than any of you have ever seen," referring to his 'lady poverty.'

While Jesus may not be calling us to a life of poverty as radical as St. Francis', we are called to remove whatever barriers we have created between us and God so that we can give freely of ourselves without holding back for fear of losing something. Living simply can mean not letting our stuff and desire for more stuff to possess us completely. Living simply can also mean letting go of our fears and anxieties about security and well-being and trusting in God's loving care. Living simply can mean really living for the first time.



Another aspect of Francis' simple living was a deep relationship with and appreciation for God's creation. When we picture Francis we almost always see him surrounded by birds and animals. In his simple living, Francis was open to receive all the riches of nature. By possessing nothing, he possessed everything that creation had to offer.

Our response to Jesus' call to live simply must include a healthy respect for nature and the environment. The world is out of balance now, and we wonder why. Yet in the problems we face is held the very answer to our questions. Rampant materialism and consumerism is draining the natural resources of the world—and we sit back and wonder why we have shortages. We are so hungry for energy we would choose to run our cars with fuel made out of grain even if half the world goes hungry because of it. We want to possess the world for our own selfish purposes. This is a huge danger we are facing today. The [Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine](#) says, "the cultural challenge that consumerism poses today must be met with greater resolve, above all in consideration of future generations, who risk having to live in a natural environment that has been pillaged by an excessive and disordered consumerism." (Section 320) To counteract this destructive pattern we simply must live simply!

Jesus' teachings are clear. We are called to live simple lives—trusting God, respecting nature, and sharing what we have with those who do not have. I wish I had the courage to do this all of the time!

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## Helping Youth Respect and Defend Human Dignity

by Jill Rauh

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Washington, District of Columbia

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### Who Am I?

The identity question is one that practically all young people deal with. Our consumerist society is ready with an answer: that identity is the newest fashion of clothing, the most high-tech cell phone, or the number of friends one has on Facebook. Are we ready with an alternative answer?

One important element of the church's answer is this: people are more than what they have, what they produce, and what they do. Their identity is rooted in an inherent dignity based in the fact that all people are created in God's image. As the church's ministers to young people, we must teach young Catholics to value every human person for what he or she is—a beloved child of God—not what he or she has.

Consider this quotation from the statement of the Catholic bishops of the United States called *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*:

*In a world warped by materialism and declining respect for human life, the Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. . . We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.*



### Resources for Young People

Once young people begin to recognize the inherent dignity of every human being, they can begin to see their brothers and sisters, near and far, as another self. When they become aware of suffering or injustice inflicted upon others, they can experience more than compassion—they can be drawn into solidarity and a desire to work for and with those experiencing injustice to change the systems and structures causing violations of human dignity.


The [Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development](#) (JPHD) at the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) (USCCB) is working to equip youth ministry leaders with the resources they need to help young Catholics respond, in faith, to the violations of human dignity that they encounter—to become young people to whom faith in action is a central part of their identity. The following are some resources that may be helpful to you as you work to guide young people in this manner.



- Themes from Catholic Social Teaching Cards and [Poster](#) are easy-to-distribute summary cards and poster can help make sure that the church's social mission is no secret to the young people you work with!
- The [Faithful Citizenship website](#) is published every election year by the Catholic bishops of the United States to help Catholics bring their faith to the public realm. This year, they have created a website especially geared for young people—[Young Catholics website](#)—with dozens of supplementary resources ideal for parishes and schools. There is also an attractive, interactive section with quizzes,



videos, e-postcards, prayer and learning activities, and other resources to engage youth with the statement's messages about putting faith in action. There is even a section where youth can submit photos of themselves making a difference in the world.

- The [In the Footsteps of Jesus Video](#) includes two parts: Part 1 provides an overview of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching. Part 2 illustrates these themes with examples of real people who are working to make a difference. A [supplementary Resource Manual](#) offers activities, prayer services, and reflections to help participants explore Catholic social teaching more fully.
- The [PovertyUSA website](#), a section of the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#), is an excellent tool for introducing youth to the reality of poverty in the United States. The [Poverty USA Tour](#) allows viewers to experience the struggles of a family living at the poverty line. A [poverty quiz](#) tests participants' knowledge about poverty in the United States. [The Education Center](#) offers resources about these issues for parish and school settings.
- [Ending Poverty In Community \(EPIC\): A Toolkit for Young Advocates](#) is an interactive, interdisciplinary curriculum for youth ministry programs and high school classrooms on poverty in the United States and includes steps that young people can take to work with the poor in eliminating the root causes of poverty today.
- [A Catholic Call to Justice](#) is an activity course for young people that leads participants through major themes of Catholic social teaching using scriptural reflections, discussion, games, and activities. Created jointly with Catholic Relief Services to examine domestic and global poverty, this is a great resource for youth retreats and religious education classes.
- The [Poverty USA Student Action Project](#)  includes lesson plans and activity suggestions for grades kindergarten to eighth on the issue of poverty in the United States.
- The [Multi-Media Youth Arts Contest](#) is an annual contest that encourages youth grades seven through twelve to learn about the root causes of poverty in our country and then to use their artistic talents to create art (music, poetry, video, painting, etc.) that can help educate others.

Take a moment to reflect on the following: What is your parish doing to help Catholic youth see the dignity that is present in all persons? How are you helping them respond to their call to make a difference?

We at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops hope that these resources prove helpful to your important work! We know that only with your help can Catholic youth develop an awareness of the human dignity of all persons and their responsibility to help ensure that this dignity is respected.

#### Free Peace and Justice Resources

The [Institute for Peace and Justice Resource Page for Diocesan and Other Religious Leaders](#) offers a free monthly e-resource with faith reflections, action suggestions, new resources, and specialized links for different ministry groupings and ages. Sign up on the website.

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## *Food Fast from Catholic Relief Services*

by Kyle Holtgrave

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Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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According to [Business.com](#), there will be approximately 33.5 million teenagers in the United States by the year 2010. This group of teenagers averages \$158 billion per year in disposable income. And the marketing industry is well aware of these facts. This kind of disposable income can lead to excessive consumerism. How can we as Catholic youth ministry leaders help teenagers understand how to live responsibly in a materialistic society?

### Retreat Program

[Catholic Relief Services](#) (CRS) offers a retreat program that challenges young people to give up something for an entire day to stand in solidarity with their brothers and sisters across the planet who live in poverty. This program is called Food Fast.



According to the [Food Fast Website](#), the “program makes the tragedy of hunger tangible and real for young people through twenty-four hours of fasting, prayer, and reflection.” Through the Food Fast program, teenagers learn that not everyone in the world has access to the latest electronic gadgets, text messaging, or Facebook. In fact, young people who participate in Food Fast will quickly realize that even the most basic things needed to survive, such as potable water, are hard to come by in many parts of the world.

### Goals of the Food Fast Program

The core messages in the Food Fast program are based on Catholic social teaching. Through Catholic social teaching we learn about the life and dignity of the human person—that each of us is created in the image and likeness of God. Food Fast offers numerous opportunities for teenagers to learn more about the people who live in all regions of the world. Through the life stories presented in the Food Fast manual, young people hear how families live on less than one dollar a day. This statistic offers a wonderful learning opportunity every time someone steps up to the soda machine to buy a drink!

Along with the life and dignity of the human person, we find that because of our inherent dignity, there are certain rights and responsibilities that each person has. The encyclical [Pacem in Terris](#) sums up our rights when Pope John XXIII wrote that all of us have “the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services” (#11). In our society, it is easy to assume that these basic rights will always be available to us. Food Fast challenges us to leave our right to food behind for a day so we can experience what it is like to have this basic right suppressed.



By giving up our right to food while participating in Food Fast, participants also embrace the solidarity principle of Catholic social teaching. The principle of solidarity teaches us that we are all created by the same God and are therefore all brothers and sisters in the same human family. The challenge of solidarity

in our materialistic society is to help young people realize that many individuals do not have a choice on whether or not to 'super-size' their meals or to have bottled water in their backpack. A further challenge of solidarity is to ask teenagers if they are consuming more than what basic needs require. Are we taking supplies of food, water, shelter, etc. away from those who are more in need?

Another goal of the Food Fast program is to empower Catholic youth to take action. By empowering young people to act, we participate in another principle of Catholic social teaching, that of the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Food Fast is an opportunity for young people to reverse consumerism by donating some of their disposable income to support the mission of Catholic Relief Services—the official international humanitarian agency of the United States Catholic community that strives to alleviate suffering and provide assistance to people in need in more than one hundred countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality. Monies sent to Catholic Relief Services is one way for teenagers to share the gifts they have through an agency that has an excellent track record of good stewardship.

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Some youth ministry leaders may be familiar with the 30 Hour Famine from World Vision, the Crop Walk from Church World Service, or other similar programs centering on hunger awareness. It is important to know all the facts about any organization, how their funds are utilized, and if the programming conforms to Catholic catechetical standards before adopting a particular program. Catholic Relief Services is the official overseas relief and development agency of the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) (USCCB), with thirteen bishops on the board of directors and a strong Catholic emphasis and identity.

The materials needed for a Food Fast program are free and can be ordered through the [Food Fast Website](#), or by calling 800-222-0025.

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## How Nigeria Can Change Us

by Christina Lujan

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### A Shortage of Water

In April 2008, I traveled to Nigeria with [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\) Called to Witness Program](#) to see how CRS is responding to poverty and fostering peace. My experience in Nigeria made me deeply aware of how consumerism affects us here in the United States. According to the [United States Geological Survey \(USGS\)](#), the average American consumes nearly one hundred gallons of water each day for preparing food, bathing, washing clothes and dishes, flushing toilets, watering lawns, and gardening. This is something we take for granted.



According to the [British Broadcasting Corporation \(BBC\)](#), the [world's supply of fresh water is running out rapidly](#), and already one person in five has no access to safe drinking water. This crisis highlights how excessive American's consumption has become and how the time for action is now.

### Wasting Gallons of Water Each Day



I count myself among the many people who consumed more water and other material items than I needed, believing that they were adding to the quality of my life. For example, on the average day I would consume roughly one hundred gallons of water. Consuming water is not just about drinking it. I paid little attention to how much water went down the drain as I washed dishes, brushed my teeth, took a shower, or watered my lawn.

This changed drastically upon my return from Nigeria. In comparison with the people of Nigeria, I was able to see firsthand how I was consuming water at an alarming rate. In Nigeria, half the population has no access to clean water and many women and children walk for hours a day to fetch what little water they do have. This was a reality check for me. I found that I was consuming more than I needed simply

because I had access to it. I asked myself, would I consume the same amount if I was limited to resources or if I had to work a little harder for them?

### Making Changes

Through our faith we all have the power to change the way we live and to become aware of our consumption and reduce it. We are blessed to live in a society whose resources are vast, yet we must be responsible with those resources. I feel that we are called to take on the responsibility to educate not only our young people, but also to educate and challenge each other to change our way of life. This is best achieved through education starting at the local parish. I challenge you to get involved with the [Called to Witness program](#), and other [CRS programs](#), where you can learn more and help others learn as well.



Resources for Education and Awareness

- [WaterAid Nigeria](#)
- [United States Geological Survey Quizzes](#)
- [WaterPartners International](#)
- [Water: Use It Wisely](#)

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## *More and Bigger*

*by Jerry Goebel*

*President of OneFamily Outreach  
Walla Walla, Washington*

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We live in a culture and at a time when the road to happiness often means, buy more and buy bigger. More stuff, more alcohol, more food, bigger trucks, bigger hard drives, bigger houses, etc.

It is not the first time that a culture has been distracted by the belief that more stuff equates to more happiness. Ancient words from the prophet Haggai indicate a similar mindset during his time: “You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.” (Haggai 1:6)

### Words of the Prophet

The prophet goes on to explain to the Israelites what lies at the root of their emptiness: “You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses.” (Haggai 1:9)

It is important to look at the word that the Hebrews used for house (Bayith)—as in the house of the Lord. It was not so much a place, as a people, a community of people. In fact, the strictest definition of God’s house implied providing a community where children could live in the safety and intimacy of God.

Why were the Israelites experiencing such a cold emptiness in their lives? Because they were focusing on their own ‘more’ and ‘bigger’ instead of building a community where children would learn what it felt like to be loved by God’s people.

Jesus makes a similar comparison when he said that the role of the church is to be prophetic, to alleviate injustice, to support those who are being prophetic and alleviating injustice, and to provide Bayith—a cup of cold water—to the least, little ones that were brought to their community. That is it—that is all. That is church to Jesus. No spectators, no commentators.

Our time is filled with strange dichotomies. Denominational religions are losing ground in America, while neural Buddhism and scientific transcendence are on the rise. People are looking for transcendence and saying that science and eastern mysticism provide more.

However—and this is of critical import—Christianity is not about transcendence. Jesus uses two models of perfection in the Gospels, one involves loving those who hate us and the other involves selling all we have, giving our money to the poor, and following him.

This is not a Gospel of transcendence or bigness. This is a Gospel of consumptive liberation. Give and forgive, until you are free. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Luke 6:37-38)

### Evangelical Simplicity

In our education outreach with schools and detained youth, we teach the following financial goal: how do I live a simple life where I am not worried more about my possessions and my debt than I am about my relationships and living a meaningful life?

With adults, we refer to this as evangelical simplicity, choosing to live simply as an example of Christ's love for all people. How pressing is this? We live in a country that spends an average of seven percent of its income on food. Other parts of the world spend up to seventy percent. We have wars and food riots breaking out around the globe that are tied to our consumptive patterns of energy. The future of our young people will rest upon their ability to find joy and purpose in living simpler and gentler.

### What Can We Do?

Lead by example. Model evangelical simplicity in our own consumer patterns. Highlight the difference between the false gods of self-transcendence or personal happiness as a goal for a meaningful life and Christ's image of perfection. Talk to young people, relatives, and friends about the liberating patterns of a simple life.

Having traveled around the world, I realize that many of us do not consider ourselves akin to the rich, young prince who broke our Lord's heart by choosing more and bigger over the perfection proffered by Jesus. Yet, the truth is, if I have spare change in my pocket, on my dresser, or in a coin jar, I am richer than the majority of people in this world. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi once said, "The rich must live more simply so that the poor may simply live."

Can we move from more and bigger to evangelical simplicity? Peace, in our children's world, may very well depend upon it.

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## **ONEFamily Outreach**

More information about OneFamily Outreach is available on the [OneFamily Outreach website](#).

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## *Facing the Holidays*

*by Katie Hayes*

*Director of Youth Ministry*

*St. John of the Cross Parish, Western Springs, Illinois*

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Writing this article when it was still quite warm here in lovely Chicago makes even thinking about the holidays unbelievable! I can not fathom that it will soon be Christmas!

### **So, what do we do in order to prepare/face/embrace the holidays?**

A lot depends on what the holiday season means to us and what is expected of us from family, friends, coworkers, youth we serve, and the list goes on. Would it not be nice to be entering the Advent season without a single point of pressure from any one of these people? That would make life easier, but not quite as engaging.



### **Holidays Are about People**

How can we face the people we love, and some we are called to love but have a hard time liking on a regular basis? Consider seeing them as the image of God that they are created to be. Whether or not Uncle Bill, who pokes fun at your pretend job, is your favorite person to encounter, he is a child of God and should be loved and appreciated as such.

### **Holidays Are about Presence**

Of course it is challenging to run from the Advent prayer service you had young people leading, to your mother's second cousin's Christmas party. It is probably one of the last things you want to do after a long day with teenagers who were not prepared. But, just as you were present to assist those young people in deciphering pronunciations, your mother wants your presence with her extended family because she enjoys your company and does not often have the opportunity to share you with her extended family. Keeping in mind why people nag us to be somewhere will help us to be present with the right attitude.



### **Holidays Are about Peace**



Yes, really, I am serious. Despite the thirty thousand things you are doing and however you are trying to be present, God wants us to find peace. Make it happen. Take time for quiet. Maybe a little extra time during the days leading up to the holiday pageant or whatever demands will break you away from peace. I enjoy being a part of an Advent scripture sharing group. Of course I do not have the time for it, but there is no better way for me to prepare for Christmas than reflecting on the Gospels of Advent and engaging in prayer with people who also feel the pressures of the season.

### **Holidays Are about Joy**

What elements of the holidays bring you joy? Seeing your niece open presents? Riding a sled? Hearing

Christmas carols from outside the church building? Make sure you get that joy, whatever it is. Put joy-filled events on your calendar, and facing the holidays will be easier and more joyful!

## Holidays Are about Jesus

Christ the King is born. Keeping this truth at the center of our chaos and frenzy is critical in facing the holidays. When we hear of an infant born in a manger, we pause in awe and wonder. God among us, God is with us!

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December 2008

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## *What It Is All About*

*by Jenn Ledonne*

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### Assisting Others During the Holidays

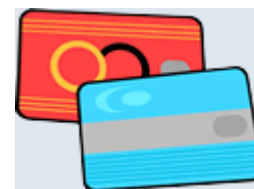
We are seeing the green of Christmas trees, and the bright colors of the holiday advertisements. Youth will be talking about what they want for Christmas. Wish lists are being written and modified almost up until gift giving time. What is a youth minister to do in the face of all this materialism? How do we shift the focus of a 'me first' culture to an 'others first' mindset?

As the holidays approach, many corporations and groups schedule time to help at local soup kitchens and charitable organizations. These volunteer opportunities provide the chance for youth ministers to help teenagers shift their holiday mindset by serving others. Prepare for the first rumblings of 'I want' and 'that would be cool to have' among the youth with some social justice teaching, research, and creativity.

Challenge youth to make a Christmas wish list with a twist. For every one item they write down for themselves, they must list two items for a person, organization, or cause in need. The wish list with a twist becomes the list they give to their families and friends. In this way they are helping others while sharing in the holiday spirit.

### Gift Cards Galore

Another way young people can help others is to look for unused gift cards lying around the house and donate them to charitable organizations. Many people love to give gift cards, yet many recipients do not redeem them. According to an article in [The New York Times](#), two-thirds of holiday shoppers in 2006 planned to give someone a gift card. It was estimated that \$80 billion was spent on gift cards in 2006, while roughly only \$8 billion were redeemed.



The following organizations take gift cards as donations to help others:

- [DonateAGiftCard.com](#)—This organization works with various organizations to raise funds through unused gift cards.
- [Charity Choice](#)—This site allows you to purchase a gift card and designate the funds to the charity of one's choosing (over one hundred major charitable causes are organized into twelve categories).
- [Chemo Angels](#)—Located in California (where gift cards do not expire), the organization uses gift cards to assist individuals undergoing chemotherapy treatments for cancer.
- [America Supports You](#)—This website is sponsored by the United States Department of Defense, and allows donations that will be given to troops overseas or their families back at home to purchase items from base commissaries.

### Other Ways To Help Others

Another worthy project in which young people can help others is to raise money to give gifts to those in need. Consider [Heifer Project International](#), where youth can join together to purchase a cow, or numerous other animals, for a person or

#### **Websites providing information on various charities**

- [Organization of Better Business Bureaus](#)

family in need. The recipient in turn shares any offspring with others in the community, thereby continuing the gift giving for years. Another idea is to work with the local thrift shop Christmas store, where lower income individuals and families have the opportunity to purchase new gift items at reduced prices. Often the biggest need is items for children and teenagers, giving the youth a chance to make a difference in the lives of their peers.

- [American Institute of Philanthropy](#)



Finally, these ideas need not be limited to Christmas. Birthdays, Easter, and other gift giving celebrations are a great time to talk more about others and their needs, and less about the things that we want, but truly don't need. One family asked guests attending an annual Super Bowl party to bring canned goods to be donated to the local food pantry. Another family, whose daughter wanted a pink party, turned the party into a breast cancer party and raised several hundred dollars.

With the right amount of creativity, and the support of Catholic social teaching, we can help shift young people's perspective from an 'it is all about me' paradigm to an 'it is all about them' mindset.

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December 2008

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## *Living Simply*

*by Katie Hayes*

*Director of Youth Ministry*

*St. John of the Cross Parish, Western Springs, Illinois*

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As the holiday season jumps into full throttle and our schedules begin to burst at the seams, can we make an effort to live simply? Maybe you never thought this a possibility, or have not been able to follow through on the desire to make your life a little less complicated. Take a deep breath and read on.

In all realms of life there is an easy or a complex way of accomplishing a task. Would you rather read the newspaper sitting on the couch near a sunlit window or hanging upside down from a tree at night using a flashlight? Obviously the first is the simpler way. Why is that so easy to point out, but finding a simpler way of life so much more difficult?

I believe it has to do with our priorities and our focus on those priorities.

Living simply is not easy in our world today. Acknowledging this and accepting the occurrence of challenges is critical. Living simply is about making a choice and following through with it. Living simply has no one-size-fits-all, but will be different for each person.



Despite the challenges and tough attitude required, we can each find a way to live simply. It begins with making simplicity a priority and focusing on it. Start with one area and gradually build to where you can say you are living a simple life. Determine your priorities in all areas of life. What matters the most to you? Or maybe it is easier to ask, what does not matter—what can I let go of?

Make a choice, set a priority, and stick with it. Will you fail? Quite possibly, but is that a reason to quit or avoid simplifying my life? No, it should not be. Allow yourself the ability to find comfort and joy by living simply.

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## *Sustainable Living: How Much Is Enough?*

by Faye Abbondanza

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Diocese of Columbus, Ohio

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Consider our fast-paced, consumer driven daily living and American society's quest for more, bigger, and better. It is no wonder that people are suffering from high blood pressure, ulcers, heart attacks, and just plain stress! There are, however, alternatives to the lifestyle of constant motion and acquisition. Sustainable living, or simple living, is not a new concept, but one that is increasing in popularity today. Along with movements to save the environment, cut down waste, and save energy, we also have the seven principles of Catholic social teaching that help us understand that we are meant to be good stewards in caring for one another and the earth.

Many groups are forming simplicity circles, or support groups, to share ideas and work on concrete ways in which to live simpler lives by eliminating the excess, and consciously choosing how much is enough. The following is an example of this decision by my fellow parishioners at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Warren, Ohio.

### Sustainable Living Retreat

As part of their planning for retirement, Julie and Chuck decided to take part in a sustainable living retreat with the [Sisters of the Humility of Mary](#) in Villa Maria, Pennsylvania. Julie knew she wanted to simplify her life, but told the sisters she did not want to live in a sod hut. She was asked to be patient and listen to what was offered.



Julie learned that sustainability and simplicity go hand in hand. It is a matter of being reflective of our actions and taking responsibility for them. She summed up the concept with the following two questions:

- What do I need to exist?
- How do I decide when something is no longer a need, and when it becomes excess?

The answer is surprising—for everyone it is a personal choice! For Julie it has also become a passion.

The retreat was a positive influence for the changes Julie and Chuck decided to make in their lives. They took the time to observe their home life, what they did, how they did it, and why they did it. “It means looking at what it takes to make you comfortable without harming those around you, the environment, or the economy,” Julie said.

An example of a small change they made was in recycling. Julie and Chuck had always been recyclers, but realized that the one thing they had never recycled was junk mail. In changing that habit of recycling junk mail rather than placing it in the trash, they reduced their weekly contribution to the landfill from three large black trash bags, to one much smaller bag. Julie stressed that it is a matter of re-education and doing things in a different way, or a better way for self, community, and environment.

Villa Maria Education and  
Spirituality Center Retreats and  
Outreach Programs  
Find out more about the various  
programs and retreats offered by the  
Sisters of the Humility of Mary.

FlyLady.net  
Rid your home and your life of

Julie said that they do not need 'stuff,' and having an excess of 'stuff' could be sinful. One of her husband's favorite sayings is, "I have never seen a U-haul truck following a hearse." Since they have pared down their possessions, Julie and Chuck are at peace, and life is less stressful. She assured me that 'stuff' will not make you happy, and all we go through to attain 'stuff' causes stress.

excess clutter using some of the great ideas found on this site. Less stuff to clean and put away means more time to play.

Before they simplified, Julie and Chuck had two cars, even though a majority of their activities were done together. Now, down to one car, they need to communicate a little more about scheduling so that they can plan out a route for errands.

## What it Means to be Christian

These changes have made a difference, not only in effecting the way they use money and resources, but also in their faith. They believe following Christ means taking care of themselves, others, and of creation. Julie said, "There are too many people without direction. Part of being a Catholic is following the example of Christ. Jesus listened to others and cared for their needs."

In the Sermon on the Mount, [chapter 6 in Matthew's Gospel](#), Jesus urges everyone to depend on God for their needs and not to worry about food, drink, or clothing. The Lord's Prayer, in that same chapter, lays out a formula for living simply: bless God, do God's will, ask for your needs, and treat others as you wish to be treated. Perhaps if we spend a little time reflecting on our daily needs versus our daily habits, we can make choices to cut back on the clutter and the unnecessary. It is not too late to make the choice to live a simpler life. It can be an excellent model of Gospel values for the young people we love and serve.

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## *Recognizing and Challenging Extreme Materialism*

*by Jim McGinnis*

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“Your children have so much that they have lost their souls. They have lost their connection with the earth and the seasons.” (Comment by Grethel Nbntoya, Nicaraguan mother and women's leader, on why she would not want to raise her children in the United States.)

The truth, and tragedy, of this statement goes far beyond the impact extreme materialism has on the souls of our children. It affects the whole world. First, with the explosion of communications technology and the pervasiveness of advertising, American consumerism has threatened traditional cultural and religious values in every corner of the world. But even more seriously, it has become the rationale for the unprecedented expansion of the United States military power. We are being sold an ‘us against them’ worldview that justifies our intervening militarily in nations that threaten our privileged lifestyle and that denies a sense of the global human family in which we are all equally important children of our common creator and God.



**How do we help young people realize how privileged and unjust the lifestyle of our nation is, especially when that is what they see all around them? How do we help them become more person-oriented and less thing-oriented, less tied to consumerism and more committed to service of others?**

Perhaps the best way to open our eyes and move our hearts to a sense of global solidarity is to open our homes and hearts to others. This can help us experience people and places where the standard of living is very different and where we can meet people and form relationships. This can begin within our own homes as we open them in hospitality to those needing a sense of belonging and perhaps a meal or short-term stay. We can also reach out into our local communities where we can encounter people who are struggling economically, whether it is at a shelter, food pantry, or public hospital. Sometimes taking public transportation provides an opportunity to see and meet others who can help us see and feel and then act. For older children, service or solidarity trips, either in this country or overseas, can provide a more expensive, but highly effective, experience.

It was on a family service trip to Nicaragua that our family, and particularly our daughter, learned that we had so many more things than the Nicaraguans did, but that things are not what provides genuine happiness. We experienced people of great courage and faith who invited us to join in their struggle for a more just way of life. We learned that community cooperation is more satisfying than everyone trying to get as much as they could for themselves.

### **Getting Beyond the Materialism Trap—Some Beginning Reflection Questions**

- How much are we affected by television commercials and other forms of advertising? Does our buying reflect our true wants and needs or what advertisers tell us we should have?
- “People are more important than things.” Do we believe this? How do we make it real in our lives?
- Do we know how much of our income we spend on needs and how much on wants? How do we differentiate between the two?
- We are stewards of creation. How can we be more generous with our time, talents, and financial resources? How can we share more freely with those who have less?
- Do we have any publications in our

At the end of our stay, a thirteen year old girl named Elizabeth gave our daughter Theresa one of the only two shirts she owned, as a friendship gift. Theresa, at fifteen, realized what that gift meant. She felt a little awkward going through her suitcase to choose one of her nine shirts to give Elizabeth in return. She understood the difference in life styles and the level of generosity in an unforgettable way. Perhaps we all need to regularly recharge our sense of solidarity with person-to-person experiences, or begin to provide them for the first time.

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home (Sojourners , Real Money, YES! Magazine, etc.) that present an alternative vision from the mainstream press and that might challenge us to live more simply?

- Are we affected by the push to instant gratification? Is there a way we could slow down our shopping habits to allow for some time to reflect about whether we need an item before we purchase it?

Visit the website for more information on The Institute for Peace and Justice.

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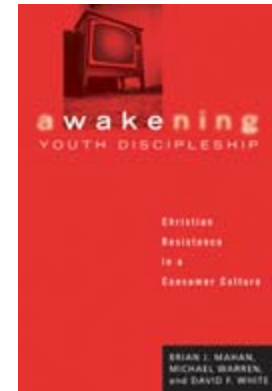
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## The Musings of Michael Warren

by Michael McCarthy  
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The Mary Louis Academy, Jamaica Estates, New York

Michael Warren, coauthor of *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture* (Cascade Books, 2008), is described in the book's foreword as a "troublemaker." Troublemaking in that he stands in solidarity with young people and calls attention to systemic injustice, oppression, and inequality.



### Grandfather of Catholic Youth Ministry

Mike Warren has been in the kitchen for a long time, always inviting youth ministers to join him at the table for a nourishing feast of insights and life-centering conversation about what it means for adults as well as teenagers to be faithful followers of Jesus in our day and time. Three decades ago, when the entire field of youth ministry was taking a 'developmental journey' with teenagers, the voice of one crying in the wilderness proclaimed, 'Pay attention to the social contexts of youth, to the cultural scripts we give them, to the ways they are manipulated by the media, the marketers, the military!' Mike is indeed a modern-day John the Baptist, urging us to repent from viewing adolescents as an exotic life stage, regarding young people as consumers rather than as persons. Mike calls us to name and resist all life-draining cultural captivities in light of gospel grace and freedom.



Michael Warren is described, at least among some 'old-timers,' as the grandfather of Catholic youth ministry. He is widely published in religious education and theological journals and has written or edited a plethora of books on ministry.

I recently participated in an online symposium hosted by [Ministry Training Source](#). There were forty-six youth ministry folks from various locations throughout the United States who took part in this two-week online conversation. We utilized two

Michael Warren articles as a focus for our discussion. Warren's perceptive and piercing voice still cries out for a radical examination of our work with youth. And I can attest that Warren's words served as a catalyst for stretching our imaginations in our lively online chat. Participants were engaged in taking a good and hard look at the underpinnings of our work with young people.

### Michael's Musings

In an effort to keep the conversation going, here are three excerpts, or musings, from Michael Warren's writings which touch upon the topic of consumerism and young people. These three quotations can serve as a springboard for continued reflection, discussion, and action. We invite youth ministers to grapple with these quotations and invite others who are concerned with youth to do the same. Perhaps this will spark a resurgence in Mike's seminal and prophetic writings.

The first quotation comes from the article *Youth Ministry in an Inconvenient Church*.

*The key gesture of capitalist consumerism is the closed fist, the fist that grabs, as in 'grab all the gusto you can get.' A related gesture is the closed fist that does not grab but that grasps, as a fundamental gesture about life: 'Everything I have is mine; I earned it, and I intend to keep it. I'm not giving up my hard-earned money to support the lazy on welfare.'*

The second quotation is taken from the chapter “The Imaginations of Youth” in his latest book *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture*.

*We like to think that our religious convictions fully direct our lives. We may consider ourselves practicing Christians, may know the gist of the gospel story, but be unaware how little the story actually guides our lives. Our first allegiance may in fact be economic security, an issue constantly preoccupying our attention and determining which social issues seem important to us, how we vote, how we read the newspaper, even which newspaper we read. In fact, the very question about the true priorities among our allegiances might unnerve and anger us.*

The third quotation comes from a paper Michael delivered as a keynote presentation on Long Island in 1993. The paper is titled “Youth, Evangelization, and Fun.”

*Imagine the possibility of the following want-ad for a youth minister: ‘Wanted: a youth minister of educated skepticism, able to understand the lies taught by the consumerist society and able to challenge young people to consider embracing Jesus’ dangerous message. Must, out of love for youth’s possibilities, be able to tell the truth to young people in loving ways. In addition to a capacity for fun, must have capacity to grieve with the young over the social ills of our time. Key quality needed: not enthusiasm but the ability to help young people imagine a future of discipleship lived in the world.’*

#### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What most strikes you about these quotations? What disturbs you? What challenges you?
- What do you make of these gestures of our capitalist consumerist culture? Do they ring true to you? How can we enhance an open hand gesture in our youth ministry (i.e., offering food to the hungry or comfort to those in pain)? What are some other gestures of those who follow Jesus?
- What do you pay most attention to in life? Where are your allegiances? Identify some of your top priorities. What do teenagers pay most attention to? Where are their allegiances?
- What are your thoughts on the want-ad for a youth minister? Would most pastors be comfortable with such a want-ad? Why or why not? Create your own want-ad with the qualities you would want in a youth minister.
- Michael Warren is concerned about the social conditions society has created for young people? why is this important in our work with young people? What are some of the myths and illusions of the prevailing culture? What place does ‘troublemaking’ have in youth ministry? Explain.

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