

Profiles of Justice – Fair Trade in Winona

Ethical Trade also known as Fair Trade has been in existence for many years with organizations like SERRV and 10,000 Villages functioning for more than 50 years. Catholic Relief Services began a collaboration with SERRV more than 20 years ago, which has expanded their Ethical Trade program.

So what is Ethical (Fair) Trade? To put it simply, it is an effort to give poor people in developing nations a fair price for the quality products they produce. In the past they worked for large corporations or local buyers sometimes referred to as coyotes, receiving subsistence wages while their products were marketed for substantial profit. Ethical Trade endeavors are working to change the system giving these poor people a hand up rather than a hand out.

While organizations like CRS work on a national scale, efforts by local/regional people and groups also make a difference. Winona resident John Kennedy traveled to Honduras, Central America in 2003, to see first-hand the work of his sister, Mary Kennedy, SSND (School Sisters of Notre Dame). Reaching past the usual mission of pastoral development, education (many rural students don't make it past 6th grade) and social advocacy, the Sisters address a broader spectrum of needs of the indigenous populations. For example, the few rural women who find employment end up being taken advantage of in the garment industry, traveling hours to and from jobs that are strenuous, low-paying and in physically taxing settings, away from their children and families. The Sisters advocated for 'micro-loans' to help some workers get their own sewing machines (mostly foot-treadle), which enabled them to do their piecework in their villages, and care for their children in a cooperative child care center near their working area. Sister Mary organized coffee bean growers to learn how to improve the quality, care, harvest and preparation of their beans, advancing them from taking as little as the equivalent of twenty cents (US) per pound for their crop to today's market price, of a more refined product, hovering around \$2/lb. The coffee co-op grew from a founding core of 10 members to the 2017 ranks of about 65 members, and still growing. Further, she has cultivated loans and contributions here in the Winona Diocese, to equip the coffee growers with bean hullers, drying sheds and American contacts for other planning, such as drying, storing/shipping and marketing.

Sister Mary Kennedy identifies artists, seamstresses, weavers and other producers among villagers who produce excellent products, but lack a fair market for their goods. Her brother John was moved to tap the talents of friends in Minnesota to found a Fair Trade organization, naming it "Many Hands Many Lands"(MHML), to foster a marketing enterprise to get products from Honduras to Minnesota, and get the lion's share of the purchase price back to the producers of the goods. Student mission groups, mostly from Catholic high schools and colleges, who visited the SSND missions were solicited to bring Honduran goods back to the States in their luggage, saving significant shipping costs. MHML sponsors 'Fair Trade Markets' once or twice per year, in conjunction with other Fair Trade marketers in Rochester and other southern Minnesota towns, to expand this effort. The Markets are staffed entirely by volunteers, the majority of whom have been local Winonans, particularly Cotter High School students, who serve MHML to satisfy a community service component in their curriculum. In fact, Sister Mary visited Cotter High School in a 2015 trip to the States to share her story with students in a number of classes.

MHML has expanded their international Fair Trade product offerings over the years to include products from Africa, Asia, South and Central America, and Native Americans. It is in their near- and long-range plans to invite parishes throughout the Winona Diocese to lure parishioners to sponsor Fair Trade

endeavors in their own communities, providing “Many Hands Many Lands” advisers to assist parishioners as needed.

John dreams of a time when he can open a permanent market in Winona and other area communities to sell Fair Trade products year round. When asked why he is doing this, he replied: “After you see the plight of the people, it is hard not to do anything. It’s a hand-up to these people and this is fun.” John is highly committed and driven to make a difference in the lives of the people he is serving.

To learn more about the work of “Many Hands Many Lands” check out the website at www.manyhandsmanylands.org.

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