

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR HEART IS

The parish budget as a moral document

Our faith calls us to demonstrate a special concern for the most vulnerable members of the human family through concrete actions on behalf of the poor. Many of us make an “option for the poor” through occasional acts of generosity, such as donations to the Church or other organizations working to alleviate poverty and promote economic justice. These acts are noble, but isolated.

At the parish level, the temptation to isolate our communal acts of generosity from parish operations is sometimes great. The realities of rising costs and the variety of worthy causes—from international disasters to local social ministries—may make it difficult to allocate extra funds for normal parish operations, like purchasing Fair Trade coffee.

Fair Trade reminds us that there are people behind all the things we consume.

Fair Trade provides hope for small-scale farmers all around the world who have been trapped in poverty by international market forces over which they have no control. It guarantees prices that enable producers to cover their costs of production and provide a decent standard of living for their families. It reminds us there are people behind all the things we consume. And it allows us to make consumer choices that are consistent with the values of our faith—choices that respect human dignity, promote economic justice and build a true sense of global solidarity.

But Fair Trade coffee costs more than the coffee that most parishes serve. For a small number of parishes with significant financial resources, the higher cost of Fair Trade coffee has not been an obstacle to participating in the CRS Fair Trade Program. Other parishes have decided with their palates and not their principles—they accept the higher costs associated with Fair Trade since the coffee they buy through the CRS Fair Trade Program is so fantastic! But most parishes struggle with the decision about what kind of coffee to buy. Parish administrators all too often find themselves in the uncomfortable position of choosing between their desire to act in solidarity with low-income coffee farmers and their need to balance the parish budget—between what they want to do as faithful Catholics and what they need to do as faithful servants in their parishes. Fortunately, there are ways that even financially strapped parishes can do both.



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There are some simple but effective measures to get around this dilemma. By distributing CRS Fair Trade educational materials during coffee hour and inviting parishioners to make voluntary contributions to a Fair Trade donation jar, many parishes are able to cover their costs. One parish leader reported that her parish is unable to cover its coffee costs when serving inexpensive conventional coffee, but makes more than it needs when it serves Fair Trade coffee! Why? She believes it is because Fair Trade coffee is good coffee that serves a great cause.

Other parishes generate revenue by selling packaged Fair Trade coffees, teas, and chocolate to parishioners during weekly or monthly sales as a fundraiser. By adding just a small amount to the price of each item, parishes can cover the costs of their own coffee supply.

Where your
treasure is, there
your heart is also.
Mark 6:21

These simple but effective mechanisms can help you help farmers without breaking your parish budget. But the decision to serve Fair Trade coffee to staff, parishioners, and guests can be seen as more than a budget balancing decision. It can be an opportunity to integrate the principles of Catholic Social Teaching into the kinds of financial decisions that are often not seen as part of our faith commitment. Purchasing Fair Trade coffee is a leadership opportunity. By committing to Fair Trade coffee, you can help your parish make a faithful (and tasty!) application of the Gospel.

Fair Trade moves us toward just trading arrangements with our brothers and sisters struggling in poverty. By purchasing directly from these small-scale producers, your parish can insure that it has a principled role to play in the production chain. Allocating your resources for the benefit of others affirms your community's commitment to Gospel values. Jesus himself helps us to understand that the financial decisions we make reflect our values: "Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart is also" (Mark 6: 21).

CRS works directly with a small group of mission-driven coffee companies that have made an institutional commitment to Fair Trade. Fair Trade is not merely a product for them, but a principled way of doing business.



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When you purchase Fair Trade coffee from these companies, you are ensuring that the farmers who grew it are treated fairly. You are also supporting an alternative business model and voting with your dollars for a value-based system of international trade. And since the companies that partner with CRS contribute a percentage of your purchase to the CRS Fair Trade Fund to support our work on behalf of low-income artisans and farmers, your purchase of Fair Trade coffee gives twice.

For most churches, budgeting is an annual process. Can you use your financial cycle as an opportunity to evaluate and reflect on your investment in Fair Trade principles? Would you be willing to commit to Fair Trade for one year? After the year is over you could work with clergy and laity to analyze financial and spiritual impacts. To be a steward of the parish budget is to take on many responsibilities. In the midst of these, would you be willing to consider the chance to make your budget a moral document that reflects the treasures of your communal heart?

Commit your parish to Fair Trade coffee for one year.

The following questions may help you others with fiscal authority to determine whether or not your parish can make a one year commitment to Fair Trade coffee:

- What are your main worries about including Fair Trade coffee in the parish budget? Do we know of other parishes in our diocese that have adopted Fair Trade coffee? What have their experiences been?
- There are some revenue generation strategies to support Fair Trade coffee detailed above. Are those realistic for your parish? What others might work?
- Has your parish ever agreed to spend extra for a particular good or service because it reflected gospel values? If so, what are the parallels to Fair Trade?
- What are the current treasures of our parish? Do they reflect our values?
- Can we commit to Fair Trade for one year? If so, are there Fair Trade companies in our area that partner with CRS and would be willing to work with us?

For more information, visit www.crsfairtrade.org.



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