

# Practicing justice one cup at a time

Michelle Martin/CNS

CHICAGO — When faculty and staff members at St. Gregory High School in Chicago reach for the communal coffee pot, they get a full-bodied cup of java and help coffee growers make a living at the same time.

For members of the Faith Justice Committee at St. Anne Parish in suburban Barrington, serving fair-trade coffee at their events is "an easy way to practice justice," said Marilyn Aleide, a member of St. Anne and business manager at St. Gregory.

The school and the justice committee are participating in a fair-trade coffee program promoted by Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' overseas development and relief agency.

"The coffee has a story to tell," Michael Sheridan, CRS' fair-trade program officer, told *The Catholic New World*, Chicago's archdiocesan newspaper. "It's a story about relationships, the relationship of the people who grew it to the people that drink it."

Last year CRS became one of 10 religiously-based partners of Equal Exchange, a for-profit company and the largest U.S. importer of fair-trade coffee and tea.

The company works with coffee growers in more than 20 countries who have organized themselves into cooperatives to produce and sell high-quality coffee beans.

Equal Exchange pays the co-ops

## Education

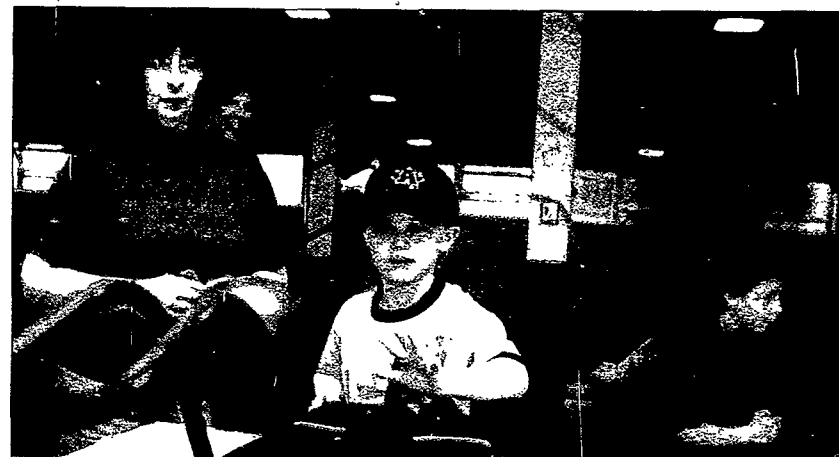
the internationally set "fair-trade" price, a price set high enough to allow the growers to support themselves and perhaps even reinvest a little bit in their business.

CRS helps market the line of coffees and teas to parishes, schools and other Catholic institutions. The agency gets a small donation from Equal Exchange for each pound sold, along with the opportunity to educate Catholics about social-justice issues and demonstrate solidarity with the poor, Sheridan said.

When Equal Exchange started in 1986, it hoped to show the corporate world that socially responsible strategies could work, said Rodney North, a company spokesman.

It is an employee-owned, for-profit corporation, with a pay scale that allows the highest-paid executive to make no more than three times the salary of the lowest-paid worker. In addition to paying prices set by an international fair-trade group, it offers organic products to help safeguard the environment.

"The manifest is to try to create a model that makes for a more level playing field for the small farmers, who have traditionally been exploited by the big corporations," North said. "And to demonstrate to conventional markets that it can be done."



Sarah Eastman/Catholic Courier

## Taking a shot

Elaine Fitzgerald, a kindergarten teacher at Rochester's St. John the Evangelist School on Humboldt Street, watches as her grandson, 8-year-old Stephen Steckler, plays a game during the school's carnival April 30.

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