

Young adults eye economy, faith

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

While many see early December as the beginning of the holiday shopping season, young adults in Brockport and Rochester are preparing for the celebration of Christ's birth this month by taking a long, hard look at their personal spending habits.

"Our culture really separates faith from the mall. We're called to make that connection," said Jamie Fazio, pastoral associate at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish.

The jumping-off point for this economic self-evaluation is Tom Beaudoin's latest book, *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are With What We Buy*. The book is the focus of the Blessed Sacrament's Young Adult Advent Book Club, which was scheduled to meet Nov. 30. The book club is led by Fazio, who also led a discussion on the same book at SUNY Brockport's Newman Center Nov. 15.

In his book, Beaudoin explains that people often buy brand-name items in order to fit in. Companies work to create a brand identity, and young adults sometimes come to understand themselves and others through their relationships to brands.

This focus on brand identity often diverts consumers' attention away

from the way a product was produced, Beaudoin maintains. Christians should take responsibility for the effects their purchases have on other members of the global community and the body of Christ.

"I think this book reminds us that we're ... called to life in this culture, not separate from it," Fazio said. "There is a connectedness between who we are and what we buy."

Beaudoin gave a presentation on the same topic at Nazareth College in March. Both Fazio and Margot Van Etten, campus minister at SUNY Brockport's Newman Center, attended the presentation, which compelled Van Etten to read *Consuming Faith*.

"It really addressed a lot of issues that we need to be looking at here on campus," Van Etten said, noting an interest among students in the Newman community in fairly-traded coffee and the anti-sweatshop movement.

Van Etten and the Newman Center linked up with St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry to sponsor Fazio's Nov. 15 visit to SUNY Brockport. One of the strengths of *Consuming Faith* is its ability to communicate with young adults on their

level, Fazio said.

"So often books on young-adult ministry ... try to take previous experiences of previous generations and bring it to the young-adult community. I think this book rises out of our young-adult experiences, our social circle, our world," Fazio said.

Today's world is different than that of 20 or 30 years ago. For example, today's young adults represent the first generation that will eventually be solely dependent on their 401(k) and stock investments, Fazio said. Cultivating what Beaudoin calls an economic spirituality entails more than just buying fairly traded coffee; it also means investigating a company's background before investing in it. It's inconsistent, for example, to oppose sweatshops but invest in a company that underpays or exploits its workers.

Consuming Faith's message is especially relevant during this Advent season, Fazio said.

"I think this book really brings us back to who we are as a Christian community," he said. "We're buying gifts to recognize the gift of Christ being born into the world, and those gifts should represent the peace and justice that Christ brought into the



Mike Crup/Catholic Courier

Jamie Fazio, pastoral associate at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church, speaks about the book *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are With What We Buy* by Tom Beaudoin during a group discussion at SUNY Brockport's Newman Center Nov. 15.

world."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Young Adult Advent Book Club will meet again Dec. 7 and 14 in the rectory at Blessed Sacrament after the 5:30 p.m. Mass. For more information, contact Jamie Fazio at 585/271-7240.

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