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Jezreel: Make parish social ministries bigger

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NCR Today

The first presenter at "A Summons to Build," the NCR conference on parish social ministry, in Kansas City, Mo., was Jack Jezreel, the executive director of JustFaith Ministries. Speaking in an off-the-cuff style without hindrance of notes or a podium, Jezreel enthusiastically invited our participants to think of ways to make parish social ministries bigger.

The best way to make this happen, Jezreel said, is to remember that everyone is called to participate. He emphasized that the church is not a place where things happen to us, but a place where all should be involved in some way.

The conference's subtitle is "Meeting the challenge of providing social service ministries in today's parish." The conference runs through Oct. 9.

The command given at the end of the Mass to "go," Jezreel said, is meant to encourage us to get to work for social justice -- in our families, in politics, in economics. The question is how to encourage people to answer this Gospel call and devote themselves to the nitty-gritty of social ministry.

Jezreel's answer to this question lies in the example of the lives of modern saints like Dorothy Day. He said that holy people like Day had four key commitments that every parish must emphasize: to a relationship with the poor, to prayer, to learning, and to community.

Once these commitments begin to be talked about at our parishes more parishioners will be willing to lead lives of social justice, Jezreel said. As an effect our social ministries will grow stronger and will more reflect the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

With such an important goal in mind, it seems we need to get ourselves moving toward making these

commitments quickly.

Other keynote speakers at the conference are

- Catholic writer Paul Wilkes who spoke about Excellent Catholic Parishes and Best Practices from America's Best Churches and
- Elizabeth Lilly, director of community and parish partnerships for Catholic Charities of Santa Clara, Calif., speaking on "Linking Liturgy to Action"
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Watch NCR Today for more reports from this conference.

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