

Fair trade finds home in Catholic colleges



—Shannon O’Neill

From left, Monika Ostrowidzki, Casey Gallagher and Andreia Marcuccio promote Siena Students for Fair Trade at a college-wide club fair in September 2013 at Siena College in Loudonville, N.Y.

By **NICK SCIARAPPA**

Catholic colleges and universities are leading a growing trend of fair trade involvement in the U.S. More than half of the country’s fair trade schools are Catholic-affiliated, with more schools close to achieving fair trade status on the way.

“We’ve essentially been on a path of doubling each year,” Parker Townley, national organizer of the Fair Trade Colleges and Universities branch of Fair Trade Campaigns,

told *NCR*. “If we can continue on that path I would be overjoyed.”

Currently, 14 out of the 25 colleges and universities that have achieved fair trade status from Fair Trade Campaigns are Catholic.

The Fair Trade Campaigns organization, whose leaders include a number of students and faculty, spreads the use of more than 80 fair trade products, such as coffee, tea, sugar, fruit and cotton. They award fair trade status to towns, congregations, schools and universities.

When a product is certified fair trade, it has passed a process of checks by Fair Trade USA, an organization that ensures

products are bought from farmers at a fair price, contain no genetically modified organisms or hazardous chemicals, and are not made using child labor. For many, buying fair trade products is a way to support human rights and social justice in places like South America, where labor for a livable wage is not always honored.

Achieving fair trade status on a college campus is a five-step process:

- A community of student leaders must put together a fair trade committee and a plan for a campaign.
- The group must work with school

***National Catholic Reporter* provides independent news about the church through its biweekly newspaper and website. For more information, visit NCRonline.org.**

vendors in order to make sure each food service provider offers at least two fair trade products in each campus outlet.

- A committee must help serve fair trade products through catering, followed by sponsoring educational activities both in and outside of the classroom.

- The student government must pass a resolution reflecting a commitment to the use of fair trade products.

Thirty-five other Catholic universities are in the process of becoming recognized.

“Every university has a mission. It always incorporates sustainability and social justice,” Townley said. “Especially in the case of a lot of Catholic universities.”

The first Catholic college to reach fair trade status in the U.S. was Siena College in Loudonville, N.Y., in 2010. Shannon O’Neill, director of the college’s Sr. Thea Bowman Center for Women, was a driving force in bringing the fair trade movement to Siena.

“Catholics should really be leading the way on this,” O’Neill said. “It just fits with what all of the documents on economic justice say. It’s the per-

fect way to live out those values.”

There are different tactics for attracting people to use fair trade products on college campuses. The Siena Students for Fair Trade club sponsors campus events, holds taste-testing education socials, and much more. O’Neill helps in leading fair trade campaigns both on campus and in the community.

“I think chocolate really gets people,” O’Neill said. “If you do a fair trade chocolate tasting and talk about child labor and human trafficking, it’s easy to raise awareness. I usually say to people, ‘Doesn’t this chocolate taste good? It’s all the justice in it that makes it taste good.’”

If the “justice-flavored chocolate” tastes good to the students, O’Neill and other advocates will tell them where they can easily purchase other fair trade products like it.

“Students are usually passionate about social justice,” O’Neill said. Choosing fair trade products “is an easy way to address the things that already depress them.”

[Nicholas Sciarappa is an NCR Bertelsen intern. His email address is nsciarappa@nchronline.org.]

SCHOOLS WITH FAIR TRADE STATUS

The following Catholic colleges and universities have achieved fair trade status from Fair Trade Campaigns:

2010

Siena College, Loudonville, N.Y.

2012

Manhattan College, Riverdale, N.Y.
St. Michael’s College, Colchester, Vt.
Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa
Creighton University, Omaha, Neb.
University of San Diego

2013

Assumption College, Worcester, Mass.
Villanova University, Villanova, Pa.
DePaul University, Chicago

2014

Cabrini College, Radnor, Pa.
Loyola Marymount University,
Los Angeles
St. Joseph’s University, Philadelphia
St. Mary’s College of California, Moraga
Neumann University, Aston, Pa.

—Nicholas Sciarappa

