

**East Texas Catholic Newspaper**  
**Faith and Action Column**  
**December 14, 2007 Edition**

As the Christmas Holiday approaches, presents and wrapping comes to mind. We can certainly put a lot of effort into the wrapping of a gift. Even when we first go into a store to purchase something, one of the first things that appeals to us is the packaging.

So much emphasis is placed on how things appear. Plenty of marketing research and strategy goes into what the outside will look like.

In our everyday life we stress the importance of appearance. We may wear different clothing depending on what we are doing. We have one way we present ourselves at work or school, another for church or our social life.

But appearance doesn't always reveal the true person on the inside. Watching a candidates' debate reminds me of nicely wrapped packages that we, as voters, are trying to open. We need to see what is behind the image they want to present; what is the reality of that person's stand on issues of concern.

I've also noticed the media personalities who facilitate the debates have their own packaging as well. They usually have a pre-planned agenda and set of questions. While these may appear organized and nicely wrapped, they may not lead to answers that clearly reveal the candidate's positions.

Advocacy and social justice is all about getting beneath the packaging. Examining a social concern brings us to the heart of the matter in order to find a solution. Hopefully when we arrive at the root we are able to apply our God given gifts along with community resources to bring about change for the common good.

Jesus often experienced conflicts with his contemporaries by challenging them to go beneath the surface of appearances. In fact, their own expectations of what the messiah was supposed to be blinded them. These preconceived notions prevented them from seeing who Jesus really was.

Throughout scripture, prophets emphasized the importance of an inner life in right relationship with God *and* neighbor. This is the root of any faith based social justice activity. Serving God and neighbor is the primary duty of every person of faith.

Since the fall of 2006, over twenty individuals have graduated from the Parish Social Ministry Leadership Series. These folks took the journey to discover their gifts, learning how to apply them through social justice and advocacy. They have looked beneath the wrapping and found where God dwells, discovering the best present of all.

Are you looking for the perfect gift? Catholic Social Teaching may be a good place to start.