

site: [equalexchange.com](http://equalexchange.com). Coffee, teas, and other items are there to interest you as well.)

Self-appointed volunteers are only too eager to approach and retrieve the bars, and half of them are opened before the chocolate gets back the group. "Before you eat, we have to read the labels," I suggest. Bewildered, they are surprised to find print on both sides of the wrapper.



After each short phrase is read aloud, we have a brief discussion about "fair trade," "from small farmers with love," "organic," "cooperatives," and so on. Much of what is discussed is new to the candidates. Most of these young men and women do not know where chocolate comes from, how it is processed, who provides the raw materials, or just how much various parts of the production cost. They just know what they like.

Finally, the chocolate is consumed, but the discussion continues. "If you like what you are tasting," I ask, "would you be willing to pay what it costs to make it?" We take a moment to discern the difference between the cost and price. "Sometimes," I suggest, "the price is low because the laborers on cocoa plantations are paying some of the cost, bearing the burden of low wages or even indentured servitude. Why should the poor farmers, who have no other recourse, be asked to pay a significant portion of the cost of production? Shouldn't that be ours to pay?"

Now there is a connection between the one who enjoys the final product, and the one who provides the raw material, the fermented cocoa beans. And we have established that a decision on the receiving end of the chain can be felt on the providing end, if the one who enjoys the chocolate has the will to make the difference.

### Hang one on

One way to insure a candidate will witness is to have her or him place their gifts right where everyone will see them -- on the Christmas tree.

I can't remember where the idea came from. Perhaps it was born spontaneously when I spied

clear glass globes at a local craft store. They were about 3" in diameter and, by the dozen, were priced at less than a quarter each. Beacon Street was due to offer a retreat within the week, so the wheels started to turn.

I invited candidates to reflect on three questions. The three most recently used were: 1. What gift has God entrusted to you? 2. How have you used that gift to serve others? 3. Who encourages you to use your gift, by their words or example? Once they had answers to those questions, they were invited to write their thoughts down on strips of brightly colored paper I had trimmed to 1/4 inch wide. Those long strips would then be carefully fed into the opening of the globes. Invariably, the papers would curl up in a unique and artistic design.

A few squeeze bottles filled with sparkly Mylar bits were then used to squirt in some "sanctifying grace" that was sure to energize and sustain the gifts. A tiny gold or silver star was added, the cap reinserted, and the globe was ready to adorn an evergreen branch. Everybody loves this exercise.

All were instructed, as they admired their handiwork, to go home and place it in a prominent place. That's the easy part. Candidates were further instructed to step up and explain the significance of the ornament whenever a visitor dropped in and inquired about the remarkable new addition on the tree. That's the sobering part of hanging one on.



And for many years to come, that ornament will find a place on the tree and a maturing young man or woman will be reminded of a commitment made, graced, and placed for all to see.

These three simple exercises have worked well for Beacon Street. The Catechism, chocolate, and Christmas can be stepping-stones to a richer understanding of Confirmation. They are step up, hands on, and taste good favorites. These and others will be posted on our web site early next year.

*"Do all you can with what you have, in the time you have, in the place you are."*

Nkosi Johnson (1989-2001). From the book We Are All the Same by Jim Wooten.