

PARISH SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION GROUPS

1. Setting the Scene

Some steps to **help you discern** why a Parish Social Justice Action Group (PSJAG) is needed.

“What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God”

Micah 6: 8

Step 1. Understand your Parish community:

- Is it an older, more established Parish, or new and emerging?
- Is it a small or large Parish community?
- What are the demographics for your Parish? For example, is it mainly young families? More retirees, or youth-focused? Culturally and linguistically diverse?
- Is it a community that can provide financial (or other) support to those in need? (through fund-raising activities and charity); or is it a Parish with many experiencing financial hardships and/or feeling socially isolated that requires more help?
- Are there effective links with appropriate referral agencies? This includes, but does not have to be restricted to, other Catholic agencies within the Archdiocese of Perth.

“Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times”

Psalms 106: 3

Step 2. Assess your Parish gifts and strengths:

- Does your Parish have a welcoming and inviting presence? Is there a sense of belonging for many/most? For example, do you have a welcoming committee for new parishioners; and/or do you have regular community gatherings?

- Consider the key features of your Parish: effective leadership from the Parish Priest and/or Parish Council, good connection with the neighbouring Catholic schools, passionate and active parishioners who want to get involved and/or make a difference for others, and so on.
- Are broad (or specific) social justice issues promoted within your Parish on a regular basis? (more than on Social Justice Sunday, the last Sunday in September).
- Does your Parish have the following services and/or activities: parish-based Outreach, St Vincent de Paul group, youth group, Project Compassion and/or Catholic Mission Coordinators, Environmental (Eco-stewards) or Parish Social Justice Action Group?
- Is your Parish involved in awareness-raising and educative activities for your community? These could also be for the broader Archdiocese e.g. providing donations and/or service time to The Shopfront to support those who are homeless.

“Without justice and love, peace will always be the great illusion”

Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara

Step 3. Be aware of other ways of being and doing (and potential barriers to action):

- Does your parish effectively cater for parishioners with varying abilities?
- Is there an awareness of and support network(s) for those experiencing major challenges and hardships? (e.g. parish-based Outreach).
- Do parishioners know where to go for assistance or when in need in your Parish?
- Do community members know who to contact if they want to get more involved in Parish (or Archdiocesan) life?
- Is active participation being effectively modelled and/or promoted within your Parish?

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”

Mt 5: 9

Step 4. Have an awareness and understanding of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles:

- Does your Parish Priest and/or Parish Council (etc.) use the language of CST? For example:
 - Dignity of the human person
 - The Common Good
 - Solidarity
 - Subsidiarity
 - Preferential Option for the Poor
 - Caring for Creation and/or Ecological Stewardship
 - Universal Destination of Goods
 - Human Rights
 - Peace Promotion
 - Participation etc.
- Is there an awareness of the Papal Encyclicals or Apostolic Exhortations on social issues? (e.g. Rerum Novarum, Evangelii Gaudium, Laudato Si’); or would parishioners know where to access this information?
- Are human rights (responsibilities, duties and obligations) openly discussed within your Parish community?
- Are social justice issues regularly promoted and/or discussed? For example:
 - ‘Closing the Gap’ to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (ATSI) through Reconciliation initiatives
 - Global displacement and/or migration resulting in Refugees and Asylum-seekers
 - Homelessness
 - Alcohol and other-drug addictions
 - Human trafficking and slavery-like conditions etc.
- Is there an awareness and/or understanding of the **See-Judge-Act** process for decision-making to assist Parish Social Justice Action Groups to read ‘the signs of the times’?

“The Holy Spirit in its simplest and most common manner expresses itself and makes itself felt in prayer. It is a beautiful and salutary thought that, wherever people are praying, there the Holy Spirit is; the living breath of prayer”

St Pope John Paul 11

Step 5. Be guided by and through appropriate Catholic Leadership:

- **The Word:** With values, beliefs and traditions being in accordance with Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching and thinking.
- **Internationally:** Through the leadership of His Holiness, Pope Francis, with support from other Vatican endorsed documents and other recognised leadership.
- **Nationally:** Under the leadership of the **Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC)** and its Commissions (e.g. Bishops' Commission for Social Justice-Mission and Service [BCSJ-MS]), and associated agencies (e.g. Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Caritas Australia and/or Catholic Earthcare Australia).
- **State-based:** With leadership from the Archbishops in Western Australia for the following Archdioceses: Kimberley (based in Broome), Geraldton, Perth and Bunbury.
- **Archdiocese of Perth:** Under the leadership of His Grace, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, with support from the Bishops and other vocations/ministries.

“It would not be out of place to recall the relationship between justice and mercy. These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love”

Pope Francis (Misericordiae Vultus # 20)

Step 6. Think globally – act locally:

(Source: *Social Justice in Everyday Life – An Issues Paper* from the ACSJC; Reprinted in 1992).

- **The Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ** requires all those who believe in it to work towards a radical transformation of the world (p 7).
- A commitment to social justice is an essential characteristic of a life lived according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (p 5).
- It is clear to be a follower of Jesus entails confrontation of the powers of this world when they do not reflect the values of the Kingdom (of God) (p 21).

- The Church's work for justice and peace is an essential part of its role. This work is not an option to be chosen according to individual interest and inclination. It is rather a responsibility incumbent on all the followers of Jesus (p 8).
- **To act is to hope...** For a Christian, hope is ultimately anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (p 30).

“Making this world more just means, among other things, ...that the economic and political never prevail over the human”

St Pope John Paul 11 (Homily in Santo Domingo)

Step 7. Prayerful discernment, faith and hope:

- What Parish groups/ministry do you already have that discuss and/or act on social justice issues?
- Is Jesus central to the thoughts, feelings and actions of the group members? We are called to *see* with the eyes of Jesus, *judge* or assess a situation with the heart of Jesus, and *act* as Jesus would today.
- Is prayerful discernment and theological reflection (Scriptural references) a key element of any social justice activities within your Parish?
- Do such groups have an action focus that is transformative in nature and hope-filled?
- Would you like the Justice, Ecology and Development Office (JEDO) to assist you on your Parish journey to develop a new, or strengthen an existing, Parish Social Justice Action Group? **Providing 1-2 key contacts for your parish is helpful.**

“There is nothing more important for us as Christians and as those who live our faith in the Catholic tradition, than to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus”

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB (Holy Thursday Homily, 2016)