

PARISH SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION GROUPS

5. Strengthening Your Group

Some steps to **strengthen** your Parish Social Justice Action Group (PSJAG).

*“Trust in the Lord forever,
for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock”*

Isa 26: 4

Step 1. Focus on Service:

- Pope Francis said that *“Jesus shows us that love is service – lowly, quiet and hidden – of our brothers and sisters, especially those in greatest need”* (Jubilee Audience, 12 March 2016, Vatican City).
- Martin Luther King Jr stated: *“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”*
- Yet Henri Nouwen commented that *“we often think of service as doing things **for** others. That sometimes needs to be. But service takes its own true character when we do things **with** others... It gives credit to what another may contribute. It takes the pace of another... It sees service as joining with the other. It sees service as companionship and walking a common road”* (Spirituality of Companionship).
- With a focus on love expressed through welcome, hospitality, charity and justice may we reflect also upon the words of Mahatma Gandhi: *“the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”*
- *“Love God; Serve God – Everything is in that”* (St Clare of Assisi).

*“Therefore walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the just”*

Prov. 2: 20

Step 2. Focus on ‘Good Works’:

- *“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Matt 5: 13-14 & 16).*
- Pope St John Paul II stated in *Laborem Exercens* (1981): *“the value for determining work is not primarily the work being done but the fact that the one doing it is a person.”*
- *“Because the Catholic Church is concerned with the human dignity and well-being of each and every individual, the work of safe-guarding all people is rightfully part of the fabric of the mission of the Church” (Good Works – The Catholic Church as an Employer in Australia, ACBC and ACCER, 2015, p 12).*
- Pope St John Paul II said: *“the unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: Indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God; fulfil His will; serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ” (Christifideles Laici, 1988).*
- *“Teach by works more than words” (St Teresa of Avila).*

“Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness”

Pope Francis (Amoris Laetitia, “The Joy of Love”, 2016, # 308)

Step 3. Support Education and Ongoing Faith Formation:

- Catholic Mission says that *“education/formation is a transformational process. It refers to the forming or shaping of the whole person; not just the cognitive but the spiritual; to take up and carry on the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. It helps individuals explore how to be Church in their context, how to live by Gospel values and how to work so that all people have a ‘fullness of life’. Such a transformed world is what Christians refer to as the Kingdom of God”.*
- Ongoing faith formation can include participation in liturgical and sacramental programs including marriage preparation; Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA); involvement with other parish ministries; Catechist training; participation in Lenten and/or Advent programs; involvement with service and justice-focused activities; retreats; Bible study groups and so much more – be creative in your personal ministry as missionary disciples.

- Mission is about evangelisation - with evangelisation being about transformation from the personal to global levels. That is, evangelisation is about the way the Church continues the ministry and mission of Jesus including celebrating the Sacraments, doing 'good works' of charity, justice and peace promotion.
- Pope Francis said that *"education is an act of hope,"*
- With Malala Yousafzai stating: *"Extremists have shown what frightens them most: a girl with a book;"* and *"let us pick up our books and pencils. They are our most powerful weapon."*

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples"

St Mother Teresa

Step 4. Encounter First Peoples:

- *"Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognised in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law"* (Article 1, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples); *"with the right to self-determination"* (Article 3), which aligns with the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principle of subsidiarity.
- Pope St John Paul II identified four very important issues when he spoke to the Aboriginal people in Blatherskite Park at Alice Springs in 1986:
 - (1) He challenged all Australians to ensure the preservation of Indigenous cultures and to keep working for an inclusive multicultural Australia.
 - (2) He called us to seek and explore the points of agreement between Indigenous traditions and those of Jesus and all His people.
 - (3) He praised the way the Indigenous peoples had cared for the land and then challenged us to learn together how to preserve our fragile environment.
 - (4) Finally, by naming past hurts and continuing injustices, John Paul II confronted us as a nation with the need to move towards true reconciliation.(ACBC Social Justice Statement 2006, p 12: *The Heart of Our Country – Dignity and Justice for our Indigenous Sisters and Brothers*).
- *"The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has been wounded by injustice and misunderstanding. The relationship needs healing so that we*

can build a better future together. This is what the process of reconciliation is about” (Catholics and the Process of Reconciliation, ACSJC, 1999).

- We need to encounter the First peoples of our world – our common home – as they have much wisdom to share with all of us. Professor Mick Dodson (a member of the Yawuru people in the Broome area of the southern Kimberley region of WA, and the first Aboriginal and Social Justice Commissioner with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) stated: *“Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.”*
- *“The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony”* (Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church of Australia).

“A Church that does not provoke any crisis, preach a Gospel that does not unsettle, proclaim a Word of God that does not get under anyone’s skin or a Word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed: what kind of Gospel is that?”

St Oscar A Romero (Archbishop and Martyr of El Salvador)

Step 5. Welcome the Stranger:

- Jesus identified himself as a stranger to be welcomed (Matthew 25:35).
- Through their fleeing into Egypt, the exiled Holy Family of Nazareth - Jesus, Mary and Joseph - are for all times and all places the archetype of every refugee family; the models and protectors of every migrant, pilgrim and refugee (Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office).
- Pope St John Paul II asked: *“How can the baptised claim to welcome Christ if they close the door to the foreigner who comes knocking?”*
- *“To see Christ in every brother and sister in need; to proclaim and defend human dignity of every migrant, every displaced person and every refugee. In this way, assistance given will not be considered an alms from the goodness of our heart but an act of justice due to them”* (Pope St John Paul II).

- May we remember the Good Samaritan when considering our neighbour. Pope Francis said: *“Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven.”*

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it”

Heb 13: 2

Step 6. We are One Human Family:

- When we work and live for the **common good** and as **global citizens**, our aim is to build a sustainable global community founded on interdependence and **human rights** – yet still affirming the rights of individuals and social groups to have their own voice through the CST principle of **subsidiarity**.
- According to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: *“solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person; the equality of all in **dignity** and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples toward an ever more committed unity”* (2004, para 192).
- Dorothy Day said: *“We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love one another, to love our neighbour, to love our enemy as our friend.”*
- Whereas Pope Francis reminded us: *“No border can stop us from being one family.”*
- *“If we practice love of neighbour with great perfection, we will have done everything”* (St Teresa of Avila).

“God is working to shape us into a community of faith and service, ready to be the signs and bearers of His love for a broken world. We all have our God-given part to play in this great enterprise. We also all have a part to play in helping each other to be all that God is asking us to be” – **Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB**

Step 7. Christ has No Body Now but Yours:

- *“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which*

He walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours” (St Teresa of Avila).

- *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and one Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4: 4-6).*
- As we follow the **Good Shepherd**, we *“know that the Lord is God. It is He that made us and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100: 3).*
- With a focus on those who are marginalised and vulnerable and with a **preferential option for the poor**, Jesus said: *“Amen, I say to you; whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).*
- Pope Benedict XVI stated: *“May you always experience the joy that comes from putting Christ at the centre of your lives.”*

“At the end of our lives, we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received; how much money we have made; or how many great things we have done. We will be judged by: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was naked and you clothed me.

I was homeless and you took me in”

St Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Time for Action – Some quotes to keep you motivated:

- *“It is utterly intolerable for Catholics to restrict themselves to positions of mere observers” (Pope St John XXIII, 1959 Christmas Broadcast)*
- *“Do not look the other way; do not hesitate. Recognise that the world is hungry for action, not words. Act with courage and vision” (Nelson Mandela)*
- *“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor” (Archbishop Desmond Tutu)*
- *“None of us can do everything; but all of us can do something” (St Oscar Romero)*
- *“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek” (Barack Obama)*