

PARISH SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION GROUPS

4. Social Justice in Other Parish Ministries

Some steps to **incorporate social justice** in other ministries.

“All who follow Jesus follow the example of the one who makes all things new, the one who makes all things right again”

Rev. 21: 5

Step 1. Incorporate Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Thinking:

- Duncan MacLaren stated: *“We are all called to transform the world, either through our baptism or our identification with a Catholic organisation. This means being involved in the politics of the common good – the organisation of society according to values of human dignity, which the Church holds to be universal. Viewing the world through the lens of CST helps us orient our judgements and values towards an approach where the dignity of the human person is always upheld”* (Towards a more just world – the social mission of the Church and new Catholic approaches, 2008, ACSJC Issue Paper # 63, p 27).
- CST and thinking places the dignity of the human person central to the economic, political, personal and spiritual realms, to create an environment conducive to people reaching their authentic or full development. This focus can be included in all Parish ministries.
- Jesus said: *“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).
- Pope Francis said: *“To build a society that is truly human means to put the person and his or her dignity at the centre.”*
- According to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, CST principles and thinking are born of *“the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarised in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society”* (2004, para 160).

“The Church is convinced that the most important tool and one which influences every other dimension of a person’s life, is a recognition of the love and presence of God at work in every human heart and in the world around us”

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB (April 2016)

Step 2. Include Social Justice in Your ‘Good Works’:

- According to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: ‘*Social Justice, a requirement related to the social question which is worldwide in scope, concerns the social, political and economic aspects and above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions*’ (2004, para 201).
- Doing ‘good works’ through a social justice lens helps to identify and then tackle situations or problems that take people away from a focus on the common good. Social justice is solution-focused, to try to change systems and structures that oppress, disregard or devalue others – devalue our neighbour. Social justice focuses on our shared humanity as one human family.
- Gerard Moore states: “*God is a God of liberation: those in slavery will be set free. God promises a new future of hope and fulfilment. As present, we come to understand that God ‘hears’, ‘sees’ and ‘is moved by’ the plight of the people and particularly the poor, oppressed and mistreated. As liberating, we are brought to realise that the love of God is neither abstract nor distant but always at work in freeing the people and maintaining them in freedom*” (Justice in the name of God, 2013, ACSJC Issue Paper # 75, p 13).
- Mahatma Gandhi said that “*our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation*” (Young India, Jan. 8 1925).
- Pope Francis stated that “*a person who thinks only of building walls, wherever they may be and not building bridges, isn’t Christian.*”

*“Love does no wrong to a neighbour;
therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law”*

Rom 13: 10

Step 3. Focus on Charity and Justice:

- Christianity teaches that there are three theological virtues to be prized over all others: *faith, hope and charity* (1 Cor. 13:13). Charity is most often translated as love – expressed as love for our neighbour – yet demonstrated through actions of service and kindness.
- Doing what is *right and just* means assessing situations and being agents for change so that a win/lose mentality is not encouraged or supported. Rather, justice is more participatory and representative of, and for, those who can often be perceived as voiceless or disempowered. To right or correct such ‘wrongs’ can include *distributive* or *restorative* justice – trying to correct an imbalance of power (in its various forms). That is, “*Biblical justice focuses on right relationships not right rules*” (Howard Zehr in ‘To each as any have need – Justice and health care’ by Elizabeth Hepburn IBVM, ACSJC Issue Paper, 2006, # 59, p 7).
- Through the *good news* of CST, we can read the signs of the times through situational analyses that assess through moral and ethical lenses to incorporate charity and justice – this is not either/or, but rather both. St Vincent de Paul explains this well: “*Deal with the most urgent needs. Organise charity so that it is more efficient... teach reading and writing; educate with the aim of giving each the means of self-support. Intervene with authorities to obtain reforms in structure... there is no charity without justice.*”
- “*Love is not patronising and charity isn’t about pity – it is about love. Charity and love are the same – with charity you give love. So don’t just give money but reach out your hand instead*” (St Mother Teresa of Calcutta).
- Pope Francis stated that “*we cannot escape the Lord’s words to us and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison*” (cf Mt 25: 31-45, Misericordiae Vultus, 2015, # 15).

“If we love God, we will undoubtedly love our neighbour also;

they are as cause and effect”

Catherine McAuley (Retreat Instructions, p 147)

Step 4. Incorporate Justice and Mercy:

- Pope Francis said that *“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”* (Misericordiae Vultus, 2015, # 20).
- With this in mind, reflect and act upon the *Corporal Works of Mercy*:
 - (1) *Feed the hungry*
 - (2) *Give drink to the thirsty*
 - (3) *Clothe the naked*
 - (4) *Visit the sick*
 - (5) *Visit the imprisoned*
 - (6) *Give welcome to strangers*
 - (7) *Bury the dead*
- Reflect and act upon the *Spiritual Works of Mercy*:
 - (1) *Counsel the doubtful*
 - (2) *Instruct the uninformed*
 - (3) *Admonish sinners*
 - (4) *Comfort the afflicted*
 - (5) *Forgive offenses*
 - (6) *Bear wrongs patiently*
 - (7) *Pray for the living and the dead*
- *“Jesus tells us that we should not judge, we should not condemn, we should forgive and we should give generously. And he sums it all up by simply saying, “Be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful”* (Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, Homily, Second Rite of Reconciliation, Year of Mercy, 15th March 2016).
- Pope Francis stated: *“The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters”* (Misericordiae Vultus, 2015, # 10).

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”

Gal 5: 22

Step 5. Focus on a Preferential Option for the Poor:

- *“As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental ‘option for the poor’ – to speak for the voiceless; to defend the defenceless; to impact on the poor... As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest need require the greatest response” (Economic Justice for All, US Catholic Bishops 1986, para 16).*
- *“A Church that does not unite itself to the poor... is not truly the Church of Jesus Christ” (St Oscar Romero, Archbishop and Martyr of El Salvador).*
- Pope Francis stated: *“Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others; no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard; the quiet joy of His love is no longer felt and the desire to do good fades.”*
- Nelson Mandela said that *“overcoming poverty is not a task of charity - it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that generation. Let your greatness bloom.”*
- *“True worship is to work for justice and care for the poor and oppressed” (Isa 58: 5-7).*

*“Let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel
where the poor have a special experience of God’s Mercy”*

Pope Francis (Misericordiae Vultus, 2015, # 15)

Step 6. Hear the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor:

- Our stewardship of the earth enables us to be participants in God’s act of creating and sustaining our world – caring for our common home – working in *solidarity* for the *common good*: for the good of all, as we are one human family.
- Pope St John Paul II referred to this global need as requiring an *ecological conversion*; with Pope Benedict the XVI stating: *“humanity must be increasingly conscious of the links between respect for nature and human ecology.”*
- Pope Francis said: *“Small yet strong in the love of God, like St Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live and all its peoples” (Evangelii Gaudium, 2013, # 213).*

- *“We have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; It must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to **hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor**” (Pope Francis, Laudato Si’ – Care for Our Common Home, 2015, # 49).*
- *“We are the first generation that can end poverty, and the last one that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change” (Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary General).*

“Never see a need without doing something about it”

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop

Step 7. Peace Promotion:

- According to a media statement following the conference in Rome on Non-Violence and Just Peace (April 2016): *“the time has come for our Church to be a living witness and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active non-violence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective non-violent practices. In all of this, Jesus is our inspiration and model.”*
- This is to change the previous ‘Just War’ theory to a focus that supports the approach modelled by Jesus in the Gospels - with a focus on peace and non-violence. The conference participants summarised this with ‘*An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Non-violence*’. This urgent appeal is for a change from the ‘Just War’ theory of the past, to a focus on ‘Just Peace.’
- *“Anyone can love peace, but Jesus didn’t say, ‘Blessed are the peace-lovers’. He says ‘peace-makers’. He is referring to a life vocation, not a hobby on the side-lines of life” (Jim Wallis).*
- Pope Francis stated: *“War really is the ‘mother of all poverties’; war impoverishes the family; it steals lives, souls, our most sacred feelings and our beloved ones.”*
- Pope St John Paul II said: *“Darkness can only be scattered by light; hatred can only be conquered by love.”*

“Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silent revolt of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is generosity.

It is right and it is duty”

St Oscar Romero (Archbishop & Martyr)