

PARISH SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION GROUPS

2. Getting Started

Some steps to **help you form** your Parish Social Justice Action Group (PSJAG).

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them”*

Mt 18:20



Step 1. Discern the calling for Parish-based Social Justice Ministry:

- What are your personal motivations? (Have you prayed on this? And/or felt called for such service?)
- Are social justice issues a personal and/or professional passion?
- Is your Parish Priest supportive and/or involved in forming the Social Justice Action Group?
- Is your Parish Council supportive and/or involved?
- Does your Parish already have one or all of the following: Catholic Outreach, St Vincent De Paul Group, Caritas and/or Catholic Missions Coordinator(s), Youth Group, and/or Environmental Group?

*“And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will
guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”*

Phil 4: 7

Step 2. Identify and approach other interested people:

- Have other parishioners expressed interest for such a group to be formed?
- Parishioners from other Ministries may want to support your goal or aim to form a Parish Social Justice Action Group – so they are a good place to start.
- Call in your friends and family to help you spread the word about your intentions, noting their support is greatly valued and appreciated.
- Build or strengthen your relationship/friendship with your Parish Priest, Parish Council and other Parish Ministries, as they may be able to suggest key people for the Social Justice Action Group or get involved themselves.
- Be mindful but not disheartened that a Parish Social Justice Action Group may not be a priority for the Parish Priest (at this time); but heed the call for your own Parish ministry.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed people can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”*

Margaret Mead

Step 3. Plan and prepare for the meeting/gathering:

- Have you decided what type of meeting you would like to hold? For example, you could have an informal gathering about social justice issues that may have specific relevance to your Parish, have an inspirational speaker at your gathering, show a brief you-tube clip, or include inspirational music.
- Where will the gathering be held? At your home, in the Parish hall, at the neighbouring Catholic school grounds?
- Think about what the equipment needs may be: DVD or CD player, butcher’s paper, white board etc.
- Personal invitations (or phone calls) are worth their weight in gold when trying to get others involved.

- However, a notice in your Parish Bulletin or a flyer (half or one page) on the Parish Bulletin Board could also work really well; perhaps include a sign-up sheet.

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled”*

Mt 5: 6

Step 4. Call a meeting/gathering and invite other interested people:

- Be mindful and respectful of the time commitment from yourself and others – recommend a maximum meeting/gathering time (perhaps 1 and a half hours).
- Having a broad plan or vision for your Parish Social Justice Action Group can help get the conversation started and may assist with getting others involved. This can be brief - half to one page.
- A group size of 7 – 10 interested and/or curious people can begin the conversation. Don't panic if it's a smaller group to start with – make a start.
- Having refreshments available can be an additional draw card – perhaps the gathering can be during a morning or afternoon tea (if during the day) or a supper (if in the evening).
- Will a crèche be needed or is someone available to help out to make a space nearby child-friendly (recognising that some social justice issues involve more adult concepts)?

*“None of us can do everything;
but all of us can do something”*

St Oscar Romero

Step 5. Hold the meeting/gathering for your Parish-based Social Justice Action Group:

- Open the meeting with prayer (a prayerful and reflective space in your meeting area is a welcome inclusion).
- An Acknowledgement of Country (or Welcome to Country – if you have an Aboriginal Elder present and involved) sets the tone for the social justice gathering.
- A brief ice-breaker introductory session gives everyone present the opportunity to be seen, heard, and validated (who are they and why are they at the gathering?).
- It is useful to include some ground rules (being respectful of others and recognising their inherent dignity and worth, valuing diversity, being justice and service-focused, not allowing one person to dominate the conversation, honouring the time commitment by those present).
- It is useful to understand if most attending are interested in broad social justice issues (e.g. promoting the good works of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference [ACBC] agencies such as the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Caritas Australia and/or Catholic Earthcare Australia– and the work of JEDO), or whether there are specific social justice issues or challenges for the Parish or for some of its members that people would also like to address.

*May grace and peace be yours in abundance
in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*

2 Peter: 1: 2

Step 6. Include ongoing reflection and discernment for prioritised action:

- In recognition of this call to ministry/service, it is helpful for the Parish Social Justice Action Group meeting or gathering to begin and close with prayer/reflection.
- Acknowledge that members of the group may have very different issues of concern that they want to discuss in more detail and then act on (this may make gaining a consensus challenging).

- To assist with discernment and prioritised actions, the **See-Judge-Act** process for decision-making is useful to promote and use (this can be through various lenses e.g. cultural, gender, socio-political).
- Remember Dr Martin Luther King's warning about *"the paralysis of analysis."*
- Trust that the members are honouring each other's contribution in a safe space (and be mindful not to disclose shared personal stories without permission).

"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 7. Useful tips:

- Incorporate Scriptural references and Catholic Social Teaching (and thinking).
- Listen and respect one another's truth (even when it is very different to your own).
- De-escalate potentially volatile conversations ('nip them in the bud,' coming back to the ground rules of being respectful of self and others).
- Brainstorm a list of social justice issues to help prioritise intended actions.
- Use local heroes, peace promoters and environmental activists as role models or guest speakers.

"Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor and for enabling them to be fully a part of society"

Pope Francis (Evangelii Gaudium # 187)