



## FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION: CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE WORK OF JUSTICE AND PEACE



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a Just World.

 COUNCIL FOR  
JUSTICE & PEACE

A black and white photograph of a young African boy with short, curly hair. He is smiling broadly, showing his teeth. He is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt. His hands are clasped together in front of him, holding a small, dark object. The background is a dense, out-of-focus texture of what appears to be dry grass or reeds.

**“AN AUTHENTIC FAITH – WHICH IS NEVER COMFORTABLE OR COMPLETELY PERSONAL – ALWAYS INVOLVES A DEEP DESIRE TO CHANGE THE WORLD, TO TRANSMIT VALUES, TO LEAVE THE EARTH SOMEHOW BETTER THAN WE FOUND IT.”**

POPE FRANCIS, *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 183

# THE SEE, JUDGE, ACT APPROACH OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Catholic Social Teaching has been described as 'faith in action', a way of reflecting upon and responding to the call of Jesus as it relates to contemporary society. This pack has been designed to provide you with material to engage with Catholic Social Teaching in a practical way in your diocese and/or parish.

In *Mater et magistra*, Saint John XXIII affirmed the methodology of See, Judge, Act as a way of reading and responding to the signs and needs of the times (23):

1. Examine the concrete situation (See);
2. Evaluate it with respect to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (Judge);
3. Decide what should be done in the circumstances (Act).

We would also suggest that this is an approach by which you might engage with the material presented here.

## 1. SEE the facts; know the reality. For each of the issues presented:

A Read the background information and the stories carefully on your own and as a group;

B Do further research as required; engage with the questions the material poses;

C Consider inviting an expert speaker to help you unpack the facts; make some judgements and plan a course of action;

D Take some time to consider the 'local' dimension of the issue explored and how the issue impacts on the local as well as the national and/or international.

## 2. Use social analysis and moral values to make JUDGEMENTS about the facts in the light of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching:

A Pray together with the facts as you have uncovered them. Spend some time reflecting in a particular way on the stories you have heard and the people you have encountered for whom the issue is a very real and immediate one;

B Spend some time discussing together the information you gather in terms of the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching outlined in this document;

C Begin the process of discerning what you are being called to do. Do this alone and as part of the group. Challenge yourselves to the call being presented by each of the issues.

## 3. Plan a realistic and effective strategy for ACTION. What are you being called to do? Reflection on Catholic Social Teaching needs to be more than just an intellectual exercise but also 'faith in action' for the wider community. Some examples of action you might begin to take are:

A Share with the wider community what you have learned, e.g. invite a speaker, have an information sharing evening, speak at prayer meetings, speak to other groups in the parish on the issue, engage your local clergy;

B Engage with elected representatives on the issue;

C Examine what changes you might seek to implement in your own community/parish/diocese in response to this issue;

D Mobilise local media around the issue;

E Create a space for conversation around the issue and develop a parish/diocesan plan for engagement on it;

F Monitor and evaluate any plan you undertake to help ensure you get the result you want to work towards and to help you learn from the engagement.

## 'Seven Commandments' for Catholic Social Teaching in your Parish and Diocese

(ADAPTED: DUBLIN ARCHDIOCESE EDUCATION SECRETARIAT)

**ROOTED IN PRAYER AND WORSHIP:** begin meetings and engagements for justice in prayer. Ensure the social teaching of the Church is communicated through community worship, especially as you celebrate the Eucharist.

**INTEGRATE, DON'T ISOLATE:** involve the whole community, see how all the various organisations and groups can be engaged in the work for justice.

**CONTENT COUNTS – STUDY THE DOCUMENTS:** situate your activity in the Church's teaching. Quote from the documents in support of your engagement and your work. See such study as a constituent part of your engagement and your sharing on your engagement. This is your chance to share the good news as wide and as far as you can.

**COMPETENCY COUNTS:** invite speakers and others to engage with your group. There is a wealth of experience within your own parish, within your diocese and within the wider Church nationally that you can call upon to help you engage with a whole range of justice issues.

**CHARITY (SOCIAL SERVICE) IS NOT ENOUGH:** a constituent part of Catholic Social Teaching is the work done for justice. Charity is not enough. Explore the best ways and best places for you to challenge structural injustices that marginalise the poor and oppressed.

**THOU SHALT SEE, JUDGE, ACT:** every action for justice should be rooted in the methodology suggested by Catholic Social Teaching: see –judge – act.

**CELEBRATE YOUR WORK TOGETHER!** Build one another up as a group. What is done is only half the story, how you do it is the other half. Don't lose sight of the group's strengths or of the people within the group. You're hopefully in it for the long haul so be gentle with one another, modelling through your group how you wish to see the world transformed!

# THE ROLE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE GROUPS IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) proposed the creation of a body of the universal Church whose role would be “to stimulate the Catholic Community to foster progress in needy regions and social justice on the international scene” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 90). It was in reply to this request that Pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Commission “*Justitia et Pax*” by a Motu Proprio dated 6 January 1967 (*Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*). This Motu Proprio places particular emphasis on the theme of development in all its forms: educational and cultural, economic and social. Explicit reference was made to the new Commission two months later in the Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio*, which had as a central theme the principle of integral human development. Paul VI succinctly stated of the new body that “its name, which is also its programme, is Justice and Peace” (No. 5).

“It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all people of goodwill, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed.”

*OCTAGESIMA ADVENIENS*, 4

In 1971 Pope Paul commemorated the first social Encyclical, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* – a key foundation document of Catholic Social Teaching – with an Apostolic Letter addressed to the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Maurice Roy, entitled *Octagesima adveniens*. In this letter the Pope highlighted the responsibility of ‘Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and for action from the social teaching of the Church’ (*Octagesima adveniens*, 4). These words effectively encapsulate the mission of Justice and Peace groups at all levels – parish, diocesan, national and international – which remains unchanged to the present day. The letter also contained clear guidelines for reflection and action.

# SETTING UP A JUSTICE AND PEACE GROUP: CASE STUDY

The Council for Justice and Peace does not have a template for Justice and Peace groups as the structure and method of working will develop according to the needs of the group, drawing on the unique talents of the individuals who

come together to form it. The following case study from the Diocese of Raphoe offers a useful model that may be helpful to anyone considering forming a new group.

## HOW TO GO ABOUT SETTING UP A JUSTICE AND PEACE GROUP IN THE DIOCESE OF RAPHOE?

### STEP 1: SUPPORT FROM DIOCESE

It is critical that before a Justice and Peace group is formed that it is supported by the Bishop and Council of Priests in the diocese.

### STEP 2: FORMATION OF A GROUP

Form a core group of 6-8 people initially in the diocese. The most effective way to get people involved is by personal invitation. Ideally, there should be representation from laity, religious and clergy in this group. The co-ordinator of this project should consult with the diocese about a panel of suitable people who could be approached to join this group. Frequency and duration of meetings can be decided by this group.

### STEP 3: TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Members of the Justice and Peace group could benefit from attending a seminar called “Rediscovering Mercy” which is a successful programme steeped in Catholic Social Teaching facilitated by Trócaire. Objectives of “Rediscovering Mercy” are:

- Building an awareness of peace and justice initiatives and concerns in our world;
- To highlight the values of Catholic Social Teaching and our relationship with God and others;
- Contemplation on how we weave justice and mercy into our daily lives as followers of Christ;
- An insight into Trócaire’s work, both in Ireland and overseas.

### STEP 4: MISSION STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

Develop a Mission Statement and Objectives for the Justice and Peace group for the Diocese of Raphoe.

## **STEP 5: CREATE PROCEDURAL AND MEETING STRUCTURES FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE GROUP**

- Who will facilitate the meetings?
- Who will take down minutes during the meetings?
- How will decisions be made?
- Is there a budget? How will funds be allocated?
- Who will keep the diocese informed about work and activities of the group?

## **STEP 6: CHOOSE ISSUES TO FOCUS ON**

- The Justice and Peace group chose issues to focus on, working in partnership with Trócaire and the Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference, and inviting Trócaire representative Roisin O'Hara to facilitate a meeting to help discern about issues which the group may choose to focus on.
- Dr Nicola Brady, Research Co-ordinator with the Council for Justice and Peace was able to share ideas and resources.

## **STEP 7: CONTACT OTHER JUSTICE AND PEACE GROUPS**

Make contact with other Justice and Peace groups in other dioceses around Ireland to get new ideas, keep the enthusiasm alive in the group and to work collaboratively on common issues.

## **STEP 8: STAY INFORMED**

It would be important for this group to keep up to date with their educational formation through the resources from Trócaire and the Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference.

## **STEP 9: ANNUAL REVIEW**

A review of the Justice and Peace group in consultation with the diocesan bishop once a year would be helpful and an opportunity to plan ahead for the following year.



# FOR REFLECTION JUSTICE AND PEACE GROUPS TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE OF POPE FRANCIS

“Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be “protectors” of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS,  
ST PETER’S SQUARE, TUESDAY, 19 MARCH 2013

With these words, at the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis underlined the centrality of the work of Justice and Peace to the life and mission of the Church. The enthusiastic response that greeted this message highlights the importance of raising the profile of Justice and Peace work. Justice and Peace groups – at parish, diocesan and national level – throughout the world, are working to change lives and transform hearts. The good news of this work rarely gets the attention it deserves in the media or even in the wider Church community. If we reflect on the appeal by Pope Francis, quoted above, it is clear that this work belongs to everyone. It takes many forms and can – and should – be part of our everyday lives. It is the practical outworking of the message of the Gospels and, consequently, central to the practice of our faith.

**The Call to be Protectors of One Another**  
The simple call to be protectors of one another, expressed by Pope Francis in his inaugural homily, contains a powerful counter-cultural message, challenging the destructive individualism that is weakening the social fabric of our societies and leaving increasing numbers of people excluded, marginalised and vulnerable. Pope Francis calls us to be

troubled by the “globalisation of indifference” (*Message for World Day of Peace, 2015*), but, at the same time, gives us a message of hope and encouragement that we can make a difference (*Address to European Parliament, 25 November 2014*).

**Joyfully Living Out the Christian Message**  
In choosing the title *Evangelii gaudium* (the Joy of the Gospel) for his first Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis reminds us that, even when faced with difficult issues, Christians bring the Good News of the Gospel. In this way he recognises the need to energise and motivate, as well as to challenge. This is an important contribution as the reputational crises faced by the Church in recent years, on a national and international level, have, understandably, had an impact on the morale of many in our local Church communities. Yet, the enthusiasm with which the teaching of Pope Francis has been received, confirmed that we are ready for this message of hope. In the encyclical letter *Lumen fidei* (2013), jointly authored by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, the theme of hope features prominently: “Thus wonderfully interwoven, faith, hope and charity are the driving force of the Christian life as it advances towards full communion with God” (7).



## Encounter and Listening as the Foundations of Justice and Peace Work

Pope Francis sets a strong example of concrete actions of solidarity, meeting and reaching out to those who suffer, acknowledging their dignity, their rights and their potential. The work of justice is not something that is done to, for, or on behalf of the victims of injustice, but alongside our brothers and sisters who suffer, according to the principle of the common good. The concept of fraternity is central to the social teaching of Pope Francis: from his first visit outside Rome to migrants stranded on the island of Lampedusa, where he exclaimed “Cain, where is your brother?” (*Homily of the Holy Father, 8 July 2013*) to his messages for *World Day of Peace: Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace* (2014) and *No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters* (2015).

## Challenging Structures of Sin, Creating the Conditions in which all Can Flourish

“Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 218). An approach to Justice and Peace based on genuine fraternity requires us to address the

structures that suppress the rights of many, concentrating power in the hands of a few. This is a radical message, calling all of us to reflect on ways in which we might be guilty of “comfortable and silent complicity” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 210). It demands a change of lifestyles, based on the recognition of the centrality of human dignity to all social and economic questions while, at the same time, recognising that human beings are part of, and depend on, the natural environment, which we have the duty to protect for the good of all (*Address to European Parliament, 25 November 2014*).

## Peace

Based on these values, Pope Francis conveys a compelling vision for peace, based on relationship with God and one another. Addressing Israeli and Palestinian leaders in June 2014, the Pope emphasised that the work of peace calls for courageous leadership. At the same time, he highlighted the contribution of faith to peace-building, stating that prayer for peace is never in vain.

Although the challenges may seem overwhelming, if we keep always before us the challenge to be protectors of the dignity of all members of the human family, we can bring the hope and light of faith to places of despair and suffering.

