**WELCOME**

This booklet is designed to help establish a social justice group in a parish, school or wherever people of goodwill gather.

It is clearly not meant to be a definitive answer but rather a stimulus to the question “what can I do?”

We so often feel powerless to effect change to what ails our world and the work to bring about a more just society can seem to be someone else’s responsibility.

Gathering with like minded people is the first step.

*Fr Peter Smith*

**JUSTICE & PEACE PROMOTER**

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// WHY A SOCIAL JUSTICE GROUP?

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus came to the synagogue in Nazareth and read the words of the prophet Isaiah:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

…Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

It is foundational to the Gospel message that to be a Christian, to follow Jesus, is to be concerned for our brothers and sisters and the world in which we live. We live in a world where people often experience a great injustice and lack of peace. The distribution of wealth continues to polarise to fewer and fewer people. Nations and militant minorities continue to make war, fuelled by the free sale of armaments around the world. We continue to treat our planet in a way that utilises its resources without concern for future generations. A social justice group is a step towards responding to these challenges.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?
JUSTICE IS GIVING TO ANOTHER (INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP) WHAT IS THEIR DUE. THIS DIFFERS TO CHARITY IN THAT IT IMPLIES AN OBLIGATION NOT MERELY BENEVOLENCE.
What does a social justice group “do”?

Informs: First ourselves and then the wider community as to what are the issues that should concern us in the world.

Reflects: We allow those issues to touch our hearts and listen, in prayerful reflection as to what Jesus would say.

Acts: Often it is not enough to be passive in the face of injustice and so we may choose to act and try to make a difference.

“All that’s necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing.”
EDMUND BURKE
Since 2006, they have:

- Raised money to bring a Sierra Leone family from a UN refugee camp
- Raised money for the Blue Dragon Foundation that helps street kids in Vietnam
- Raised money to bring out a wife from Somalia for a disabled parishioner
- Raised money for Rosemount Foundation - a family support service of the Good Shepherd Sisters in the inner west
- Raised money for the farmers in Bangladesh hit by a rat plague
- Furnished a room in a safe house run by ACRATH
- Raised money for farmers affected by drought and bushfire
- Helped a young woman and her children leave a violent marriage
- Collected socks for the homeless
- Raised money for St Canice’s Soup kitchen
- Attended and supported the Sydney Alliance

TESTIMONY

One of the great advantages of belonging to the Catholic Church is our global perspective. We both hear information beyond the media presentations and can call on the support of our parish community to respond to those in need. St Brigid’s Social Justice Group in Coogee has decided to support those outside mainstream funding and educate parishioners about the wider world.

Small achievements, but a great source of parish and personal satisfaction. We can’t solve all the world’s problems, but we are trying to do our bit.

Dianne Mullin, St Brigid’s Coogee
// What is the Church’s Social Teaching?

The Church’s social teaching recognises that we are not alone in this world and that we need to care for each other. Since the late 1800s, the various Popes have written about different aspects of how we can build a more just world and this makes up the body of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). They are not a set of rules and regulations but exhortations or guides as to how women and men can live and work together. They are derived from 14 primary Papal Documents (see Appendix).

They may be enunciated in 5 basic principles:

1. The Dignity of the Human Person: The focal point of CST is the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, and so having fundamental freedom and dignity, the basis for human rights. Recognising this image in our neighbour, the teaching rejects any policy or system that reduces people to economic units or passive dependence. (See especially Pacem in Terris & Laborem Exercens).

2. The Common Good: The common good refers to what is good for all people. We exist as part of society. Every individual has a duty to share in promoting the welfare of the community and a right to benefit from that welfare. This applies at every level: local, national and international. Public authorities exist mainly to promote the common good and to ensure that no section of the population is excluded. (See Sollicitudo Rei Socialis).
**Solidarity:**
Solidarity is standing with others. As members of the one human family, we have mutual obligations to promote the rights and development of peoples across communities and nations. Solidarity is the fundamental bond of unity with our fellow human beings and the resulting interdependence. All are responsible for all; and in particular the rich have responsibilities towards the poor. National and international structures must reflect this.

(See Populorum Progressio, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis & Centesimus Annus)

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**Subsidiarity:**
All power and decision-making in society should be at the most local level compatible with the common good. Subsidiarity will mainly mean power passing downwards, but it could also mean passing appropriate powers upwards. The balance between the vertical (subsidiarity) and the horizontal (solidarity) is achieved through reference to the common good.

(See Quadragesimo Anno)

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**Option for the Poor:**
We should choose to put the poor at the forefront of decisions we make. Implicit in earlier CST, this has now been taken up with new urgency and far-reaching consequences for pastoral action. Fidelity to Christ means seeing him above all in the faces of suffering and wounded people.

(See Sollicitudo Rei Socialis & Centesimus Annus)
1. Identify the issue

- What is the cause?
- Who is affected?
- Why is it important?

2. Research

- It is often important to gather information around our concerns. This may mean contacting organisations working in the area, gathering statistics or searching reliable internet sites.

3. Prayer

4. Action

- Is there anything we can do as a group to have a positive influence?
- Can we communicate our concerns to a broader audience?
- Would enlisting the help of others be worthwhile?

Some of the issues a social justice group may address include:

- Distribution of wealth
- Homelessness
- Discrimination
- Work opportunities for all
- Gender equality, especially in the workplace
- Access to healthcare
- The environment
- Refugees
- Prisoners
- Indigenous peoples
- Issues in our local community

See page 11 for Resources

Note: Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website has discussion guides free to download.
“BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE, THEY SHALL HAVE THEIR FILL”
Mt. 5:6
Any group requires a driving force and commitment. Those in our midst who are:

- Passionate about justice
- Committed to working with others
- Connected within our community
- Organised
- Prayerful and thoughtful
- Prophetic (attentive to the signs of the times)

Having identified leaders it is then necessary to build our group which is best achieved through personal invitation. Community leaders can often help identify those who would be willing to join. The model we see in the Gospel is Jesus identifying with those in need. He embraced the poor and the marginalised, he listened to their stories, he healed them with his touch.

It is important that our groups are relational; that is to say we need to take the time to get to know each other. Genuine sharing can only take place when we are prepared to listen with our hearts as well as with our ears.

Too often we live in a world of “doing” and we become task oriented. A social justice group may not effect dramatic change on the outside but sometimes the biggest changes come in the participants. We become more enlightened, we become more understanding and we become more tolerant. Raising consciousness of justice issues is itself an action.

However, it is important that we look at how we can respond to needs. A major focus of this is listening to the voices in our community; the voices of people who already work for justice. More often than not this means going outside our Catholic community and meeting with groups like the local council, the neighbourhood drop-in centre, land care group. Local libraries are frequently a good place to start the listening and learning process.

If you would like a training workshop, contact the Justice and Peace Office and we will come to you. In doing so, we can look at strategies and ways to establish and launch your group with specific emphasis on training leaders.
// RESOURCES

1. Catholic Social Justice Statements by the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
   www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

2. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
   Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

3. Modern Catholic Social Teaching
   Kenneth R. Himes (ed.)


5. Sydney Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Office
   www.justiceandpeace.org.au
   ph: 02 93078465

“This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: to act justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly with you God”
MICAH 6:8
The Condition of Labour examines working conditions in industrialised countries and insists on workers’ rights. The Church, employers & workers should work together to build a just society.

1931 Quadragesimo Anno – “On the Fortieth Year” – Pius X
The Reconstruction of the Social Order at the time of major economic depression: QA criticises abuses of capitalism & communism. Unity between capital & labour. Ownership brings social responsibilities. Subsidiarity.

1961 Mater et Magistra - “Mother & Teacher” – John XXIII
Christianity & Social Progress: Updates earlier teaching and applies to agriculture and aid to developing countries, thus ‘internationalising’ CST. Role of laity in applying social teaching as an integral part of Christian life.

1963 Pacem in Terris - “Peace on Earth” – John XXIII
Peace on Earth: With the imminent threat of nuclear war this is a plea for peace based on the social order from a framework of rights and duties applying to individuals, public authorities and the world community.

1965 Gaudium et Spes - “The Joys and Hopes” Vatican II
The Church in the Modern World: Church’s duty is discernment of the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. Principles of cultural development and justice, enhancing human dignity and the common good. Work for peace.
AN AUTHENTIC FAITH - WHICH IS NEVER COMFORTABLE OR COMPLETELY PERSONAL - ALWAYS INVOLVES A DEEP DESIRE TO CHANGE THE WORLD, TO TRANSMIT VALUES, TO LEAVE THIS EARTH SOMEHOW BETTER THAN WE FOUND IT.

POPE FRANCIS, EVANGELII GAUDIUM
1967 Populorum Progressio – “The Development of Peoples” Paul VI
The Development of Peoples Charter for development – ‘the new name for peace’: Deals with structural poverty, aid and trade. Limits put on profit motive and the right to private property. Christians to strive for international justice.

1971 Octogesima Adveniens – “On the Eightieth Year” – Paul VI
A Call to Action Rome doesn’t necessarily have the answer: Need for local church to respond to specific situations. Urbanisation has brought new injustices. We are called to political action.

1971 Justicia in Mundo - “Justice in the World” – Synod
‘Justice is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel…’ The Church must examine its conscience about its lifestyle and so witness to the Gospel. Importance of Education for Justice.

1975 Evangelii Nuntiandi - “Evangelisation in the Modern World” – Paul VI
Profound links between evangelization and development and liberation. Only the kingdom is absolute; everything else is relative. All levels of society are to be transformed by the power of the good news.

On Human Work For JPII work is the central social issue. Work increases human dignity. Priority of labour over capital. Rights of workers (especially women) and unions. Critique of capitalism as well as Marxism.
1987 Sollicitudo Rei Socialis - “The Social Concern of the Church” – John Paul II
Social Concern Updates Populorum Progressio with analysis of global development: North/South divide blamed on confrontation between capitalism and Marxism. Conversion from ‘Structures of sin’ towards solidarity and option for the poor.

1991 Centesimus Annus – “The One Hundredth Year” – John Paul II
One Hundred Years Review of CST and major events of the last century, constantly affirming human dignity and human rights, justice and peace. The fall of Marxism does not signify a victory for capitalism.

2009 Caritas in Veritate - “Charity in Truth” – BenedictXVI
Charity in Truth Updates Populorum Progressio with a comprehensive review of development and some reflection on the economic crisis and business ethics. Provides a theological framework for CST.

The Pope speaks on numerous themes, including evangelization, peace, homiletics, social justice, the family, respect for creation, faith and politics, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and the role of women and of the laity in the Church.
For more information, please contact us at the Justice and Peace Office by visiting our website.

www.justiceandpeace.org.au