

Diocesan day

Where do we start with a vision?

The equal roles and responsibilities of lay, religious and clergy.

See it continuously – in Jubilee 2000, campaigns against trident, in work with homeless, refugees, etc. We work together and equally.

J&P is a place where not only do we **all**

- Have a right to play a role
- But we all have a responsibility to make sure we are taking up that role.
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That is essential and can act as an example to the rest of the Church as we look at what role and place lay people do, and should, have.

But, takes us further.

Over years, with SCIAF/ Trocaire, and more recently I've found myself having a recurring conversation with people from a range of issues and backgrounds the common denominator being a faith dimension.

- Why involved?
- What's the motivation?

Sense of Vocation; Calling; Mission

Common thread too, sense that lay people felt ambivalent, awkward, about claiming a sense of vocation or mission for themselves.

Interesting that not just Catholics had this feeling.

Yet despite that ambivalence to name it, the feeling was there that this involvement was different, more significant, more rooted in life and God than other activities.

Many people I spoke to said things like this.

And this instinct is confirmed by Vatican II where it was affirmed that we all, lay people included, share the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ in the mission of the Church, through our baptism.<sup>1</sup> (Thomas Groome).

And surely work for Justice and peace, especially in our world today; is part of that prophetic role?

So what does that role involve?

To challenge injustice,

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<sup>1</sup> Groome, Thomas. Sharing Faith. p323

To work for peace, absolutely.

- To feed the hungry
- To visit the prisoner
- To make the stranger welcome.

But it's something else . Or perhaps its all part of it.

To offer the possibility of something different. Hope.

At a time when our world seems in such despair

- Economically
- Environmentally
- Socially

To be a prophetic people that offer the possibility of hope  
is both foolhardy and essential!

Jim Wallis talks about what hope gives us.

“Hope means more than just hanging on. It is the conscious decision to see the world in a different way than most others see it. To hope is to look through the eyes of faith to a future not determined by the oppressive circumstances of the present. It is to know, despite the pretensions and cruelties of idolatrous authorities, that God rules. It is God who will have the last word.” Jim Wallis. *Sojourners*, April 1984

It's true that if we allow ourselves to lose sight of hope, of God, that we give up. We stop trying, and we allow the despair and fear to take over.

Jean Vanier's book, *Becoming Human*, explores what happens to us when we allow this to happen, and why we do it.

“The story of Lazarus tells us a lot about today's world, where there is a huge abyss between those who have food...and those who are hungry...Haven't we all felt embarrassment and fear in front of those who are hungry...?”

I suspect that we exclude Lazarus because we are frightened that our hearts will be touched if we enter into a relationship with him. If we listen to his story and hear his cry of pain we will discover that he is a human being. We might be touched by his broken heart and by his misfortunes. We might want to do something ...to alleviate his pain and where will that lead us?

As we enter into dialogue with a beggar, we risk entering into an adventure. Because Lazarus needs not only money but also a place to stay, medical treatment, maybe work, and, even more, he needs friendship. That is why it is

dangerous to enter a relationship with the Lazaruses of our world. If we do, we risk our lives being changed. All of us are, more or less, locked up in our cultures, in our habits, even in our friendships and places of belonging. If I become a friend of a beggar, I rock the boat...

I am beginning to discover how fear is a terrible motivating force in our lives. We are frightened of those who are different. We are frightened of failure and of rejection. And I have become increasingly aware not only of my own fears but of the fears of others. Fear is at the root of all forms of exclusion, just as trust is at the root of all forms of inclusion.”

Becoming Human p. 70-71. Jean Vanier

These excerpts sum up the challenge that our world faces today. The tension between hope and despair, and the reality of what action for Justice and peace is about.

At its roots it's about the hard work of being part of campaigns, of challenging people to change attitudes and behaviour, of writing letters, joining demonstrations, persuading politicians and sometimes, priests!

But at the end of the day, all that action and reflection is about this:

It's about holding up the vision that Jesus offers us in his words and his life.

It's about the hope and possibility that we will have a world where justice flows and everyone can enjoy the fullness of life that enables us all to become the people we are meant to be.

That the kingdom of heaven can be here and now!  
And we can all have a small part in making that happen.

“We cannot do everything  
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference  
between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.”

Oscar Romero

How can we build on these moments of hope in this diocese and the firm foundations that Chris, the core group and yourselves have laid?

Suggested three strands to how we might do this.

1/ Working towards a diocesan wide recognition that Justice & Peace is core to our faith and we are all called to take action. **P/P 10**

In whatever way is appropriate for us, big or small, local or global.

Yet J&P is still, in many ways, seen as a minority interest!

Often it's something that a small group have responsibility for in a parish and it's not seen or felt to be of interest or concern to the rest of the parish. Have you had, or know of people, who've had that experience?

Sometimes we're even seen to be a certain "type"!

Yet Catholic Social Teaching instructs us on our roles and responsibilities to take action for justice and peace in the world.

"It is up to Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper in their country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflections, norms of judgement, and directives of action from the social teaching of the Church." *Octogesima Adveniens 4*

It certainly isn't viewing action for justice as peripheral, or only for the minority. Rather it views it as integral to the church's mission and ministry. So if we count ourselves as part of the Church, it is part of our role.

"Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it."

*Caritas in Veritate 6*

And part of our work should be to support the wider church to understand and recognise this. To recognise too, that much of the ongoing work they are engaged in, is **already** work for justice

And should be celebrated as such.

Can we imagine a diocese where work for justice is integral to what we all do, and not just the few in the J&P group?

2/ Recognition of the place of faith in our action.  
the flip side of our first one!

The importance of supporting people to keep faith at the core of their action.

Faith often brings people to justice & peace but for some people faith can become detached for different reasons.

We can become so focussed on the action that we lose sight of the faith dimension

- Or, don't see the need for a spiritual practice.
- Saw that in some of the young people I worked with.
- "My action is the way I express my faith"

Or,

Individuals who are involved in action for Justice & Peace often feel they don't get the support or nourishment they need from their parish or faith community. Places they have traditionally looked for faith nourishment.

- J&P issues are not mentioned in the weekly liturgy, the link between faith and action is not made.
- sense from others in the community that their action is political or they have become "troublesome".

So while it doesn't mean that people aren't interested or desiring faith connection or a re-engagement with their faith

The lack of connection that people find can cause an increasing sense of detachment from their faith.

So whether the individual disconnects, is disconnected

Part of our work in this diocese should be to support people to keep faith at the core of their work

And that means working with and supporting those who are responsible for liturgy development etc. to make that connection that highlights the need and value of faith and spiritual nourishment in our work.

3/ Recognition and acknowledgement of how our faith can, and will, change through involvement in action for justice and peace.

And that this is something positive rather than threatening.

Supporting this, recognising the value of it and as a Church/ diocese, recognising how we can all grow and benefit from it.

When I was talking to people about their views of faith and justice found: that for some individuals, engagement with the Catholic development agency/ action for justice and peace and through it, civil society was leading to personal transformation in peoples' faith, enabling them to understand and take up their role in the ministry of the church.

"I had noticed the effect of active involvement in Justice and Peace work on spiritual growth. Such people tended to be more in touch with themselves and with God than those who were not so involved."

Gerry Hughes S.J

For some,

- An experience of faith growing and deepening, leading to deeper awareness of justice and personal role and responsibilities in it.
- An increased reflection on faith and its place in their lives.
- An increased awareness of the Global nature of the Church and the role of all people in its mission.
- For some young people, a better understanding of the relevance of their faith in their own lives and the world.

Sense of vocation and active role within the Church as lay people.

Need now for informed, mature lay people to take a leadership role in the Church, especially at these times of change.

Reflect on how to respect that faith development/ adult formation and consider how we and the church body can grow and benefit from it.

That's the theory – how might we do it?

Not for me to decide alone. My ideal is to have dialogue and discussion with you and others who are interested.

Useful model to work within is that given us in Micah

### Acting Justly

What are we about in Justice and peace?

Acting for justice and peace is about working for a world where the dignity of every human being is respected and all have the opportunity to reach their God given potential.

What are you involved with and how might you want to be supported in it?

Supporting people in their existing activities.

- training, information, skill sharing.
- Spreading it out to beyond justice and peace groups. Integrating justice. Working with other agencies in diocese.
- Developing our knowledge and awareness of Catholic Social Teaching, the place of justice & peace in the bible
- Theological reflection. How do we reflect theologically on what we're doing and that re-informs our subsequent action?

Remit with

Parishes, Religious Orders, schools. Missing anyone?

Supporting people who want to become involved for justice and peace.

- training, skill development, information, mentoring.
- Who to do this? Can you be involved with this? Sharing experience and knowledge, especially mentoring?

Involving young people, in and out of school.

- working with youth service, schools, ecumenically.
- Exploring issues.
- What has faith got to say about J&P?
- Don't assume it's a bad thing that young people don't come to events like this morning? Work with them where they are.

Loving tenderly

How do we support each other as well as the people we are working for?

Justice & Peace work can be hard.

- the danger of burn out. Sense of isolation, doing it all alone.

“If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing.”

St Paul

Build a support network.

You are that to each other already. How do we build on that?

- Celebrate the successes. A time where we celebrate, allow hope to blossom.
- Bringing people together. Days like today. What else is helpful?
- Sharing ideas and experiences/ Learn from each other. Links with mentoring.
- Website. How do we communicate with each other? Newsletters work?
- Look at what other dioceses and churches are doing and draw support from each other.

Walking humbly

Keeping God at the centre of our work.

- What is justice spirituality and how do we express it?
- Produce prayer and reflection material
- Liturgy resources
- Retreat time.
- Spiritual reflection group.
- Spiritual directors w interest in Social justice.
- Awareness of other resources.