

SESSION 3: SATURDAY 13 April 2013 - Leela Ramdeen

a. *Distinguishing between Works of Mercy and Works of Social Action.*

b. *Practical strategies for promoting social justice – using the SEE/JUDGE/ACT Process*

a. *Distinguishing between Works of Mercy and Works of Social Action.*

Ice breaker: I would like you to consider in your groups for about 5 minutes, why you think some people are poor. Why are the poor poor? (Report back and explore possible causes of poverty e.g. see: <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/2/causes-of-poverty>). **Then focus on:**

The 2 feet of Christian Justice

Pope Pius XI stated in *Divini Redemptoris* (Divine Redeemer) (1937):

“Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account...Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice.”

While this is true, do not forget the words Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in his encyclical: *God is Love* (*Deus Caritas Est*). He said:

The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word ... for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being”. (Pope Emeritus Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est*, n 20, 25).

Social justice involves: a) works of mercy/ Charity; and b) works of social action – seeking systemic change.

These are often called “*the two feet of Christian Justice*” because to walk in justice we must walk with both feet. Although there is a relationship between charity and justice they are not the same.

Working for justice involves changing systems, structures, institutions and public policies that are at the root cause of injustices such as poverty and social exclusion. It is important to understand the interplay and differences between the two approaches.

The Office of Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, USA, rightly makes the following distinction between works of mercy/charity and works of social action/justice:

Works of mercy/Charity/Social Service

Scriptural reference: Good Samaritan story: See Luke 10:25-37: Lawyer asked Jesus: Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?...Who is our neighbour? He/she who has need.

* The Gospel story does not attempt to survey the causes of highway banditry. The Samaritan provides temporary and immediate relief.

* Private, individual acts

* Responds to immediate need – e.g. soup kitchen, giving a blanket to a homeless person,

* Provides direct service: Almsgiving to the poor and needy, running homeless shelters, food distribution, clothing drives, offering shelter, emergency services, visiting the sick, the elderly, orphans, battered women/men/children, those in prisons, taking care of victims of crime, prayer, meditation, offering up masses, novenas, fasting, vigils etc.

* Requires repeated actions

* Directed at the effects of symptoms

The Corporal Works of Mercy: Feed the hungry, Give drink to the thirsty, Clothe the naked, Visit the Sick, Shelter the Homeless, Visit the Imprisoned, and Bury the dead.

Let us remember the words in Matthew 25:31-36. At the last Judgment will we be on God's right hand or on His left? Let us act now so that He will tell us: "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me...In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.

Yes, each baptised person has a responsibility to serve "the least of these" if we are true disciples of Christ. We are called to see Christ in our neighbour. This is what the social justice principle of "solidarity" is all about. Let us see our neighbour as another "self." Give example of workshop – wives of some businessmen.

- Link this to 7th Commandment.

Social action/Social Change/justice

Scriptural reference: Exodus story

(Second Book of the Bible)

* Moses does not ask for food and medicine for the Jewish slave- labour force. He challenges the institutional system. Message: “Let my people go.”

* Public, collective actions

* Responds to long-term need e.g. provide support services, employment – living wage, housing, healthcare, transportation, infrastructure, care of the elderly/alcoholic/other drug abusers/those with HIV/AIDS (e.g. Cyril Ross Nursery. And see man who bought Gramoxone to kill himself)

* Promotes social change in institutions.

* Resolves structural injustice.

* Directed at the root causes of injustice: social injustice – e.g. young boy falling asleep in class – Why? Mother – ectopic pregnancy etc. Find the root causes and seek to take social action.

Social action involves an examination of underlying causes - seeking long term solutions, and involving people – SJ theme of “participation” etc. People should be able to participate in society and in decisions that affect their lives.

In their document: “Faithful citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a new millennium”, the U.S. Catholic Bishops said:

“Jesus called us to love our neighbours by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and afflicted, and comforting the victims of injustice (Mt 25:31-46). Our Lord’s example and words demand a life of charity from each of us. Yet they also require action on a broader scale in defence of life, in pursuit of peace, in support of the common good, and in opposition to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Such action involves the institutions and structures of society, economy, and politics.”

Social ministry, in the Catholic tradition, is a "both/and" proposition. While we meet immediate needs today, we work for long-term changes that will create a more just tomorrow – for all. As the US Bishops say in their document, *Communities of Salt and Light*, 1993: *“Service and action, charity and justice are complementary components of parish social ministry. Neither alone is sufficient; both are essential signs of the gospel at work”*

For us Catholics, therefore, justice means more than healing the immediate symptoms e.g. of poverty/social exclusion. We are also challenged to heal the causes of systemic poverty/social exclusion and structural injustice. Unjust structures perpetuate inequity, inequality and

selfishness. (Give example of “virginity test” in UK and my delegation to the then Home Secretary, Hon. Timothy Renton. That was an example of structural injustice.

“Justice and charity are both rooted in the social dimension of the gospels. Both reflect the same gospel mandates. The Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and such parables as the Last Judgment, the Good Samaritan, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector—these and dozens of comparable passages inspire acts of justice and charity. Both can be powerful Christian responses to human need. The dividing line between them is often blurred and, in reality, many a response is a dynamic blend of justice and charity. For descriptive purposes, however, some people find it useful to see charity in terms of giving direct aid and justice in terms of correcting structures.” <http://www.osjspm.org/document.doc?id=186>

Mother (Blessed) Teresa of Calcutta was a model of mercy. She celebrated the value of every human person and symbolised the spirit of compassion that must characterise all Christian service. However, she did not reject social action.

If questioned about how to help those in need, Mother Teresa would simply say:

“What you can do, I can’t do, and what I can do, you can’t do, but together we can do something beautiful for God.”

We need to remember the work of people like Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and Archbishop Tutu – models of social action. The poor need more than handouts. You know the Chinese saying: *Give people a fish, feed them for a day. Teach them to fish, feed them for life.*

Archbishop Tutu fought for the unjust system of apartheid in South Africa to be dismantled. He linked political action with his religious beliefs to bring about systemic change.

In our various islands we need to look at the social, political, and economic system as a whole and press for systemic change. We need an holistic approach when dealing with ‘violence’. Violence takes its forms also in unjust and inequitable social and economic structures.

We need to address the structural violence of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion and to consider peaceful ways of effecting changes in society to promote social justice.

Each day we see a declining respect for human life in our communities. Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. People are more important than things. The test of every institution or policy in our nation must be whether it threatens or enhances human dignity and indeed human life itself.

We must have an holistic approach to development since authentic development must be integral human development, that is, the development of all dimensions of a person and of every person (Charity in Truth, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 2009). We must raise our voices to heal our broken nation/world. We have the capacity to make a difference.

- Refer to *The Caribbean Human Development Report (HDR) 2012: Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security*, commissioned by the United Nations: “The Caribbean Human Development Report reviews the current state of crime as well as national and regional policies and programmes to address the problem in seven English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. The new study recommends that Caribbean governments implement youth crime prevention through education, as well as provide employment opportunities that target the marginalized urban poor. A shift in focus is needed it says, from a state protection approach to one that focuses on citizen security and participation, promoting law enforcement that is fair, accountable, and more respectful of human rights.”
- Refer to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative of Oxford University). The MPI technique was developed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster. 3 dimensions of poverty:

Health – nutrition and child mortality,

Education – years of schooling and School attendance, and

Living standard: cooking fuel, sanitation, water, electricity, floor, assets.

In February 2012 two UN agencies (The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – ECLAC) and the UN Children’s Fund Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF-TACRO) launched a guide to help policymakers measure child poverty in the Caribbean and Latin America. This multimedia tool is available free of charge from the ECLAC website. The 2 Agencies state that the “Guide for Measuring Child Poverty teach how to measure child poverty according to different deprivations, calculate indices, analyse disparities, carry out simulations and present information by territories with maps generated by a free computer programme.”

According to the 2010 study : “Child poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean”, almost 45% of the population under the age of 18 years is living in poverty in the region – affecting almost 81 million children and adolescents in the region.

If we wish to walk with the 2 feet of Christian justice, we need to develop our awareness also of the fragility and vulnerability of our Small Island Developing States (SIDSS) in the region. See, for example:

http://www.eclac.cl/portofspain/noticias/paginas/2/44232/Fragility_and_Vulnerability_in_Small_Island_Developing_States_A_Santos.pdf

It is important to note that economic growth does not necessarily lift people out of poverty. This is why it is imperative that countries develop a people-centred approach to development.

We must stand in solidarity with people everywhere, which are e.g. on low incomes or unemployed, differently abled, sick or infirm, homeless or poorly housed, in prison or who are otherwise vulnerable, powerless and at a disadvantage. Our Church tells us that solidarity means the willingness to see others as another 'self' and so to regard injustice committed against another as no less serious than an injustice against one's self.

Vatican II stressed the need for the Catholic Church to stand in solidarity with the whole human family: "*The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ.*" (*Lumen Gentium*).

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. Learning to practise the virtue of solidarity means learning that 'loving our neighbour' has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

Prayers are essential to social justice work. Indeed, our social ministry must be anchored in prayer where we uncover the depths of God's call to seek justice and pursue peace. Prayer helps believers to apply their faith to everyday situations.

People of faith have a duty to be in communion with God by prayer. We must find space for God, and nourish our own spiritual life by giving time to God daily. We must pray for a conversion of hearts because true justice and peace can be a matter of policy only if it is first a matter of the heart. Let us open our hearts to conversion to truly love one another as God loves us.

We must not underestimate the power of prayer in our efforts to transform the world. But remember, social justice is more than just prayer. As the late Cardinal Hume said:

"the deepening of the spiritual life must go hand in hand with practical concern for our neighbour, and thus with social action."

Today, the social mission and message of people of faith in our region are more important than ever, and we must share these with credibility and integrity.

b. ***Practical strategies for promoting social justice – using the SEE/JUDGE/ACT Process to read the signs of the times and respond***

See: Seeing, hearing, and experiencing the lived reality of individuals and communities:
What exactly is happening?
Why is this happening?
Who is being affected?

Judge - analyse the situation and make an informed judgment about it. This involves two key parts: i) social analysis ii) theological reflection:

What do you think about all of this?
What do your values, your beliefs, your faith say?
What do you think should be happening?

Act – taking action e.g. to transform unjust structures and promote social justice
What exactly would you like to change?
What action are you going to take now?
Whom can you involve in your action?

Introduce the See/Judge/Act process – see handout - and ask participants to use the Worksheet on *the homeless man who has been released from the Asylum* as the basis for their work using this methodology which was developed by the Belgian worker priest, Fr Joseph Cardijn (later Cardinal Cardijn) who supported the Young Christian Workers Movement.

See link to this methodology/process: - [Cardijn Resources - Google Sites](https://sites.google.com/a/cardijn.info/cardijn-resources/see-judge-act)
sites.google.com/a/cardijn.info/cardijn-resources/see-judge-act

Blessed John XXII formally recognized the See Judge Act method in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961). The encyclical noted that “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge, act.” ... Knowledge acquired in this way does not remain merely abstract, but is seen as something that must be translated into action.” -*Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress) Blessed John XXIII, 1961.*

Group work: List some practical ways in which you/your parish can reach out to those in need.

Refer to CCSJ’s Newsletters – examples of good practice at parish level e.g. St Theresa’s Woodbrook – woman with no stairs

- Building small room for widow
- Computer classes for the elderly
- Health Fairs
- Advocacy work with the differently abled - Become an advocate – help write letters to Councillors, MPs etc
- Adopt a granny/granddad/auntie/uncle/a family etc.

- Join e.g. literacy group or other Charitable organisation to promote integral human development.
- * Share handout from www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/poverty - Campaign to reduce poverty in America. As this Charity states: “Poverty is a moral crisis and a threat to the common good.” The 6 areas of action suggested are worth noting:

Reflect, Get informed, Get organized, Get involved, Volunteer, Donate.

See website: www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/poverty for an elaboration on each of the 6 areas above.