

“Bringing forth the Kingdom”

Putting the vision into practice

A framework for development with three main challenges:

- How to co-operate more closely with others;
- What methodology to use;
- How to relate to church structures

Summary of a report produced in May 2001 and adopted by NJPN

Our Inspiration

In the last 50 years the emphasis on the study of the Scriptures and on the discernment of the signs of the times has transformed Catholic attitudes to social and political issues. We have rediscovered the implications of faith in God, the father of widows, orphans and strangers and in Jesus, proclaimer of the Good News of the Kingdom; and in the Spirit living in everyone who comes into this world. ‘Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.’ (1971 Synod). We have come to see redemption as concerned with saving not only from personal sin, but also from the structural sin incorporated in our political, economic and social systems.

Taking her lead from John XXIII's compassion, Paul VI's call to action for justice, and John Paul II's vision of the inalienable dignity of the human person, the Church in the Third Millennium has the tools for the new tasks facing humanity. The same teaching has been highlighted by our own bishops in their statement, ‘The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching’.

In his inspiring letter for the new millennium the Pope again reminds us that the Gospel "requires the Church to make a preferential option for the poor" in whom "there is a special presence of Christ" and to "get close to" those who suffer. He highlights among today's challenges: the ecological crisis, the cause of peace and human rights. At the same time, there has been a growing realisation that this prophetic witness crosses the boundaries of different denominations and faiths, and that all should be working together for a just and peaceful world.

Our Context

The Church's struggle to fulfil her mission is taking place in the midst of vast changes in our world.

- Globalisation is having devastating effects on the poor and the environment.
- The gulf between rich and poor across the world continues to grow, particularly as a result of conflict, HIV/AIDS, discriminatory trade conditions and debt.
- The integrity of creation is threatened by climate change, pollution, deforestation and the destruction of species.
- Gender discrimination continues in the political, economic and ecclesial fields.
- While militarisation and arms trade increase, sustained models of peacemaking are lacking.
- Institutionalised racism and xenophobia remain powerful in our society.

There are also signs of hope:

- The widespread use of the language of Human Rights, despite the violations that take place, brings us closer to a common understanding of the value of the human being.
- Young people, though often alienated from the institutional Church, frequently give evidence of their commitment to justice, peace and environmental issues and their search for a relevant spirituality.
- Religious and secular movements of ordinary people modelling alternative ways of living are emerging, especially in the third world.
- There is increasing dialogue between the churches and with different faiths.

Yet also part of our context is the relatively low priority that often seems to be accorded to resources for justice and peace in the life of the Church in England & Wales.

Challenge I: To promote a number of different models for bringing about change

The context for our mission is a world with every sort of plurality – of culture, of faith, of ideology – where the institutional is largely rejected while spirituality is being sought after and where the market and its values dominate everything. In the midst of such diversity there can be no single model for engagement with justice and peace. We need to discern where the Spirit is at work in our world and how our energies can be most effectively used. Given our range of expertise and commitment and considering the lack of resources for justice and peace at national and diocesan level we need to explore new ways of working with others. There are opportunities for justice and peace to come more fully onto the agendas of groups which already exist for other purposes. Wherever possible we should seek to collaborate with our fellow Christians, with other people of faith and indeed with all people of good will.

Solidarity should underlie our whole endeavour. Many groups have responded directly to the needs of excluded people particularly when those needs have been evident locally (e.g. homelessness, unemployment, racism and increasingly befriending and supporting asylum seekers). Other groups tend not to have much experience of poor or marginalised people. More might find opportunities for direct contact if they worked alongside those who are already involved in 'working with' people rather than just 'working for' them. Potential partners include CHAS, Refugee Forum, Committee for Community Relations, community workers, CARJ, Church Action on Poverty, Kairos UK and also local and regional groups.

The following models (or ways of bringing about change) have been found helpful. Each requires that we work in ever-closer collaboration with others.

1) Campaign Model

This model of concerted action for change around a specific issue is well established, bringing together a wide range of organisations to campaign together and maximise public impact. Our main partners are the Catholic and ecumenical agencies who usually provide training and resources (e.g. CAFOD, Christian Aid, CHAS, CARJ, Pax Christi and CAP).

2) Catechetical Model

There is a great opportunity, already taken up in some parishes, to integrate justice and peace into sacramental preparation programmes for both children and adults (RCIA). More Catholics would then be enabled to perceive the essential integration of faith and justice. Working as a network at national level, and through network members at diocesan and local levels, NJPN could seek discussion, offer theological reflection and examples of good practice, and work towards the full adoption of justice and peace into sacramental preparation programmes. Potential partners here are diocesan & parish catechists and Catholic education policy-makers.

3) Whole Parish Model

Another challenge to which some groups have responded is to see the whole parish as a potential mission community. This avoids justice and peace being left to a small group and not being integrated into the life of the parish. It demands considerable commitment from priest and parish and regular renewal. The approach offers the opportunity to develop creative liturgies, which resonate more with people's lives and with the challenges of our world. Given a sense of themselves as part of a missionary community, people can participate more fully, and feel genuinely involved as they share their lived experience through the liturgy and draw greater nourishment from it. Potential partners are the Catholic Missionary Society, Orders or Missionaries conducting missions, diocesan and parish teams.

4) School Model

There is great potential for working with diocesan RE teams who have indicated they would welcome support in this dimension of their work. Apart from specific contributions to the curriculum the objective would be to enable the whole school to become a justice and peace community. There is also an opportunity to support teachers in developing the new Citizenship courses. Potential partners are diocesan RE teams, school chaplains, RE teams in individual schools; CAFOD and Pax Christi.

5) Other Models

There are many other ways of acting that NJPN members have found useful in particular contexts. Some already work ecumenically; some focus on credit unions; some have been deeply formed as communities of resistance through prophetic witness. A group may well operate across parishes and churches and faiths and its members may be involved in a number of different models.

We recognise that young people, racial minorities and ecumenical contacts are currently under-represented in our Network. We are keen to improve this situation and are exploring strategies for making these important connections.

Challenge II: To sustain J&P groups and networks through the spirituality of the pastoral cycle

The key building blocks of the J&P network have been small parish-based groups which have often been very successful in raising awareness and in campaigning on specific issues. Groups are a means of sustaining us through processes that enable the transformation of ourselves as much as society around us and help prevent us becoming isolated and dispirited. We want to affirm the effectiveness of groups, increasingly working across parishes and ecumenically, and encourage that other ways of bringing a local network together be explored where parish groups seem problematic.

Pursuing initiatives such as those already outlined, people need an opportunity to share their experience and insights, to be inspired by theological reflection, and to be enabled to integrate their experience into their life of faith and prayer. This well-tried methodology of the pastoral cycle is a way of working that helps us to link faith, action and politics and to develop critical judgement about situations, events and structures. It may also need to be complemented by other ways of enabling active individuals to come together to share and grow. When the lived experience of action for justice and reflection are shared, and the action of God's Spirit prayerfully discerned together, a community can grow and a whole change of life-style becomes possible. Such communities may also be generated among those who share our spirituality and Gospel values but find little support from local church structures.

NJPN will actively support these approaches through networking, resources and training.

Challenge III: To integrate Justice & Peace into the life and mission of the Church

As a constitutive dimension of the mission of the Church, our justice and peace mission is ultimately about 'bringing forth the Kingdom'. This requires the prayerful discernment of God's spirit at work in the world in order that we can co-operate with it and oppose those powers which prevent its realisation. At times however the Church's prevailing perspective seems to be restricted to maintenance and the promotion of growth so that action for justice is seen as a fringe activity.

NJPN brings together representatives not only of dioceses but also of agencies and increasingly of religious orders. Since it spans a range of domestic as well as international justice and peace concerns, NJPN also has a responsibility to dialogue with all the relevant departments and agencies of the Bishops' Conference. As a result of members' involvement in political, social and economic transformation, it has a prophetic and challenging role.

NJPN will therefore actively seek the following:

- To have justice and peace promoted as at the heart of the Gospel in every diocese through an effective commission (or similar body) supported by staff with appropriate skills and status.
- To broaden NJPN so that it involves all church institutions committed to our vision i.e. dioceses, orders and agencies.
- To have a national justice and peace programme that fully lives up to our mission and is supported by the Bishops' Conference.
- To examine its structures and procedures in the light of this strategy paper and its ability to respond to foreseeable demands.
- To increase the resources and funding for justice and peace in order to be able to implement the above proposals

NJPN is setting up working groups to consider in detail how these objectives can be achieved.

At the same time it will integrate them into its national training and support role.