

Do Justice: for Parishes, 2024

“...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6:8

“Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied.”

Matthew 5: 6

“We may have plenty of good ideas on how to reform the Church, but let us remember: to adore God and to love our brothers and sisters with his love, that is the great and perennial reform. To be a worshipping Church and a Church of service, washing the feet of wounded humanity, accompanying those who are frail, weak and cast aside, going out lovingly to encounter the poor.”

Pope Francis (1)

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Welcome to the **Do Justice** campaign of Caritas Social Action Network, the agency of the Bishops' Conference dedicated to convening a network of Catholic charities to tackle poverty and injustice in England and Wales.

Do Justice is an invitation to parish groups in England and Wales in Lent 2024 and beyond to deepen their commitment to being, as Pope Francis said at the end of the synod in Rome in October 2023, “a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel” (2). The three sessions are based around the gospel readings for the first three Sundays of Lent in 2024, but there is no reason why the sessions can take place at any time of the year. The readings fit very well into the See-Judge-Act approach.

Preparation

“It is up to the 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 to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church....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 men 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.”

Pope Paul VI (3)

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We suggest that any parish group engaging with **Do Justice** should, by way of preparation, read and reflect on our 'core text' *Do Justice: A Vision for Spiritual and Civic Renewal in England and Wales*.

The next task by way of preparation we suggest is to 'see' your local community. Where is the 'good news' in the community, where is God at work in the gestures and projects that promote solidarity and the common good? Likewise, where are the challenges, where are people not flourishing? Poverty and injustice are often hidden in plain sight in our communities.

A parish knows the power of first-hand witness and 'immersion' in the lived experience of a community. In the gospels, Jesus sent his disciples out in twos to preach and heal in the surrounding districts. Perhaps the parish group could walk round the neighbourhood in twos - with due attention to safety - and really see what is around them, engaging where they could with local people. This is the culture of encounter.

There is also much to be learned from the voices of those who are not often heard, the stories of the lived experience of poverty and injustice. This is not easy to convene, especially for a group with little experience. Even if the **Do Justice** group convenes a parish gathering to hear the perspectives from the parish on poverty and injustice, it will be a helpful contribution to the preparation of 'seeing' the community as fully as possible.

Information is also important. It might be helpful for one person to scan the local press for information about poverty, isolation or possible exploitation; another might contact the local authority, or local councillors; another might look for the national data for an understanding of definitions of poverty, for example the House of Commons Library report, *Poverty in the UK: statistics* (2023), and more local data mapping low incomes from the Office of National Statistics: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>.

The **Do Justice** core text, *Do Justice: a vision for spiritual and civic renewal in England and Wales*, provides a brief introduction to how poverty and injustice is treated in sacred Scripture and in the Magisterium of the Church, including an overview of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

The **Do Justice** parish group (which may well be an existing parish group) will need a facilitator and a note-taker. The facilitator ideally should have training in the synodal practice of Conversation in the Spirit (see: Infographic from Synod 2021-2024), since that is the practice at the heart of the three sessions. The note-taker is not asked to produce 'minutes' of the meeting, but a summary of the 'fruits' of each conversation: "To what steps is the Holy Spirit calling us together?"

There will be a wide variety of parish groups involved in the **Do Justice** campaign, from established groups with programmes and activities already up and running, to parish groups

starting from scratch. For the former, this process may be more of a ‘top up’ or review of mission, while for others it may be the beginning of the work of social justice.

Session One

“The Christian's programme —the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees’. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly”

Pope Benedict XVI (4)

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In the course of the first week in Lent, or at another time which works well, we invite the parish **Do Justice** group to convene (either in person or online, whichever best suits local circumstances) for the first session.

In line with the guidance of Pope Francis at the end of the synod, we suggest that the focus is on two movements of the heart, *to adore and to serve*.

The session could begin with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church, or if the gathering is in someone's home or online, then a suitable period of prayerful silence.

After the time of prayer, the group convenes, welcomed by the facilitator, who recaps briefly on the purpose of the group. Each session begins with a gospel reading. The first gospel reading is from the first Sunday in Lent, from Mark 1:12-25, **Jesus is tempted in the wilderness**:

“The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. ‘The time has come,’ he said, ‘and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.’”

After the gospel reading, there is a time of silence. Then the group begins the Conversation in the Spirit.

The questions to consider for Session One: *What do you ‘see’ in our community? Where is the good news of renewal; where are people not flourishing? Where are we tempted not to look?*

Round One: Each person has a chance to speak without interruption in response to the questions, with a time limit (eg three minutes, which the facilitator will keep an eye on). There is no discussion in this round. It may help to have an object (a stone or holding cross) which is held by the person who is speaking.

A period of silence and prayer follows.

Round Two: From what has been said, each person shares what has resonated with him or her, or what has aroused most resistance, allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit, “*When, listening, did my heart burn within me?*” Each person has a chance to speak without interruption. There is no discussion in this round.

A period of silence and prayer follows.

Round Three: Together we open up a dialogue on the basis of what has emerged in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit, to recognise convergences, to acknowledge discordance, obstacles and new questions, to allow prophetic voices to emerge. The note-taker tries to capture what the Holy Spirit is calling the group to ‘see’ in their community, what temptations to avoid.

The session ends with the Glory Be, or some suitable prayer.

Session Two

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

(Romans 12: 2)

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The session could begin with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church, or if the gathering is in someone’s home or online, then a suitable period of prayerful silence.

After the time of prayer, the group convenes, welcomed by the facilitator, who recaps briefly on session one and what was discerned. The session continues with the gospel reading from Mark 9: 2-10, **The Transfiguration of the Lord:**

“Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. ‘Rabbi,’ he said, ‘it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.’ Then suddenly, when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus.

As they came down the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what ‘rising from the dead’ could mean.”

After the gospel reading, there is a time of silence. Then the group begins the Conversation in the Spirit.

The questions for Session Two: *What does the Gospel tell us about what we have seen in our community? What is of God, what is not of God? What is humanising, what is de-humanising? Where is the light of God shining on what we see?*

Round One: Each person has a chance to speak without interruption in response to the questions, with a time limit (eg three minutes). There is no discussion in this round. It may help to have an object (a stone or holding cross) which is held by the person who is speaking.

A period of silence and prayer follows.

Round Two: From what has been said, each person shares what has resonated with him or her, or what has aroused most resistance, allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit, *“When, listening, did my heart burn within me?”* Each person has a chance to speak without interruption. There is no discussion in this round.

A period of silence and prayer follows.

Round Three: Together we open up a dialogue on the basis of what has emerged in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit, to recognise convergences, to acknowledge discordance, obstacles and new questions, to allow prophetic voices to emerge. The note-taker tries to capture what the Holy Spirit is calling the group to ‘discern’ in their community, where is the ‘gentle tug’ of the Spirit?

The session ends with the Glory Be, or some suitable prayer.

Session Three: third week of Lent

“Evangelization always requires the transformation of an unjust social order; and one of its primary tasks is to oppose and denounce such injustices.”

Bishops of England and Wales (5)

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The session could begin with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church, or if the gathering is in someone’s home or online, then a suitable period of prayerful silence.

After the time of prayer, the group convenes, welcomed by the facilitator, who recaps briefly on session one and two and what was seen and discerned. The session continues with the gospel reading from John 2: 13-25, **The Cleansing of the Temple:**

“Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers’ coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, ‘Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father’s house into a market.’ Then his

disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when he saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him."

After the gospel reading, there is a time of silence. Then the group begins the Conversation in the Spirit.

The questions for Session Three: *What can we do with the resources and skills we have to build a world more in conformity with the Kingdom of God in our community? What 'tables' do we need to tip over? For this question, a useful preparation will be the **CSAN Advocacy Handbook** (to follow).*

Round One: Each person has a chance to speak in response to the questions, with a time limit (eg three minutes). There is no discussion in this round. It may help to have an object (a stone or holding cross) which is held by the person who is speaking.

A period of silence and prayer follows.

Round Two: From what has been said, each person shares what has resonated with him or her, or what has aroused most resistance, allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit, "*When, listening, did my heart burn within me?*" Each person has a chance to speak without interruption. There is no discussion in this round.

A period of silence and prayer follows.

Round Three: Together we open up a dialogue on the basis of what has emerged in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit, to recognise convergences, to acknowledge discordance, obstacles and new questions, to allow prophetic voices to emerge. The note-taker tries to capture where the Holy Spirit is calling the group to act in their community, *to what steps is the Holy Spirit calling us together?*

At the end of the third session, the group should have some clarity about what it intends to do to build the Kingdom of love, justice and peace in their community. For each group and community, the discerned needs and action will be different. There may be a focus on material poverty in the community, or isolation and loneliness among the elderly, or refugees and migrants in the community, or the victims of human trafficking, or people who are homeless, or care for our common home (or an integration of more than one of these).

The session ends with the Glory Be, or some suitable prayer.

Follow up

“Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights.”

Pope Francis (6)

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In the next stage, the group may well focus on the roll-out of the action plan, refining what has to be done, to what end, with whom and with what resources? What other religious groups might we work with, or community organisations, in order to pool our resources?

For any work of social justice, it is good to have some idea in mind of what needs to be achieved, what is the intended impact. We should also be careful, however, to avoid an overly managerial approach, dominated by ‘key performance indicators’. It might be better to use the more scriptural language of ‘bearing fruit’. Where are the fruits of justice, peace and love as a result of your project?

It would also be helpful for the group to consider the difference between compassion and justice outlined in the **Do Justice** core text. The Gospel begins in compassion but does not end there. We are called to be agents of change for a more just society, challenging the root causes of injustice and peacefully advocating for more just structures and practises in our community.

The call to action

“In the developing nations and in other countries lay people must consider it their task to improve the temporal order. While the hierarchy has the role of teaching and authoritatively interpreting the moral laws and precepts that apply in this matter, the laity have the duty of using their own initiative and taking action in this area—without waiting passively for directives and precepts from others. They must try to infuse a Christian spirit into people's mental outlook and daily behaviour, into the laws and structures of the civil community. (68) Changes must be made; present conditions must be improved. And the transformations must be permeated with the spirit of the Gospel.”

Pope Paul VI (7)

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The Season of Easter, as we follow the development of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, would be an ideal time to see the Do Justice project bearing its first fruits, although any time of the year would be suitable. An important part of the process is to reflect on how it's going, is it bearing fruit in the way you had hoped, is there any need for mid-course correction? What can we celebrate.

We would like to create a **community of practice of parishes groups** involved in **Do Justice** projects so that we can support each other and learn from each other. Your diocesan Caritas may well want to bring the groups together for this purpose. We can see the benefit in a national community to share learning and encourage one another.

Please contact Raymond Friel at CSAN at raymond.friel@csan.org.uk to join the national Do Justice community of practice.

With every blessing for your works of justice.

Raymond Friel, CEO, Caritas Social Action Network

- (1) <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2023/documents/20231029-omelia-conclusione-sinodo.html>, accessed 2.12.2023
- (2) As above
- (3) Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 4
- (4) Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 31
- (5) Bishops of England and Wales, *The Common Good*, 40
- (6) Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 116
- (7) Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 81