

JPIC (JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION) GUIDELINES

JPIC DEFINITION

First, it is important to understand that JPIC stems from Catholic Social Teaching (CST), which was set in motion by Pope Leo XIII in the 1880s (and thus is not new). CST, in turn, is an attempt to develop from certain teachings of the Gospel (e.g., the Beatitudes, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, etc.) policy stances and practical approaches to current social, political and economic problems.

As Franciscans, we are called to live, work and act in solidarity with the poor. We can do that in numerous ways, including acts of charity and working to change an unjust system. We can take these actions as individuals or in groups such as our fraternities.

Our aim is to seek God in others and attempt to lift them up. Obviously, we need to develop our personal interior lives in order to ensure that our actions are in accord with the Gospel.

In some respects, the term JPIC gets in the way of what we intend to do, and it appears that some important areas, such as family and labor/work, are left out. That is not the case, however.

Justice really means that everyone has essential dignity and should get his/her due. This has nothing to do with punishment, but rather one's treatment within the system. If we look around, we can see that some people are not being treated equitably. What is our responsibility towards them?

Peace can mean many things (many of our fraternities have spent countless hours trying to define it in Franciscan terms). Essentially, it means absence of war, chaos or violence, and a state of calm that permits individuals to go about their lives without fear. If we pay attention to the news, we can appreciate that many people live in environments not conducive to peace. Are there ways that, as Franciscans, we can be peacemakers?

Finally, it is tempting to understand "**Integrity of Creation**" as meaning only and exclusively the environment and ecological matters. While it certainly does include the environment—and there are many calls to action in this area—it is far more than that. Integrity of Creation really has to do with all of life—from natural birth to natural death—and everything in between. All of these are life issues.

We are already quite familiar with the Right to Life issue and how that has energized many Catholics. Similarly, many bishops have provided moral instruction as some states have considered laws to permit assisted suicide.

Many "life issues" fall between birth and death, and they need to be considered as well. Some of these are:

- Women's and children's issues: abusive or violent households, malnutrition, human trafficking
- Education and Health: quality of education, access to health care
- Racial, Cultural, and Sex discrimination: many ways in which people are not treated according to their essential dignity
- Affordable housing and homelessness, loan operations that prey on the poor
- Worker rights and other labor issues

IDENTIFICATION

Now that we have a better understanding of what JPIC involves, it is important to identify areas in our own communities where such problems exist. That is why the JPIC survey is so important. In one community, environmental issues loom large; in another the main issue might be jobs availability; in another affordable housing. It is useful for the fraternity to talk out the issues that are important to that community, and then to consider how to address them.

ACTION

Once we have identified the key issues, we can start to determine the best way to deal with them. There is ample scope for fraternities to collaborate with other groups to move forward on a given issue. Also, some issues must be addressed at the state or regional level. In some cases, fraternities can support diocesan initiatives, or initiatives of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops. There may be other areas where no existing group is active.

Some issues can be handled at the local level through various forms of charity. Many of us, as individuals or fraternities, already participate in food banks, soup kitchens, and other forms of direct charity. In some cases, however, the problems require changes to the system. That kind of action does make us visible as advocates for the poor, and it does entail some sacrifice on our part, since we may be criticized or exposed to ridicule. The right to life movement faced these issues for years, and it deals with only a small part of the “Integrity of Creation” continuum. It is up to individual members and the fraternity to decide what kind of action to take, and to assess its effectiveness. This is also an opportunity for fraternities to make known to the region what issues should be taken up at a higher level, or which to flag to the attention of the national Secular Franciscan Council.

CHARITY

As we all know, charities depend heavily on financial gifts and volunteer assistance. As Franciscans, we are called to participate in such apostolates as we have time and talents to do so. Any and all forms of assistance are welcome and necessary.

However, we must also appreciate the limitations of most forms of charity. While they often address specific, immediate problems (e.g., a soup kitchen), they usually do not address the root cause of poverty. That is where advocacy comes in.

ADVOCACY

Sometimes the injustices we encounter are due to unjust laws, regulations or a bureaucratic approach by our governments. The best way to address these issues is to open a dialogue with our elected officials. To make headway, we need to arm ourselves with documented cases, statistics, and other means to support the need for change, and often we need to help our officials find fixes that are politically viable. These processes require much work and determination. They also often require higher-level skills of lawyers, accountants, and other specialists to pave the way for solutions. Even people without those skills, however, can often make a difference by staying informed, communicating with elected officials, attending public hearings, and signing petitions.