

Characteristics of a Justice Seeking Parish

In September at the Regional Parish Social Ministry Conference in Raleigh, Father Brian Massingale shared his 12 characteristics of a Justice-Seeking Parish. As we challenge you to examine your local parish peace and justice activities, the characteristics below may be useful. You may wish to copy these at your next Social Action (Concerns) meeting and discuss them as a committee.

The parish is the place and agent of conversion, believing in the Good News for the poor, seeing the priority of the poor. It explicitly names conversion and social transformation as part of the parish's mission.

The parish is a place of compassion (no "us" and "them" but "we"). The parish practices and witnesses the solidarity it teaches.

The importance of justice and social outreach is reflected in the parish budget. (Time & Money = Priority & Commitment)

There is an ongoing parish "audit" of the poor—the least among us—and their needs.

Catholic Social Teaching is integrated and presented in ALL of the educational efforts of the parish: day school, religious education, sacramental education (including baptism, reconciliation and Eucharist), RCIA, and adult formation.

Every Sunday is "Social Justice Sunday" because of the preaching, prayer, and music.

The parish is known for welcoming those whom society disdains, dismisses, and despises. (e.g., God's Inclusive Love Proclaimed Here).

The parish is a vital part of its neighborhood and involved in the civic life of its community.

The Human Concerns committee is "unconditionally pro-life" (John Paul II), embracing a "consistent ethic of life."

The Human Concerns committee does not do all of the parishes "justice work," but is its conscience, pushing and prodding the parish to express the whole of its faith by acting for justice.

The parish engages in public advocacy, speaking on behalf of the least of its community, our country, and the world.

The parish cultivates gratitude and thanksgiving, rather than duty and obligation, as motives for caring for the least.

Father Bryan Massingale specializes in Roman Catholic moral theology with a focus on Catholic social thought, liberation theologies, African American religious ethics, and racial justice. His recent work applies Catholic social thought to the issues of affirmative action, racial reconciliation, environmental justice, and terrorism and the challenge of peacemaking.