Notes from Justice Peace & Reconciliation Commission Meeting

January 7, 2019

Provincialate Offices

Present: Fr. John Czyzynski, Fr. Wayne Jenkins, Mark Peters, Fr. Bob Bossie, Fr. Guy Blair, Dn. Juancho Castaneda Rojas, Fr. Ed Zemlik (afternoon)

1. Juancho led us in prayer for a productive meeting and reflection on servant leadership. After personal sharing, Mark gave a report on his activities since the last meeting, including with Seventh Generation Interfaith (board membership, new member recruitment, and shareholder filings with TJX and Macy’s as well as a dialogue with Wisconsin Energy Corp.); the DACA coalition in Milwaukee that raised $17,000 for DACA students at area Catholic colleges to re-apply for the program (the US Province was a top contributor with a $1000 gift); and immigration education at St. Martin of Tours Parish. Discussion ensued about the importance of socially responsible investing for religious communities and the need for more parish education on immigration and social justice in general. **The Commission and Director stand ready to assist the Province membership or any province ministries in such efforts.** We expressed appreciation for Fr. Terry Langley and Fr. Joseph Quang Tran for working with us at St. Martin’s.

Mark reported that the weekly newsletter experiment he ran in December did not generate any feedback pro or con, so for now he is going back to publishing monthly with updates up to once a week if needed. He has tried to cut the length of the newsletter further by placing more content on the JPR website, with links in each newsletter.

Mark shared the disappointing results of the Public Charge comment campaign in the Province. Despite this being the biggest push of a year filled with big pushes by the USCCB and other immigrant and refugee advocacy groups, we were able to muster less than half a dozen comments despite several mailings that tried to make the process as easy as possible. Did some try but found the process too confusing? Not that we heard. Are people just feeling overwhelmed by the constant state of emergency on this issue the past two years? Very likely, but this is exactly what the Administration hopes will happen, that people will give up and allow these new, highly counter-productive policies to become the “new normal.” (Mark wrote a reflection in that week’s JPR News on the importance of advocacy.)

Lastly, Mark is still a member of the North American Migration Commission, and attended their most recent meeting in Toronto, where among other things a discussion of the responsibilities of the NAMC and the JPRC for this issue was re-opened. Previously an informal understanding had developed that the NAMC would bear primary responsibility for education and awareness-raising of SCJs in the U.S. and Canada, and for direct engagement with local communities about how they can respond, while the JPRC would focus specifically on the United States and coordinating advocacy efforts. But Fr. Ed Kilianski communicated to Mark that he felt all major initiatives, including something like the Public Charge campaign, should go through the NAMC. However, that group had not seen their charge in that way. Fr. Jack Kurps will facilitate a strategic planning session for the NAMC that may address this issue, among others. Meanwhile, we will continue to lift up advocacy opportunities when they arise as best we are able.
2. The rest of the morning and most of the afternoon was given over to discussion of an article in Atlantic magazine entitled [“The Real Roots of American Rage.”](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/01/charles-duhigg-american-anger/576424/) We chose the article in large part because of the polarization we are seeing in the U.S. over Donald Trump especially, but also because we see the US Province as reflective of the country in general: some despise Trump, others support him or at least think those who despise him have “Trump Derangement Syndrome,” and most dread conversations with anyone from the “other side.”

	1. The article begins with a 1980’s study of a small town in Massachusetts chosen because it was “placid.” But a survey showed that most residents experienced anger many times each day, often showed it in various ways, and perhaps most surprisingly found doing so to be cathartic, empowering and ultimately worthwhile. This led us to share with each other our own experiences of being angry or the subject of others’ anger. Several members also shared their perceptions of how religious in community often tend to avoid confronting issues that may cause anger out of a desire for harmony, and often even self-segregate with others whose political leanings they feel comfortable with.
	2. In the end, we felt the article was useful and worth sharing with the Province, but unsure of how to do it. We began the afternoon with individual reflection on how we discern that God is calling the JPRC to respond to growing polarization. The overlap and agreement was remarkable. We agreed our first charge is to witness to the truth of the Gospel and its development in Catholic social teaching, no matter whether the reaction is positive or negative, but also to work for reconciliation, which is part of our name, Dehonian identity, and mission. Bob spoke of this as “creating a ground for dialogue and conversion,” while Ed Z and Wayne mentioned our political impasse and the challenge to find “common ground.” We also agreed that our job is both to work with those who share our values, and to seek understanding and dialogue with those who disagree with either those values or our methods.
	3. Bob also mentioned the idea of “being the change you want to see in the world,” while Juancho said that while others came at this first from the social angle, his immediate reaction is to “look in the mirror” and ask how we can go out to preach reconciliation when we don’t necessarily have it together ourselves. He also spoke of the importance of realizing that each of us has a “right to be angry.” This dovetailed with the article, which stressed that there are two types of anger: ordinary anger, which is human and natural and can be healthy to express in appropriate ways, but which if not heard and confronted can lead to “moral indignation,” in which justice is no longer enough but the desire for revenge takes over and one wants his or her enemies to suffer and be punished.
	4. Another point of the article is that “ordinary anger can be sharpened, manipulated, and misdirected,” which is happening today. The author believes that “we may be further down a path toward widespread violence than we realize. Guy made the observation that “both parties have issued a call to anger – not to justice, peace and reconciliation. He and John talked about the “two uses of anger” (above) and how we can mobilize the first without adding to the second. John recalled hearing once that
	“anger is a God-given power to strike out against injustice,” and that in Ephesians 4:26 Paul writes "be angry and do not sin."
	5. We talked only briefly about how to use the article, including doing a similar survey among SCJs or a few focus groups, or use in a small group process that could be shared with those who might be interested. Because the article was long, we agreed that Mark would develop a summary of it for possible sharing, and that we would discuss this further at our next phone-in meeting on Friday, Jan. 18. We further agreed those meetings, which we experimented with holding every week for 15 minutes, will from now on be held on the 1st and 3rd Fridays from 10:45 – 11:15.
3. We concluded with quick updates on the Ratio Committee and their willingness to consider incorporating in the Ratio up to a week-long “immersion process” in the greater Milwaukee area, which John and Mark will work on; the hiring of Fr. Raul Gomez as SHSST Rector, with whom we hope to meet this summer; and the Klingler Award nominations, which have been slow to come in. Mark will check as to whether we can open nominations to SCJ employees or other laity with ties to the Province, and Commission members were encouraged to ask SCJs they talk to for suggestions. All we require is a paragraph or two detailing the reasons why the nominee meets the award criteria: “to recognize individuals or groups who exemplify the Dehonian charism of dedication to "ministry to the lowly and the humble, the workers and the poor" (Rule of Life #31).”
4. We will set our next regular meeting for early spring to look at our budget and follow up on the areas above. We agreed to read a substantive article for discussion for all future meetings. John will take prayer next. The meeting concluded with prayer.