Notes from Justice Peace & Reconciliation Commission Meeting

May 3, 2019

Provincialate Offices

Present: Fr. Bob Bossie, Fr. Juan Carlos Castaneda, Fr. John Czyzynski, Fr. Wayne Jenkins, Mark Peters, Fr. Ed Zemlik and Fr. Guy Blair (via phone in afternoon).

**Prayer:** Wayne led us in praying the song “All Are Welcome,” which was used at the Dehon Lecture April 10 and reminded us of Sr. Norma’s challenge to act to make the words of the song a reality.

**Director’s Report:** Much happening lately around immigration, including a new initiative to form a Catholic coalition to lobby our federal representatives of both parties in Southeastern Wisconsin. SGI efforts continue, with resolutions Mark has sponsored coming to a vote at Macy’s and TJX’s annual meetings. Eli McCarthy has asked if there is interest in a gathering of “JPICs” from various CMSM congregations next April 17-20 at Ecumenical Advocacy Days in D.C. The new “Catholic Coalition for Migrants and Refugees” is also planning a border visit this fall, and SCJs will be invited.

**Group Discussion:** Bob led us in discussion of an article he wrote entitled “The Human Impact on the Earth, Our Home: Nuclear War and Climate Change.” It looked at the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, war and military spending, and the migration crisis. We all agreed our initial reactions were the same: feeling overwhelmed and depressed. Besides the complexity of the problems, political polarization and gridlock in Congress makes progress seem next to impossible, and with the current Administration we are actually seeing movement backwards. The Green New Deal, while one of the few proposals that tries to respond adequately to the immensity of the crisis, is problematic, given that it is a Democratic proposal, and one that has divided even the Democrats.

Bob asked us to think about the following questions: Do we believe the scientists’ predictions? Does it really affect ME? Do I feel I have any power to do anything, personally or politically? Some of the responses: No one denies the scientific consensus, but there is a “big distance between my ‘head’ and ‘heart.’” We regularly see “storms of the century” every year; Juancho sees people in Houston still affected by Hurricane Harvey three years ago, Wayne sees the impact on farmers. Mark admitted it is too easy for him to “go along with the crowd” or simply hope technology saves us. Feeling powerless as individuals – it’s easier to do something as part of a collective with others to share the sacrifices and hold each other accountable.

We brainstormed about what we could do as a group. Ideas included engaging with the Generalate JPR office; forming small groups in local communities to learn about our individual and communal carbon footprints and reflect on how we could respond personally or as a body; looking into ways to “green” our own buildings (Bob mentioned Tom Cassidy’s retrofitting of St. Joseph’s heating system as one example) or move toward electric vehicles for the province fleet; advocacy via Seventh Generation Interfaith (engaging corporations) or with local businesses; alternative/impact investing; a speaker or workshop; education about the connections between the climate and migration crises; changing hearts by sharing the message of Greta Thunberg and the growing youth activist movement. We agreed to reflect on this further and pick it up again at our next meeting. We also noted that May 24th is the 4th anniversary of the promulgation of Laudato Si before breaking for lunch.

Guy Blair joined us in the afternoon, and Juancho led us in a prayer for families and communities affected by violence, injustice and corruption.

**Klingler Award:** Four excellent candidates were nominated; we used a discernment process to surface a recommendation that will be sent to the Provincial Council.

**Venezuela Crisis:** Juancho reported on his phone conversation with Fr. Carlos Enrique. Although he has not been in Venezuela for several years, he is closely in touch with SCJs and others there, and his view is that while Hugo Chavez started off positively with a focus on the poor, he used his popularity to put down dissent and consolidate his own power, and things have gotten worse under Maduro. The suffering in the country is tremendous, and Juancho saw when he was in Colombia how many Venezuelans have now fled there. But Bob reminded us that much of that suffering, though, is a direct result of U.S. sanctions, and we all agreed that the U.S. government historically has not been a good-faith actor in the region, but rather has subordinated Latin American interests to its own and even subverted democracy in many countries (including an attempted coup against Chavez). Whatever the political reality in Venezuela, U.S. citizens must take a hard look at our government’s approach to the situation.

**Other:** Mark noted Mike Tyrell’s invitation to this year’s Mission Education program in South Dakota and asked commission members to consider attending and surfacing other non-SCJs to invite as per Mike’s request. Mark also suggested that the commission begin planning for a future “immersion experience” or social justice workshop so we have something ready if requested by the Formation Team and/or at a future assembly or other Province gathering.

**Next Meetings:** Our next full quarterly meeting will be Thursday, Sept. 12, from 9:15 AM – Noon at the Provincialate Offices.