

Just Peace

A Just Peace ethical framework or process has arisen from and within a pastoral approach that listens to the experiences and voices of people in conflict situations across various cultural spaces. This orientation envisions a just peace as a way of cooperation for the common good, the prevention of violence, and a focus on the transformation of conflict by nonviolent strategies. ‘Just Peace’ refers to positive peace – rooted in just relationships and societal systems that respect the dignity of all people and the earth, our common home.¹

Just peace norms operate in three distinct spheres or categories that may overlap in time and space. They apply to all stages of conflict. Strategies and actions chosen must enhance or at least not obstruct these norms. Such just peace strategies and actions are always contextual with attention to those most impacted by a situation. Sustaining spiritual disciplines are critical to the fruitful exercise of these norms.²

1) Develop virtues and skills for constructively engaging conflict (*jus in conflictione*)

- *Virtuous habits* - mercy, hospitality, courage, nonviolence, justice, compassion,
- *Education and training in key skills*- nonviolent communication, civil resistance, analysis of root causes, intersectional, and needs-based analysis.
- *Participatory processes*, inclusive of as many stakeholders as possible, especially women, youth, and marginalized groups.
- *Form more nonviolent communities*, institutions, cultures

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis points to this category when he proposes "*processes* of encounter that build a people that can accept differences."³ He has also called us "to become nonviolent people and to build nonviolent communities that care for our common home."⁴

2) Break dynamics or cycles of violence (*jus ex bello*)

- *Reflexivity*: keeping the means consistent and congruent with the ends
- *Re-humanization* of all stakeholders: language, labels, and narratives we focus on.
- *Conflict transformation*: address root causes; consistent dialogue, trust-building initiatives, trauma-reduction, meeting human needs of all
- *Acknowledge responsibility for harm*: via statements or more formal restorative justice mechanisms
- *Nonviolent direct action*: enhance civil resistance, unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent civilian-based defense

¹ Just Peace Ethic Primer: Breaking Cycles of Violence and Building Sustainable Peace, ed. E. McCarthy, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020).

² Such as prayer, discernment, forgiveness, ritual, contemplation, or a Eucharistic prayer that explicitly names Jesus' love of enemies and rejection of violence.

³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, par. 217, 2020,

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_ enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

⁴ Pope Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," par. 7.

- *Integral disarmament*: create conditions and actualize the reduction of armed weapons along with the reduction of bitterness, hostility, and hatred within persons and communities⁵

Pope Francis points to this category in *Fratelli Tutti* when he says "every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound; every violent death diminishes us as people. ... Violence leads to more violence. ... We must break this cycle which seems inescapable."⁶

3) **Build sustainable peace** (*jus ad pacem*)

- *Relationality and reconciliation*: promotes across all sectors of society, such as inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, or truth and reconciliation commissions.⁷
- *Robust civil society and just governance*: re-distribution of political power.
- *Ecological justice and sustainability*: long-term well-being of people, non-human animals, and the environment
- *Human dignity and human rights of all*: including adversaries by ensuring human rights and cultivating empathy for all actors.
- *Economic, gender, and racial justice*: focus on the marginalized and vulnerable

Advantages of a Just Peace Ethic

This approach would better form us as peacemakers by enabling us to imagine, develop, and stay committed to nonviolent practices. It also better enables us to transform conflict, get to the root causes, and build sustainable peace. It is consistent with human dignity and ecological care, whereas war significantly distorts and damages both. For instance, war and killing increases trauma, domination, and even moral injury, while lowering empathy and a sense of gift of all persons. The just peace approach is less likely to lead to the structural and cultural violence of being prepared for war(s) as well as a corresponding arms race, as these divert needed resources and often exacerbate mistrust. It also helps us better stay out of and break cycles of violence, which even wars that appear just still get us stuck in. The just peace ethic will also better enable us to move closer toward outlawing war, a goal for which Vatican II called us to "strain every muscle." In turn, the just peace ethic is more likely to actually prevent, limit, and defuse an ongoing war. Further, and perhaps most importantly, however, the just peace ethic will better enable the illumination of Christ in our world and draw people to a loving relationship with Christ and the Church.

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⁵ Drawing on Pope John XXIII, Pope Francis uses this term to refer to the integral link between reducing the bitterness, hostility and hatred in hearts with making a significant reduction of armed weapons.

<https://zenit.org/articles/pope-stresses-need-to-halt-nuclear-arms/>

⁶ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, par. 227.

⁷ Includes deepening a sense of relationality with our ancestors and those yet to be born.