

The Ministry of Peace and Justice

by Michael Jordan Laskey

Session 5 Handout

The DART Method of Social Ministry

These next two sessions are meant to get you thinking about how you might practically apply the ideas you've talked about over the last four sessions within your parish.

During session 6 (next time), you'll have the chance to start brainstorming actual experiences your group might want to coordinate. This time, you'll learn a tried-and-true system for doing peace and justice ministry called "The DART Method of Social Ministry."

Whether you're planning a legislative advocacy campaign, a visit to a soup kitchen for a small group, or an educational session about homelessness in partnership with your parish's youth ministry program, you'll want to make sure all four elements of the DART Method are included. Think of the D, A, R, and T steps you're about to learn as the essential ingredients of any peace and justice recipe.

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia's Office of Social Ministries developed this method, which is an acronym that stands for:

Discern community needs and Parish resources.

Act to meet the immediate needs of your community.

Reflect on your experience in light of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching.

Transform social structures to achieve the common good.

First, **Discern**. This two-part process involves *looking out* at the world around you and *looking in* at the talents and resources of your faith community.

Start by looking outward: What are the needs in your local community or surrounding areas? Is hunger an issue? The arrival of immigrants? Lack of affordable housing? Violence? A good way to learn about the needs around your community is to contact agencies and organizations that are working to meet these needs. Many of these organizations depend on volunteer support, which will come into play in the Act phase of DART.

Subgroups within your committee might want to spend time in the coming weeks building relationships with a few of these agencies that your faith community hasn't connected with before. Over a meal with someone who works for the organization you've connected with, learn about what they do and ask how the parish might support their work.

As you're building these relationships, also gather with other parish leaders interested in peace and justice ministry and look inward. What talents do your parishioners possess? What sub-communities in the parish might be interested in taking action as part of an activity you've organized? How would a particular peace and justice initiative fit in to the parish schedule or help fulfill parish goals and priorities?

Second, **Act**. Once you've discerned some of the needs in your community and the ability of the parish to respond, the next step is to act. Ideally, this step means connecting with a community organization and getting off the parish property!

Here are some sample action steps based on each of the six areas of peace and justice ministry:

- *Prayer and Worship*: Prayer vigil for families and children outside of an abortion clinic during Respect Life Month.
- *Preaching and Education*: A visit to a Catholic Charities office that helps resettle refugees in your area.
- *Outreach and Charity*: Working on housing construction with Habitat for Humanity or a similar organization.
- *Legislative Action*: A visit with your congressional representative's staff at his or her in-district office and advocate on behalf of important legislation as identified by the US Catholic bishops or your local state Catholic conference.
- *Organizing for Justice*: Attend a public meeting with local officials to support the expansion of affordable housing in your city or town.
- *Global Solidarity*: Host a Fair Trade goods sale, allowing parishioners to purchase crafts made by fairly paid adults.

Third, **Reflect**. In his masterpiece *Four Quartets*, poet T.S. Eliot writes, “We had the experience but missed the meaning.” How easy it is to let experiences pass us by without reflecting on them and inviting them to change us.

Setting time aside for reflection immediately after the action is completed can be a challenge. It requires asking for a longer time commitment from those who participate in the action. It might mean cutting the moment of encounter a bit short to make time for reflection. No matter what it takes, be sure to plan for it.

There are three important types of reflection that should all be included in any peace and justice action: sensory, social, and theological reflection.

Sensory reflection is the first step, and it focuses on a recap of what happened during the experience. Ask participants to summarize the action—not only what happened externally, but what happened to them internally.

Social reflection includes the big “Why?” questions. It encourages participants to get to the root of the social issue(s) they experienced. Here are some example social reflection questions:

- Why do you think the social issue we encountered exists?
- What people, institutions, and values contribute to this situation? Who might be involved in potential solutions?
- What obstacles exist for people who might be trying to overcome this situation?

Theological reflection puts our experience in dialogue with our faith. We are not called to work for peace and justice because it seems like a nice thing to do. We are called because it is a central part of our faith tradition. Here are some theological reflection questions:

- Where is God at work here? Did you see the face of Christ anywhere?
- Is there a passage from Scripture this makes you think of?
- What beliefs and values lead you to say, “Things shouldn’t be this way”?

Fourth and finally, **Transform**. The reflection after the action is meant to lead to some big changes. To keep the momentum going after a positive experience, there has to be a “next step.” How will life be different after this shared action? How will our community be different? How might the *world* be different?

There are three types of transformation that are important here: personal, interpersonal, and structural transformation.

Personal transformation means that the action and reflection experience lead the participant to change some things about his or her daily life. Participants ask, “What comes next for me because of this experience?”

Interpersonal transformation means getting other members of the community involved, allowing one's own personal change to reach out to others. For instance, if a small group has a powerful experience at a soup kitchen, perhaps that small group might organize a toiletry items drive to engage the whole parish in supporting the soup kitchen's work.

Structural transformation means working to change the systems that lead to social injustices. Moving beyond meeting the immediate needs of individuals, structural transformation focuses on long-term, community-based solutions. The soup kitchen group might organize a letter-writing campaign to urge elected leaders to pass legislation that helps lift up those who are living in poverty, for instance.

The DART process never ends. Hopefully, transformed disciples are led to another moment of discernment, and the cycle continues. No matter the type of experience you're considering planning, make sure the DART Method is applied.