



The Reign of God: Transforming Our World

What the Small Communities Need to Know

1. Doing justice is *not* optional in the reign of God. It is required of all who follow the witness of Jesus, who so loved this *incomplete and wounded* world. We need to encourage and promote education, preaching, reflection, reading, and media materials and workshops that underscore the profound insight lifted up by the 1971 International Synod of Bishops, convened by Paul VI: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world... [is integral to] the preaching of the gospel."¹ While committees such as Parish Outreach and Parish Social Concerns are of great importance, the parish community should not relegate the work of justice solely to these committees. This is the work of all baptized Christians. Moving into a broader understanding of our role in doing justice is the work of a lifetime and needs to be lifted up often and in creative ways.
2. The reign of God sometimes calls us to demonstrate, march, organize, advocate; certainly, these are very valuable and very visible means of promoting full justice in God's reign. But if we limit justice-making *only* to these actions, what do we understand our lives are about when we are doing household tasks; going about the work that supports us; praying; being present to family, friends, community; and all the ordinary aspects of everyday life? We need to integrate faith and justice into every moment of daily life, realizing that these ordinary acts, done with love and attention, also hasten the coming of God's reign.

More than just doing projects, the reign of God calls us to bring forth a just society through such things as honesty in business, assisting with housing, social equity, caring for the environment, the distribution of resources, involvement in corporate decisions, care for those who cannot handle the complexities of our society living.

3. Doing justice can sometimes place an individual in a space of loneliness and isolation, with a sense of being the only voice crying out in the wilderness. For this reason, small Christian communities become of even greater critical importance, for it is in small communities that members come together to pray, reflect, discern, share faith and story, grasp the social implications of the gospel, and find support to move into action. Participation in small Christian communities is integral to sustaining the struggle for justice. The doing of justice comes out of the very heart of small Christian community. Supported by the group's wisdom, small Christian communities are called to be involved in the totality of life. Those in small Christian communities are in positions to help or hinder the reign of God in the lives of others around the world. From small Christian communities also emerge elected representatives who are in a position to carry out justice on a wide scale.
4. The needs of our world cry out for attention, and these needs are so huge they can easily paralyze us into a state of thinking that we can't possibly make a difference. Understanding that justice or right relationship starts in our own hearts and moves outward helps us to move away from *the paralysis of analysis*. Small communities begin by looking at issues of justice where they live, and receive support and guidance from the larger parish community in taking action.
5. If our actions are rooted in prayerful reflection individually and in community, we can best sustain our passion for justice. One very effective way to do this is for a small Christian community to use a reflection process (the Observe, Judge, Act methodology that St. Thomas Aquinas used for arriving at prudent action²) such as RENEW International's *IMPACT* Series.³

6. It will be very helpful to talk with parish and/or diocesan/(arch)diocesan staff for additional ideas on the topic. Also, the workshop, “The Reign of God: Transforming Our World,” can be downloaded from www.ParishLife.com.

¹ *Justice in the World*, International Synod of Bishops (1971), 6.

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Allen, TX: Thomas More Press, 1997) II, Question 47, Article 8. See *Justice in the World*, International Synod of Bishops (1971), 6.

³ Suggested titles in the *IMPACT* Series include: *Beginnings: Human and World Issues*; *Beyond Black & White*; *Civic Responsibility: What's It All About?*; *Discipleship of Nonviolence*; *Embracing Life*; *Hunger in God's World*; *Our Origin Story: Foundations for Ecological Responsibility*; *Make Media Work for You*; *Reflections on "Dead Man Walking."* (Available through RENEW/SCC Resources, 1232 George Street, Plainfield, NJ 07062-1717, phone: 1-888-433-3221, fax:1-908-769-5660, e-mail: Resources@renewintl.org, bookstore: <http://www.renewintl.org/Resources/Pages/faithshare.html>)