

Just Peace Ethic

We envision a just peace as a way of political cooperation for the common good, respect for the dignity of all persons and the natural world, preventing violence before it begins, and the transformation of conflict by nonviolent strategies.

Just peace norms operate in three distinct spheres or categories that may overlap in time and space. Strategies and actions chosen must enhance or at least not obstruct these norms, as well as keep means and ends consistent.

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

- sustaining spiritual disciplines²
- virtuous habits³
- education and training in key skills⁴
- participatory processes⁵
- form nonviolent peacemaking communities⁶

2) Break cycles of destructive conflict and violence (*jus ex bello*)

- reflexivity⁷
- re-humanization⁸
- conflict transformation⁹
- acknowledge responsibility for harm¹⁰
- nonviolent direct action¹¹
- integral disarmament¹²

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

- relationality and reconciliation¹³
- robust civil society and just governance¹⁴
- ecological justice and sustainability¹⁵
- human dignity and human rights of all¹⁶
- economic, gender, and racial justice¹⁷

Guiding questions

What ongoing actions and policies could help build sustainable peace? What are the root causes of the conflict? What virtuous or vicious habits are at stake and skillsets needed to transform the conflict? What just peace practices and transforming initiatives could be scaled up to break cycles of violence?

Advantages of a Just Peace Ethic

Compared to traditional ethical approaches, a just peace ethic 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 by addressing the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions. This 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, whereas both divert needed resources and often exacerbate mistrust. It also helps us better stay out of and break cycles of violence. 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 loving relationship with Christ and his Church.

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¹ Latin terms coined by Gerald Schlabach, University of St. Thomas, U.S.

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

³ Virtue of active nonviolence (or nonviolent peacemaking) realizes the goods of conciliatory love that draws enemies toward friendship, and the truth of our ultimate unity and equal dignity. Related virtues include mercy, compassion, empathy, humility, hospitality, solidarity, courage, and justice.

⁴ Such as nonviolent communication, civil resistance, social analysis of root causes, and gender, racial, intersectional, and needs-based analysis.

⁵ Participation refers here to decision-making and action chosen must be participatory and inclusive of as many key stakeholders as possible, especially women, young adult leaders, and marginalized groups.

⁶ Includes institutions and cultures.

⁷ Keeping the means consistent with the ends.

⁸ Through language, image creation, and narratives.

⁹ To draw adversaries toward partnership and address root causes, such as dialogue, trauma-healing, meeting the human needs of all actors and independent initiatives to build trust.

¹⁰ Such as lament, restorative justice and “dangerous memory.”

¹¹ Such as civil resistance, unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent civilian-based defense and locally-based nonviolent strategies.

¹² By “integral disarmament,” Pope Francis uses this to refer to the need for a preceding or simultaneous reduction of “weapons” or disarming of the heart to enable a fuller reduction of concrete weapons.

¹³ Relationality and reconciliation refer to actions that invite, create, strengthen and heal relationships in ever-wider (horizontal) and deeper (vertical) directions across/within social groups; such as inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, or truth and reconciliation commissions.

¹⁴ Re-distribution of political power and the practice of advocacy.

¹⁵ This would call us to action that contributes to the long-term well-being of people, non-human animals, and the environment, i.e. an integral ecology.

¹⁶ Human dignity calls for action that is consistent with and improves appreciation for the equal dignity of all people, including adversaries by ensuring human rights and cultivating empathy for all actors.

¹⁷ With a focus on the marginalized and vulnerable.