



Africa - FAITH AND JUSTICE

"And justice will produce lasting peace and security."

Isaiah 32:17

Mission, Faith and Justice

Justice is integral to faith, for we cannot love our neighbour without treating them justly. The God of the Old Testament and of Jesus Christ is a God who loves justice and righteousness. Faith therefore, not only implies belief but also a way of life that seeks justice. This is why SMA's and other missionaries have not only preached but also dug wells, built schools and hospitals as well as Churches.

Mission entails the preaching of the Word and also loving ones neighbour by working for Justice. Actions that promote human development, recognise the dignity of each person and provide individuals with the opportunity to fulfil their God-given potential are an essential part of mission.

Justice motivated by Faith is an essential part of the Church's mission



"How I wish for a church that is poor and for the poor!"

The meaning and context of the above words, spoken by Pope Francis during his first papal audience, are explained by the words that preceded them. *"And so the name came to my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and safeguards Creation. In this moment when our relationship with Creation is not so good he is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man."*

A homily given in August 2012, by the then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio said, *"Justice is that which gladdens the heart: when there is something for everyone; when one sees that there is equality...that there is enough for all."*

Concern for Justice and Peace was again clearly stated when Pope Francis ended his first Easter Sunday homily in the Vatican by calling for *"peace in the whole world, still divided by greed looking for easy gain, wounded by the selfishness which threatens human life and the family, selfishness that continues in human trafficking, the most extensive form of slavery in this 21st century. Peace to the whole world, torn apart by violence linked to drug trafficking and by the iniquitous exploitation of natural resources."*

By highlighting the injustice of greed, selfishness and violence as well as some of the forms in which these evils are manifest in our world, His Holiness has focused on the Church's mission to bring the Gospel and also to make the justice it implies a reality in our own lives, in our work and in the world.

An African Response

The First Synod of African Bishops in 1994 identified pastoral priorities essential for evangelisation – the work of Justice and Peace was included in these. The Second Synod in 2009 focused on the Church's activity and mission as *"salt of the earth, light of the world"* and as *"servants of reconciliation, justice and peace."*

This prioritising of Justice and Peace has led to many initiatives and programmes led by bishops, priests, missionaries and the laity in parishes and dioceses across Africa. These local responses have focused on issues such as education, health, conflict resolution, housing, poverty, environmental degradation, oppression and corruption.

International Response

There are however, many issues of injustice affecting Africans that originate far from Africa. It is a sad reality that business and economic decisions made in Europe and the

Western World contribute to the fact that millions of Africans do not have the basics we take for granted and which we see as fundamental human rights. The right to clean water, to adequate food and to medicines are a reality for most people in Europe; they are **NOT** for most people in Africa.

Here in Ireland and in Europe missionary groups including the SMA work for justice in Africa by contributing to the efforts of the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN). It was formed in 1988 following a request made by Pope John Paul II for *"missionaries to be present wherever decisions are made that affect the lives of people in the developing world."*

The role of the AEFJN is to highlight and challenge the unjust effects that decisions made by European Governments and Corporations may have on African peoples and countries. Trade practices, policies and legislation often maximise corporate profits and protect European interests at the expense of the African countries providing the materials and produce that generate wealth in Europe.

Promoting Gospel Values

The AEFJN is guided by the Gospel and Church Teaching. It recognises the right of every human person to enjoy their fair share of the earth's resources. Sometimes this right is denied. Economic and social policies adopted by the European Union may directly affect the price an African farmer gets for his Cocoa, Ginger or Grain. In turn, this affects his children, the food they eat, whether or not they get the medicines they need or even if they can go to school.

"If you want Peace, work for Justice." Pope Paul VI

Working for Justice and Peace in Africa is part of the Church's Evangelising Mission

By working within the European Union structure in Brussels and through branches in European and African countries the AEFJN gathers information about inequalities caused by unfair trade and political relationships. This is published as widely as possible in order to raise awareness of the injustice. The AEFJN also acts by lobbying and campaigning in order to influence fair decisions at EU and Governmental level in European countries.

The SMA sees the action and advocacy of the AEFJN as an expression of the faith from which justice cannot be separated, a practical and necessary way of loving our African neighbour.

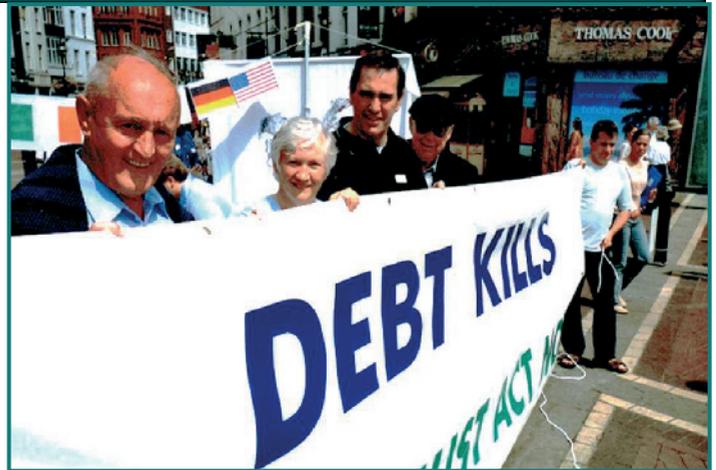
AEFJN 25th Anniversary

This year the AEFJN celebrates its 25th year. Since 1988 it has helped to bring about positive change and succeeded in reversing unjust trade practices. In the photograph above we see an example of an occasion when members of the AEFJN have campaigned on the streets of Ireland against the unfair burden of illegitimate International Debt on Africa.

Efforts on this issue made by the AEFJN and other organisations have had significant success. The work of informing and lobbying has also borne fruit by influencing the terms of trade agreements, policies and also practices affecting trade and the availability of medicines in Africa.

Still a long Way to go

While the AEFJN has much to celebrate it is acutely aware that Africans are still suffering because of problems originating in the developed world. In particular AEFJN Ireland is focusing its efforts on two issues. Firstly, **climate change**. This is a problem created largely by the profligate use of fossil fuels in the developed world. It is turning African farmland into desert.



Campaigning for Justice Fr John Horgan SMA, Sr Helena Greely and Fr Angelo Lafferty SMA

Secondly, **land grabbing** - the leasing of huge tracts of African land by foreign Corporations (amounting to more than 16 times the landmass of Ireland) is robbing Africans of what is rightly theirs, depriving them of the wealth and resources with which they could develop and support themselves.

These are issues that the AEFJN and the SMA will continue to highlight and campaign against as injustices which have far reaching negative effects on the lives and livelihoods of Africans.

Faith and Justice

Living our Faith and loving our neighbour is something every Christian is called to. The AEFJN and the SMA witness to this call in Africa and where decisions affecting the lives of Africans are made. We are all called to be just and loving in our work, in family situations, and in how we relate to our neighbours - even those who are far away. We will do well if we follow the principles and aims that have guided the AEFJN. If we respect human dignity, give preference to the poor and seek the common good, then we will be loving our neighbour as ourselves.

"The Church advances the mission of Christ, serves the Kingdom of God, and contributes to mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her preaching, witness, establishing communities and local churches, spreading "gospel values", and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children."

The Church in Africa must embody and promote an African society that is sincere in its respect for law and order, the rights of others, and equal access to the resources of the land and water – in sum, a society that does social justice and lives in communion and enjoys peace.

The Church in Africa must be the historical form of the Kingdom of God on the continent, causing justice and Kingdom values to sprout everywhere..... To be servants of reconciliation, justice and peace, as salt of the earth and light of the world is a challenge to the Church in Africa to live up to her nature in the historical and concrete life of the continent – to inculturate – by promoting reconciliation, justice and peace."

Cardinal P Turkson,

Quotations from: Root and Routes of Justice Ministry in Africa, March 2013

