

The Practice of Social Justice: An Augustinian Response to Contemporary Social Issues

Arthur Purcaro, OSA

Assistant Vice President for Mission and Ministry, Villanova University

ABSTRACT: This paper presents the “signs of the times” methodology and proposes its use as an appropriate pedagogical tool for contemporary practical theology, particularly in the area of social justice. The author presents three examples of the application of the method by students in theological formation for the Augustinian Order, and also provides an explanation of the method’s suitability for other Catholic traditions and Christian denominations.

KEYWORDS: pedagogy, methodology, awareness, social justice, signs of the times

INTRODUCTION

School shootings, mass incarceration, governmental corruption. These are headlines which, tragically, jump out at us all too regularly from social media. What does the Church have to say about these, and other compelling social issues? That depends on who you believe the Church is: the Pope, the hierarchy or the entire People of God.

In order to constitute a Christian response to contemporary social issues, awareness and formation of conscience are necessarily involved. The process of formation of conscience enables personal and communal transformative action, which can address not only immediate needs but also, and more significantly, the root causes of these issues.

In June of 2018, eleven theology students gathered for a course on Augustinian formation for ministry.¹ The first topic explored was: Augustine's Rule and Catholic Social Thought: Sources and Resources.

The course explored each of the four basic principles of Catholic social teaching (the dignity of every person, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity) as defined in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*² and involved the participants in a search for the roots of these principles in the Rule of Augustine, delving into the social context in which the Rule was developed in the last decade of the fourth century in northern Africa.

After sharing this research, participants were invited to employ the "signs of the times" methodology, used in the composition of *Gaudium et Spes* and promoted actively in the Church since Vatican II, to reflect on and identify concrete applications for each of these principles in addressing contemporary significant social issues. This paper presents three of those student essays as a resource for exploring this methodology, which will be presented in more detail below. This exercise was meant to help the participants in their preparation for ministry as Augustinians, following the indications of the outstanding Augustinian scholar, Tarsicius van Bavel O.S.A., in his commentary on the Rule of Augustine.³

We could characterize the Rule of Augustine as a call to the evangelical equality of all people. It voices the Christian demand to bring all men and women into full communion. At the same time it sounds an implicit protest against inequality in a society which is so clearly marked by possessiveness, pride and power. According to Augustine, a monastic community should offer an alternative by striving to build a community that is not motivated by possessiveness, pride and power, but by love for one another. And, in this sense, the Rule of Augustine is also socially critical.

¹As a community of male religious in the mendicant tradition, our primary charism is community life at the service of the Church and the world. Throughout our long history, many of our friars have chosen to be religious brothers, exercising ministry not as priests nor deacons but as Augustinian friars. As a result, we generally don't refer to our students in formation as seminarians, which more precisely identifies candidates for the priesthood. The same sensibility tends to exist among other mendicant Orders, like the Franciscans and Dominicans.

²Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), 49–92.

³Tarsicius van Bavel O.S.A., *The Rule of St Augustine with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 8.

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXPRESSION “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”

In order to comprehend the expression “the signs of the times” as used in the Second Vatican Council, it is helpful to understand the concept that human history and the history of salvation are not two separate stories, one superimposed upon the other, but rather a unique history of humanity in which and through which God is actively present. Consequently, events are read from the viewpoint of faith in order to discover the deeper significance they hold for us beyond mere occurrences. The signs of the times are not always immediately understood because they are present in the very human, intrinsically ambivalent situation in which we find ourselves. They need to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel.

THE METHODOLOGY FOR A PEDAGOGY OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

This pedagogy is inductive and incarnational. We are invited to discover God in and among us, to empower, support, purify and celebrate that presence. The emphasis is on discovering God, with the help of the Spirit, rather than deducing or elucidating from a few absolute truths about God which are then to be applied to our reality. The events of life and life itself are understood as theological space, calling us to discover the presence of God and awaken our potential for evangelizing for the transformation of the world according to the divine plan.

The Bishops of Latin America in the conclusive document from their Conference in Aparecida, Argentina in 2007, state unequivocally:

This method has helped us to live more intensely our vocation and mission in the Church; it has enriched our theological and pastoral activity and, in general, has motivated us to assume our responsibility in the face of the concrete situations which affect our continent. This method allows us to articulate our reality in a systematic way and from a faith perspective; to assume the criteria which come to us both from faith and reason for discerning and evaluating with a critical sense; and, consequently, to project our activities as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. The faith-filled, joyful and trusting commitment to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the insertion of our Church in this world are indispensable fundamentals which guarantee the efficacy of this method.⁴

The purpose of this methodology is to awaken our awareness, to open our mind and heart in order to discover God among us. It is the methodology

⁴Aparecida Document, <https://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>, n. 19.

used to raise critical awareness, to grow accustomed to a way of seeing the world and the situation in which we live.⁵ This served as an exercise in practical theology, requiring an immersion and awareness of prevailing contemporary issues as well as the ability to search together, listening actively to God and to one another, allowing ourselves to be enlightened both by Scripture and Catholic social thought.

During the course, each Augustinian chose a compelling, contemporary social issue and, using the “signs of the times” methodology, prepared material which could be used by a Campus Ministry Intern in a residence hall, or an Augustinian friar or any professor in preparing for reflection and discussion by typical college undergraduate or graduate students.

This document presents three of these reflection papers in the hope that the methodology might prove both attractive and persuasive as a means of announcing the Good News of God’s reign. The significance of this exercise leans more toward encouraging facility with the “signs of the times” methodology than familiarity with Augustinian sources and resources.

I believe the methodology, fostered and promoted as a result of the paradigm shift which the Second Vatican Council embodies, is a timely tool to promote authentic Christian dialogue, of greater need currently perhaps than during the early 1960’s when the Council was in session. Talking heads, barking over one another as opposed to listening respectfully and for understanding are far too prevalent in the contemporary scene, substituting diatribe for dialogue, seeking to impose more than propose, reflecting the ever-increasing individualism which blights our society and impedes growth in the search for our common good.

Please observe how Bill Gabriel employs this methodology in addressing the issue of school shootings.

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: AN AUGUSTINIAN RESPONSE OF SOLIDARITY

William Gabriel O.S.A.

School shootings: an all too familiar occurrence of late. What has filled headlines and news coverage has become the chaos all too inescapable as a reality in the world. School shootings with all their outrage and destruction are not of God. God, as revealed in the Trinity, is relationship. What is of God, then, necessarily is that which gives life, builds communion, as well as, creates and sustains relationship. Employing the Signs of the Times Methodology made popular by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, this paper will attempt

⁵For an exposition of the sign of the times methodology, see *God’s Quad*, edited by Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano (New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 211–213.

to see, judge, and offer action on school shootings. Bringing to bear Catholic social teaching, Scripture, and the Rule of St. Augustine on these tragedies, the wisdom of the tradition provides a lens to view and shape our actions in response. Particularly, the principle of solidarity can form the basis of our standing with both the person as shooter (including potential shooters) and the victims with their communities. The aim of this document is to ultimately stimulate conscious-raising questions in exploring how Augustinian community can serve as a response of solidarity in the face of school shootings.

SEE: Observe, Listen, Hear, Experience

School shootings, albeit rarer occurrences in the broader scope of mass gun violence, deeply impact the atmosphere at our high school and college campuses. Schools as places of learning also play a formative role in the social development of students. At school, students experience the first taste of community and friendship, as well as what it takes to relate to those who may share differing opinions. Yet, according to CNN,⁶ the Santa Fe High School shooting in Santa Fe, Texas on May 18, 2018 marked the 22nd school shooting of 2018. This brings the average to over one school shooting per week. Imagine how this is impacting the social and learning environments of students.

The frequency of school shootings has instilled fear and the feeling of being unsafe. The effects sound off in the voice of Paige Curry, a 17 year old student at Santa Fe High School, who said after the recent shooting on May 18: "It's been happening everywhere. I've always kind of felt it like eventually it was going to happen here too. I wasn't surprised."⁷ What does that reveal about our conversation around the topic? Are we too accustomed to mass events of violence that we have become desensitized to them?

In this polarized culture, the tendency is to respond to school shootings by arguing for either gun control or mental health care. A February 2018 poll from ABC News and the *Washington Post* took the pulse of some 808 Americans and discovered that more blame mental illness than gun control.⁸ The partisan political sphere only adds to this division: 80% of Republican respondents

⁶"There has been, on average, one school shooting every week this year." CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/us/school-shootings-2018-list-trnd/index.html>.

⁷Emily Shugerman, "Texas School Shooting: Student Tells Media 'I Wasn't Surprised, I Was Just Scared,'" *Independent*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/.texas-school-shooting-girl-student-paige-curry-santa-fe-high-school-not-surprised-a8358586.html>.

⁸Molly Olmstead, "More Americans Blame Mass Shootings on Mental Health Than on Gun Laws, New Poll Finds," *Slate*, February 20, 2018, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/02/abc-and-washington-post-poll-finds-americans-blame-mental-health-more-than-gun-control-for-shootings.html>.

blamed mental health while only 33% of Democrats said the same. However, after observing the current climate on the topic, advocating for only gun control or mental health is seemingly an oversimplification. Research suggests that mass shootings are both a gun control problem and a mental health problem, though many in society isolate the two..

Yes, it is a mental health issue. Duwe and Rocque, research director and professor of sociology, respectively, have conducted research that reveals a connection between mental health and these shootings. The rate of mental illness among mass shooters is “more than three times higher than the rate of mental illness found among American adults, and about 15 times higher than the rate of serious mental illness found among American adults.”⁹ Certainly, though, it would be unfair to characterize all people struggling with mental illness as potential mass shooters.

And yes, it is a gun control issue. There has been increasing evidence to show that mass shootings and gun-related homicides are a uniquely United States issue.¹⁰ Access to legal purchase of extreme firearms that are sometimes used in these mass shootings does not assist in curbing the occurrence of these events. The limitations of this document cannot sufficiently cover the complexities of the topic. The division among political agendas makes up the main discussion around the issue. However, this research demands the culture to move beyond the either/or view to a both/and seeking of ways to prevent school shootings in the future.

JUDGE: Discern

How do we judge with the appropriate lens of God in viewing the injustice of school shootings? For this, the wisdom of Catholic social teaching’s principle of solidarity, combined with the light of Scripture, and the Augustinian way of life can help illuminate our understanding and inform our judgment.

What does solidarity have to say?

Solidarity, as one of the four principles of Catholic social doctrine detailed by the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, requires not merely

⁹Grant Duwe and Michael Rocque, “Actually, There Is a Clear link between Mass Shootings and Mental Illness,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-duwe-rocque-mass-shootings-mental-illness-20180223-story.html>.

¹⁰German Lopez, “America’s Unique Gun Violence Problem, Explained in 17 Maps and Charts,” *Vox Media*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/2/16399418/us-gun-violence-statistics-maps-charts>.

an attitude of “standing for” others, but also a “standing with” others that is motivated by love and gets to the root of the conditions contributing to injustice. It requires an awareness of interdependence.¹¹ This same idea is echoed by Saint John Paul II’s treatment of the principle: “we are all really responsible for all.”¹² Solidarity, therefore, is interrelated with the other three principles:¹³ it stems from recognizing human dignity of all people, seeks action beyond individual interests for the sake of the common good, and desires to help people address these issues at their most elemental level and from within their situation in an exercise of the principle of subsidiarity.¹⁴

Choosing to stand in solidarity with those who are victims as well as with those who are the school shooters (or potential shooters), one must be motivated first by recognizing the human dignity of all people. Inflicting violence and fear clearly does not act in accordance with seeing the human dignity of every person. More challenging, any judgment that demonizes the shooter in these school shootings fails to acknowledge the dignity of the perpetrator. Standing with compassion and a desire to heal the hurt of those suffering as victims and as the emotionally wounded shooters is to reach for a more human and life-giving world.

Solidarity assumes the responsibility of addressing the underlying conditions of the issue. With a better understanding of the conditions, a person and community can begin to empathize with all involved. It is only then that we realize the violence and fear from school shootings directly impacts my brother and sister in God. Solidarity moves us to a desire for the common good that transforms the biased debate of either gun control or mental health and reshapes it in terms of both/and for the sake of life. Furthermore, standing with others involves subsidiarity. Our “standing with” cannot be simply a “standing for” out of mere pity or from a place of imposing a solution, but rather seeks to create the conditions necessary so that those involved can find healing and resolution themselves. Living this principle of solidarity in response to school shootings gives us the wisdom to condemn such violence, recognize the dignity of both victim and the person committing the shooting, and fight along with others to address the underlying conditions for a more God-aware world.

¹¹*Compendium*, 86.

¹²John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Mr George Bush President of the United States of America,” May 27, 1989, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1989/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19890527_us-president.html.

¹³*Compendium*, 71.

¹⁴*Compendium*, 81–83.

What does Scripture say?

There are several passages from the Word of God that can be formative in how we judge the various aspects of school shootings.

To name a few:

In reference to these shootings as not of God: “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).¹⁵ In solidarity with the victims: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those whose spirit is crushed” (Psalm 34:19). In solidarity with the shooters: “Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget all his gifts, who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills” (Psalm 103:2). In response to those who demonize the shooter: “Do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written: ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19). Finally, a call to create a different environment of communion over hate: “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:15–16). This small sample of biblical input can inform our judgment and response to such injustice.

What does the Augustinian Rule/Way of Life say?

Augustine’s Rule, written around 397 CE, provides a uniquely Augustinian, and, subsequently, a uniquely Christian approach to such tragedies—for both the persons who commit the shootings and the victims. It calls for a way of life that strives for communion, is motivated by healing, and seeks to create healthy and holy living together in God. Sixteen 1 later, Augustine’s lens on the gospel sheds light on the lived discernment of community illness, correction, and harmony.

Understanding that God is relationship, Augustine emphasizes the importance of human dignity in all people: “All should live united in mind and heart and should in one another honor God whose temples you have become.”¹⁶ When there is illness or need, Augustine charges the community to be attentive. He writes, “Do not think that you are being a mischief-maker when you draw attention to this. On the contrary, you would be no more innocent yourselves if by silence you let your brothers be lost, when by reporting the matter you

¹⁵NB: All scripture citations taken from: *The Catholic Study Bible: The New American Bible: Revised Edition*, 3rd ed, edited by Donald Senior, John J. Collins, and Mary Ann Getty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, translated by Agatha Mary, S.P.B. (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1997), Chapter 1. p. 6.

could have corrected them.”¹⁷ Also, in reference to Augustine’s determination: “to each one according to his need,”¹⁸ attention is required for those who are hurting: both the victims and shooters, as well as, potential shooters. Rather than marginalize the needs of greater mental health care or ignore gun law reform, Augustine suggests a real look at healing for the victim, taking seriously the illness, and a desire to express concern around the division that can be caused by woundedness.

Augustine describes a way of living the gospel that stands in contrast to the lack of connectedness found as a cause of mental illness. He writes on the need for mutual concern in many places: “If your brother had a wound in his body which he wished to keep secret for fear of medical treatment, would it not be cruel to keep silent and compassionate to make it known? How much more, then, ought you to report him so that he shall not suffer from a more terrible festering, that of the heart.”¹⁹

It is this relationship-building for healing so stressed by Augustine that inspires solidarity among all people, especially those most in need.

ACT: An Augustinian Response

Augustine, in outlining a way of living the gospel, provides an antidote personally and communally to the underlying conditions of school shootings. On a personal level, who am I called to be and what am I called to do in light of school shootings? First, speak of the person so as to acknowledge their dignity. Concretely, Augustine desires each person to honor God in each other. How can I change the way I speak about the shooters in person-centered language? From “perpetrator, shooter” or “deranged, sick, insane,” to “a person with mental illness” or “a person who has committed a school shooting.”

Second, if mental illness is revealed, believe the person. Augustine sees the importance of believing the person with illness so as to create an atmosphere of healing. He says: “if one of the servants of God has a hidden pain and reports it he is to be believed without hesitation.”²⁰ How might I take seriously mental illness as a real disease? If I take seriously people suffering with depression, loneliness, anxiety, bipolar, disconnectedness, or who are emotionally or psychologically wounded in any way, only then will I be ready to believe them if they approach me.

Third, share a word of concern to a person with mental illness symptoms. Augustine shares in Chapter 4 of his Rule the need for personal courage in

¹⁷Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, Chapter 4, p. 20.

¹⁸Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, Chapter 1, p. 2.

¹⁹Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, Chapter 4, p. 21.

²⁰Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, Chapter 5, p. 30.

order to name some concern about another person. He warns that this is not to be done in order to demonize someone else or puff oneself up, but to bring about healing in our hearts. That person's health, as well as, the community's health depends upon it.

Communally, who are we being called to be in light of school shootings? First, our ministers, faculties, and administrations, must prioritize an Augustinian ethos of community marked by relationality. Augustine understood the significance of feeling secure in order to share life with others. How can our schools and communities build a network of belonging, connection, friendship, and concern?

Perhaps communities could strive to remove the stigma around mental health, encourage students, faculty, staff as well as parents to look after one another. We could also teach about how to name our woundedness and ask for healing, recommending open-door policies for students to feel comfortable sharing their woundedness and emotional distress. We might consider addressing issues that ruin community relationships (disrespect, bullying, technology, social media among others) in the classroom or in assembly. We could implement others-oriented service learning. These are some of the ways that our schools might become true places to connect, to inter-relate; spaces of genuine Augustinian community where people gather respecting diversity while promoting unity of spirit. In this way we would be fostering spaces and people that allow God to become more apparent through their purposeful relationships. Then, perhaps, we might act more readily in solidarity by sharing concern and friendship with those communities impacted by these atrocities.

Finally, how might our action be transformative and conscious-raising? It begins with asking: why do school shootings occur? A few stirring questions with no easy answers: If we cannot recognize the human dignity in the person standing before us, how will gun control legislation have any effect? What contributes to mental illness? Will the difficulty of spotting those suffering with mental illness challenge our schools to think creatively about the ways we build communion as an antidote? Does this require advocacy of gun control in the meantime to restrict gun access? Can we place political agendas aside to discuss both mental health and gun control for the common good? If I only feel impacted by this violence when it involves me personally, what will raise the consciousness of today's student beyond the limited scope of one's geographic area? How does this reveal a lack of solidarity?

* * * * *

Hopefully, Bill's exercise of this pedagogical method provides you some insight into the possibilities of utilizing the method as a tool for awakening and

encouraging people toward assuming responsibility for the formation of their conscience and orientation of their activity in the face of social sin. Catholic social thought is meant to inspire social action.

This exercise in practical theology provides an opportunity to open our mind and heart to the will of God, expressed in a shared concern for real-life situations, confronting our concerns with our own understanding of God's will in this matter—particularly with the four basic principles of Catholic social thought—and coming to an agreement on how we might actively respond, as persons and as a Christian community, to this situation. The more we share, the more truly human we become, the more truly divine. Asking questions and genuinely listening to one another provides a path toward greater communion.

We now examine Jeremy's application of the same methodology.

AN AUGUSTINIAN RESPONSE TO MASS INCARCERATION AND RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Jeremy R. Hiers, O.S.A

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church defines the common good as the social conditions which allow people “to reach their fulfillment more fully and easily.” Promotion of the common good requires that the good of all people and of the whole person be the primary goal of society (Nos. 164–165). In this section, I will use the “signs of the times” methodology to raise awareness of how traditional structures of retributive justice, especially mass incarceration, violate the common good by perpetuating unjust social structures. Accordingly, I will outline how the primary principles of Catholic social teaching and Scripture call for a more “restorative” as opposed to “retributive” approach to justice. Finally, I will conclude with an examination of how the Augustinian way of life, informed by the teachings and Rule of St. Augustine, call for a more “restorative” model of justice. I will end with two concrete ways in which Augustinians can witness to this truth.

SEE: Observe, Listen, Hear, Experience

The first phase of the methodology is to outline and explore what we observe regarding the lived reality of the human family related to mass incarceration. The U.S. has the largest rate of incarceration in the world. While the U.S. is only 5% of the world population, it has 21% of the total world prison population. Incarceration in the U.S. has increased by 500% in the last 40 years.²¹

²¹The Sentencing Project, “Fact Sheet: Trends in U.S. Corrections,” SentencingProject.org. <https://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf>, 2 (accessed June 22, 2018).

Meanwhile, incarceration has proven highly ineffective at reducing crime. Almost 80% of people released from prison are re-arrested for committing another crime within five years of being released (known as recidivism).²² It is clear that the current form of justice in the U.S. does little to deter crime, leads to further harm to individuals and communities, and therefore harms the common good. What would be an appropriate Catholic Augustinian response?

JUDGE: Discern

Our second phase in the methodology is to make an informed judgement about the situation in the light of faith. This requires us to first understand the social causes behind mass incarceration.

The U.S. criminal justice system has been largely structured around a system called “retributive justice,” in which crime is seen as a violation of laws and authorities (not a violation of the victims of crime) and therefore seeks to reconcile offenders with authorities (not the victims) through punishment that equals the weight of the crime committed. It relies on the paradigm that threat of punishment deters crime (“do the crime, do the time”). Yet, it is clear from the aforementioned recidivism rate that threat of punishment does little to deter crime. I posit this is because this form of justice actually works counter to the common good and the flourishing of “all people” in our society (especially that of the offender) in a number of ways.

First, the U.S. incarceration rate is racially and economically disproportionate and retributive justice does nothing to fix that disparity. Those who are both non-white and poor have a significantly higher chance of being incarcerated. One in seventeen white men will be incarcerated at some point in their life, while one in every three black men and one in every six Hispanic men will be incarcerated.²³ Further, incarcerated people earn 41% less than non-incarcerated people.²⁴ We must also consider the children of those who are incarcerated. Up to 11% of children will have a parent incarcerated at some point in their life. Children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to be incarcerated in their life.²⁵ The U.S. further perpetuates this condition

²²National Institute of Justice, “Recidivism,” NIJ.gov. <https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/pages/welcome.aspx#statistics> (accessed June 21, 2018).

²³The Sentencing Project, “Fact Sheet: Trends in U.S. Corrections.”

²⁴Prison Policy Initiative, “Prisons of Poverty: Uncovering the Pre-Incarceration Incomes of the Imprisoned,” PrisonPolicy.org. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/income.html> (accessed June 21, 2018).

²⁵National Institute of Justice, “Hidden Consequences: The Impact of Incarceration on Dependent Children.” NIJ, gov. <https://www.nij.gov/journals/278/Pages/impact-of-incarceration-on-dependent-children.aspx> (accessed June 22, 2018).

by prioritizing funding for incarcerating people over other programs that are proven to deter crime, namely education. Over the past 33 years, spending for K–12 education has increased only a third of what spending on corrections has.²⁶ All of this has created the “poverty to prison pipeline.” A large percentage of those who are incarcerated and their families have not been given equal access to advantages that others in society have, a direct violation of the common good.

Second, it follows that retributive justice fails to address the social structures necessary to promote the common good. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that in addition to defending public order and protecting people’s safety, punishment must have a “medicinal purpose” that contributes to the “correction” of the offender.²⁷ The leading cause of recidivism is lack of resources needed for true integration back into society after release. This includes affordable housing, access to work, childcare services that enable parents to go to work, and educational opportunities.²⁸ Further, 16% of the prison population suffers from mental illness that goes undiagnosed and untreated.²⁹ It is clear the current forms of retributive justice has created a segment of the U.S. population with significant odds stacked against them.

We now address the second step in this phase of discernment which is to conduct a theological reflection in order to explore the deeper meaning of these root causes.

A more “medicinal” and “restorative” model of criminal justice is clearly articulated in Scripture and the four interrelated principles of Catholic social thought (i.e., human dignity, common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity). The common good relies on upholding the dignity of the human person, which holds that everyone has certain rights and has something for which they are responsible to contribute to the common good of society. Society should therefore be structured around giving access to the “level of well-being necessary” for everyone’s “full development.”³⁰ Clearly, the aforementioned barriers to

²⁶Department of Education, “State and Local Expenditures on Corrections and Education,” ed.gov, <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/expenditures-corrections-education/brief.pdf> (accessed June 22, 2018).

²⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (No. 2266).

²⁸Friends Committee on National Legislation, “Mass Incarceration and the Cycle of Poverty,” FCNL.ORG, <https://www.fcnl.org/documents/335> (accessed June 21, 2018).

²⁹Center for Research on Globalization, “The Prison Industry in the United States: Big Business or a New Form of Slavery?” GlobalResearch.CA, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-prison-industry-in-the-united-states-big-business-or-a-new-form-of-slavery/8289> (accessed June 22, 2018).

³⁰*Compendium*, 75.

human flourishing that inmates and their families (especially children) face before, during, and after incarceration indicate this is not happening.

The focus of retributive justice is rather on ensuring the offender “gets what they deserve” by locking them in a jail cell to “do time” rather than giving them resources for human flourishing. Scripture tells us not to “repay evil for evil” or “look for revenge” (Rm 12:17–19), but to forgive and “encourage” those who offend society (2 Cor. 2:5–8). Further, retributive justice harms the dignity of the victims as it sees the crime as a violation of government authority, not as a violation of the dignity of the victim. This robs the victim of the opportunity to receive healing and restitution for the harm done, and the opportunity to forgive and “conquer evil with good” (Rm 12:20–21). Last, the impact on the children of offenders is most often not a variable in sentencing guidelines, creating a bigger disadvantage for their future wellbeing.

The common good also relies on the principle of subsidiarity to ensure that local communities are empowered to take responsibility to the greatest extent possible to promote the common good.³¹ Retributive justice limits responsibility of local communities to reconcile the damage caused by the crime and fix the inequality and unjust structures that contributed to the crime to begin with. Further, by viewing crime as a violation of government authority and not of the human person, retributive justice further oppresses those who are the victims of crime by removing them from consideration of what is needed to heal the harm done.

The common good thus relies on the principle of solidarity to create and sustain unity among peoples by inviting all to examine ways in which everyone contributes to the conditions we face. It calls each of us to remove the splinter from our own eye before attempting to remove the splinter from the eye of the other (Mt. 7:3). In addition to just blaming criminals, a community must also look at the aforementioned social structures of inequality that foster crime to begin with. Retributive justice violates the principle of solidarity by building walls between people (i.e., the offender, the victim, and the community in which the crime was committed) rather than giving space to promote common growth in which “all share and in which all participate” in the problems our society faces.³²

ACT: An Augustinian Response

The third phase of the methodology is to identify actions, both personal and communal, which further our commitment to transform this reality. Our

³¹*Compendium*, 187.

³²*Compendium*, 86.

Augustinian way of life as informed by our Rule promotes a way of living that is in line with the four principles of Catholic social teaching and a concept of restorative justice. Restorative justice sees offenses as acts committed against victims (not just laws and authorities) and attempts to reconcile offenders with the victim and the community in which the crime was committed. It therefore focuses on the needs of the victim as well as on the offender's responsibility for repairing the damage caused, relying on the paradigm that the healing of broken relationships heals the wounds caused by crime.

Our Augustinian way of life provides a powerful witness to the value and method by which local communities can address crime in a more restorative way. Augustine's own view of justice is that only Christ can establish and rule a truly just society. Leaders should imitate Christ's example of mercy toward offenders and promote an environment in which both leaders and citizens acknowledge their moral failings openly and pray for forgiveness.³³ The Rule promotes such a life and all four of the aforementioned principles of Catholic social thought.

It promotes the common good by calling us to avoid structures that would give someone an unfair advantage in community. We do this by sharing "everything in common"³⁴ and prioritizing the common good over personal advantage³⁵ to ensure everyone has what is required to flourish in our community. This directly encounters the racial and economic disparities that seem to be at the heart of crime that leads to mass incarceration. Our unity in this is directly dependent on the recognition that all members have something to contribute to our community life. Accordingly, we promote the dignity of the human person by striving each day to honor God "in one another . . . whose temples we have become"³⁶ and serve one another "without murmuring."³⁷ We promote solidarity by striving to live in unity with "one mind and heart"³⁸ when we devote special attention to those who need more help.³⁹ Those who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged are given more according to their needs to contribute to their own flourishing within our community. When conflicts or crimes against others occur within community, we promote subsidiarity through our manner of fraternal correction, where the offender and

³³Robert Dodaro, O.S.A., "Justice" in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: William P. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 2009), 481–483.

³⁴Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 1, p. 1.

³⁵Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 5, p. 27.

³⁶Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 1, p. 6.

³⁷Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 5, p. 32.

³⁸Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 1, p. 1.

³⁹Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 3, p. 12.

victim are brought together as quickly as possible⁴⁰ for resolution at the lowest level possible.⁴¹ When we do this well, we live in “unity of spirit” because the common good is achieved justly.

Yet, we build such a community precisely for the mission of sharing the gift of community with others (Mt. 5:14–16). In what ways can we contribute the gift of our community to the problem of mass incarceration?

I see two concrete actions our Augustinian community can take. First, as Augustinians who live in cities impacted by crime and high rates of recidivism (e.g., Philadelphia, Chicago or elsewhere), we can provide a powerful witness by opening our community doors to those who have been impacted by crime and allow them to experience the beauty of our way of life by sharing in the activities that unite us each day around the common good (i.e., our daily meals, prayer, and recreation). This could include groups that minister to those who are victims of crime and/or those who are re-entering society after serving jail/prison time. By providing witness to these groups, we can inspire the creation of new groups of lay communities throughout the United States that will heal the impacts of crime through restoration as opposed to retribution. The Adeodatus Prison Ministry in Philadelphia is an example of where Augustinians are witnessing our way of life by building a community of mutual support involving offenders, victims of crime, and the local community to support those who are recently released from prison and looking for a second chance.

On another level, Augustinians can advocate and promote legislation that favors restorative versus retributive justice. This includes writing letters and creating community petitions for legislators and judges to consider the use of restorative justice practices such as peace circles (which bring together offenders, victims, and community) in lieu of jail time to achieve reconciliation between offenders and victims and identify the root causes of the crime.

In conclusion, mass incarceration works against the common good of humanity, perpetuating a cycle of unjust social structures that violate the common good. Our way of life, based on the lifestyle of the early Church, provides an alternative model for promoting the common good in light of the human propensity towards sin and evil. The gift we Augustinians share of community can be shared with others to promote this alternative model to justice.

* * * * *

Jeremy adapts the methodology to his own topic, delving deeper into the root causes of the social ill he is addressing. His application of Scripture and the

⁴⁰Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 6, p. 33.

⁴¹Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 4, p. 20.

four fundamental principles of Catholic social thought lead him to suggest specific activities ideally suited to the Augustinian charism.

For our third and final example, we examine Jeff's presentation on Flint, Michigan. You may hear how personal this issue is to him as he is a native of Flint and part of the purpose of the exercise is to be able to see from the viewpoint of the marginalized.

Jeff's application of the methodology provides some variance from the previous two, which I intentionally include in order to emphasize the variables in the reflective process which the signs of the times methodology encompasses. Objectivity on the topic is certainly harder when one readily identifies with the negative consequences for those directly involved.

The goal was to shadow the path outlined, but not to slavishly follow instructions as though theology were an exercise in assembling a piece of Ikea furniture. The methodology is meant to foster an experience of the dynamics involved in the formation of conscience as opposed to magisterially dictate official teaching on one topic or another. Jeff employs the methodology in such a way as to encourage the reader to allow insight from Scripture and Catholic social thought to inform their conscience on this topic, in a less prescriptive fashion than Dan and Jeremy did. He has been more telegraphic and less directive in applying Scripture and Catholic social thought, allowing the reader to discern God's point of view on this troubling topic. I encourage and value this style of education as more respectful of the moment we live as Church, aware of the emphasis on synodality, involving walking together, sharing the journey, listening to God who speaks to us in and through one another.

GOVERNMENTAL CORRUPTION: THE FLINT, MICHIGAN WATER CRISIS

Jeffrey Rath, O.S.A.

The Flint water crisis, once an issue that captured the attention of millions across the country, is now little more than a fading memory in the minds of most Americans. Yet, there are still some residents of Flint who do not have safe drinking water, more than four years later. It is important to note that much of the water in Flint currently exceeds the EPA standards for safe, drinkable water. However, according to Kristin Moore, the former public information director for the City of Flint, "as of April 18, 2018, the total number of lead and galvanized lines replaced is 6,264. . . . Existing City records indicate there are about 12,000 remaining homes in Flint with lead or galvanized service lines."⁴² In the opinion of many Flint residents, replacing the water pipes just scratches

⁴²Kristen Moore, "Crews Resume Work to Replace Lead and Galvanized Pipes in Flint as Part of Mayor Weaver's FAST Start Initiative," City of Flint, Michigan.

the surface of addressing the complexity of issues presented by the water crisis. In an attempt to understand the multifaceted nature of the Flint water crisis I will offer an overview of the events leading up to and in the midst of the crisis. Following the overview and enlightened by Catholic social teaching, I will use the principle of the common good as a lens to examine the Flint water crisis.

SEE: Observe, Listen, Hear, Experience

Before I begin to outline the events of the Flint water crisis, I think it is important to provide some background information on the city itself. During the 1900's, the auto manufacturing company General Motors was founded in Flint and quickly became one of the largest manufacturers of automobiles in the country.⁴³ With the booming success of General Motors, Flint became an extremely desirable location to live and work, the population expanded exponentially. However, during the late 1980's and early 1990's, "because of internationalization in the auto industry and increasing popularity of imported cars, GM closed several plants in Flint. Production was outsourced to other countries, causing tens of thousands of U.S. workers to become unemployed."⁴⁴ The departure from Flint of General Motors led to the financial collapse of the city some years later. Along with the financial collapse, Flint had also been experiencing a "white flight." Thus, demographically, Flint become predominately a city of minorities. Once known as the prosperous home of General Motors, Flint's reputation quickly shifted as it became one of the most violent and poverty-stricken cities in the United States.

Keeping in mind the above information, I will now offer a brief synopsis of the water crisis. Flint had an expensive water contract with the city of Detroit to pump water into Flint from Lake Huron. Due to the financial situation of Flint, state emergency managers were appointed and decided to switch the city water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River. The water source change took place in April of 2014 and was expected to cut expenses significantly.⁴⁵ However, the water from the Flint River was extremely corrosive and was not treated properly. The water quickly eroded the protective lining inside the pipes and lead began leaching into the water. In January 2015 Flint residents raised concerns about the smell, color, and "mysterious illnesses" that were occurring following the water source change.⁴⁶ About a month later, the EPA announced that dangerously high concentrations of lead were found in

⁴³Brandon Lazovic, "The Rise and Fall of Flint Michigan Beginning in the 1800s," *Odyssey Online*, February 16, 2016.

⁴⁴Lazovic, "The Rise and Fall of Flint Michigan Beginning in the 1800s."

⁴⁵"Flint Water Crisis Fast Facts," *CNN Online*, April 8, 2018.

⁴⁶"Flint Water Crisis Fast Facts."

the water. However, due to bureaucratic ineffectiveness, political flexing and officials protecting themselves from fallout, use of the Flint River water did not officially end until October 2015. In the following months, the governor declared a state of emergency and ordered the city to switch back to Detroit for its water source. Several lawsuits were filed against the state of Michigan and others for their slow response, negligence and criminal behavior.⁴⁷

In this brief overview I have left out a significant number of details; however, this synopsis provides major details necessary for understanding the Flint water crisis. The impacts of this tragedy are still largely unknown. A large number of Flint residents, including children, were poisoned by the water. Unfortunately, the effects of lead poisoning are not immediate and often manifest themselves later in one's life. So, the extent of the damage may not become apparent for years.

JUDGE: Discern

Now that we have more details on the context and nature of the Flint water crisis, I will offer passages from Scripture, Catholic social teaching and the Rule of St. Augustine with a particular emphasis on the common good. I chose to focus on the common good because if we are faithful to the principle, it requires the other three principles be brought to bear especially on this particular issue. If one examines this issue honestly from the lens of the common good, human dignity must be upheld and affirmed, subsidiarity be honored and recognized, and we are compelled to stand in solidarity with the residents of Flint. Thus, the principle of the common good thoroughly informs our understanding of the issue and, if committed, deeply shapes one's response to the water crisis.

What does Scripture say?

- Isaiah 1:17 "Learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow."
- Zechariah 7:8–9 "Judge with justice, and show kindness and compassion toward each other. Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the resident alien or the poor."
- Acts 2:44–47 "All who believed were together and had all things in common."
- 1 Peter 4:10–11 "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace."

⁴⁷"Flint Water Crisis Fast Facts."

- Hebrews 10:24–25 “We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works.”

What is the contribution of Catholic Social Teaching on this topic?

- Caritas in Veritate, 7: “The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them.”
- Pacem et Terris, 56: “It is the nature of the common good that every single citizen has the right to share in it. . . . Hence every civil authority must strive to promote the common good in interest of all without favoring any individual citizen or category of citizen.”
- Laudato Si, 157: “Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development.”
- Laudato Si, 30: “Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.”

What does the Augustinian Rule/Way of Life contribute?

- “Food and clothing should be allotted to each of you . . . not equally to all because you are not equally strong, by to each one according to his need.”⁴⁸
- “As for the sick, they need to eat little so that they do not become worse. Thus, after the illness they must certainly be given special care to help them to get strong as soon as possible, even if they came from extreme poverty in the world.”⁴⁹
- Regarding fraternal correction: “You would be no more innocent yourselves if by silence you let your brother be lost, when by reporting you could have corrected them.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 1, p. 1.

⁴⁹Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 3, p. 12.

⁵⁰Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, chapter 4, p. 20.

And so, with these inspired thoughts in mind, we should be able to discern elements of this water crisis that are in keeping with the Gospel and those that are directly opposed to it.

Unfortunately, I found it quite difficult to discern where God might be present in this situation. The only suggestion that I can offer is that God is present in the people who have endured this crisis and in those who have worked diligently to alleviate the suffering caused by the water crisis. However, the events leading up to the water crisis do not readily give witness to God's merciful presence. Many of the decisions that contributed to the water crisis seem to have been made for strictly financial purposes, with little concern to what was best for the people of Flint. The Gospel values are difficult to find in some of the decision making that caused the water crisis, but it does not have to end there.

ACT: An Augustinian Response

This third step is difficult because I am not sure what actions need to be taken in order to foster the common good and bring about human flourishing in Flint, Michigan. In reflecting upon this issue, I came up with more questions than answers. I know, from spending time in Flint and speaking with residents, that human flourishing is something entirely absent from the mind of the population. Even before the water crisis, the city experienced extreme poverty and violence, and there was little reason to believe things would get better. So, the issue goes far beyond addressing the water crisis. If one is to bring about the common good and human flourishing in Flint, it will take more than clean water. Three different aspect of this commitment could be characterized as personal, communal and transformative.

Personally, one could make a commitment to use water resources more appropriately and sparingly. Although this does not assist the city directly, developing an attitude of respect for our common resources creates an environment of solidarity with those who do not have access to abundant resources.

Communally, we can encourage and empower the people of Flint to govern and make decisions for themselves. Greater effort can be put forth to developing attitudes of interdependence and reliance upon each other among the residents of Flint. There undoubtedly needs to be monetary assistance sent to the Flint in order to begin returning necessary elements of human flourishing. In addition to monetary aid, encouraging businesses to invest in the city of Flint to provide sustainable work would build morale and restore a sense of normalcy to a city that longs for peace.

Transformatively, I am only left with questions. To what extent are people willing to engage and assist the people of Flint to create an environment that

encourages human flourishing? Can we engage Augustinian institutions, such as Villanova University, to offer support and work with residents and city officials to solve infrastructural problems and create a more communal atmosphere? How do we respond to the rampant violence in Flint which has contributed to a deep sense of hopelessness? How do we communicate the Gospel message in a way that is both hope filled and energizing for Flint?

Unfortunately, I do not have the answers to these questions, but I know that Flint is ripe for transformation. The people desperately want change and renewal. So, the questions I am particularly drawn to are what do we as Augustinians have to offer to the city of Flint?

CONCLUSION

And so, school shootings, mass incarceration and governmental corruption as evidenced by the water crisis in Flint, Michigan: what do you think?

What would be an appropriate personal response, a significant communal response, an activity which could be truly transformational? These are the questions that have been posed. Problem posing, rather than resorting to the banking methodology which leads us as well as others to think that we have the answers, is considered more appropriate pedagogical method for adult learning, consciousness raising and awareness training.

We've read what Bill, Jeremy and Jeff think about these issues; hopefully, the method they have employed in presenting them will allow you and others to form your own opinion in a Christian fashion. You may be able to contribute more from personal experience, or perhaps some specific insight from Scripture or from your particular charism. This methodology seeks to incarnate the belief that we all truly have something to offer, that we search together for the truth, we are better together. The more we relate, the more truly human we are. The more we share, the more like Christ we become.

What these three theological students have provided is an outline on three key issues impacting our society today: school shootings, mass incarceration, and governmental corruption as in the case of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. While there are no clear answers or solutions to these issues, through the use of the signs of the times methodology, Bill, Jeremy, and Jeff have provided a framework for evaluating these issues in light of Catholic social teaching. They pose relevant questions that seek communal dialogue and critical thinking at *all* levels of society and the consideration of all people who are impacted by the issue, not just those at the highest levels. Each of the three, while following the general outline of the "signs of the times" methodology, has made it their own. Certain stylistic adaptations are evident, and I feel that it is worthwhile to allow and encourage this liberty so that it might encourage others to not

follow slavishly a preconceived method but rather to grasp the purpose and make the method your own, adapting it not only to your own identity but also to the particular topic under consideration in a certain time and place.

This method, obviously, is not limited to the Augustinian family; it is meant for all the Church in its mission as instrument of communion in the edification of the Reign of God here and now. Although the source materials are available, a structure for promoting their exploration and use is less present in society, even sixty years after Vatican II clarified and promoted the role of the Church in the world. Catholic social thought is not merely a body of knowledge to be aware of but much more a series of significant guidelines to orient social action with a view toward transforming the world.

Allow me to share with you a brief explanation of the methodology itself, based on my own decades-long experience in its application, in the humblest settings of the Peruvian Andes as well as with well educated students of philosophy and theology in various seminaries around the globe.

Signs of the Time Methodology

FIRST PHASE: to SEE, observe, hear, and experience the lived reality of people and of the community itself. This involves naming what it is that you observe that causes you concern. It means carefully, respectfully examining the primary data of the situation: what are the people involved doing, feeling, saying; what is happening to them and how do they respond.

Dialogue on the topic being treated allows us to understand better this situation, to identify with it and with the people involved in order to analyze in what way this might affect me or others. The questions to be addressed might be:

- What do we know about this situation, what are we able to observe about it?
- What specific facts can we cite about this experience or issue?
- What can I learn or observe from this?
- How do we feel in the face of this issue or experience?
- How does this situation touch me personally?

We do not announce the message without considering the context, situating ourselves in time and place, here and now, taking into account the specific situation of the People of God. The significance of an action in Vatican City is not necessarily the same if that same action occurs in Lagos, Nigeria or Washington D.C. How we lived our vocation in the Church and the world in 1950 is not the same way we are called to live that same vocation today.

The SECOND PHASE is to JUDGE or DISCERN. This means to analyze the situation and, in dialogue, to make an informed judgement about it in the light of faith. This involves two key steps:

1. Social analysis
2. Theological reflection

The first key step, social analysis, allows us to obtain a more complete understanding of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, through dialogue and active listening, we attempt to make sense of the reality under observation. Some of the questions to be addressed could be:

- Why does this situation exist?
- What are the root causes:
 - Economic factors (who owns, who controls, —who pays, who gets, why)
 - Political factors (who decides, for whom do they decide, how are decisions made, why)
 - Social factors (who is left out, who is included, why)
 - Historical factors (what past events influence this situation today)
 - Cultural factors (what values are evident, what do people believe, who influences what people believe)

The second key part is theological reflection, which explores the situation and its deeper meaning.

Two important sources for this part are Scripture and Catholic social teaching. They serve as light as well as a measuring stick for this experience. Some of the questions to be addressed for this purpose are:

- What Scripture passages can help us interpret this situation?
- How do biblical values aid us in understanding the reality in a different way?
- What does Catholic social teaching have to say about this issue? It can be enormously helpful to address the issue being treated in light of each one of the four fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching: dignity, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity.
- What do other key teachings of the Church have to say about this issue?

These two vital parts enable us to discern and pronounce a prophetic judgment:

- What do we find to be consistent with the Gospel, with theological reflection and therefore what we understand that God wants us to support as a response to his plan?
- What is not in accordance with the Gospel and that God does not want, which is therefore subject to criticism and a call to conversion?

It is important to understand that a prophetic judgement is not:

- A court that judges people and groups;
- An act of power exercised by one over others;
- A legal trial based or exercised on behalf of a law;
- A moral judgment on the attitudes of the people.

A prophetic judgement is:

- A confrontation with the Gospel of our choices and actions;
- An act of faith in the activity of God in history;
- A act of discernment necessary to being protagonists of history, to cooperate with the divine plan;
- It is both censure and proclamation;
- Is an act of solidarity with the world.

Typically, this step includes prayer and petition for the guidance of the Spirit, in order to see ourselves and our world as God, the loving and merciful Father does (in the parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15: 11–32): with compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. This stands in contrast to viewing the situation in an indifferent fashion, or with anger, or envy, or contempt, like the elder son in the parable of the prodigal son, who manifested an attitude of pride, envy, contempt and rejection.

The THIRD phase is to ACT; as a result of the insights from the previous two steps, emerges a decision for social and personal change, a commitment to transform reality. From the information gathered, analyzed and reflected upon, proposals for concrete actions surface, actions which are to influence and change the situation and address its root causes.

Some characteristics of these possible actions are:

- Personal commitment;
- Communal commitment;
- Organization for action;
- Consciousness raising to bring further awareness on the issue.

If no particular action clearly comes forth, people can consider what additional research or reflection might be needed. Some of the questions which might help in this stage are:

- How could we best transform the structures and relationships that produce this situation?
- How can we act to empower those who are disadvantaged in this situation?
- How can we evaluate the effectiveness of our action?

If we consider dialogue as the path toward greater communion, an evangelical touchstone elaborated on from the age of the early Church, reiterated forcefully in Vatican II and specifically articulated by Paul VI in *Ecclesiam Suam*, then the promotion of structures which favor listening to one another and working together can readily serve as instruments of the communion so desired by our Lord and Savior. The pedagogical method we have explored and experienced through the three examples can serve to motivate us to assume personal responsibility in the face of particular concrete social situations, encouraging and enabling us to offer an alternative by striving to build a community that is not motivated by possessiveness, pride and power, but by love for one another, “that they all might be one, as you Father in me and I in you.”

Art Purcaro, born in the Bronx, professed vows as an Augustinian in 1968, graduated from Villanova in 1972, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1975. He received his pontifical degree as Doctor in Sacred Theology from the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín, Colombia.

Art has worked in the Augustinian mission in Chulucanas, Peru, from 1975 till 2014, also serving during 12 years in the central administration of the Order of St Augustine in Rome (1995 to 2007), promoting renewal of the Order in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as directing the Augustinian Justice and Peace Office and establishing the Augustinian presence at the United Nations.

He has been involved in developing the local diocesan seminary and Catholic university in Chulucanas, before returning to the United States where he is currently Assistant Vice President for Mission and Ministry and teaches Liberation Theology, Stewardship of Creation: Sustainability and Environmental Justice, as well as a course on Stewardship in the Church Management Master's program in the Villanova School of Business.