

# JPIC Experiences and Lifestyle

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## *JPIC Animation*

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*I have been asked to talk about animation for JPIC in more traditional Friar Communities. I have been told that most of you have experienced inserted communities. I presume that this means that the challenge is: How do you introduce a JPIC dimension into the lives of those friars who still live in the more traditional and somewhat larger communities of friars only.*

I also need to state that I did not volunteer to be the JPIC Coordinator of our province. I was volunteered and left with no way out. I don't know if I have answers, but I have stories. Someone said that God made us humans because God likes stories. Each one of us has our own story. Perhaps we need to pursue how our puny little story fits into the one great story, the Good News of the Gospel.

I have lived in the more traditional communities of friars only. When I found myself isolated, I made community with religious sisters. Justice is about right relationships. When you are isolated, you're not really in relationship with anybody. I've made community with married couples and "kids." For one who is 62 years old, "kids" are people from 18 to 30 years old. When you get "volunteered"

into managing a 250 bed overnight emergency shelter and your staff people are full-time volunteers who live in community, if you want to survive, you better form community with them. As one 18 year old full time volunteer told me- "When three of us walk out the door at night and face 250 street people, I need you covering my back and you need me covering your back. That's the best reason I know for community." Or, as TO FILL THE WHOLE WORLD says- "We need each other."

Perhaps a better way of putting this is: being in communion with others is the right relationship we need to have with each other. If we are not in communion with each other, I doubt if we can "DO RIGHT AND LOVE GOODNESS AND WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD." (Micah 6-8) I hope Micah is in agreement with me as I edit Micah: TO WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD, EACH OTHER AND ALL OF CREATION. Living in Communion is the ground of JPIC. I also need to admit that I stand in need of a good deal of conversion in regards to seeing the goodness in others and walking humbly with others, especially when they are my brother friars.

Concretely, how have I animated for justice, peace, and integrity of creation in more traditional communities of Friars? I'm a firm believer that only others can name your gifts. I taught at our-High School Seminary from '68-77. I'm

remembered for many things. Many of them I wish others would forget. However, one thing I am proud of (and I'm also proud of the other Friars who encouraged me and pitched in with me), we were able to organize an apostolate program and get every student involved in some sort of apostolate that brought the student and faculty members into contact with people on the margins of our society. We also boycotted lettuce and grapes as a pledge of solidarity with Cesar Chaves and the United Farm Workers. One student wished to have a salad. Another student approached him and said; "since you are the only one eating salads, the food services wants to know what type of dressing do you want?"

1977-1985 were my Africa years: First Zaire (now called Congo) and then Uganda. I always found myself in "Zone Rouge," operational red war zones. Four of us from our province entered Zaire. Then 9 months later Zaire was again invaded. Three choose to be evacuated back to the US. I was evacuated to safe territory. I'm bull-headed. I get the gift from both my mother and father. I was just getting comfortable with speaking in French and Swahili – I refused evacuation. I was safe. I didn't want to lose what little French and Swahili I had mastered. Eventually I went back into the invaded territory. I was the only Friar. Fortunately some of the Belgian and Spanish sisters returned. I had to survive. We shared meals, prayer, work, and playing cards. I didn't have a vehicle

and when I finally got a Land Rover, we couldn't get any "mazout." So, I pedaled my bicycle to the 40 or so parishes that were in my mission. I pedaled around tanks that had been disabled. I didn't venture off the beaten paths – nobody did. There were probably still some land mines around. At that time, I didn't even know the word SOLIDARITY, much less what it meant. But my bicycle trips into "1a brousse" endeared me to many people. Unfortunately, many people back at the central mission turned against me because I wasn't always available at the central mission.

It wasn't until 1990 that I could verbalize how God was working in my life. John Doctor was the novice master of Sacred Heart province then. John is presently our provincial. John sent me an article by a Vincentian priest, Fr. Theodore Weisner, who had served many years in the diocese of Marsabit, Kenya. The article was entitled: "*Experiencing God In the Poor.*" Fr. Weisner used the well-worn terminology describing the spiritual life – you know, the Purgative Way, the Illuminative Way, and the Unitive Way. Moving from one way to the next involves a transition or crisis usually called Conversion. But, Fr. Weisner re-interpreted the development of the spiritual life in terms of our experience of the poor, those on the edge, the marginalized. He speaks of the Way of Appreciation, the Way of Dialog, and the Way of Solidarity. Each of the Ways is preceded by a crisis, a Conversion.

According to Weisner, the first Conversion comes "through some contact with the poor, the suffering and abandoned; sometimes it is the result of a retreat or a workshop; sometimes some experience of oppression or suffering within oneself." As Weisner says, "The experience of the poor... is essential to" the Way of Appreciation. If we allow the experience to develop, the experience will lead to compassion, resulting in acts of mercy. Compassion confronts us with the need to live more simply.

My attempts at animating for JPIC begin with inviting the friars and others to experience those on the margin.

Weisner says that our ministry to the poor leads to the realization that poverty is not only an individual problem but also a structural one. We become angry which is the beginning of the second Conversion. We experience feelings of guilt. We may become paralyzed. Perhaps we retreat into some form of quietism. Or we give in to activism and find ourselves exhausted and possibly burnt out. Unconsciously, we see ourselves above the poor as their helpers.

At this point we need to move on to the Way of Dialogue. The invitation is to enter into a new kind of relationship with the poor. The emphasis is now no longer DOING for the poor but BEING with them. This will probably lead to boycotting, joining protests, and possibly acts of non-violent civil disobedience. Now, we have placed the poor on a pedestal. We idealize the poor.

Introducing friars to petition signing, letter writing, boycotts, demonstrations, etc., is way of getting them to experience the poor and move into the first Way, the Way of Appreciation.

Having placed the poor on a pedestal, I can guarantee we will soon discover that they are as selfish, greedy, as the rest of us: another crisis. But, it is the invitation to the Third Conversion, the Conversion to the Way of Solidarity.

*Perhaps a story will illustrate the Way of Solidarity:*

Damien Du Veuster had worked among the lepers on Molokai for twelve years. Then in 1845, he came home one day exhausted. As usual he had the feeling that his labors had again been fruitless. He boiled some water and poured it into a basin to soak his weary feet. He plunged his feet into the hot water. He felt nothing. The next Sunday he began his homily with the words "we lepers" instead of his usual words, "you lepers." From that time on his ministry bore great fruit.

To bring some sense of order to these ramblings, how do I attempt to animate for JPIC?

- (1) I use the power of stories. They are not threatening until the hearer realizes that storyteller "Gotcha."
- (2) I use every opportunity to invite others to experience first-hand the poor and the marginalized around them. I try to lead them to discover the hidden and the marginalized.

- (3) I invite others to sign petitions, write letters, and to join in Demonstrations and protests and non-violent acts of disobedience.
- (4) I try to maintain communion with others.
- (5) I try to share the beauty of my feeble attempts at solidarity.