

JPIC Education

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My fellow Franciscans, who are gathering here from all over the world for this historic chance to deepen our Franciscan Charism viewed from the point of justice, peace, and preservation of creation, it is with great pleasure that I, as the moderator for JPIC, can share some of my experiences with you in the area of formation and informal education.

First of all, I would like to share with you some of the steps I took in my own life as a Franciscan that sensitized me to be active for JPIC. It was triggered in my own family even before becoming a novice. I am the third of ten children with 6 sisters and 3 more brothers. We grew up in the countryside close to nature. Defending justice and peace among us siblings was a big deal. During my education as a Franciscan Friar here in Germany we often voiced the rights for the poor, organized races for peace, and were really into the Liberation Theology of Leonard Boff. Franciscan missionaries from the North East of Brazil visited us on a regular basis. They told us about suppression by the military and about the insult to human dignity, the spirit of fraternity and solidarity. The lifestyle of these brothers and their sacrifices impressed me deeply from early on and up to now. In February 1983, after completing my education in philosophy and

theology, I packed my suitcase and left for Brazil. I have lived and worked there since. Learning both a new language and a new culture was a challenge. The next big challenge over a period of 11 years was to train the new novices in Brazil. This was both challenging and rewarding. Since 1995, I am in charge of the Educational Center for the Laity and the Elementary School.

As an activist for JPIC since 1992, I have found that it is easier to work with brothers from the beginning. That is to say, it is easier to get them going rather than to keep them motivated.

Our topic today is about the challenge generated by formal and informal education to know how to include the values of JPIC in the adult education and the elementary school or in pastoral and social activities. The JPIC Team of our Province and our local inter-Franciscan group for JPIC are inspired by other areas of Brazil and develop their own initiatives.

The 500th anniversary of the Franciscans in Brazil demonstrates how important it is to remember mistakes from the past critically: 500 years of suppression and exploitation, genocide of the South American Indians, slavery of Africans, and martyrs in the conflicts about ownership of the land. We are dealing with a dangerous memory that questions our own actions and it should trigger another more just, peaceful, and humane 500 years ahead of us. Therefore, continued education remains a big challenge, in reference

to facing the whole truth and not to watch silently or to manipulate the truth.

Another important item is to take this whole series of important meetings seriously:

January 1, 2000:

International Day of Peace

March 8, 2000:

World Women's Day

May 1, 2000:

Labor Day

June 5, 2000:

International Day of the Environment

September 7, 2000:

Cry of the Excluded (Brazil)

September 17, 2000:

Stigmata of Saint Francis

October 27, 2000:

World Prayer Day for Peace

These are only a few examples for JPIC cornerstone data. Important is the illuminations of these data through "the Sun and the Moon of Assisi," the liberating practices of Clare and Francis. During our training sessions we use reflection as well as concrete actions and we should not do this in isolation. It is a good idea to work with other organisations and initiatives to concentrate our energy and launch impulses originating from our Franciscan Charism.

In addition to this, the year 2000 was characterized by many campaigns for our goals, and these took place not only in Brazil. It is up to us to use all the media available to spread our initiatives, such as seminars, collection of signa-

tures, demonstrations or gatherings in big public places.

In Brazil this year, the following campaigns aimed at our goals:

campaign of children for peace within the family

manifest 2000 of the UNESCO for a culture of peace

campaign of brotherhood of the Brazilian Bishops for the beginning of the new Millennium with dignity of man and peace

many more (ANMERKUNG: diese Auffistung ist nicht sehr gut uebersetzt).

I find it easier to get lay people involved in these campaigns than my own Franciscan brothers or the Franciscan family. A Franciscan priest once told me: "If I were involved in all these social campaigns, I would have no time left for Evangelization proper." This is a good example of separation of religious belief and the life we live. Public schools and universities are often more sensitive to our JPIC appeal than educational institutions of the Church or of our own Order. A Franciscan University that even advertises with the slogan "education for peace" turned things into an obstacle course when an educational course for JPIC goals was to be set up; on the other hand, a state university immediately and enthusiastically accepted this proposal.

A big challenge or even a danger for me today is the "Charismatic Renewal," my

Lord and me. The songs of this movement prove the narrowness of a very individualized belief "Nobody, Lord, loves you more than I do".

Where is the sense of community? The critical reflections, the cornerstone thoughts and the social campaigns we talked about earlier, all require a sense of community, not the 'I' but the 'We' is important. It is a community project.

There is individualism and Egoism enabled by Neo-liberalism that we find ourselves confronted with. Nowadays it is not fashionable anymore to care for the poor neighbor who faces being excluded and is being discriminated against. What counts today is self-realization. Picture a Franciscan who is a follower of such an ideology, who preaches egoism and individual deliverance and who despises solidarity commitment for deliverance.

This last example leads us to another request: I can only imagine educational work with the JPIC if the trainer demonstrates at least a minimum of coherence. In our case as Franciscans there has to be a continued reflection on JPIC, before, during and after our training and we should live this and reflect it on others.

We should bind our charism to the reality and our belief to our lives. In Brazil we have a saying that goes as follows: "The parents' house is the school for the children." Translated into our situation this means that an educator can give an example of how he lives his life that is con-

vincing to the student and that shapes the student. Again the educator should be a living example of what he preaches.

The formal and informal education with JPIC has to lean on a common project but at the same time needs a collective coherence. An educator who fights alone will be easily labeled as "This project is his own desired work" But if a project is the reflection of a group or a community or of a Province or an Order success will be guaranteed. In many provinces the secretary of JPIC has a team.

Moreover, some provinces of the Brazilian conference have adopted the initiative for agricultural reform as their province option. This decision directly influences the field of activity of our Brothers and their commitment in formal and informal education and training. Our goal is to defend Mother Earth as a preferred missionary area for all Franciscans of our conference.

To yield even greater efficiency in the educational endeavors not all of us have to be specialists. What is important is the establishment of networks with movements, organisations and groups in Church and society who share the same concern for JPIC with us. For example, ecology requires knowledge of economics and exact data. In many areas we are lay people requiring greater specialized knowledge. In concert with specialized organisations we can acquire additional knowledge and this in turn will challenge us to take on a leading role and to uncov-

er the treasure of our Franciscan Mysticism. In my opinion schools, universities and other institutes that belong to us are allowed to exist only if they help create a network and if they help to deepen and broaden our mysticism. We must concentrate all our forces to achieve greater awareness and efficiency in our actions in face of today's challenges.

As I mentioned, in our Order our commitment to JPIC is not a hobby for some of our Brothers or a certain group but a provocation that is in accordance with the Franciscan vocation. In this sense serving JPIC is one of the priorities in our Order since the General Chapter in Assisi in 1985. During his visit of our Order's Conference in Agudos-Sao Paulo last year, our Brother the General minister of our Order took a step in the same direction. He asked that all our reflections and actions in connection with JPIC, our initial and continued education should penetrate the Evangelization and the missioning process. Thus education and missionary work would gain more credibility in our Franciscan spirit. Of course this is true as well for formal and informal educational work. An educator, who during his education-

al work excludes all spirituality of JPIC, buries our treasure and in my opinion loses the privilege of calling himself a Franciscan educator.

Dear Brothers, I apologize, if I have not met your expectations in my speech. I do know that my thoughts are neither complete nor highly scientific. As initiators for our discussions I have selected the following items:

- my personal past
- critical memories
- cornerstone data
- community projects
 - (common projects)
- coherence of the educators
- collective coherence
- network
- pro-vocation

I hope that our Congress will create more clarity for our service and that it will help our Order to accept JPIC as values of our Franciscan vocation.

To all of you a brotherly hug and from the bottom of my heart PEACE and GOOD LUCK.

GOD BLESS YOU ALL.