

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

See, Judge, Act: A process for social justice groups

This year, 2011, is the 50th anniversary of Pope John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, and the decade-based anniversaries of several other encyclicals. In honour of these anniversaries, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council has prepared educational materials which will be made available throughout the year to parishes, social justice groups and schools in Australia.

These materials are titled **Reading the Signs of the Times**.

In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII picked up Pius XII's expression the 'signs of the times' and used the phrase to call the church to renewal in its own life and in its involvement in the world by 'reading the signs of the times'. In his writings he himself set about reading the hopeful and concerning signs of his time.

In *Mater et Magistra* he affirms the process of **See, Judge, Act** as a way of reading and responding to the signs of the time:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgement on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge act.

Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961 (# 236)

1. See

Seeing, hearing, and experiencing the lived reality of individuals and communities.

Naming what is happening that causes you concern

Carefully and intentionally **examining** the primary data of the situation. What are the people in this situation doing, feeling, and saying? What is happening to them and how do you/they respond?

2. Judge

The word 'judge' is used here in a positive sense – to **analyse** the situation and **make an informed judgement** about it.

This involves two key parts:

- i) social analysis
- ii) theological reflection.

3. Act

Planning and carrying out actions aimed at transforming the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice.

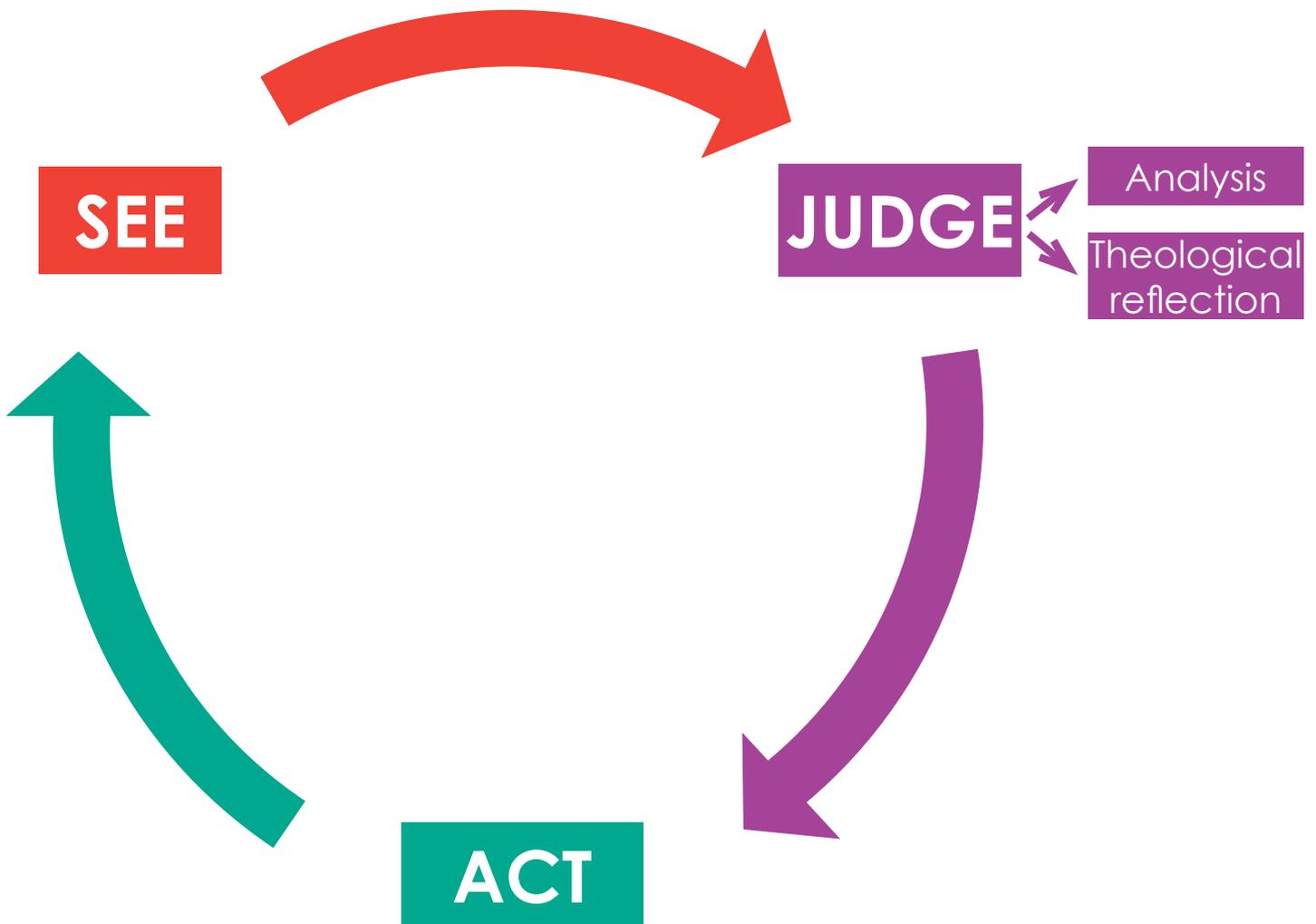
Further resources to assist in seeing, judging and acting well will be available from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council throughout 2011.



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The See, Judge, Act process



Cardinal Cardijn and the See, Judge, Act method

In speaking of the see, judge, act method, Pope John XXIII was drawing on the thought of the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882–1967), who as a priest had ministered to poor workers and founded the Young Christian Workers. Cardinal Cardijn, one of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, spoke on the document that was to be promulgated as the Declaration on Religious Freedom. Religious freedom, he said, 'is not an end in itself. It is a necessary means for education in freedom in its fullest sense, which leads to interior freedom'.

*This interior freedom, even if it exists in germ as a natural gift in every human creature, requires a long education which can be summarised in three words: see, judge and act.**

The process of the pastoral cycle has become a potent way of reading the signs of the time and engaging in action for justice in a way that is transformative.

* Translated from French by Stefan Gigacz, 5 October 2010. Available at <http://www.josephcardijn.com/religious-liberty>.

Step 1: SEE

What do you **know** about this issue or what did you **observe**?

What specific **facts** can you cite about this issue or experience?

What did you **learn** or **observe**?

How do you **feel** in the face of this issue or experience?

How does it **touch** you personally?

Step 2: JUDGE

Judging involves:

- a. social analysis
- b. theological reflection.

a. Social Analysis

Social analysis helps us to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, we attempt to make sense of the reality that was observed in Step 1.

Why does this situation exist?

What are the root causes?

To answer these questions, we need to examine:

Economic factors:	Who owns? Who controls? Who pays? Who gets? Why?
Political factors:	Who decides? For whom do they decide? How do decisions get made? Who is left out of the process? Why?
Social Factors:	Who is left out? Who is included? Why?
Historical Factors:	What past events influence the situation today?
Cultural Factors:	What values are evident? What do people believe in? Who influences what people believe?

Social Analysis assists us in naming the 'heart of the matter' which we then take to the theological reflection.

Step 2: JUDGE (Continued)

b. Theological Reflection

Theological Reflection explores the experience and its deeper analysis, in dialogue with the religious tradition.

From this conversation we gain new insights and meanings.

Two important sources of this tradition are the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching.

How do they serve as a measuring stick for this experience?

What **Scripture passages** can help us to interpret this experience?

How do **biblical values** us to see this reality in a different way?

What does **Catholic social teaching** say about this issue? What key principles from Catholic social teaching apply to this situation? (For example: human dignity, the common good, human rights, the option for the poor.)

Insights
from the theological reflection
lead to
ideas for action.



Step 3: ACT

From your **information** (Seeing) ...

and **analysis** and **theological reflection** (Judging) ...

what **action** needs to be taken –

- to change the situation?
- to address root causes?

If no action is clear, what **additional research** is needed?

How would you transform the structures and relationships that produce this situation?

How can you act to empower those who are disadvantaged in this situation?

How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your action?