

Taskforce on Theology of Social Justice Advocacy

Minutes for July 10, 2020

Attending: Sarah Lawton (Chair), Prince Singh (Vice-Chair), Lallie Lloyd, Ruth Frey, Brant Lee, Dora Mbuwayesango, Susanne Watson-Epting.

Absent: Andrew Dietsche, Anne Copple-Hodges, Guy Leemhuis, Jose Rodriguez-Sanjuro, Reuben Varghese.

Opening: The meeting began with an opening prayer.

Update on Blue Book Report Deadlines:

Sarah reported that because this Taskforce is contextualizing our work in terms of COVID and the Black Lives Matter movement, our report deadline has been extended until January 18, 2021.

Questionnaire:

Overall, those who have taken the questionnaire, or have been asked to assess it, have said it is too long. In general, respondents found it helpful as a reflective exercise.

Lallie reported she is not fully convinced of the value of the questionnaire and asked that we review its purpose. She noted it is a big commitment of ourselves, the people we are surveying, and the GCO so it needs to be transformative for our report. Other taskforce members agreed with this assessment. Dora wondered if we could use the information we have already received. Sarah noted the questionnaire will give us a format to have deeper interviews with key people. She also observed that involving the bishops and deputies will raise awareness of our work and promote its support among the members of the two houses. The people we are currently interviewing have deep roots in social justice, however others in the Church may have a different perspective. The questionnaire is a way to invite people to think about training and relationship building towards advocacy.

Prince noted that people are honored to answer the questions. Social justice is lonely work and sometimes people feel isolated. To be asked about background and insights is a way to recognize their work and the theological reflection they bring to it. The questionnaire invites practitioners to share how they approach the work of social justice and remain committed to it.

Susanne wondered if we might submit a different kind of report – perhaps create videos of people who are engaged in advocacy in ways we think are important. Sarah responded that we are required to submit a Blue Book report, however we could create something (such as a video) in addition to the report.

After further discussion, taskforce members agreed to proceed with the questionnaire and to make it a priority so it can go out in September. The group then focused on specific changes to the questionnaire with the goal of making it shorter:

- Q9 “What is your deepest joy?” received positive responses and should be kept in the survey.
- Include questions that solicit stories about how respondents came to social justice work.
- Include questions about training through Christian, secular or interfaith coalitions.

- Questions that get to the importance relationship building should be included.
- Q4: "What informs your understanding of the place of social justice advocacy in Christian vocation?" was cited as a strong question.
- Include a question about what defines theology of social justice advocacy.

Lallie and Sarah will revise the questionnaire and put it in a google doc for the rest to review and respond. The goal is to complete the process by the last week in July.

We will ask the GCO to send the questionnaire to bishops and deputies. We could also ask bishops and deputies to distribute it in their dioceses. Our goal is to get 1000 responses and sift through them to find stories and themes.

Preliminary Plans on Report:

We discussed other components necessary for the generation of the report:

- Historical documents, such as the Jubilee document.
- Our process and what we learned from the survey (trends and stories)
- Relationship to current events especially the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement.

We may also want to consider resolutions that include a theological statement, recommendations on formation and funding to support formation and education. Our writing will begin in December.

Next Steps:

Taskforce members will continue to conduct interviews. We will review names on the interviewee list and add other names. Next month, we will focus on what we want to say theologically about our process and what we want to say to the church.

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth Frey