



CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE

Public Justice: What does it mean for citizens, governments, and CPJ?

A Guideline for Christian Faith and Public Life

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Grounding

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) grounds its work in the conviction that the earth and all life on earth are created and sustained by God. All people, created to live in dignity as God's image-bearers, are called to be stewards of creation and practice justice and compassion in their relationships. Justice and compassion are portrayed in Scripture as the foundation for peace and joy in the many different social relationships that people have.

Failure to practice justice and compassion results in brokenness for humans and creation itself. God offers redemption through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and empowers people through the Holy Spirit to be agents of transformation. We do this, in part, by shaping and reshaping social structures to be more just and by acting in solidarity with those who experience a lack of justice in their lives. We live in hope, rather than fear, trusting in God's providential and redemptive love.

God gifts every person with both rights and responsibilities:

- a rightful claim to live in dignity, be respected by others and have access to resources needed to live out God's calling; and
- a duty to act justly, care for creation and work for peaceful and just relations within society at all levels.

In our contemporary context, CPJ emphasizes the exercise of rights and responsibilities in a way that focuses on dignity for all by working for an equitable society with diverse communities and social structures.

Public Justice: A Principled Approach to Public Issues

CPJ's work focuses on specific issues to help people who experience a lack of justice, because God's love reaches into daily lives through human actions, not as an abstraction. Beyond the

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ)

Our Vision

CPJ is committed to seek human flourishing and the integrity of creation as our faithful response to God's call for love, justice and stewardship.

We envision a world in which individuals, communities, societal institutions and governments all contribute to and benefit from the common good.

Our Mission

CPJ's mission is to promote *public justice* in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice and stewardship.

¹ This document was approved in 2007 by CPJ's board as the articulation of CPJ's core principles for this time in its history. The document forms the basis from which board and staff seek to fulfill CPJ's mission and vision for public justice. An expression of harmony with CPJ's vision and mission, and with this document as a guideline for Christian faith and public life, is expected of all board members and senior staff.

specific issues, however, is a vision of a better way of living together, a careful analysis of how society works, and principles to guide governments in making decisions that affect daily life.

CPJ's principled approach to public policy is captured in the concept of public justice. Rooted in Scripture, public justice unfolds in human history as God continues with redemptive work in creation. It provides norms for decision-making, not a recipe book for good government, a formula for a just society, or a list of isolated moral issues for Christians to address.

Public justice offers a coherent approach to social issues, but respects the complexity of creation and contemporary life, rather than flattening public life to its economic dimension alone or to a majority opinion.

The following paragraphs explain what public justice means and how it frames CPJ's work.

Public Justice and the Role of Government

As CPJ understands the teaching of Scripture, the role of government is to promote just relations between people within God's creation, correct injustice in a way that restores relationships, protect the environment and foster conditions that enhance the common good.

Governments fulfill their calling to promote public justice through various means, such as:

- adopting fair laws, designed to nurture an equitable society and to maintain space for and balance between various essential aspects of community life (not allowing one dimension to squeeze out others or one group to marginalize other groups of people);
- legal recognition of rights and responsibilities that allow persons, groups, communities and social structures to participate in the on-going development of society;
- enforcing laws equitably, with a special focus on marginalized people, because justice for the least powerful is a test of how well a society provides justice for all;
- identifying and resolving injustices that arise between groups in the development of society, as well as providing restorative justice for individual victims and offenders;
- providing or ensuring access to infrastructure and public services that benefit all, with a focus on access for those who might not be able to access such services on their own;
- enabling other social structures to meet identified community needs or further the development of society, in keeping with the norms of justice and care for creation;
- managing external relations in a way that fosters global justice, security for all peoples and peace between nations and/or other political jurisdictions.

CPJ promotes respect for governing authorities and active, positive engagement to shape our public life in Canada. At the same time, CPJ is very realistic about contemporary misuse of government as a power tool to advance self interest, partisan interests or particular religious beliefs.

We grieve the harm and suffering that result when God's norms of justice and compassion are neglected and governing authorities give priority to power, wealth, or personal gain. CPJ also recognizes that there may be unusual times when non-violent civil disobedience is the only way to call governments maintaining harmful and severely distorted policies or practices back to their God-given calling.

CPJ promotes specific policies and practices that contribute to public justice in Canada and works for the redress of current injustices by acting in solidarity with persons and communities who suffer harm or are excluded from full participation in Canada's development.

Within Canada's federal system of government, jurisdictional and resource disputes between national, provincial and municipal levels of government often distract from a focus on public justice for all citizens and residents. Jurisdictional conflicts, which tend to blame others for failures in governance, can lead to disempowerment of citizens and communities in the shared task of creating space for everyone in the public life of Canada. In this context, CPJ attempts to reframe public debates in terms of the justice issues that affect people in contrast to power struggles between different political forces in Canada.

Citizenship for Public Justice

Citizenship in a democracy like Canada combines the calling to govern and be governed. Ancient Scripture texts that call for rulers to show justice and the ruled to obey authorities did not envision contemporary democracy. Nor do the Biblical stories of exodus from oppression. In a democracy, prayers for justice for the King, for example, are also prayers for citizens to show justice. In a democracy, obedience to authorities because they are created for the good of all, combines respect for the law and participation in shaping just laws. The Biblical message of hope and freedom from oppressive rule and purification customs, translated into a democracy, alerts citizens to pay attention to how their elected governments deal with minorities; it motivates citizens to prevent the kind of social exclusion that Jesus transformed through his redemptive love.

Christians, called by God to be agents of justice, can exercise their calling through developing a practice of Christian citizenship. This is different from recognition as a legal citizen. It can also be practiced by persons who are residents in a community but are not legal citizens.

Using citizenship as a tool for justice starts with learning to discern when government actions contribute to greater justice and when they serve distorted goals. In response, citizens and residents can use the tools available in a democracy to help shape governance in a way that contributes to public justice and the common good.

Justice-oriented exercise of citizenship is particularly powerful because citizens are commonly expected to pursue benefits for themselves or particular special interests rather than justice for others.

CPJ recognizes that the structure of public life in Canada has been largely shaped by a spirit of materialism and individualism that runs counter to God's desire for creation. In a culture dominated by forces that alienate people from God and the deeper purpose for living, Christian citizens witness to the hope of redemption, including the transformation of public life from its faith in human power, fear, and abuse of creation and others to a public order that reflects God's call to live in justice and peace.

Many factors shape the context for government decisions and can foster or impede steps toward greater justice. The media, economic actors, churches, education and associations all play shaping roles in a democracy. Justice-oriented citizenship, as well as holding governments accountable, can contribute by creating social space for actions that reflect the norm of public justice.

Guided by the norm of public justice, and aware of the concrete realities in local communities and the nation of Canada, citizens can work out their calling by:

- developing the use of public justice as a personal frame for thinking about public issues, rather than personal benefits or particular interests; promoting its use for analysis of social issues; and reminding governing agencies that public justice is the primary purpose of government;
- participating in public life in a way that enables just relations between persons and cares for creation;
- naming injustices and standing with those experiencing injustice. Governments often ignore injustices under the influence of powerful lobbies or a preoccupation with obtaining the most votes; justice-oriented exercise of citizenship can draw attention to such issues and encourage action on them;
- promoting social structures and associations that contribute to the common good, including a focus on the exercise of justice within and between such agencies;
- participating in public policy formation processes with an eye for public justice and engaging with elected political leaders on matters of public justice;
- participating in electoral processes to help hold elected governments accountable for public justice and promote the development of political parties that pursue just policies rather than electoral machines; and
- working for reform of political structures and governing processes themselves in ways that reflect public justice for all.

CPJ encourages just citizenship by being:

- a voice through which its members, as Canadian residents, can hold up the God-given purpose for government;
- an avenue to contribute to public policies that promote justice or redress injustice; and
- a resource for people in Canada to sharpen their own capacities to exercise citizenship in keeping with God-given norm of justice for all.

Public Justice and Structural Pluralism

People are created to relate to others in a variety of relationships and through a wide variety of social structures, such as families, economic enterprises, churches, schools or other educational communities, geographic or common interest communities, professional associations, international alliances, etc. The main purpose of each is different and the rules of engagement reflect that purpose. Families, for example, nurture caring commitments to each other and hospitality to others, while businesses provide goods and services, and professional associations develop specialized gifts and ensure quality. But the norms of dealing justly with people and caring for creation need to be incorporated within all societal structures.

The political community, the state, has as its primary purpose the promotion of public justice, which respects and protects the rights and responsibilities of both persons and other societal structures. In a culture of highly individualized lifestyles, within the context of globalized markets and communication systems, it is particularly important for governing agencies to support and

foster social structures that help people exercise their responsibilities for others, as well as fulfilling their own rights.

In its work, CPJ promotes public policies that encourage the development of a rich web of social, economic and cultural infrastructure with the capacity to meet diverse needs.

One current challenge is that many traditional social structures have been found wanting on tests of showing justice or caring for creation within their own mandates. Justice-oriented citizens and residents can use direct engagement in various social structures to help ensure that justice is done internally. Governments may need to call other social structures to account under the norm of justice, and citizens and CPJ may need to support their governments in doing so.

Public Justice and Religious Pluralism

Pluralism in worldviews and religious beliefs is also of particular significance for the exercise of public justice. Within the political community, respect for a diversity of religions and worldviews will foster space for public expression and living out of such worldviews to the extent that they do not harm others or squeeze out space for other worldviews.

CPJ recognizes that allowing maximum space for the freedom of public expression of religions and different worldviews can result in a conflict of rights and responsibilities. The challenge is to resolve such conflicts without marginalizing legitimate claims or assuming a hierarchy of rights. Key to resolving such claims within a democracy is full participation of stakeholders and decision-making processes that can mediate claims in the interest of peaceful co-existence, with respect for diversity as well as the common good.

Public Justice Criteria/Tests for Citizens and Governing Agencies

Public justice functions as a norm to use in analyzing current realities, forming policy options and assessing impacts of governing actions or inaction. Public justice embraces what others have called commutative, restorative, procedural and distributive justice, all of which find expression in Scriptural descriptions of just relations between people. It applies to social, economic, environmental and foreign policies as much as it does to the development of judicial systems. One of the most important indicators of public justice is the situation of the most marginalized, who have the least power to obtain justice for themselves.

Questions that arise from a focus on public justice can be useful for decision-making, such as the following:

- Does this action or inaction promote respect for the rights, responsibilities and dignity of people?
- Is it sustainable in terms of caring for creation, with an eye to future generations?
- Does it respect and support the role of other social structures and communities?
- Does it contribute to more equitable opportunities and relations within society? Does it reduce inequities or resolve injustices that exist presently?

- Does it promote participation and active engagement in building just, peaceful and sustainable communities? Does it enable or disempower persons or groups that have less power to meet their own needs?

CPJ uses a public justice lens to identify gaps in policy, unjust situations needing redress, and impacts of alternative policy options from the perspective of those with the least power to pursue justice for themselves. Based on this analysis, CPJ proposes alternative policy options. CPJ also works with its members and other organizations to engage in public discussion of the choices available for Canada and build public support for the exercise of more just governance.