

# JPE Wisdom from the Groups

The intention of the presentation by Margaret Swedish at the Chapter was to give a **context in which we live out our lives and ministry today and to what this context may call us**. The small groups as a follow up to the talk acted as a collective reflection, wisdom of what might be our response as individuals and as a province. Although limited by time, the groups nevertheless did point us in a number of practical and helpful directions.

When one sorted through the individual responses (and practically all are represented below) some broader themes or headings became evident. An attempt was made to place the various responses under the appropriate/best heading. Feel free to recategorize anything if it seems it was wrongly classified!

When sorting and arranging others' thoughts there is a risk of arbitrariness and a temptation to edit. So while placing them in some broader groupings, the actual wording, phrasing of the points made (no matter how "diamond in the rough" they were found to be) was preserved except in a few rare instances. So below find three larger headings with their subgroups. This report back concludes with a section containing some possible general insights and an invitation that readers draw some conclusions of their own.

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A. One question asked of the groups was about **COMMITMENT—PERSONAL, COMMUNITY, SOCIETAL**. Three general groupings are presented in response to this foundational question:

## Where it all begins—with myself/ourselves:

- Start with yourself; inform and educate myself on the issues..
- We ought to cultivate personal change to be the change we want to see.
- Lead by example; start a movement—take the first step.
- Become informed; inform and educate myself on the issues.
- How to get better information, be better informed?
- View documentaries to keep us alert; [presumably all appropriate informative resources whatever their form: books, Websites, dramatizations, articles, etc.]

## Personal/communal life style, new consciousness:

- “Be challenged personally and community wise to search out and adapt concrete expressions for lessening carbon footprint—e.g. less meat consumption, vegetarian options, cutting back on driving (travel by bus, train), and similar practices; deal with the issue of climate control—looking at use of electricity and recycling and amount of travel we do.

- Expressions of a personal commitment to being “green” and also need for practical, specific ideas for local communities, for example, re food matters and green suggestions; learn new way to conserve energy and consumption
- Watch wastefulness, “throw away” mentality; do less driving.
- Know the life cycle of the product used, stop waste in our house, recycle (whether the municipality has a program or not); can we presume houses recycle?
- Recommend that each community at least once a year meet together to discuss how we could cut down on our [carbon] “footprint;” examples: 1) we will not buy bottled water, 2) we will use re-usable bags when we shop, 3) once a week have a meatless meal, 4) we will purchase from farmers’ markets as much as possible.
- Find a way “to ensure community discussion around the issues raised in the presentation and around the fact that we have developed an upper middle class life style.”
- Community exchange of written and computer sources and review in some kind of community reflection session.
- Work with other groups; make a better effort at cooperation (strength in numbers).
- Continue to support Cap Corps in their attempts to live simply.
- See that a report is sent through the province of what local Capuchin communities are doing to give ideas to other communities; need to know what local communities and individuals (e.g. re Arbor Day!) are doing on JPE front—especially as to ecological matters, in order to inspire other communities.

**Spiritual foundations needed:**

- Spiritual foundation for the changed consciousness that is needed today.
- Spirituality to counteract sense of powerlessness and being overwhelmed and to help empowerment & hopefulness.
- Need for communal & spiritual re-enforcement to pursue and stick with the change and follow through.
- Use our Franciscan story/values to educate people [and ourselves, we hope and presume!]  
—simplicity, austerity, reverence for creation, [what else?].
- Promote an ecological spirituality and link it to the call for Spiritual Renewal in the province.

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**B. Another set of recognizable themes focused on **CONCRETE WAYS OF JUST LIVING** situations and how to facilitate such living.**

**Food matters:**

- Meatless Fridays in each friary [recall former practice of meatless Wednesdays and Fridays] in view of “industrial farming.”
- In buying be conscious of “industrial farming,” local producers, farmer markets, Amish products available in many areas, organic produce, etc; develop an awareness & commitment to sustainable food sources and eating.

- Promote vegetarian cooking in our friaries.
- Keep “green” in mind re food, dishes, utensils, etc, at provincial gatherings, celebrations.
- Help us to know where best to purchase our food.

**Advocacy:**

- Be coached as to issues through the internet and local ecological organizations that will help us be advocates and how to influence policies;
- Politics: the people we elect can make a difference—how challenge? Who vote for? One issue candidates?
- Occasional suggestion from JPE Office for ideas on legislative action for policy makers or other actions.

**Broad insights, awareness needed:**

- “Everything seems connected and comes down to money [profit].”
- “It boils down to a moral issue not just political.”
- Overall global, serious effect of waste/neglect/abuse.
- How does population growth fit in?
- Ecology/care of creation seems to be rising [as a main and overarching focus. NOTICE THAT MANY INDIVIDUAL ITEMS UNDER OTHER HEADINGS ALSO REFER TO CARE OF CREATION—A THEME THROUGHOUT MOST ALL THE THEMES.]

**Problems (?) in zeroing in on the issues:**

- For one: Clarification of reality of various “experts” was helpful, while for others: Who do you believe? How to find the “truth” in midst of the various research/opinions; credibility of sources.
- Big, complicated, systemic issues.
- Overall global serious effect of waste, neglect, misuse—can lead to hopelessness.

**Corporate Responsibility:**

- Good to hear what Mike Crosby and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility are doing.
- More ongoing reports would be appreciated.
- Twice a year reports from office on Corporate Responsibility on their actions.
- Written support of what Michael Crosby is doing from the friars.

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C. Finally, since the groups were specifically asked about THE JPE OFFICE, the last section of responses deals with the Office and its ministry:

**JPE Office [many suggestions about tasks for the office]:**

- Mission statement, purpose, nature, responsibilities/objectives, JPE Ministry Council [all can be found in the Provincial Policy Handbook.]

- Focus on two or three issues.
- Possible issues could be water, immigration, WalMart, carbon footprint, among the vast various possibilities; food (meatless Fridays), water, increasing disparity between the rich and poor as key issues (?).
- Keep us informed on what the JPE Office is doing specifically on what we can do to have an impact!
- Occasional scriptural insights or homily ideas to give hope to those we minister in order to motivate them toward a spirituality to deal with hopelessness; somehow support more effectively preachers trying to bring this [justice, peace, care of creation?] message to people.
- Reinvigorate Green Committee; follow up on the 2008 chapter resolution, decision..
- Invite younger friars into the office or Ministry Council for their input.
- Work with other groups a bit. Make a better effort at cooperation
- Conscientize the friars more.
- Educate us more as to recyclable products and procedures.
- What things are we already doing—report on initiatives in the various houses and ministries to help to enlighten all with ideas and suggestions.
- Help us assess what do we feel energy around JPE issues? [Help us assess toward which issues we ought to direct our energies.]
- Study and suggest practical energy saving in our houses and how to educate the younger generation to lower green [sic carbon] footprint through our ministries.
- Need better dissemination of information; more info on JPE issues as to what is happening; “rally the troops” on issues of concern.
- Visit individual friars to help them process what the local friary can do as a friary and then revisit same friary 6 months later to re-evaluate and refine their choices and finally report choices to whole province for its information and education.
- More JPE internet alerts.

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## CONCLUSIONS/INSIGHTS:

- *Probably one of the most important (if not the most important) of all of the insights, noted by several of the groups, is that becoming informed and aware and conscientized begins with ourselves—with each of us as individuals--as the first theme points out.*
- A special importance is given to the **concern for the environment** echoing what is stated in a recent document from our OFM brothers in their paper, *Franciscans and Environmental Justice*, where it states that **there “is a growing concern with the unprecedented ecological crisis that we are facing. There is growing consensus that the climatic changes we are experiencing are the result of human activity, and that we are reaching a point of no return in the process.”** For many this is the overarching, key issue that subsumes all the rest—if there is no longer a planet earth, our home, then there is nothing! That paper goes on to

expand on these crucial contentions. There is a companion paper also: *Care for Creation in the Daily Life of the Friars Minor*. Both papers can be found at [www.OFM.org](http://www.OFM.org) then click on JPIC in the menu to the right.

- *There is a desire to know better **the spiritual foundations** of our justice and peace commitment and particularly what our Franciscan tradition offers.*
- Significant interest in **food matters**—industrial farming, food production and distribution, healthy buying and eating, meatless day or two and vegetarian preparation, and so forth—are noted by a number of the groups. Seems that some follow-up ought to be provided to satisfy that interest. A quite comprehensive **resolution** on food by the JPE Committee on Food Issues was crafted for possible consideration by the 2011 Chapter but was withheld for various reasons. However, because of this interest in food matters it is accompanying this report on the groups' responses as sort of an appendix to them.
- *Many expectations are expressed for **the JPE Office**. Numerous things for the new staff to process in the various thoughtful suggestions. Probably need a robust website, participation in social media, a blog, as well as more regular emails to make available a lot of what is asked for in the numerous items listed in that section.*
- **One thing is certain: The “thrust,” commitment, concern, dedication to, for, in behalf of justice, peace and ecology in the province is as well as it has ever been since our 1972 Assembly.**
- *What further nuggets of wisdom do you see in the responses from the groups?*

## **Food Resolution: Toward a Just Food System**

**Whereas** Pope Benedict XVI lamented in 2010 that certain industrialized countries lead "lifestyles marked by unsustainable consumption, which have damaging effects for the environment and the poor," and proclaimed that it is necessary "to point in a truly unified way to a new balance between agriculture, industry and services, so that development be sustainable, and no one go without bread and work, and so that air and water and the other primary resources be preserved as universal goods;"<sup>i</sup>

**Whereas** we recognize the importance of cultivating a "clear ethical consciousness," in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, to inform our choices as consumers and providers of food in many of our ministries;

**Whereas** food production and distribution have major implications for social and environmental justice; and in the tradition of our Father Francis, who exemplified a spirit of sister-brotherhood with all creation, we, the Capuchins of the Province of St. Joseph, strive to live with reverence in balance with the Earth and all beings;

**Whereas** access to healthy, nourishing food is a universal human right and should not be treated as a commodity;

**Whereas** the number of people with too little to eat is now rapidly rising instead of falling, as the (estimated) number of undernourished people in developing countries was 824 million in 1990-92 and in 2009 the number had climbed to 1.02 billion people;<sup>ii</sup>

**Whereas** the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified a link between consumption of processed foods and obesity, as well as related chronic diseases such as diabetes and various heart conditions, etc—which conditions disproportionately impact many of the communities where we live and serve;<sup>iii</sup>

**Whereas** "[m]ore than a third of all raw materials and fossil fuels consumed in America are used in animal production. Beef production alone uses more water than growing the nation's entire fruit and vegetable crop. Animals raised for meat also generate about 2.7 trillion pounds of waste annually (more than the human population) which leads to contamination and disease outbreaks;"<sup>iv</sup>

**Whereas** cutting down on consumption of animal protein and eating lower on the food chain can limit one's ecological impact, helping to preserve important resources for future generations;

**Whereas** abstaining regularly from animal protein has a longstanding place in the Catholic tradition, as well as many other faith traditions;

**Whereas** supporting local food production protects small family farms, avoids long-distance transportation, assures fresh and healthy products, and builds community ties;

**Whereas** many ministries of the Province of St. Joseph already demonstrate a commitment to sustainable agricultural practices and fostering a deep connection to the land, such as the Earthworks Urban Farm and Rosa Parks Art Garden in Detroit;

**BE IT RESOLVED that we, the friars of St. Joseph Province, build on our tradition of care and concern for God’s creation by committing ourselves to the following actions to promote a just food system:**

To continue to educate ourselves on issues around food, for example, by

- Always making meals a time of sharing our kinship with whomever is at table and as an opportunity to nurture bodies, minds, souls in true community; and
- Holding at least two food justice awareness events per year at our various sites, as for example, (1) a community seasonal cooking night, (2) food justice roundtable discussion and picnic, (3) discussion around a film, as *Fresh, Food Inc, Fat, Sick & Nearly Dead*, [these three are at the JPE Office] or a similar film, or CDs [several at the JPE Office], or book(s)/article(s), etc, (4) inviting in resource person for a health and nutrition workshop or talk, (5) participating in advocacy related to a particular food issue, and so forth.

To cut down on animal protein as individuals and communities by dedicating at least one animal protein free day in our communities and ministries (if feasible) with corresponding education and making vegetarian fare available.

To buy local, organic and fair-trade products whenever possible by specifically:

- Working towards sourcing 10% of our food locally,
- Shopping at local farmers markets when possible, and
- Planting gardens and growing some of our own food where/when feasible.

To be much more discerning when choosing processed foods

- By creating a list of ingredients or foods that we will limit and eventually eliminate in our communities and at our ministry sites, whether purchased or donated.
- By using as helpful guides those offered by various sites, agencies, etc, for example as the ones noted here: Whole Foods List of Unacceptable Ingredients (<http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/products/unacceptable-ingredients.php>), or the *Fresh* shopping guide, or any other similar to these.

To become advocates regarding issues of food justice and to support the development of a locally owned, healthy food system.

- By have the JPE Office make available to all in the province a list of the various Websites dealing with food health, security and advocacy.
- By friars familiarizing themselves with one or more of the various Websites related to food health, security and advocacy for the purpose to be kept up to date and receive alerts.
- By paying special attention to the legislation on the 2012 Farm Bill and its provisions and how it will determine food policy in the country and impact the more vulnerable in our society.

- By learning about and supporting what is happening locally as to a healthy food system.

To encourage accountability by establishing a committee created by the JPE Office/Ministry Council and presented for approved to the provincial council—which committee would see to the implementation of this resolution and its supporting actions.

Submitted By:

The JPE Committee on Food Security/Issues in conjunction with the JPE Office

[This resolution resulted from the work and meetings of the JPE Committee on Food Issues. The committee met over a period of two years in Detroit. In a way this resolution is the summary of the committee’s discussions, studies and reflections. The main guides and crafters of the resolution were Lisa Richter (employed at the time at EarthWorks) and Rachel Severin (Cap Corps Volunteer ‘10-‘11 at EarthWorks) while Jim Zelinski did some final formatting. It originally was going to be presented at the 2011 Chapter.]

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## Citations

<sup>i</sup> Zenit, Nov. 14, 2010, Vatican City. <<http://www.zenit.org/article-30959?l=english>>.

<sup>ii</sup> World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics, Nov. 14, 2010. <<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>>.

<sup>iii</sup> World Health Organization, “Obesity and Overweight” Fact Sheet, Sept. 2006. <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>>.

<sup>iv</sup> Davidson, Emily. “Vegetarianism: The Benefits and the Dangers.” Healthy Eating Naturally. Nov. 13, 2009. <<http://healthyeatingnaturally.wordpress.com/2009/11/13/vegetarianism-the-benefits-and-the-dangers/>>.