

A day in the life: a sister on the Justice Team

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What do I do all day in this Justice Team ministry? No two days are exactly alike. Sometimes I am out of town at a conference or visiting sisters in one of our convents that has become a retirement care center. When I have one of my more “usual” days at the office in Belmont, it looks something like the day described here.

I arrive at the office at 7:00 a.m. I do my best work in the morning, and I almost never work at home; I find the ambiance of an office more supportive. If I run into a problem, such as a Zoom link not working, help is near. The office is also more conducive to plans for meetings with local people. When I arrive at the office, I start a pot of coffee unless one of the other early arrivals has already done so. I look at my calendar to see what is already scheduled for the day. Usually, there is a conference call or webinar on a topic related to the Critical Concerns or to Catholic social justice in general. Topics and sponsoring organizations can vary widely: the Coalition on Human Needs, the Mecklenburg Interfaith Ministry organization, Catholic Climate Covenant, the Center for Migration Studies, or an analysis of some legislation such as the budget bill. I also interact with and give limited support to local groups such as a local human trafficking group or a local care for creation group. Some are time limited, such as the committee for the Belmont Solar Ribbon Cutting Event or the committee to plan the Catholic Committee of Appalachia’s Annual Meeting being held in North Carolina this year. I also sometimes work with the Social Justice Office of Catholic Charities to sponsor an event such as a session for Earth Day to which local Catholics are invited.

With coffee in hand and a sense of my day’s plans, I begin to go through my e-mails. I do not listen to the news on the TV, so this catches me up on international and national events. I also receive some state-level news by e-mail, particularly from nearby southern states’ journalists or state-level justice groups such as Ohio Sisters for Justice and Alabama ARISE. I subscribe to a variety of news sources and analysts. I curate my sources by using the delete and unsubscribe options as needed, especially with the numerous unwanted shopping e-mails. I occasionally analyze what kind of e-mails I receive; I don’t need to get e-mails from every environmental, immigration, or news organization, so I choose to unsubscribe from some. E-mails with more lasting value are moved into folders labeled by topics. E-mails calling for a response get one immediately if I can, or I make a note of where I need to follow up. For example, I received a request from the Southern Poverty Law Center to share an upcoming program for community organizations working on health care in low-income areas. I connected with the Catholic

Charites staff member who handles applications for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. He immediately responded that he knew of a group that fit these criteria.

Mid-morning, I take a break and go across the street for the daily mass at the local parish. I don't do this out of obligation or even spirituality but because this quiet half-hour with other people in community helps me in this very stressful time to give attention to my mental health and to stay somewhat centered and peaceful.

After Mass, I get another cup of coffee and look at my schedule; what is on my list to either follow up or initiate? Is there an issue that I would like to recommend to our action alert committee? Is there an action I should invite people to in one of the states I watch? Should I plan a state-level lobby meeting with Senator Tillis's office on extending temporary protected status for Haitians?

Looking ahead to the next few days and weeks, are there meetings I should prepare for in advance? For example, I am speaking on advocacy at a local trafficking conference. I will be on a panel at the Mercy Education Conference in October on the Critical Concern of Women. My responsibilities in the Justice Team Strategic Planning Project need time to plan and work.

Are there longer-term meetings or commitments that need more advance planning? I want to plan out-of-town visits to the sisters and ministries in Georgia and Ohio. There are one-on-one meetings I'd like to have locally, and others to set up in places I'll visit in my travels. Recently, I had a one-on-one with a contact from a local Catholic group formed in response to the pedophilia crisis and another with a local interfaith dialogue group. Are there ways we and other groups can work together, especially given the upcoming midterms?

On my list is to contact the local organization that trains and schedules volunteers to be present with immigrants at the Charlotte Immigration Court. I would like to participate and encourage others to participate if they can.

Then I also look at upcoming meetings or webinars that are on my schedule. They can take place in the daytime, evening, or on weekends. My main question is: are there ones I can skip or ones I should or must attend? I prioritize in-person meetings to build contacts and community, and I prioritize Mercy-sponsored opportunities. But I may choose not to attend others, particularly if the topic could be covered in other meetings or if it takes place in the evening.

Each day's schedule, then, is a combination of already-planned meetings or webinars and setting priorities drawn from the rest of the list.

This ministry is never boring, but there is never enough time. In it all, I am carrying out my vow of service to the poor, sick, and ignorant. I measure my success not only by the outcomes achieved but by my faithfulness to the call of the Gospel, even as I pledged at my vows in this community of Mercy in my ring motto: My Lord Jesus, I am yours.