



# MOTIVATIONS Jesuit & secular

*The 1970s was a period of great social change. It was a time of strongly held political views. People marched against the Vietnam War. Governments were dismissed. A whole array of social movements emerged, as people spoke about what a community should look like.*

**AMONGST** those hoping for changes in the structures of society, especially those working with the most marginalised, there was an optimism about how society could be more just.

The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) has been known for its involvement in education in secondary schools and universities around the world. In the late 1960s the Superior General of the Order, Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ challenged his fellow Jesuits to rethink the focus of their mission.

*the moral obligation of the Society (is) to rethink all its ministries and every form of its apostolate to see if they really offer a response to the urgent priorities which justice and social equity call for.*

Responding to this call, in 1975 the 32<sup>nd</sup> Congregation of the Jesuit Order declared in its decree, Our Mission Today:

*There is a new challenge to our apostolic mission in a world increasingly interdependent but, for all that, divided by injustice: injustice not only personal but institutionalised: built into economic, social, and political structures that dominate the life of nations and the international community.*

The founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola, saw that it was not enough to express a commitment to justice. What is required is an action-oriented commitment to the poor.

This challenged a young Jesuit, Peter Norden, to imagine a project which would work with very troubled young people exiting custody and so began Four Flats hostel. In his proposal for the hostel he wrote:

*Not only must the Church preach on the value and dignity of each individual person, but it must also give leadership through action in attempting to assist those in our community whom others are not prepared to help.*

At the centre of this work with each person was a focus on personal relationships. Looking back over the first two years, Peter Norden reflected on the work with the young men at Four Flats.

**We were trying to give a sense of security through a caring, friendly, compassionate house through personal presence, of giving stability in sometimes extraordinary situations – as a sort of anchor.**

The decision to live with and share day to day life with the young men of Four Flats was a clear sign that ‘solidarity’ was a driving force in the decision to set up the hostel. In the 1977 - 78 Jesuit Year Book, Peter Norden wrote

**Our belief in God and our preaching of the Word must be given concrete expression in action, especially in our care for the poor and those abandoned.**

Not all who were part of Four Flats were motivated by Catholic social teaching. Some, like David Murray, the second Director of Four Flats, came from a secular perspective.

**We spoke of access, choice, dignity and opportunity. For many of us working at Four Flats, it was less of a job and more of a political statement about what a just society should look like. If we weren’t able to care for these damaged young people in our midst then what sort of a community did we have?**

For Murray this was not at odds with the views expressed at the 32nd Congregation of the Jesuits.

**It was, if you like, a coalition of the willing - those of us with a political and social objective in a partnership with those whose theological and spiritual position brought them to the same place.**

This was expressed in the daily life of Four Flats through efforts to support young people just released from custody. Understanding what led young people to a life of offending laid the foundation for the work done by Jesuit Social Services today. Many of these young men came from broken, grieving families who could not care for one another. David Murray expressed it this way:

**We were in a close relationship with a group of young people who had experienced such severe abuse, neglect and deprivation as children. This was the result and impact of violence, loss and grief. Their experience of education shows how isolation and exclusion and failure can lead to anger, violence and contempt for the mainstream and a paradoxical longing for inclusion. Their experience of homelessness shows us how basic needs such as shelter and food were not automatically available in the way most of us understood.**

A defining feature of Ignatian spiritual teaching is that the work for justice must be adaptable and responsive to the areas of greatest need. It also calls for a willingness to respond creatively to emerging needs. Jesuit Social Services was formed because of a realisation that helping young people released from custody was not enough. There were many areas of unmet need and the work of Four Flats was just the beginning.



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