



GUIDELINES FOR PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY COMMISSIONS

Diocese of Lansing

The Catholic Charities USA logo is represented with two C's, one reversed, joined together by a cross representing Catholic Charities' commitment to the Gospel of Jesus and the social mission of the Church.

PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

Parish Social Ministry is an organized effort of the entire parish to serve those in need, to advocate for justice, and to work at changing societal structures that perpetuate injustice. It is social because it applies the gospel vision to society and social relationships.

Parish Social Ministry is rooted in the passion for the justice of the Hebrew prophets and the words and deeds of Jesus. It continues to be shaped by the teachings of the Catholic Church. Every parish community shares in the mission of Jesus Christ proclaimed in Luke's Gospel of "bringing good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, new sight to the blind, and setting the downtrodden free". *Luke 4:18*

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being. *Deus Caritas Est 25a*

The Gospels and Catholic Social Teaching call us to be in solidarity with those who are poor and vulnerable. It is in serving and walking with our brothers and sisters who hunger and thirst, who are lonely and imprisoned, who are poor and powerless, that we find Christ (*Mt 25*). Parish Social Ministry is about building real community among those who serve and those who are served, among those who are privileged and those who are not.

Parish Social Ministry is clearly not an option for the parishioner or the parish, nor is it separate from the other ministries in the parish. Its integration into every aspect of parish life will be the sign of an authentic Christian community. People will recognize how "they love one another".

THE SOCIAL MINISTRY COMMISSION

The Social Ministry Commission is composed of staff members and volunteers who serve to empower the parish community to fulfill the Gospel mandate of charity and justice. With the assistance of the parish pastoral council, the Social Ministry Commission works to implement the parish pastoral plan.

Every baptized Christian is called to fulfill this mandate. It is imperative that the members of the commission realize they are not exclusively responsible for doing social ministry – for, it is essential for others to be involved in actively accepting the responsibility of their baptism.

RESPONSIBILITIES

LEADERSHIP:

- provide an organizational structure for the ministry that will foster collaboration, communication, and a welcoming atmosphere for potential volunteers and those in need
- provide social ministry with competent leadership by continuously recruiting and developing leadership in parish volunteers
- identify social issues and human needs in the parish and the broader community; and design ways to address them

THE PASTORAL CIRCLE:

The Pastoral Circle is used to help social ministry leaders to:

- analyze the local situation
- reflect theologically on how the Gospel calls Christians to respond
- plan a response and move into action

This process provides the foundation for competent action based on Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture.

EDUCATION, FORMATION, AND TRAINING:

An essential part of developing social ministry leadership is education and formation. Transformative education provides the fertile ground for conversion of hearts to Gospel justice. Training is important for the success of the ministry that includes:

- leadership
- purpose of the commission
- use of the pastoral circle
- understanding of specific issues being addressed

A solid education in Catholic Social Teaching is a must for volunteers who are active in parish social ministry. Educating all parishioners about Catholic Social Teaching in collaboration with Catechetical programs in the parish is essential to the overall Christian maturity of a parish.

COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, COORDINATION:

Parish Social Ministry encompasses all Christian Service and Life Justice activities. Effective coordination between their various programs ensures efficiency in delivering services and a minimum duplication of services. Communication within the whole parish about what our Catholic Social Teaching says about current events provides ongoing theological reflection for parishioners. It lays the foundation for legislative advocacy – one of the pillars of Parish Social Ministry. No parish is an island unto itself; parishioners live in the context of a broader community and therefore, collaboration with organizations in the wider community is essential in some matters. Catholic Charities Agencies and hospitals are excellent contacts for reaching out into the community.

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

The most effective way for this ministry to function is to first establish and develop the position of Parish Social Ministry Coordinator – and ideally this person would be a member of the parish staff. The Parish Social Ministry Coordinator provides a link with the pastor and staff and serves to assist and develop leadership within the commission. In the event that it is not possible for a staff person to assume this role, it is essential that the pastor and staff provide their fullest support to the designated coordinator.

Different structural models can be used for Parish Social Ministry Commissions. Some parishes have a Christian Service unit and a Life Justice unit under the social ministry umbrella. Others have four units based on the list below. Regardless of the parish structure, Catholic Social Teaching is at the heart of the commission's work – all commissions need to address the following areas:

- Direct Service (food pantry, BeFrienders, Christmas Giving Tree)
- Legislative Advocacy (voter registration drives, petition drives, offering of letters)
- Community Organizing (housing coalitions, CCHD funded groups, public issue forums)
- Global Solidarity (hunger banquets, operation Rice Bowl program, overseas partnerships)

All four components are essential for a comprehensive parish social ministry.

To reflect the integration of social ministry into all aspects of parish life, the commission is in communication with the Parish Pastoral Council either by having an advocate on the council or by submitting a regular report to the council chair. It is important for the commission to initiate regular meetings with representatives from the parish school, religious education programs, and the worship commission.

STARTING A NEW COMMISSION

A Parish Social Ministry Commission can be established from the initiative of the pastor, staff member, or parishioner. The founding organizers need to recruit the initial membership based on previous volunteer efforts, talents and expertise, and/or interest. A comprehensive job description of expectations should be available to interested parishioners. For on-going operations of the ministry, recruiting, screening, interviewing, and recognition is essential for good volunteer management. A blessing of social ministry leaders during a Sunday liturgy is a good way of recognizing their essential role in the life of the parish.

Once established, the first priority for commission members is their education and formation in the basics of Catholic Social Teaching. Setting up the structure out of which the commission functions would be their second priority.

RESOURCES

Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes. Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing.

Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish. Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, March 7, 2005.

Kammer SJ, Fred. Doing Faithjustice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press. Revised edition: January 5, 2004.

Pope Benedict XVI. Encyclical: God is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*). Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing. © 2005 Libreria Editrice Vaticana

The Department of Catholic Charities can be of service to parishes regarding Parish Social Ministry. Within this department, the Offices of Life Justice, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and Catholic Relief Services have many adult Catholic Social Teaching education and formation resources available. Parishes are also encouraged to dialogue with their respective regional Catholic Charities Agency to develop collaborative efforts to serve the local poor.

Resources: DIOCESAN DEPT OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES
300 West Ottawa Street
Lansing 48933
517-352-2469

or any of the following REGIONAL CATHOLIC CHARITIES and SERVICE AGENCIES

ADRIAN: Catholic Charities of Lenawee County
199 N Broad Street
Adrian 49221
517-263-2191

HOWELL: CSS of Livingston County
2020 E Grand River Ave, Suite 104
Howell 48843
517-545-5944

ANN ARBOR: CSS of Washtenaw County
4925 Packard Road
Ann Arbor 48108
734-971-9781

JACKSON: Catholic Charities of Jackson
407 S Mechanic Street
Jackson 49201
517-782-4430

DAVISON: Outreach East
425 Genesee Street
Davison 48501
810-653-7711

LANSING: St Vincent Catholic Charities
2800 West Willow Street
Lansing 48917
517-886-1150

FLINT: Catholic Charities of Genesee County
901 Chippewa Street
Flint 48503
810-232-9950

OWOSSO: Catholic Charities of Shiawassee County
120 West Exchange, Suite 204
Owosso 48867
989-723-8239

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PO Box 815, Flint 48501
810-234-4693