

Building a Parish Social Justice Ministry

Some Tips and a Sample Mission Statement

- ◆ Social Justice is the work of every baptized person. By social justice we mean changing policies, structures, and institutions so they work on behalf of the common good.
- ◆ The core planning group gets things started for the parish, provides opportunities for all parishioners to get involved, constantly visits with members of the community to surface issues, and organizes them for actions that lead to effective social change.
- ◆ The public life of the parish is just as essential as the inner life of the parish. At every level -- internal and external -- we seek to develop just processes and policies to govern ourselves.

Common Steps in the Formation of a Parish Social Justice Ministry

Getting Started

- Approach your pastor and/or parish council to gain approval in starting a social justice ministry. Give them an outline of the steps you will take to get it started, using this document. (Keep the council and pastor on board with you. They too must own the development of the social justice effort. Use every opportunity you can to keep them informed and moving with you).
- Convene (personal invitation and appointment) a beginning core committee of seven to ten members.
- Develop a brief vision statement and some operating guidelines (see other side) to be approved by your pastoral council and pastor.

Education and Formation

- Invite the Office of Justice and Peace to send a speaker to give a presentation on Catholic social teaching. The OJP presentation will ensure that the social justice core group and parish council have a solid understanding of the biblical and scriptural foundations of Catholic social teaching, its basic principles, archdiocesan programs and resources, as well as available skills workshops.

Assessment and Inventory

- Compile a list of the activities currently happening in your parish which are involved in social needs/outreach. Distinguish the works of charity from social change projects. Keep the focus of the justice committee on long term.

structural and systemic change.

- Contact existing justice ministries at neighboring parishes (the OJP can help you identify neighboring parishes that have a strong social justice ministry)
- Conduct visits with parishioners to surface key issues of interest in your local community. What are some of the problems you hear? How do the various issues relate to one another? List and discuss as a group.

Create a Plan

- Based on what you have learned through the assessment and inventory process, establish goals and plans for action with a simple timetable, and a way to evaluate how you are successful.
- Procedural items to be decided quickly include:
 - ◆ How will you keep the pastor, pastoral council, staff and other committees informed and working with you?
 - ◆ Establish a simple budget to begin to cover mailing costs, paper/copies, speaker fees, educational workshops for leadership, etc.
 - ◆ Who will facilitate the meeting? Who will record minutes accurately and distribute to others? Who will be designated contact for Archdiocesan mailings?
 - ◆ Who on staff will serve as liaison to the social justice ministry? (pastoral minister, director of religious education, deacon, etc.)

Other Things to Remember

- This is not a ministry of one age group—what does hospitality mean?
- Remember to reach out to new parishioners.
- Keep in mind your expectations as individuals and as a parish.
- Recognize the variety of gifts your parishioners have.
- Anchor your vision with prayer and spirituality.
- Take care of your volunteers.

The Office of Justice and Peace can help if you are unsure how to proceed or want to work on an issue, but don't know how to begin. Contact Maria Perales at (213) 637-7550.

Sample Mission Statement

The mission of the Social Justice Committee is to serve the parish as its primary resource and catalyst for the work of social justice.

Operating Principles

1. We will operate as a committee of the parish council of _____.
2. We will base our activities on the biblical and theological foundations of Catholic social teaching.
3. We will emphasize the "option for the poor" by pursuing issues which address the dignity and rights of people who are socially, politically, or economically disadvantaged.
4. We will maximize opportunities to assist and work with organizations, coalitions, and neighborhood groups to promote our common interests.
5. We will give priority to strategies which enable people to realize and act on their own power.
6. We will operate from and promote social action that includes both the private, personal commitments to justice and also public, communal, and institutional commitments to social justice.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Justice and Peace has adapted this document from materials developed by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis Office for Social Justice, Delis Alejandro, St. Monica Church, and Kathleen Smith, St. Paul the Apostle Church in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.