



VISION FOR PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

by Mrs. Helene E. Paharik, MA

INTRODUCTION

Bishop Zubik, in his pastoral letter *The Church Alive!*, describes the challenge facing local parishes in our diocese:

For us to grow the Church, for us to be the "Church Alive," the time is now for us to consider how each of us can live our faith in bold, courageous and effective ways, especially on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, the often forgotten in our cities and neighborhoods (#102).

The time is now to strengthen parish social ministries throughout the diocese of Pittsburgh. The economic, social, and environmental challenges of our time are significant. So, too, is the challenge to affirm the dignity of every human person — from the moment of conception until natural death.

Building a successful, parish-based social ministry effort of the kind envisioned in *Communities of Salt and Light* requires tapping each and every able Catholic's baptismal call to serve. The vision for parish social ministry outlined in *Communities of Salt and Light*, issued by the USCCB in 1993, has profound implications for the way we organize and structure social ministry in our parishes. So, too, does every parish pastoral plan.

An important starting point for building or strengthening parish social ministry is the pastor, the parish staff, and the parish pastoral council. It is essential that the vision, mission, goals and objectives for parish social ministry flow from the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the parish pastoral council. Parish Social Ministry is *at the service of the* parish pastoral plan.

The role of the Parish Social Minister or Parish Social Ministry Committee is to lead parishioners in the mission and vision of parish social ministry *articulated in the parish Pastoral Plan*, employing principles outlined in the USCCB document *Communities of Salt and Light* as well as diocesan guidelines for Best Practices of Parish Social Ministry. The Pastoral Letters of Bishop David A. Zubik will also serve as the primary lens through which parish social ministry will be operative in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

SEVEN MESSAGES REGARDING PSM

- 1. *Parish social ministry is rooted in love and truth.*** "Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelled out by that doctrine is derived from charity" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 1). In Parish Social Ministry what we share is no less than the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ. "The Church's charitable activities must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by faith which works through love (*Deus Caritas*, 31).
- 2. *Parish social ministry is rooted deeply in the heart of the Church.*** "The exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning (*Deus Caritas*, 32). St. Paul said to the Church at Corinth "The love of Christ urges us." "Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and



Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh
Department for Human Life and Dignity

desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ" (*Deus Caritas*, 33). Those who lead social ministry in the parish bring to life the Church's social doctrine in complete harmony with the diocesan Bishop and under the direction of their parish priest.

3. ***Parish Social Ministry fosters integral authentic human development.*** "Authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 12). This development of the human person maintains the truth that Trinitarian love is the origin and destiny of the human person. Authentic integral human development has an ontological and eschatological view of the human person. Integral human development promotes the advancement of all persons and of the whole person. "The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development." (*Caritas in Veritate*, 18) Parish Social Ministry fosters the integral and authentic human development of those both giving *and* receiving charity. Reciprocity is essential in Parish Social Ministry.
4. Our social mission should be ***integrated throughout parish life.*** As the story of the Last Judgment in Matthew's Gospel reminds us, in the end we will all be judged by how we have cared for the least among us. This means that the Catholic social mission is an essential part of the faith life of every able Catholic. It must be woven into education programs so that all Catholics learn about Catholic social teaching. It must be reflected in the prayer and worship of our faith community. And it must include a wide range of opportunities for members of our parishes to act and reflect upon the social dimensions of our faith.
5. Parish Social Ministers in their leadership capacities should ***organize the work, not do the work.*** The primary role of these leaders is to provide opportunities, and to invite, train, and support members of their faith community to become involved in the Catholic social mission. For example, the leaders of the parish's program to support a local soup kitchen can do their job well only by creating opportunities and inviting other parishioners to volunteer. This is not to suggest that parish social ministers should absent themselves from being involved in the doing of the work; rather, in the role of leader/organizer/planner, the critical task at hand is to organize, invite, recruit, orchestrate and create opportunities for the parish, and all of its members, to become engaged.
6. Parish Social Ministry should include ***both efforts to provide direct service or outreach to people in need and efforts to work for justice and peace by shaping the policies, programs, and structures of society.*** These two dimensions of the Catholic social mission are essential and complementary. We need to ask the question: "Why is there hunger, homelessness, or lack of employment in our neighborhood?" and work with others to alleviate these situations that cause human suffering.
7. ***Three concentric circles form the locus of parish social ministry:*** the parish community; the region in which the parish is located; and the global community. "As the objects of God's love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity and to weave networks of Charity." (*Caritas in Veritate*, 5) These networks of charity are woven into the fabric of parish life.

Social Ministry focused on the parish community is exemplified best in the Parish Care and Concern Model outlined in "Jump Start your Parish Social Ministry" published by the Diocese of Erie. The Parish Care and Concern Model of service engages parishioners in helping to meet some of the social and human needs of the parish community. The model is based on the fact that ***all parishioners are gifted through baptism and have both a right and responsibility to***



Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Department for Human Life and Dignity

use their gifts in the service of others. Each parish assesses the needs and determines the types of care and concern ministries they will implement. *Care and concern ministries flow from the sacramental and pastoral ministries of the parish.* They are in addition to sacramental ministries. There are basic services that are needed in practically every parish:

- social visitation of the sick, the homebound, the bereaved, the lonely, new parents, new parishioners, the college-bound
- providing meals in times of family crisis
- minor home repairs or seasonal yard work (leaf and snow removal)
- communication of care including phone calls, birthday cards, valentines, bereavement, graduation, sweet 16, etc.
- prayer ministries — prayer chains, rosaries and devotions for families in crisis or transition, as well as prayer shawl ministries for the aged, newborns, the bereft, disabled and college-bound parishioners

Parish social ministry focused on the region includes responding to the human, social and economic needs of the community at large. Basic needs such as food, shelter, and utility assistance are offered in collaboration with other entities to the local community. These prayerful works of charity are coupled with the prayer and community organizing to address the root causes of these societal problems.

Outreach is not limited to the local community. As Catholics we are called to *global solidarity*. St. Paul took up a collection for Jerusalem (Acts). To be Catholic means to be global. Our parishes can develop meaningful, measureable and sustainable outreach to the global community. This outreach, however, is facilitated most effectively through Catholic conduits, such as Catholic Relief Services. Catholic conduits have accountability, transparency and are coordinated with and through the local bishops in the international community. Global solidarity enables parishioners to feel empowered to address some of the most pressing global issues. It makes our faith relevant.

ORGANIZERS AND DOERS

To understand the role of social ministry leaders, it is essential to understand the difference between "organizers" and "doers". These two activities are very different and require different characteristics.

Organizers tend to do the following activities:

- Planning
- Being strategic
- Recruiting leaders and participants
- Bringing people together
- Organizing training sessions on Catholic social teaching and social ministry skills
- Facilitating problem-solving discussions and meetings
- Visioning
- Listening and communicating

Doers of social ministry are busy with:

- Putting the solutions into action



Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Department for Human Life and Dignity

- Being energetic and dedicated to completing tasks
- Learning ministry skills
- Deepening their baptismal call to serve through participation in on-going formation
- Providing input, ideas, and data that shape the planning process

As distinguished from the leaders of social ministry who are the "organizers, "doers" of social ministry make sure specific tasks get done. The "doers" are the people who make the home visits to the elderly, who collect/distribute the food, who write the letters to the legislators, who attend the rally sponsored by the community organization, who make a trip with fellow parishioners to the sister parish in Haiti. They do not organize the effort; they perform the service. Of course, organizers can be doers and vice versa. However, it is critical to know the difference and to make sure the parish has a structure or system that includes leaders, or organizers, who make sure many parishioners have opportunities to become "doers".

Effective parish social ministry emerges from attentiveness to the word of God, eyes to see the needs in your community and beyond, a commitment to work for greater justice and peace, a frank assessment of your current efforts, and a willingness to collaborate within and beyond the parish. (Communities of Salt and Light, p. 1)

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- ✓ A measured increase in "affiliation" with the parish community by parishioners, thus enhancing their Catholic identity and self-realization as disciples of Jesus Christ
- ✓ Sustainable ministries that become woven into the fabric of parish life and pastoral planning
- ✓ Solutions to pressing community needs that produce measured success in reducing human suffering
- ✓ Greater visibility in the community of the local Catholic parish as a resource for change that fosters human life and dignity
- ✓ Increase in vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life and ecclesial lay ministry
- ✓ The Church becoming more ALIVE

There are a myriad of theories as to why some Catholics leave the Church. It is my assertion that **no one ever left the Church because they were loved.** Parish Social Ministry makes visible the love of God made known through Christ. Giving and receiving love animates the Church ALIVE.