

Building Social Justice Committee

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 Committee

1. Convene (personal invitation and appointment) a beginning core committee of seven to ten members.
2. Develop a brief vision statement and some operating guidelines (see other side) to be approved by your parish council. (Keep the council 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).
3. 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.
4. Provide educational experiences for the committee and gather information:
 - Biblical/Scriptural foundations for Catholic social teaching
 - Basic principles from Catholic social teaching
 - Archdiocesan programs and resources for justice work
 - Skills workshops and training of volunteers for effective action
5. Contact existing justice committees at neighboring parishes
6. 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.
7. Establish goals and plans for action with a simple timetable.
8. 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 committee? (pastoral minister, director of religious education, deacon, etc.)
9. Many committees like to meet in regional gatherings where they exchange information and get new ideas. This is an important act of solidarity for all committees, young and old alike. Contact the Office for Social Justice for a list of contact persons in your region.
10. If you get stuck, or find an issue you want to work on but are unsure of how to begin, contact Cheryl Peterson, Parish Social Justice Manager, at (651)291-4490.

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.