ORGANIZING A PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY COORDINATION TEAM

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. There is much ministry to do but the good news is that there are plenty of baptized sisters and brothers to invite to participate. One important challenge is to create an effective structure for carrying out this important work. The vision for parish social ministry outlined in *Communities of Salt and Light* has profound implications for the way we organize and structure social ministry in our parishes. In the past, the group responsible for social ministry, often called the social concerns committee, was often made up of the very few people who stuffed the Thanksgiving baskets and volunteered at the homeless shelter. *Communities of Salt and Light* challenges us to completely rethink the role, focus and structure of the parish social concerns committee (from this point forward, the "Coordination Team").

An important starting point for building or strengthening a "Coordination Team" is the pastor, the parish staff, and the parish council. While some may want to be more involved than others, it is essential that the pastor, staff, and leaders of the parish be kept informed at all times.

Since *Communities of Salt and Light* was issued by the United States bishops in 1993-94, many parishes have tried to make this vision a reality. The following description draws on these experiences. . It is a model not in the sense that it is "ideal" or rigid, but in the sense that it provides an example. It includes all the elements described in *Communities of Salt and Light* but is intended to be adjusted to meet the unique needs of each parish. We realize that no two parish social concerns coordination teams will be identical and that most parishes are always in the process of developing and strengthening their social ministry programs.

Three Basic Messages

Communities of Salt and Light provides three key messages that have implications for the responsibilities and structures of the "Coordination Team":

(1) 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 (not just the usual suspects on the social concerns committee) 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 on the social dimensions of our faith.

(2) Social concerns committees, in their leadership capacity, **should *organize* the work, not *do* the work.** The primary role of these leaders is to provide opportunities, invite and recruit members of their faith community to become involved in 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 members of "Coordination Team" 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.

(3) Parish social ministry must include both **efforts to provide direct service or outreach to people in need <u>and</u> 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.

<u>Basic Structure</u>

In *Communities of Salt and Light*, the bishops highlight seven elements for effective parish social ministry:

- Prayer and Worship
- Education and Formation
- Family, Work, Citizenship
- Outreach and Charity
- Legislative Advocacy
- Community Organizing
- Global Solidarity

Parishes that seek to realize this vision will structure their "Coordination Team" so that someone or some group/committee is responsible for making sure each element comes to life in the parish. In other words, it is important that there is a person or a group of people responsible for organizing activity in each area listed above. (See diagram on page 7.)

The "Coordination Team", then, is made up of (at least) leaders from each area of activity. Depending on the size of the parish, this could include a coordinator for each general area (e.g. an outreach and charity leader or an advocacy leader). Or the "Coordination Team" could include a representative from each subgroup within each general area (e.g., for outreach and charity, a leader from the parish St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Gabriel Project; from advocacy, representatives of the legislative network and the parish's Bread for the World group). The diagrams at the end of this article illustrate (a) a parish social ministry coordination team that is fully developed in light of the elements of *Communities of Salt and Light* and (B) how one parish chose to begin building its parish social ministry team. It is important to keep in mind that these are only an examples There are certainly other ways to organize the work to ensure that all elements of the *Communities of Salt and Light* framework are covered and that engaging and effective social ministry can occur in the parish.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each activity area shown in the diagram represents an area of responsibility or function that might be filled by one or a few people or by several sub-groups. The following descriptions of the areas include examples for illustration purposes. In each of the areas described, it is essential for social concerns leaders to respect the expertise of those parish staff members and volunteer leaders who are responsible for, or involved in, related ministries or programs.

<u>Prayer and Worship Leader(s) or Team</u>

The Prayer and Worship leader or team of the "Coordination Team" is not the same as the parish Liturgy Committee. This is a person or group whose job is to work with those who plan parish liturgies, pointing out opportunities to connect Sunday liturgies to Catholic social mission and organizing prayer services focused on charity, justice, and peace. For example, when a legislative advocacy day is planned by the

advocacy team and/or an issue subcommittee (e.g., a hunger group), the social concerns committee's prayer and worship leader(s) might plan a prayer service and might work with parish liturgy planners to include prayers for the success of the event in the general intercessions on the preceding Sunday. When a collection of goods for homeless people is planned, the prayer and worship leader(s) might work with the parish liturgy planners to include some of these goods as part of the presentation of the gifts. The "Coordination Team's" prayer and worship leader(s) might also organize a "prayer network" to pray about issues of human life, justice and peace, or might organize special prayer services to mark feast days and other events that highlight the social mission of the church. It is essential that these activities be carried out in a way that is respectful of the expertise and areas of responsibility of those whose job is to plan liturgies.

Education and Formation Leader(s) or Team

The primary role of the Education and Formation Leader or Team is to ensure that the social mission of the Church and Catholic Social Teaching is integral to all education and formation efforts. For example, they would work with the parish DRE and the School Principal, if applicable, to ensure that the Catholic social mission is incorporated into all parish educational programs. This might include organizing an in-service on the Catholic social mission for catechists or the school faculty, or providing them with a list of educational resources on Catholic social teaching. It might mean letting education staff or leaders know what is being planned by the "Coordination Team" and developing a plan for involving students in some of these outreach and advocacy activities. It might include organizing a session on the Catholic social mission for sacramental preparation programs or the RCIA process. It could mean that this team sponsors JustFaith in the parish or CCHD's Journey to Justice Program. In some parishes, the DRE is happy to turn over to this person or group the responsibility these types of activities. It is essential that the Education and Formation Leader(s) work with the DRE and school principal to develop a plan for the year that not only ensures that the Catholic social mission is explicitly taught, but also respects the expertise and areas of responsibility of the parish's education leaders.

Family, Work, Citizenship Leader(s) or Team

Whether it is one person or a group of people, it is important that someone take responsibility for finding ways to help parishioners live their faith in everyday life—at home, at work, and in their communities. This might include organizing a workshop on socially responsible investing or providing family-focused social ministry activities when all age levels can participate together. It might involve regularly including in the bulletin information about church teaching on "faithful citizenship" or organizing occupation reflections groups (e.g., when people in similar occupations or professions gather to discuss how their faith shapes their work lives).

Charity and Outreach Leader(s) or Team

This is the person or group that focuses on direct service activities to people in need. They might organize parishioners to serve once a month at a soup kitchen, or to fold clothes every week at a clothing distribution center. They might organize a collection of blankets for homeless people or a collection of food for Thanksgiving baskets. The key is understanding that this person's or team's job is not simply to show up at the soup kitchen, but to provide opportunities for other parishioners to get involved. Recruitment of volunteers is the critical task. In some parishes, this team may be made up of leaders who organize various ongoing outreach projects or programs (e.g., St. Vincent de Paul, Gabriel Project, Thanksgiving baskets, etc.). Where outreach programs have been active for a long time, it is important to connect them to the larger social ministry effort in ways that respect the knowledge and experience of those who have been working hard on parish outreach, sometimes for many years.

Advocacy Leader(s) or Team

The Legislative Advocacy Leader or Team is the person or group that creates opportunities for parishioners to be involved in working on public policies related to justice and peace. This might mean organizing a parish chapter of a diocesan legislative network or a parish affiliate of a group like Bread for the World. It might include coordinating parish participation in a lobby day organized by the state Catholic conference. It might involve providing information to parishioners about other local advocacy groups. It might also include inviting local elected officials to meet with parishioners about important local issues or inviting speakers to discuss church teaching on public policy issues. Again, it is essential that this person or team understands their role as providing opportunities for many parishioners to be involved in shaping a world that protects human life and dignity and promotes justice and peace.

Community Organizing Leader(s) or Team

The Catholic Church in the United States has a long history of supporting community organizing projects that empower people in low-income communities to improve their neighborhoods and their lives. One of the key ways we do this is through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), a collection taken in parishes nationwide each year through which grants are given to local community organizations. The role of the Community Organizing Leader or Team has two key components: (1) providing information to parishioners about the CCHD collection so that they see it not as a burden, but as a valuable opportunity to support self-help efforts in low-income communities; and (2) enabling and encouraging parishioners to become involved in community organizing projects that are active in the local community. This could involve bringing low-income leaders from local community organizing groups to the parish to share their stories and describe their work in the community.

Global Solidarity and Peace Leader(s) or Team

A common perception is that it is easier for parishioners to find ways to respond to local needs than to identify ways they can make a real difference for people half a world away. Therefore, the Global Solidarity and Peace Leader or Team is responsible for organizing opportunities for parishioners to respond to the needs of our sisters and brothers around the world. Since Catholic Relief Services of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has as its mission the call to global solidarity and peace, promoting and organizing its wide variety of programs can be central to this team's efforts. This could mean establishing a sister parish relationship with a parish in another land. It might involve organizing a mission trip to another country or organizing Operation Rice Bowl in the parish. It might also involve bringing in speakers who have recently returned from overseas or sharing information about the Catholic Relief Services Collection, an opportunity for Catholics to contribute to our faith community's programs for global relief and development, refugee assistance, and advocacy. It may also include organizing a parish chapter of Pax Christi.

Issue-Specific Teams

These groups, identified in the diagram by names like Hunger Subcommittee or Death Penalty Subcommittee, are typically groups who have a commitment to a particular need, cause or organization. They often reflect the needs of the local area or the charism of some parishioners. These groups reflect the uniqueness of parish social missions and that of their constituents. Each of these group's efforts needs to be orchestrated with the rest of the "Coordination Team's" work. By having each subcommittee linked together, healthy cross-pollination of ideas and the nurture of respect for other ministries is encouraged and celebrated. In addition, these ministries are encouraged to craft their work with attention to the values and concerns sounded by *Communities of Salt and Light*. This means, for

example, a group like the Hunger Subcommittee will be encouraged and engaged to consider how its work can/should address those appropriate areas of concern represented by leaders and teams attentive to the vision of *Communities of Salt and Light.*

The Parish Social Ministry Coordination Team

Drawing from the diagram, the "Coordination Team" is usually made up of leaders or representatives from each of the social ministry sub-areas described above. They meet regularly (monthly) to keep each other informed about all social ministry activities. A chairperson or co-chairpersons convenes and runs the meetings. These meetings serve a number of important purposes:

- They provide a setting for creating and maintaining an **effective system of communication** about parish social ministry activities, making sure that the various leaders and activities are not "bumping into each other" due to duplication, poor communication, unplanned recruitment, or other reasons.

- They ensure that each social ministry leader or team produces some type of **annual plan** so that the efforts are well thought out and the tasks identified can be accomplished.

- They provide opportunities to **identify situations where two or more leaders or teams might work together**. For example, the global solidarity leader(s) and the legislative advocacy leader(s) might work together to help the parish respond to a crisis somewhere in the world. Part of the response might involve a collection of money or goods. Another part of the response might involve lobbying on U.S. policy related to the crisis or related to poverty in the U.S. and abroad.

- They allow the leaders or teams that relate to other ministries in the parish (e.g., prayer/worship and education/formation) to keep abreast of what other social concerns leaders are planning so they can **identify opportunities to make connections among parish ministries**. For example, the education/formation leader(s) might learn from the advocacy leader(s) about plans for a pro-life rally in the state capital and might work with the DRE to arrange for Confirmation candidates to participate.

- They provide a forum for proposing and discussing major **new social ministry initiatives** in the parish. For example, they might provide a forum on faith-based community organizing and what it means for the parish and the community.

- They provide for **accountability**. If a leader or team doesn't have anything to report, they may not be doing their job!

The Parish Social Ministry Coordination Team has, at its heart, these primary oversight and support functions:

1. Coordinating social ministry activities to ensure a smooth, well functioning operation.
2. Providing oversight of the integration of the parish social ministry effort into the overall life of the parish.
3. Providing oversight (and coordination) of the planning for the different social ministry activities.

4. Developing an effective and comprehensive system of communication with special emphasis on communication with the pastor and parish council.
5. Identifying emerging parish and community social ministry needs and potential leaders.
6. Providing social ministry skills training opportunities for parishioners.
7. Maintaining communication with diocesan offices that can deliver professional skills training and support for social ministry leaders.
8. Emphasizing the seven touchstones described in *Communities of Salt & Light*

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. Please consider… ***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…

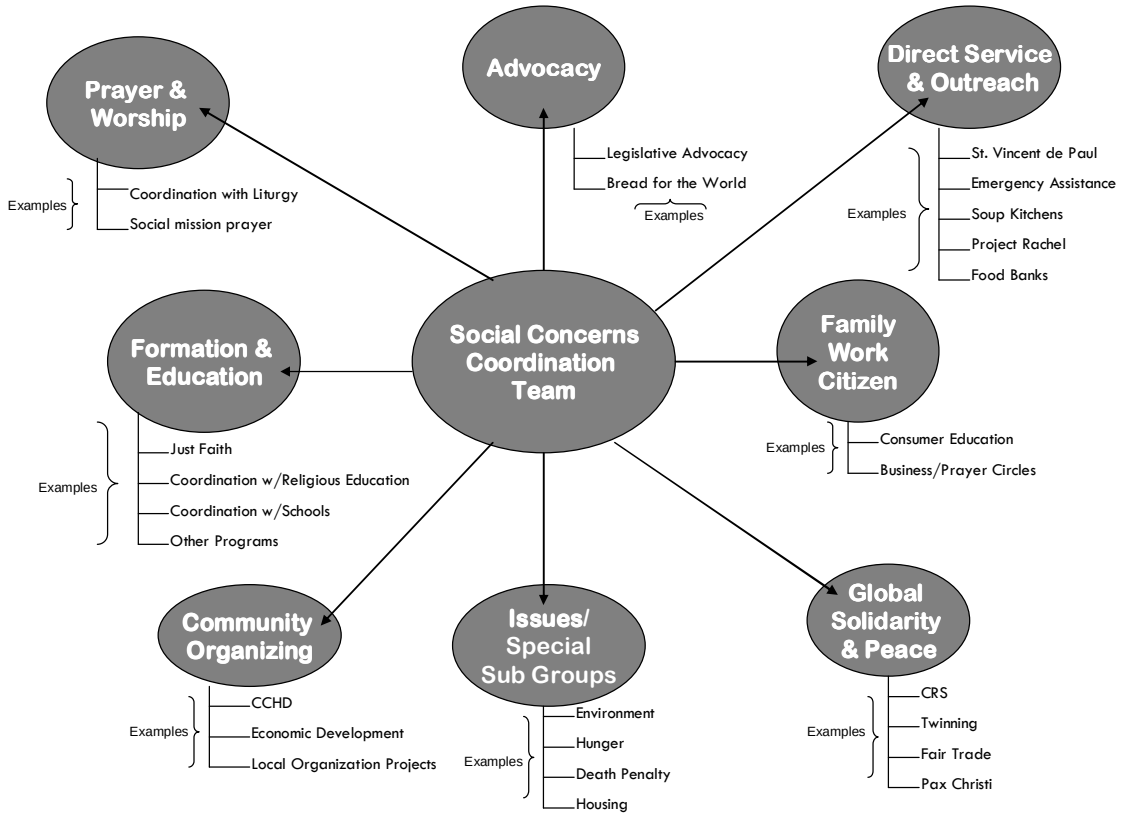
- Putting the solutions into action
- Being energetic and dedicated to completing tasks
- Learning ministry skills
- Deepening their baptismal call to serve through participation in on-going formation
- Providing input, ideas, data that shapes the planning process

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, the critical thing is 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."

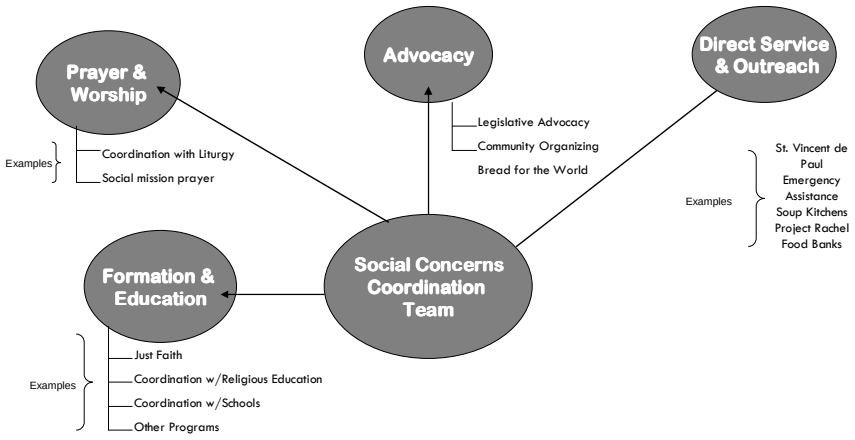
ONE MODEL, NOT THE ONLY MODEL

There are many structures that a parish can create to make sure that "organizing" and "doing" social ministry happens, to ensure that our social mission is woven throughout parish life, and to ensure that social ministry includes a variety of opportunities for parishioners to act through service and through advocacy or working for justice and peace. This is just one model. Structural experimentation is encouraged because the structure must meet the unique qualities of and challenges faced by each parish and must relate to the general structures and leaders of the parish, including to the staff and the parish council. The important point is to make sure that a core group of people are specifically responsible for helping the parish act on each of the elements of effective parish social ministry outlined in *Communities of Salt and Light.*

A. Parish Social Ministry Coordination Team



B. Starting point for one parish:



Note: Global solidarity is woven throughout.