



PARISH HUMAN CONCERNS Commission



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	2
INTRODUCTION	
• The Church and Catholic Social Teaching by Archbishop Jerome E. Listecki	
• Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching	
SECTION I: THE HUMAN CONCERNS COMMISSION	4
Flowchart of the Parish Community	
Description of the Human Concerns Commission	
The Role of a Parish Commission	
Functions	
• Areas of Responsibility	
Commission Leadership and Members	
• Human Concerns Commission Leadership	
• Human Concerns Commission Membership	
• Ex Officio Members of the Human Concerns Commission	
• Possible Sub-Commissions/Ministry Teams	
• A Note About Parish Staffs	
Spirituality of Human Concerns Ministry	
SECTION II: HUMAN CONCERNS COMMISSION STRUCTURES	14
Components of Parish Social Ministry	
• Justice Education	
• Direct Service	
• Advocacy	
• Empowerment	
A Word about Structures and Sub-Commissions	
Steps in Forming/Reforming the Human Concerns Commission or Multi-Parish Commission	
Planning Process	
Ideas for Collaboration	
• Collaboration with Other Parishes and Models	
• Annual or Semi-Annual Projects	
• Collaboration Within Your Parish	
• Collaboration With Other Denominations	
Global Relationships	
• Global Parish Twining	
APPENDIX	20
A. Self-evaluation for Humans Concerns	
B. Productive Meetings	
C. Hints for Recruiting Volunteers	
D. Parish Outreach	
E. Overview of Catholic Social Teaching	
F. Additional Resources and Sources	

PREFACE

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.*

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.*

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.
Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

— Matthew 5:3-12



Our hope is that leaders and members of parish Human Concerns Commissions in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee can use this booklet as a resource. One may want to read it cover-to-cover, but you may also select parts for specific suggestions, direction or clarification. Archdiocesan staff are available to assist Commissions in their training and formation.



The St. Martin de Porres Food Pantry is a beneficiary of the CRS Rice Bowls.

Logically, the booklet begins with some background on why we, as Catholics, are called to work for justice. In his introduction, Archbishop ListECKI emphasizes the importance of living the Great Commandment. Following the introduction, we have a “summary” of major themes woven throughout our social doctrine. This only provides the reader a synopsis. For more in-depth resources on Catholic Social Teaching, Respect for Life and a variety of justice issues, please refer to the resource list in the appendixes.

INTRODUCTION

The Church and Catholic Social Teaching by Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKi

April 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,



Thank you for your desire to live out the charitable aspect of your faith and to help others do the same.

When Jesus commissioned his disciples, he told them to teach all the nations to “observe all that I have commended you” (Matthew 28: 20). Although Jesus had several commands, one appropriate way to sum them up is to love God and love one another. Our love for God is merely a recognition that God loves us first. God’s gift of love embodied in our Savior, Jesus Christ, allows us to love God and to love one another.

As Pope Francis has written: “We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 14). Not only do we bear witness in our own lives, we also bear witness as a Church through our parishes and our charitable organizations. It is the particular role of our parish Human Concerns commissions to help the parish itself, and everyone in the parish, to love God and love one another.

One of the pastoral priorities from our 2014 Synod is to provide a strong, coordinated Catholic response in relation to social issues in our communities in the archdiocese. One of the ways we do this is by encouraging the creation or expansion of service opportunities and inviting more people to become involved in this work of the Church. Again, the parish Human Concerns commission should play a crucial role in encouraging, expanding and inviting.

My hope is that this handbook will provide helpful resources and effective techniques for carrying out this important mission of the Church. Even more so, my prayer is that it helps all of us conduct ourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ! If we do that, we will be loving God and loving one another.

With assurance of prayers, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads “+ Jerome E. ListECKi”. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKi
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

No single summary list captures the entirety of Catholic Social Teaching. The most comprehensive summary of Catholic Social Teaching can be found in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, available on the Vatican website (www.vatican.va) or from booksellers. The Compendium is 255 pages of text, which is a valuable, but time-consuming, undertaking. The following list of key emphasis, which characterize Catholic Social Teaching today, is drawn from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' document, *Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, and our hope is that it encourages further study and reflection on Catholic Social Teaching.



Catholic Social Teaching is one of our Church's greatest treasures. Since the time of the Apostles, Church leaders have sought to relate the Gospel to the conditions of their age. Jesus's call in Matthew 25, to be good and faithful servants who serve the hungry and the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the ill and the incarcerated – all these and more are the basis for this social teaching. From the late nineteenth century to the present day, popes, councils and bishops have condensed this teaching into the seven fundamental principles described below. These principles, and related themes from Catholic Social Teaching, provide a moral framework that does not easily fit liberal or conservative ideologies or political party platforms. They are nonpartisan and nonsectarian, reflecting fundamental ethical principles that are common to all people.

The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person

Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. This teaching also compels us as Catholics to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism and other conditions that demean human life.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. This sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children must not be redefined, undermined, or neglected. Supporting families should be a priority for economic and social policies. How our society is organized — in economics and politics, in law and public policy — affects the well-being of individuals and of society. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate in shaping society to promote the wellbeing of individuals and the common good.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible. Each of us has a right to religious freedom, which enables us to live and act in accord with our God-given dignity, as well as a right to access the things required for human decency — food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities — to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us — the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the poor and marginalized.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Economic justice calls for decent work at fair, living wages, opportunities for legal status for immigrant workers, and the opportunity for all people to work together for the common good through their work, ownership, enterprise, investment, participation in unions, and other forms of economic activity.

Solidarity

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Our Catholic commitment to solidarity requires that we pursue justice, eliminate racism, end human trafficking, protect human rights, seek peace, and avoid the use of force except as a necessary last resort.

Caring for God's Creation

Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We all are called to be careful stewards of God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.



SECTION I: THE HUMAN CONCERNS COMMISSION

(The following section is from Parish Commissions and Commissions Manual: Archdiocese of Milwaukee)

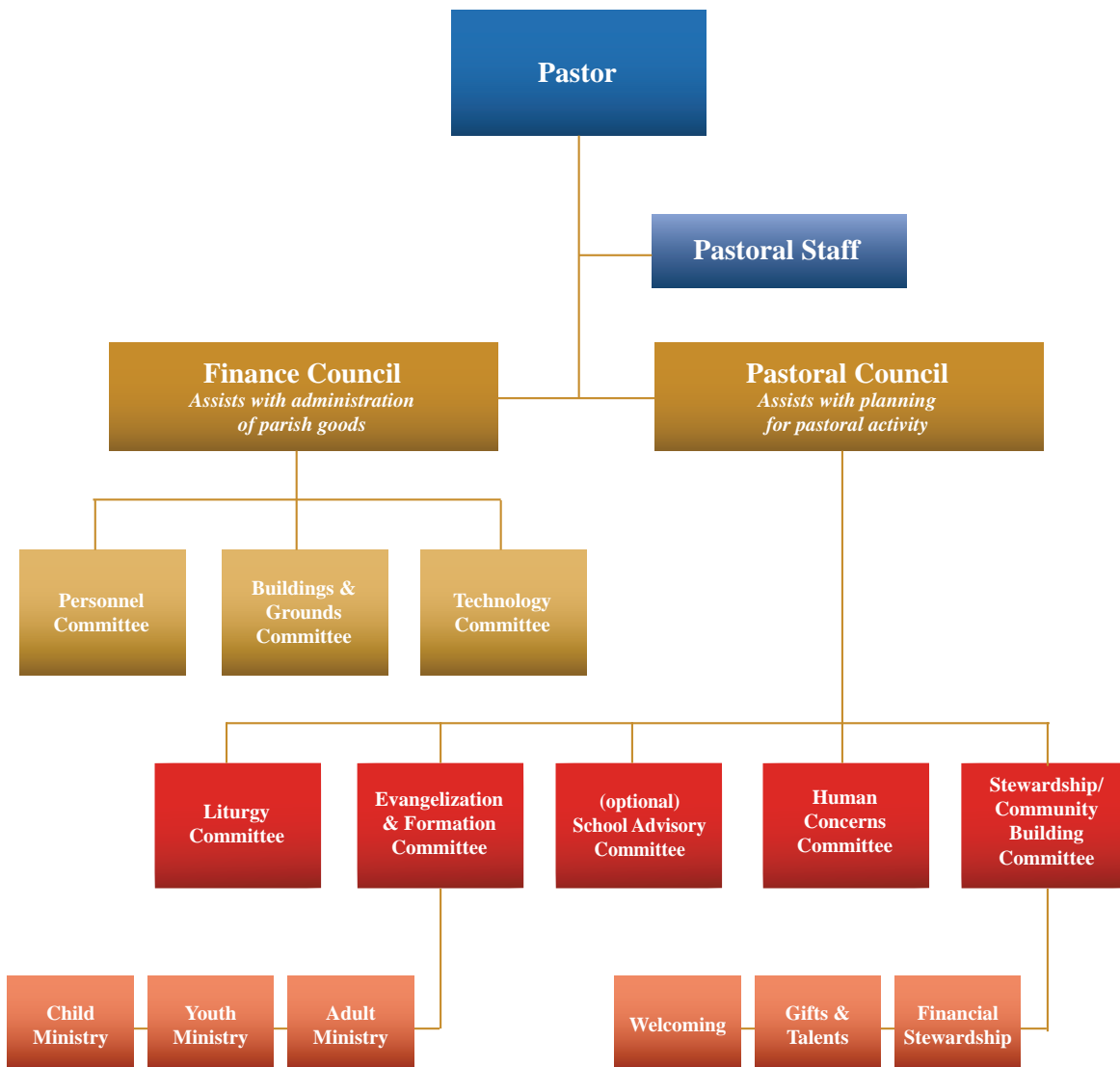
Note of terminology

Commissions - parishes which have specific ministry groups under each area of mission use this term to designate the four or five (if there is a School Advisory group) areas of mission in the parish.

Committees - this term can be used for the standing committees or for groups that serve under the standing committee. Many parishes prefer this term to a sub-committee.

Ministry Teams - this term can be used for groups that serve under a standing committee. Commissions or committees like Worship and Human Concerns may prefer this term to others.

Flowchart of the Parish Community



Description of the Human Concerns Commission

Each Parish Council has four or five standing commissions to assist with the implementation and coordination of pastoral activity in the parish. Councils may choose between the titles of “Commission” or “Committee” for these groups. One of the standing commissions is Human Concerns.

The Human Concerns commission discerns and responds to the needs of persons in the parish, the wider community and the world by identifying resources to meet their needs and enlisting the active cooperation of parishioners. The members collaborate with the pastor, staff, and other organizations and agencies in service, advocacy, justice education and empowerment of people. The commission may have subcommittees to work in particular areas, such as promoting the pro-life movement, a meal program, or a food pantry.

Purpose

The purpose of the Human Concerns standing commission is to discern the needs of people in the parish and wider community – especially the poor – and identify resources to meet those needs while enlisting the active support and participation of parish members. This commission helps to fulfill the justice dimensions of scripture and our Catholic social teaching tradition while acknowledging that every Christian is called to service and to work for justice.

The focus of the commission is on the fourfold task of Catholic social ministry:

- **Direct Service** – assist the parish in performing works of charity and in relating to organizations that provide direct service to people in need
- **Justice Education** – raise awareness among parishioners about social justice issues and Catholic Social Teaching
- **Advocacy** – form partnerships with organizations that serve as advocates for the poor, the vulnerable, and the unborn that work for changes in public policy and societal structures so as to aid the poor, the vulnerable, and the unborn.
- **Empowerment** – develop practices and support organizations that encourage people in need to take action themselves.

Commission members are not responsible to actually do all the commission’s work, but rather to involve others in actively accepting the responsibility of the baptism. The commission supports those in the parish who are already involved in service, social action and justice education. This commission works with community groups and other parishes to help solve social problems. They keep parishioners aware of issues related to justice and peace on local, national and international level, so that appropriate Christian action on such issues can be determined. Respect for Life, which covers a variety important in life issues, but particularly focuses on anti-abortion efforts, should be integrated into the justice activities of the Human Concerns commission. A parish may also develop its own area of special concern based on the needs in the area.

The Role of a Parish Commission

Commissions are the working bodies of the pastoral council. They study, pray and act to make the parish the real center through which the Church carries out its mission. The commissions implement the pastoral council’s priorities and goals, thereby serving the parish community in many important ways, but especially by broadening the representation and participation of parishioners in parish life. Whatever the commission plans and proposes to the pastoral council needs to help the parish move toward accomplishing its stated mission.

Functions

Areas of Responsibility

The Human Concerns commission is responsible for these key functions:

1. Assess the level of basic human needs within the parish and the wider community by studying the demographics of the parish area and surveying the needs.
2. Identify resources to meet needs by learning about existing Church agencies and community groups and providing referral information.
3. Develop services and programs by involving others in the ministry to help people in need and to work for justice.
4. Develop a parish-wide consciousness of Catholic Social Teaching by educating and forming people about right to life and human dignity issues.
5. Coordinate and support the activity of commissions and ministry teams which are directly involved in particular projects and ministries.
6. Promote and organize twinning and sharing relationships with international or national parishes as well as parishes within the diocese.
7. Review and evaluate the commission budget in conjunction with the parish finance council.

The mission of Human Concerns usually requires the commission to organize into subcommissions or ministry teams in order to address specific activities and projects. The commission's role is to monitor, evaluate, and collaborate with these groups so that they minister more effectively. These commissions or ministry teams should report their activity regularly to the commission. Commissions should meet with these groups periodically to discuss the current state of the ministerial activity and to exchange new ideas for more effective ministry.

Commission Leadership and Members

Human Concerns Commission leadership and members include:

- Leadership (Commission officers and parish staff)
- Commission membership
- Ex officio members

“The biblical call to charity, justice and peace claims not only each believer, but each community.”

— USCCB, Communities of Salt and Light

Human Concerns Commission Leadership

It is recommended that each commission have a chair, a vice chair, and a secretary. If that is not possible, the chair is essential and someone else should record minutes of the meeting. Each commission regularly selects a chair from its members.

The Human Concerns commission chair is responsible for the direction, coordination and promotion of the commission's work. This does not mean that the chair does all the work! The chair acts as a facilitator for the commission - planning the agenda with others, running the meetings, delegating tasks for the commission's activities, and helping the commission to appropriate conclusions. The chair should see that regular evaluations and an annual planning process takes place. This person serves as a communication link between the parish, the broader community, and the archdiocesan offices. The chair needs to be sensitive to the balance between the number of members on the commission and its responsibilities in terms of workload. This issue is addressed by the commission to the establishment of sub-commissions or task groups in the recruitment of new members. Some parishes have co-chairs for the Human Concerns commission.

If the commission has a vice chair, this person conducts meetings when the chair cannot, and in the event of a vacancy, he/she should be familiar with the parish structures and the work of the commission, so as to be able to provide continuity for the group. Some commissions may consider the model of the vice chair becoming the chair the following year.

The secretary records minutes of each Human Concerns meeting and distributes them to members, the pastoral council, the parish staff and other interested people. The secretary may be asked to be responsible for the correspondence, and preparing bulletin announcements to keep the parish informed of the work of the commission. The secretary should keep a permanent file, with minutes, sub-commission reports and other correspondence.

Human Concerns Commission Membership

Commission membership is voluntary and every parishioner is a potential Human Concerns member. However, people need to be repeatedly encouraged and personally invited to join the commission and be made to feel welcome and needed. Nurturing commission members and recruiting new members is important. Lack of organization, unproductive meetings and overuse of the same people are sure ways to discourage parishioners in joining commissions. A successful Human Concerns commission includes a definite length of membership (e.g. 1 to 3 years), well run meetings, a clear sense of purpose, good social interaction and recognition of time and effort.



Human Concern members: Commissions are made up of parishioners whose talents and interests are especially suited to service, justice education, and social action. Qualifications include:

- An understanding of the commission's ministry
- A willingness to learn
- A sense of the importance of searching out and responding to the needs of people
- An ability to work well with others
- Availability

Annually, the Human Concerns commission should provide an orientation for new members to explain the purpose of responsibilities of the commission and the expectations of its members. All commission members need continued education in the area of social justice, both at regular meetings and in workshops and conferences. Human Concerns commission chairs are encouraged to call upon the archdiocese for resources.

Ex Officio Members of the Human Concerns Commission

Every commission of the pastoral council has *ex officio* members who are permanent members because of another position held, e.g., pastoral council liaison. *Ex officio* commission members are persons with a broader base of experience and information whose input on the commission is respected as such. These members participate fully in equally and decision-making.

There are *ex officio* members of the commission who serve by virtue of their office. Additional members are selected to serve on the commission. The parish can determine a membership formula for the commission in order to represent the tasks of Catholic social ministry. The parish can also require some formation and/or experience of members in order to serve.

Ex Officio Members

- Pastor or Parish Director
- Staff member with responsibilities for Human Concerns ministries
- Pastoral Council liaison
- Representatives of other Social Justice ministry in parish, e.g., St. Vincent de Paul Conference, Knights of Columbus, etc.

Representatives of parish organizations need to be encouraged to participate in commissions with similar areas of responsibilities as *ex officio* members. For example, the St. Vincent de Paul Society should have a representative on the Human Concerns commission if the parish has a conference. This type of structuring helps to create a unified effort within the parish and avoid duplication of efforts.

Possible Sub-Commissions/Ministry Teams

A Human Concerns Commission will likely have a number of sub-commissions or ministry teams, which work directly with particular projects or ministries. The commission should coordinate all human concerns projects and ministries. Commissions should consult with the Pastor or Parish Director and the Pastoral Council prior to the organization of any new Commission or ministry team.

Possible Sub-Commissions of the Human Concerns Commission are:

- Respect for Life
- Sister Parish
- Meal Program
- Food Pantry
- Older Adult Ministry

A Note About Parish Staffs

Some parishes in the archdiocese have a full-time or part-time staff member that work with the Human Concerns ministry. It is common for the staff person to have a number of roles within his or her job description. Staff may help empower and enable the Human Concerns ministry to move ahead in the life of the parish. Some ways the staff person can go about this include:

- Helping to deepen the faith dimension of the committee
- Providing a support base for the chair
- Helping to research issues
- Providing a link to other parish staff, to other parishes, and the broader community
- Helping parish members to fulfil the Gospel mandate of justice and service
- Encouraging and assisting in leadership development
- Affirming the leader and members of the commission
- Presenting opportunities for growth and learning
- Helping to recruit new committee members
- Sharing archdiocesan resources

“Charity is love received and given. It is “grace” (cháris). Its source is the wellspring of the Father’s love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (cf. Jn 13:1) and “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). 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.

Spirituality of Human Concerns Ministry

“Our social ministry must be anchored in prayer, where we uncover the depths of God’s call to seek justice and pursue peace.” — USCCB, Communities of Salt and Light

Our spirituality develops through reflecting on human experiences in light of scripture and faith tradition. Our experience calls us to make things right. The Gospel mandate of service and action on behalf of people in need challenges us to integrate justice into all parts of our lives. We need to develop a whole new way of seeing, thinking, and looking at issues with the mind of Christ.

As Human Concerns commissions carry out their ministry, and create times for theological reflection, they should do so with appreciation of the whole consistent ethic of life. The consistent ethic of life states that all human life is sacred. As Christians, we have a responsibility, personally and socially, to protect and preserve the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Reflection on the simple fact of the dignity of the human person leaves us to be advocates for a wide variety of life issues.

In looking at the life issues and concerns of our day, we are called to use the lens of scripture and Catholic Social Teaching to interpret and respond to what we see. Catholic Social Teaching begins the inherent dignity of all human people, recognizing their rights and duties, and calls everyone to stewardship of all creation. Our tradition of Catholic Social Teaching includes scripture, papal encyclicals, pastoral letters by the bishops, and a variety of other documents. These all assist the Church and its people to measure and evaluate social structures and institutions.

Human Concerns Commissions need to provide opportunities to explore Catholic Social Teaching in the Scriptures, as well as having opportunities for prayer and reflection as integral parts of the Human Concerns meetings and gatherings. Key elements of any spirituality of a Human Concerns ministry are prayer, reflection, and formation. We also need to ask how we can be empowered to work for social change locally, nationally, and globally. As we look at issues and begin the challenging work of justice, it is important to provide opportunities for people to share their stories and reflect on their experiences. Some ideas for this are:

- Invite people to share their experiences and stories
- Ask who is being affected by a social problem
- Ask why the social problem is occurring
- Explore what our faith tradition says about this
- Ask what steps need to be taken to eliminate this problem
- Reflect on each of these in the context of prayer

The spirituality of Human Concerns ministry is a developing process. In expanding our awareness and deepening our relationship with God, we empower ourselves and others. We learn how to deal with the tension between Gospel values and what is happening in our society.

Theological reflection can help provide necessary information for planning. Providing quality time for examining our faith and actions assists the Human Concerns commission to learn from their experience, to affirm members’ experiences, to discover connections, and to understand the context of the issues.



Unlike business or civic groups, when parish commissions meet, they gather as members of a faith community focused on the mission of Jesus. Each commission is dedicated to a particular area of mission or a specific ministry for which they have responsibility. The manner with which they go about their task serves as an example of unity in Christ. Every meeting becomes an opportunity to proclaim the Word, to worship, to heal and serve, to build and strengthen community.

Commissions should begin in prayer. Here is a simple example to follow

*V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
R. And kindle in them the fire of your love.
V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.
R. And you will renew the face of the earth.
Let us pray.
Lord, may everything we do begin with your inspiration
And continue with your help,
So that all our prayers and works may begin in you
And by you be happily ended.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Prayers to Begin Meetings, Book of Blessings)*



SECTION II: HUMAN CONCERNS COMMISSION STRUCTURES

Pastor or Parish Director. The pastor or parish director must be on board with whatever social ministry there is in a parish. It is vital to keep him or her informed as you proceed, and to enlist the pastor/parish director's support whenever possible. It is the particular responsibility of the chairperson to make certain that there is regular communication with the pastor/parish director. A good question to ask is "What is the best way for me to keep you updated about the work of our committee?" Another is: "Is there anything you really hope we'll do or anything you hope we'll avoid?" (Office of Catholic Social Justice Ministry, Archdiocese of Hartford, *Parish Social Ministry Basics*)

Components of Parish Social Ministry

As stated above, the responsibilities of the Human Concerns commission fall into four main components:

- Justice Education
- Direct Service
- Advocacy
- Empowerment

In all these areas, the Commission needs to keep in mind that they are there to help "call forth every member of the community to use their God-given gifts and experiences to minister to one another (and the whole community)." (Tom Ulrich, *Parish Social Ministry: Strategies for Success*, pg. 21)

Justice education. The Human Concerns commission helps raise awareness within the parish on social justice issues and Catholic Social Teaching. It serves as a catalyst, helping to integrate the justice dimension of our faith and to all levels of parish life. Justice education forms the basis for the parish's work in service and social action.

Direct service. In this area, the commission provides the structure, planning, logistics, etc. for the members of the parish to perform works of charity and provide direct assistance to individuals in need. It deals with the effects of social problems and helps to meet an immediate need such as feeding the hungry, providing shelter and warm clothing, which are considered works of charity.

Advocacy. The Human Concerns commission helps the parish to work for changes in the structures of society that are oppressive so as to aid people in poverty, the vulnerable, and the unborn. Advocacy is the changing of unjust policies and practices of social institutions such as government, business, healthcare, etc. It deals with the causes of problems in ways such as legislative advocacy and helping people help themselves.

Empowerment. The Human Concerns commission develops practices and support organizations which encourage people in need to take action themselves

Human Concerns commissions vary greatly in size, structure, and ability. Some parishes have highly structured social ministry commissions with dozens of volunteers that are members of sub-commissions. For other parishes, two or three people are the entire human concerns commission.

Because of the variety, the commission structure that suggests sub-commissions for justice education, service, and direct action is not always practical. It is recommended that all Human Concerns commissions strive to integrate these components into their ministry. The Gospel clearly mandates that we must be involved in service and action for our sisters and brothers in need.

This may be achieved with good planning. By looking ahead at the coming year or two years, large or small committees can plan their project for special events with a holistic perspective. For example, if the parish regularly prepares food for a meal program, you could also look at simple ways of educating the parish about hunger issues, and being advocates for hungry people.

Keep in mind that there are various levels of involvement — such as creating awareness of local, national, and global justice issues. Many organizations and resources exist which can assist the commission. Think about networking with committees and groups in your parish for justice education and social action.

Some ideas are listed below:

Concern	Justice Education	Direct Service	Advocacy	Empowerment
Hunger	Sponsor educational evening	Food Drive	Bread for the World letters to legislators	Support an employment ministry
Abortion	Respect Life Month Activities	Baby Bottle Collection for Pregnancy Help Center	Human Life Action from NCHLA	Promote Chasity Education

Commissions do not need to reinvent the wheel to be active in these four components. Many church and civil organizations exist to help people in need work for societal change. Here are some ideas

Justice Education

Poverty USA
Catholic Relief Services

Direct Service

St. Vincent de Paul
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Advocacy

Wisconsin Catholic Conference
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Pro-life Secretariat,
Committee for Human Life Amendment,
Catholics Against Global Poverty

Empowerment

Andean Health & Development (focus on health care in rural Ecuador)
Casa Romero Renewal Center, Milwaukee
Center for Working Families, Quito, Ecuador
Guest House of Milwaukee



A Word about Structures and Sub-Commissions

The structure of the Human Concerns commission and its sub-commissions (if they exist) can be similar to the Pastoral Council and its structure. In this case, the Human Concerns commission form sub-commissions to help carry out its responsibilities. The purpose and area of responsibility of the sub-commission is clearly stated in writing and updated when necessary. When possible, each sub-commission has a facilitator and recorder. The facilitator or designated representative of each sub-commission serves as a regular member of the Human Concerns commission similar to a Pastoral Council liaison position.

Steps in Forming/Reforming the Human Concerns Commission or Multi-Parish Commission

Forming or reforming a Human Concerns commission for a single parish or multi-parish community takes time, planning, and leadership. Instead of beginning by inviting all potential members to a meeting to discuss ideas for a few hours, two or three people need to meet first. This small group should spend some time talking about the following items:

- Purpose of the initial coming together
- Identifying decisions that are already made
- Seeking professional help from the parish, the archdiocese, or related agencies
- Deciding what decisions need to be made to move forward
- What exactly will happen at the first gathering.

Unless the first meeting is well planned and executed, participants leave with a sense of frustration or lack of purpose and direction. You run the risk of people not returning. The result of the initial meeting can simply be to call another meeting to further explore ideas, but participants must have a sense of process and closure leading to a tangible action in the future.

Someone needs to accept responsibility for leading the first meeting. This person might not become the chair for the group. In addition, someone needs to record decisions and plans made at the meeting. Again, this person might not become the secretary for the group, but initial records should be kept.

After the initial planning, the commission can be called together. If a commission for a multi-parish community is planned, it will have to be determined if the entire commission from each parish will be invited, or only the chair or representatives. If the question is in “what will the group do?” a full day of reflection, formation, socializing and planning maybe more appropriate. Well-planned prayer time and hospitality will set the tone for getting to know each other. Another activity could be to brainstorm needs and concerns. Participants should receive an agenda in advance of the meeting, so they will know what to expect and can make any necessary preparations.

The first meeting should include:

- Introductions
- Prayer
- A review of the purpose for coming together
- Share individual gifts, talents and experiences that each person brings to the group; or share what each parish is doing that may help the multi-parish group
- How the chair will be selected
- Where and when will the next meeting be held
- Who will be responsible for prayer/ hospitality/ formation

Initially your meetings may be more frequent (monthly). Eventually as the group discovers its identity, the frequency of meetings may be adjusted to meet the needs of the group.

Activities for later meetings include:

- Brainstorm common social needs (crime, racism, the environment, unemployment, domestic abuse etc.) or plan to conduct a needs assessment.
- Prioritize needs based on specific criteria: urgency, mutual interest, likelihood to be met.
- Discuss ideas of ways to meet needs
- Set goals and objectives, and put them in writing

- Determine the relationship between the commission and the parish; or the relationship between the multi-parish commission and the individual parishes; part of this task involves establishing communication links
- Investigate and research methods of implementation considering the cost involved
- Decide on implementation; at this point consider breaking into subcommittees.

Planning Process

The commission should keep in mind a planning process like the one below. They should know where they are at in the process and look ahead to the next steps.

1. Mission - affirming the parish mission statement
2. Analysis of the of the situation - knowing the history of the parish
3. Vision - visioning in the future
4. Needs assessment - assessing the needs and setting priorities
5. Goals/Objectives - setting goals and objectives and developing action plans
6. Implementation - implementing specific programs and services
7. Evaluation - evaluating and adjusting the plans.

Make sure that at some point decisions and plans are formalized. Written statement of purpose, goals and objectives, and records of activities can prove to be valuable to future participants or to others who are in the initial planning stages.

Make sure to plan for turnover in membership and leadership; and look for opportunities to recruit new members as activities increase. Utilize available resources such as parish staff members, social agencies, archdiocesan offices, as well as professionals in the social services field.



One technic that may be helpful are *SMART* Goals. There are several different ways to think about SMART Goals. One is that goals are:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| S | Specific and Measureable |
| M | Motivating |
| A | Attainable |
| R | Relevant |
| T | Trackable & Time bound |

For example, “Send 100 letters to our federal representative regarding the issue of _____ by September 1, 20xx.”

Reviews and evaluations need to be built into the group’s programs in order to insure success. Taking the time to assess progress and reassess needs are worthwhile activities, especially for a new group. Set reasonable times for an evaluation, for example, six months or one year.

Ideas for Collaboration

Collaboration with Other Parishes and Models

Example One: Many parishes are joining neighboring parishes is to carry out tasks in the area of social ministry. When two or more parishes decide to meld their Human Concerns commissions, this is called a “multi-parish commission.” Some parishes join their commissions to form a new collaborative group, which serves as the Human Concerns commission for all parishes involved. The collaborative Human Concerns commission meets regularly and rotates the location. This type of multi-parish arrangement needs to specify a minimum number of representatives from each parish in order to insure participation on all parts of all parishes.

Example Two: Three Human Concerns commission still meet individually, and also have inter- parish meetings on a regular basis. If one parish has its own project in Human Concerns, that information is shared and promoted through the other parishes. They have good communications between the commissions and all are mutually supportive of each other. They share information on singular projects and on joint efforts by way of a multi parish Human Concerns communication.

Some examples of activities could include:

- Individually, parish A establishes a sister parish in another country. Parishes B and C are invited to a two-part educational series on the home country of the sister parish. Parish A will share letters from their sister parish and in the joint Human Concerns communication. (justice education)
- The parishes collaborate jointly and sponsor a Habitat for Humanity house. They work together to raise funds and fix up the house. (Direct service)
- Parish C is trying to begin a St. Vincent de Paul Conference. Parish B and the district St. Vincent de Paul are helping them in this process. (Direct service)
- A respect life subcommission of parish B was successful in organizing all three parishes to write letters on behalf of respect life legislation in Madison. (Advocacy)

Example Three: In another type of joint effort, the Human Concerns commission in each of the participating parishes remains intact. A new collaborative commission is formed with representatives from each parish. The collaborative commission identifies common social needs and sets priorities. This umbrella commission decides on a common theme and may form subcommissions to determine specific goals, objectives, and plans of action. The collaborative commission and its subcommissions develops implementation plans and determines each parishes involvement. The implementation is carried out by the individual parishes Human Concerns commissions according to the plan developed by the collaborative commission. In the planning stages, the collaborative commission meets monthly. When goals are set and plans underway, this group may not need to meet as often. However, ongoing communication among the parishes is critical.

Some examples of how this collaborative commission could function are:

The five commissions choose one common theme, e.g., “putting children and families first.” Then they divide into two working commissions: “hunger/the unborn.” Each subcommission has a coordinator.

Each sub commission puts in writing 2 to 3 simple goals and objectives so they can develop a plan of action. For example some activities of the unborn subcommission are:

- Work with a local pregnancy help center nearby to provide layettes for newborn children.
- Each of the parishes could collect diapers for Catholic Charities Pregnancy Support Services.
- The five parishes will promote and participate in their regional Holy Hour for Life. One of the parishes and its deacons offers to be the host site for the prayer.
- One of the parishes has been involved in a letter writing campaign on behalf of protecting unborn children. They will take the lead in expanding that advocacy/letter writing campaign to other parishes.

Annual or Semi-Annual Projects

Every parish does not need to be involved in a Human Concerns joint effort, however, parishes that have well-established Human Concerns commissions, or parishes that are close in proximity, may consider annual or semiannual meetings. These gatherings could serve at threefold purpose:

- Exchange information about current, ongoing projects and programs.
- To consider working on a project together – possibly arranging a speaker around a justice issue and/or a workshop to training organizing skills.
- Provide an evening of prayer reflection, evaluation, and celebration.

Collaboration within Your Parish

The Human Concerns commission can encourage other commissions/groups within the parish to collaborate on a project. A good example of intra-parish cooperation is the Lenten Rice Bowl sponsored by Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The Human Concerns commission may sponsor CRS Rice Bowl and provide justice education about local and global hunger issues. This may also be considered direct service



because of the financial contributions involved. In addition, the parish could collect food or sundries for a local food pantry. The role of the Human Concerns commission is supervision of the overall project and invitations to other groups to participate. The Christian Formation commission could assume the educational aspect of this project, using materials provided by Catholic Relief Services in religious education and school programs, as well as bulletin inserts, speakers, posters and social media campaigns for adult education. If a School Commission exists, educational materials could be shared with that group to foster the school-Christian formation connection. The Stewardship Commission can

provide communications that identify the specific activity to a life of a faithful disciple-steward, which will reinforce the broad parish vision for ministry. The Worship commission can extend this project to the weekend liturgies in order to raise awareness about local/global hunger. A small example would be the inclusions of prayers of the faithful addressing the issues of hunger. This type of intra-parish collaboration creates a sense of community. All involved need to be aware of the results. Successful projects of this nature often paved the way to future cooperative efforts. Human Concerns commission is in a unique position of surfacing issues that are appropriate for parish wide participation

Collaboration with Other Denominations

In some areas, working with other denominations and religious traditions is a possibility. This might be feasible in smaller committees or in areas where there is an ecumenical/interfaith group already in existence, or where several denominations are in close proximity.

Global Relationships

Global Parish Twinning

In response to the Church's call to Global Solidarity, many parishes in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee have a partnership with a parish, village or organization in another part of the world. Rather than a relationship that requires solely financial help, Catholics in Southeastern Wisconsin are encouraged to engage in international relationships earmarked by mutuality and rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' November 1997 document *Called to Global Solidarity*.

- If you would like to know more about twinning from a parish perspective, [click here for stories from twinning parishes, or to share your story.](#)

For more information or assistance with entering into a partnering relationship with people in another part of the world, please contact the World Mission Ministries office at 414-758-2280 or wmo@archmil.org.

- Parishes that prefer to create a relationship with a parish in this country will receive assistance through the Extension Society at www.catholicextension.org

APPENDIX

- A. Self-Evaluation for Human Concerns
- B. Productive Meetings
- C. Hints for Recruiting Volunteers
- D. Parish Outreach
- E. Overview of Catholic Social Teaching

This dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church's social teaching, which is caritas in veritate in re sociali: the proclamation of the truth of Christ's love in society.
— Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*

Appendix A: Self-Evaluation for Human Concerns

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has developed a website for Human Concerns Commissions in parishes. The website (*We Are Salt and Light*) includes resources intended as a catalyst for both the New Evangelization and the continuing development of vibrant communities living the Gospel in the United States. Communities that strive to be salt and light share God's love with others, as we encounter Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit's transforming presence. Inspired by the Trinity's dynamic of community, we pray together, reach out together, learn together and act together.

We Are Salt and Light is based on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) document *Communities of Salt and Light*. This project is under the joint direction of the Committee on International Justice and Peace and the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and has been developed by the staff of the Office of Education & Outreach of USCCB's Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development.

The website includes an assessment tool for Commissions that is available here <https://www.wearesaltandlight.org/assessments/pray>

Appendix B: Productive Meetings

Effective Commissions

COMMISSION GUIDELINES

1. A well-prepared agenda – the agenda is clear about who will present, past and current items to be discussed, what actions are to be considered, and reports to be reviewed.
 - Who: The Commission officers and assigned pastoral staff member
 - What: Plan the agenda for review and preparation by the Commission members
 - When: Preferably 2 weeks to 10 days prior to the meeting date
2. Agenda and meeting materials are sent in advance of the meeting – the agenda and any accompanying materials should be sent in advance to all the members.
 - Who: The secretary
 - What: Prepare the agenda for distribution
 - When: At least one week before the meeting
3. All members are prepared for the meeting – each member should read the agenda, previous meeting notes, and any other materials prior to the meeting
 - Who: All Commission members
 - What: Prepare for the meeting by reading the materials for the meeting
 - When: Prior to the meeting
4. Prayer sets the tone and helps the group focus on the mission of Jesus and the Church
 - Who: Prayer leader
 - What: Prepares and leads the prayer at the meeting. If the prayer involves a scripture reading, faith sharing can also be part of the prayer experience
 - When: Meetings usually begin and end with a prayer but prayer can be shared before a decision is reached on an important item
5. Discussions are conducted in a respectful, inclusive and prayerful manner
 - Who: All Commission members
 - What: As individuals and a group, the entire commission needs to create an environment in which there can be honest, concise and open conversation
 - When: At the time items on the agenda are open to discussion
6. Decisions are made by consensus
 - Who: Chairperson
 - What: Facilitates the discussion to a resolution upon which all members agree
 - When: The time for discussion has been concluded and the chair summarizes the comments which are similar and those which are diverse
7. Members follow up on agreed-upon actions
 - Who: Any member who is assigned or has agreed to complete a task
 - What: Complete a specific task of reporting or gathering information
 - When: Between the current meeting and the next scheduled meeting



BEING AN EFFECTIVE COMMISSION/COMMISSION MEMBER PREPARING FOR THE MEETINGS

1. Submit any agenda items to the chair at least two weeks prior to the meeting. .
2. Read the minutes of the previous meeting, the agenda, and any additional materials which the commission has included for discussion or information at the meeting.
3. Bring all materials needed, including your personal calendar.
4. Plan to arrive on-time for the meeting. If you are unable to attend, inform the chair before the meeting.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETINGS

- Honor your commitment to the group
- Take interest in other members of the Commission
- Study the area of mission and ministry to which you have committed
- Volunteer to assist with Commission tasks as your availability allows
- Keep your discussion comments brief, on topic, and without tangents or sidebars
- Listen to others in the group with respect and without judgment
- Share responses but do not dominate the discussion
- Seek consensus and results
- Ask for clarification when a comment is unclear or could be misunderstood
- Protect the rights of others to have opinions and feelings shared
- Encourage silent members to speak
- Avoid communication that disrupts the group – sarcasm, diversions, side conversations
- Make your own notes on the agenda

AFTER THE MEETING AND BETWEEN MEETINGS

1. Complete any assignments
2. Know that a report of the commission's actions will be submitted to the commission and Pastoral Council
3. Be prepared for the notes and agenda for the next meeting to be distributed

LEADING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

- The Commission chairperson facilitates the meeting by following the agenda, encouraging participation and discussion, adhering to a timeline, and guiding the Commission to resolve the action items.
- The work of the chairperson begins well before the Commission meets.

BEFORE THE MEETING

1. Read the minutes of the previous meeting and work with appropriate parish staff member and officers of the Commission to prepare the agenda. Timelines should be estimated for each agenda item. Items should be prioritized according to importance. The agenda should be distributed 7 – 10 days prior to the meeting.
2. Bring all materials, including a personal calendar, to the meeting.
3. Arrive ahead of time to ensure that the meeting room is open and set up.
4. Complete the meeting room checklist:
 - The room has enough seating to comfortably accommodate the participants
 - There is adequate lighting and ventilation
 - The room is free of distractions and interruptions, such as telephones, loud noises, bouncing balls, etc.
 - The chairs are comfortable enough for the length of the meeting
 - All necessary materials are available or prepared, such as projector, handouts, newsprint, etc.
 - Refreshments are available as appropriate and customary

BEST MEETING PRACTICES

- Begin the meeting on time. Meetings should not exceed a two-hour time limit.
- Lead the introductions of members and/or guests.
- Overview the meeting briefly so that all members are clear about agenda items and proposed actions.
- Follow the agenda as published or as revised.

- If there are latecomers, briefly acknowledge them as they arrive and indicate the current agenda item.
- Manage the time for each agenda item.
- The agenda should be set up so that less important items are last on the agenda and can be carried over to the next meeting.
- Conclude the meeting when the agenda is completed or when the two-hour time limit has been reached. Agenda items can be carried over to the next meeting. Meetings may exceed the time limit only with the approval of the members and with an agreement upon specified amount of time – 10 minutes, 15 minutes, etc.

FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS

Below are some suggestions and examples for ways to promote discussion and effective decision-making.



ASK QUESTIONS

- What are the Commission's thoughts about this item?
- How do you feel about this issue?
- How would you answer John's question?
- How does the Commission want to proceed on this matter?

ASK FOR A SUMMARY

- A lot of good ideas have been suggested in the last few minutes:
- Can someone summarize the major points before we go on?
- Can someone summarize what we have agreed upon so far?

ASK FOR EXAMPLES

- Can you give us an example of what this would look like?
- Can you tell us about other parishes that already do this?

TEST FOR CONSENSUS

- Does it seem to you that we have reached agreement on certain points?
- Could we test our agreement on this issue with a show of hands?

SURVEY THE GROUP

- Let's go around the table quickly and ask people to share an initial reaction to the proposal.
- How many of you like this section of the report?

BE SUPPORTIVE

- Let's give those who disagree an opportunity to explain why they disagree.
- That's a very good point you have raised.

CHECK FOR BEST OUTCOMES

- Are we asking the right questions?
- Do we need more information about this?
- Is this the most effective way to proceed?
- Have we considered all the possibilities?

CONFRONT DIFFERENCES

- Could you explain to the group why you are so opposed to this?
- What could be changed in the proposal to make it more acceptable?

LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

- What is the worst case scenario if we move forward (or don't move forward) with this?
- How will this impact our future?

MANAGING CONFLICT

From time to time, Commissions will experience tension between members which has the potential to lead to annoyance, disengagement, heated exchanges, angry outbursts, and a member leaving the meeting. Below are some common situations in which conflict can develop and some suggestions for mediation.

KEEPING THE DISCUSSION ON TOPIC

- Intervene quickly but sensitively if the discussion moves off topic
- Acknowledge the speaker's point and re-connect with the discussion topic
- Suggest that the off-topic issue can be discussed as a possible future agenda item
- The chair should meet privately outside of the meeting time with commission members who consistently speak off-topic

NAVIGATING A DISCUSSION ON CONTROVERSIAL OR CONTENTIOUS TOPICS •

- Address the potential conflict by clearly identifying the opposing sides or issues
- To the extent possible, keep the discussion rooted in the facts and ask people to state when they are sharing an opinion
- If necessary, suggest a moment of silence or lead a prayer to keep the group focused on its important ministerial task, then resume the discussion

ENDING THE MEETING

1. End on time or negotiate for additional time with the Commission members
2. Summarize the results of the meeting:
 - What was accomplished
 - What has moved closer to being accomplished
 - What action needs to be taken before the next meeting
 - What communication is needed regarding the meeting results
3. Request possible agenda items for the next meeting
4. Thank all for their work and commitment to the parish
5. Close the meeting with prayer

Appendix C: Hints for Recruiting Volunteers

One of the purposes of the Human Concerns commission is to involve many parishioners in social justice ministry. In order to get volunteers, and to keep them motivated, some of the following hints may be helpful.

- Be clear on the commission's needs and scope. What is it the volunteer will do? What background is needed? What time commitment is involved? State clearly and simply what the expectations are, and put them in writing.
- Approach people personally. One on one contact is more effective than just an ad in the bulletin. Be sure to follow up if pulpit or newsletter announcements are used. Brainstorm with others in the parish who might have an interest in this area.

-
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- Present options to people so they can match up their needs, gifts, and skills with the needs of the Commission. Have long and short-range opportunities available.
 - Orientation and training are critical to help the new Commission members feel welcome and confident. Provide practical “how to” training and provide ongoing spiritual formation times for the whole Commission. (Be sure the Human Concerns budget includes funds for resources, for training opportunities, and for continuing education.)
 - Be sure commission volunteers are recognized and thanked by the parish for their contribution.
 - Keep in mind recruitment for the Human Concerns commission all year long.

Appendix D: Parish Outreach

Outreach ministry is a form of service whereby a parish acting as a corporate entity donates a portion of its income to groups or individuals outside the parish boundaries. Some parishes of the archdiocese regularly set aside a percentage of their income to help fund social justice efforts outside the parish. Usually, this funding is an outgrowth of the parish’s Human Concerns ministry and considers Direct Service, Advocacy, Empowerment, and Justice Education. Parish will also attempt to maintain a balance in funding among local, national, and global efforts.

Corporate entity. Saint Paul’s understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ (see I Corinthians 10:17; 12:12) is echoed by the Second Vatican Council: “God, however, does not make men and women holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men and women together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.” (*Lumen Gentiun*, #9). Outreach ministry presumes and understanding of the Church is the people of God, and not merely as collection of individuals. The decision to undertake some form of Outreach ministry must reflect the parish’s appreciation and acceptance of this corporate identity.

Some parishes tithe 1% to 5% of their annual income. The same rationale offered individuals to tithe a portion of their incomes may be applied to the parish itself.

Efforts funded should be consistent with the mission of the Parish and consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Appendix E: Overview of Catholic Social Teaching

CST 101 is a collaborative 7-part video and discussion guide series presented by the USCCB and Catholic Relief Services on [Catholic Social Teaching](#). The videos bring the themes of Catholic Social Teaching to life and inspire us to put our faith into action. Some suggested uses of the videos and discussion guides include adult faith formation settings, high school theology classes, lay ministry formation, and preparing groups for service trips. The series also includes downloadable posters and handouts for adults and children, in English and Spanish. The artwork featured in the videos and accompanying videos are courtesy of Br. Mickey McGrath, OSFS. <https://www.crs.org/resource-center/CST-101>

Through the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the bishops of Wisconsin have created four bulletin inserts, which cover Catholic Social Teaching in greater detail (www.wisconsinatholic.org under “Faithful Citizenship Resources”). The USCCB has produced a national statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (rev. 2015) (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship>).

Appendix F: Additional Resources and Sources

Additional Resources

Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004.

DOCAT: What to Do? The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2016.

Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry of the Archdiocese of Hartford

- <http://www.catholicsocialjustice.org/>
- <http://www.catholicsocialjustice.org/uploads/1/3/0/4/13041697/parishsocialministrybasics.pdf>

Wisconsin Catholic Conference: www.wisconsinatholic.org

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States (rev. 2015) <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship>

Parish Social Ministry: Strategies for Success by Tom Ulrich, Ave Marie Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2001.

Sources: Parish Commissions and Commissions Manual: Archdiocese of Milwaukee - pages 11-17

For Outreach Ministry: Fr. Brian Holbus “Examining the Historical and Theological Roots of Outreach Ministry.”





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