

The Ministry of Peace and Justice

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Session 3 Handout

What Types of Things Might a Peace and Justice Coordinating Committee Do?

The ministry of peace and justice is all about putting the principles of Catholic social teaching into action. The job of the peace and justice coordinating committee (PJCC) is to *organize opportunities* for parishioners to participate in this essential work.

It's important to note that a PJCC is *not* a small group that does peace and justice ministry on behalf of the parish. As every baptized person is called to participate in the work of peace and justice, your role as a committee is more about planning, inviting, and facilitating than it is about doing the ministry yourselves.

So what sorts of activities might a PJCC facilitate, plan, and invite parishioners to participate in?

The Catholic bishops of the United States provide a helpful outline in their 1994 document *Communities of Salt and Light*. There are six primary areas of peace and justice ministry that parishes active in peace and justice have running. (At the start of your parish's ministry, you will not have all six areas going strongly right away, but it's good to keep them all in mind.)

1. Anchoring Social Ministry: Prayer and Worship

“The most important setting for the Church's social teaching is not in a food pantry or in a legislative committee room,

but in prayer and worship, especially gathered around the altar for the Eucharist,” the bishops write. Active peace and justice parishes have themes of social justice reflected in liturgical music selections and in the parish’s general intercessions. The connections between Mass and justice—how we are sent from the eucharistic table to bring Christ’s love to the world—should be emphasized frequently.

Also, prayer has a critical role in all elements of peace and justice ministry, and should be included in any organized activity. Prayer helps frame any peace and justice experience for participants, and reminds parishioners that their work is a response to God’s call to build his kingdom on Earth.

2. Sharing the Message: Preaching and Education

Catholic social teaching has been called the church’s “best-kept secret.” We have not always done the best job at sharing the social dimension of the Gospel with the faithful. Therefore, PJCCs organize faith formation activities for disciples in all age groups, often partnering with those in charge of children’s, youth, and adult faith formation ministries. Guest speakers, movie nights, book clubs, small faith-sharing groups, intergenerational gatherings, and other educational activities connected to CST in general or particular social issues are important elements of peace and justice ministry.

3. Serving the “Least of These”: Outreach and Charity

“Just as the gospel tells us our lives will be judged by our response to the ‘least of these,’ so too our parishes should be measured by our help for the hungry, the homeless, the troubled, and the alienated—in our own community and beyond,” the bishops write in *Communities of Salt and Light*.

Active peace and justice parishes reach out to those who have pressing material needs. Whether that means running a food pantry through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, supporting

a local homeless shelter with volunteers and toiletry donations, or setting up a tutoring program in partnership with a school in an impoverished area, PJCCs should help their parishes to identify needs in their communities and in the world and to respond in concrete ways.

4. Advocating for Justice: Legislative Action

While concrete acts of charity are needed, the bishops also call on parishes to participate in legislative advocacy to help change the systems that oppress people. In the case of fighting hunger, for example, outreach and charity might include feeding people at a soup kitchen. Legislative action might involve organizing a postcard campaign at the parish to urge lawmakers to protect important programs like SNAP (food stamps) that can help the working poor lift themselves out of poverty.

Political involvement does not mean partisan activity. The church never endorses a candidate or political party, but instead encourages her members to raise their voices with and for those who are poor and vulnerable. The US bishops, national Catholic agencies like Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services, and state-based Catholic conferences raise important legislative issues throughout the year and often provide language for the faithful to adapt when reaching out to lawmakers.

5. Creating Community: Organizing for Justice

“Many parishes are joining with other churches and groups to rebuild a sense of community in their own neighborhoods and towns,” the bishops write. “Parish leaders are taking the time to listen to the concerns of their members and are organizing to act on those concerns.”

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) supports organizations that are empowering those who are poor and vulnerable to seek social justice. Most dioceses have a

CCHD point person, who can fill your PJCC in on what sorts of organizing activities are happening in your area.

6. Building Solidarity: Beyond Parish Boundaries

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we assert that all human beings are brothers and sisters because we share the same heavenly father. (We pray, "Our Father," not "My Father" or "Her Father.") CST calls us to look beyond our own parish, city, and even national boundaries to respond to the needs of the human family wherever they may be. Global solidarity ministry connects your local parish to international economic development and relief. Catholic Relief Services, the official overseas humanitarian agency of the US Catholic Church, is the best place to start when learning about global solidarity. Some parishes in the US have formed "twinning" relationships with a parish in a developing nation, or have sent groups on immersion trips to nations around the world.