“The pursuit of justice and peace is an essential part of what makes a parish Catholic”

~ U.S. Catholic Bishops, Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish

Communities of Salt and Light:
Integrating Catholic Social Teaching throughout Parish Life

Parish Assessment Tool

Updated 3/16
INTRODUCTION

Pope Benedict XVI in Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love) and Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth) taught that the Church has a three-fold responsibility: to proclaim the word of God; to celebrate the sacraments; and to exercise the ministries of charity through service and the promotion of social justice. “These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable” (DCE, no.25a).

In Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis urged us to embrace “the social dimension of evangelization.” He encouraged our parishes to enthusiastically embrace a sense of mission characterized by an urgency to address the wounds of the poor and vulnerable through mercy and the promotion of a more just society. Our parishes, the heart of the Church, are communities called to be agents of God’s love to the world. Our goal is for them to be “completely mission-oriented” (no.26).

To guide parishes in this vocation, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued a statement, Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish. Through it, the bishops provide a roadmap for how Catholic Social Teaching and mission can be integrated into every aspect of parish life, so that our faith communities can more fully be salt and light for the Holy Spirit’s work of building the Kingdom of God.

We invite parishes (e.g. through parish staff, pastoral councils, social action committees) to assess how much the Church’s social teaching and social ministries permeate, not just the work of social action committees, but all major activities of the parish. This questionnaire follows the outline provided by the U.S. Catholic bishops, encouraging an examination of how social teaching and ministry are integrated in four areas of parish life: 1) Prayer and Worship, 2) Formation and Education, 3) Stewardship of Resources, and 4) Social Ministry.

PURPOSE

This tool is an opportunity for parishioners to gain a new awareness about what is already being done in the parish to live out Catholic Social Teaching and ministry. In addition, it should help parishioners identify areas for growth. If your parish does not have a social action committee or is weak in some areas of implementation, this survey can be used as a teaching tool to encourage parishioners with the vision of a parish active in the work of justice. Parish gifts and talents can be called upon and encouraged by the parish staff in order to begin an organized social action team or enhance one that is ongoing. The final page of reflection questions might be helpful to you in analyzing strengths and weaknesses and in charting next steps.

Each part is important. However, not all possible applications of Catholic Social Teaching are included. In addition, it is highly unlikely that any parish will highly rate all of the questions; and a lower rating is not necessarily an indication of a deficiency. This resource is not intended to “grade” your parish against other parishes but rather to identify where Catholic Social Teaching integration already exists and to offer ideas where additional integration could take place.
HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

1. **Select a coordinator.** Identify a person or group who will play a coordinating role in undertaking this assessment. This will vary from parish to parish. This assessment is often used as part of the Archdiocesan Catholic Social Action Office’s “Salt and Light Catholic Social Teaching Formation Program,” in which case the Salt and Light participants form the team to complete the assessment.

2. **Involve others.** It may be appropriate to involve several parish committees in completing the different areas of the assessment.

3. **Complete the questionnaire.** Insure that all portions of the questionnaire have been filled out and the key findings evaluated.

4. **Review and discuss.** It is highly recommended that the pastor and pastoral council be informed about this process and about the results. Perhaps the results could be shared with the entire parish via the parish newsletter. The whole process could be celebrated with the parish where appropriate during a Sunday liturgy.

5. **Plan next steps.** If the assessment team or other reviewers in the parish identify areas in which the parish could grow in its promotion of Catholic Social Teaching and social ministry, adopt some realistic goals and formulate next steps to achieve those goals.

6. **Inform the Catholic Social Action Office.** Share your results with the Catholic Social Action Office to assist them in their work. Moreover, the Office would be glad to support you as you undertake this assessment and discern where to go next!

CONTACT
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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... In prayer, we find the reasons, the strength, and the call to follow Jesus in the ways of charity, justice, and peace.

(U.S. Catholic Bishops, Communities of Salt and Light)

Score each activity as occurring: 3 = Often 2 = Occasionally 1 = Rarely
If unfamiliar, leave blank.

Eucharistic celebrations, intercessions & homilies
1. _____ Our Sunday liturgy reminds us that the Eucharist unites all humanity and creation in the Body of Christ, calling us to protect all life and dignity.

2. _____ The general intercessions (prayers of the faithful) include Catholic social teaching themes.

3. _____ Inclusive language is used in homilies and in the prayers of the faithful.

4. _____ Based on the readings from Scripture, homilists do not hesitate to challenge the assembly with their Christian responsibility to bring about a more peaceful and just society.

5. _____ The music used in liturgy reflects the themes of a church called to love and serve others.

6. _____ Our parish organizes additional Masses and/or prayer opportunities in response to current events having to do with life, justice and peace.

Inclusion and diversity
7. _____ Parish celebrations incorporate the cultural and racial diversity of the community.

8. _____ Care is taken that all people feel welcomed at parish liturgies, especially visitors, minorities, the poor, persons with disabilities and those who are alone.

9. _____ The full complement of liturgical ministers within Sunday Eucharist reflects God’s reign by being representative in age, race and gender of the parish community.

10. _____ Eucharistic ministers take communion to the sick and homebound.

Liturgical seasons
11. _____ Our parish celebration of Advent allows us to pray and reflect on themes of hope, respecting life, justice and peace in the world.

12. _____ Our celebration of Christmas, the mystery of the incarnation, challenges us to respect the life and dignity of all human persons and to recognize the presence of Christ in our world today.
13. ______ Our parish celebration of Lent places before us the challenge of ongoing conversion of heart.

14. ______ Our parish celebration of the Easter season inspires us to work for resurrection in our world from the tombs of poverty and violence and to give hope to those who suffer.

**Special days, seasons, opportunities for education and action**

15. ______ Inserts from the or other pertinent church documents on social justice (papal encyclicals, letters from the USCCB, etc.), are placed in the bulletin to tie in with the liturgy and readings.

16. ______ Our parish’s administration of penance, confirmation and other sacraments reflect a social dimension that relates to our relationship to the poor and vulnerable.

17. ______ Our parish utilizes CRS Rice Bowl prayer resources during Lent.

18. Our parish observes these days/months with prayer, preaching, and/or bulletin announcements:

   ______ World Day of Peace (Jan. 1)
   ______ National Migration Week (Early Jan. around Epiphany) – Dignity of Migrants
   ______ Week of Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25) – Ecumenism
   ______ Martin Luther King Day (Jan.)/Black History Month (Feb.)/Black Catholic History Month (Nov.) - Racial Justice
   ______ Catholic Relief Services Collection (Second Sunday after Easter) – Global Solidarity
   ______ Earth Day (Apr. 22)/Feast of St. Francis of Assisi (Oct. 4) – Care for God’s Creation
   ______ Mothers Day/Fathers Day - Family as Pinnacle of Society
   ______ July 4th – Religious Liberty and Justice For All
   ______ Respect Life Sunday (First Sunday in October) - Consistent Ethic of Life
   ______ Mission Sunday - Global Solidarity
   ______ Catholic Campaign for Human Development Collection Weekend (Sunday prior to Thanksgiving) – Poverty
   ______ Thanksgiving - Local and Global Hunger and Homelessness

**Other**

19. Are there other activities of prayer and worship organized in the parish that call the community to pray for the promotion of life, dignity and creation? If so, please list.
FORMATION AND EDUCATION

Our social doctrine is an integral part of our faith; we need to pass it on clearly, creatively, and consistently... Our social doctrine must be an essential part of the curriculum and life of our schools, religious education programs, sacramental preparation, and Christian initiation activities... Every parish should regularly assess how well our social teaching is shared in its formation and educational ministries.

(U.S. Catholic Bishops, Communities of Salt and Light)

Score each activity as occurring: 3 = Often  2 = Occasionally  1 = Rarely
If unfamiliar, leave blank.

Religious education
1. _____ In the last five years, the parish has hosted a Catholic Social Teaching formational series, such as the Archdiocesan Salt and Light Program or JustFaith.

2. _____ The parish offers educational events each year concerning some aspect of Catholic Social Teaching (e.g. presentation on immigration, the death penalty, or respect life.)

3. _____ In the last five years, information about the following areas of Catholic Social Teaching have been offered to parishioners in programs of adult formation (RENEW, Bible Study, etc.), in print, and/or online:
   Check all that apply. If eight or more are checked, rate this overall question with a “3”; if between four and seven are checked, rate “2”; if less than four, rate “1”.
   _____ Abortion
   _____ Care for God’s Creation
   _____ Death Penalty
   _____ Economic Justice/ Dignity of Work/Fair Trade
   _____ End of Life Issues
   _____ Faithful Citizenship and Political Responsibility
   _____ Family and Marriage
   _____ Global Solidarity/World Peace
   _____ Immigration
   _____ Poverty (e.g. hunger, homelessness, health insurance, education, etc.)
   _____ Racial Justice
   _____ Reentry/Criminal Justice
   _____ Religious Liberty
   _____ Rights and Responsibilities
   _____ Others (Please specify): _______________________________________

4. _____ Efforts promoted by the Archdiocesan Catholic Social Action Office and Commission and/or regional parish social justice collaborative efforts, such as the Greater Cincinnati Social Action Collaborative, Dayton Weavers of Justice, Springfield Social Action Commission, and Catholic Rural Life Conferences of the St. Marys/Sidney and St. Martin Deaneries are sponsored and/or promoted.

5. _____ Inclusive language is used and understood by all involved in formation and
6. _____ The parish engages in efforts to promote intercultural competencies (e.g. visiting churches of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, sending parish delegates on mission trips, etc.)

7. _____ The parish promotes an understanding of other Christian or faith communities.

Sacramental preparation and Christian initiation
8. _____ Our sacramental preparation programs for Baptism, Reconciliation, First Communion, Confirmation and other sacraments incorporate a connection to Catholic Social Teaching principles.

9. _____ Our RCIA process incorporates a rich understanding of Catholic Social Teaching.

School and Youth Formation
10. _____ In-service programs are offered to teachers in areas of Catholic Social Teaching.

11. Catholic Social Teaching principles are intentionally incorporated into the curriculum of:
    _____ Parish School of Religion/ Religious Education of Children by Parish
    _____ School
    _____ Youth Ministry

12. Youth have opportunities to learn about/experience our multicultural world.
    _____ Parish School of Religion/ Religious Education of Children by Parish
    _____ School
    _____ Youth Ministry
STEWARDSHIP OF PARISH RESOURCES

Parish plans and priorities – as well as the use of parish facilities – that reflect the social mission of the Church are expressions of justice. Investing parish resources in social justice and empowering the poor are also expressions of justice. Just personnel policies, fair wages, and equal opportunity efforts are expressions of justice. Respecting and responding to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the communities we serve is an expression of justice. Recognizing the contributions and welcoming the participation of all members of the parish whatever their race, gender, ethnic background, nationality, or disability—these are integral elements of parishes seeking justice.

(U.S. Catholic Bishops, Communities of Salt and Light)

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If unfamiliar, leave blank.

Finances
1. _____ Our parish promotes an understanding of the parish budget to all members.
2. _____ Our parish submits to the Archdiocese the entire collection for the Archdiocese’s designated collections: Catholic Ministries Appeal, Catholic Relief Services, Holy Father’s Collection, Mission Sunday, and Catholic Campaign for Human Development.
3. _____ Special collections for ministries serving the poor and vulnerable, in addition to Archdiocesan collections, are taken up.
4. _____ Support for local social programs that improve lives of the community is part of the parish budget.
5. _____ The parish has active organizations (e.g. St. Vincent DePaul, etc.) to provide financial assistance, resources, and support to parishioners and members of the community in need.
6. _____ No parishioner is denied access to the parish school or religious education programs because of an inability to pay.
7. _____ Parish resources support the work of the social action committee, should one exist.

Personnel
8. _____ The parish is known to provide fair wages, and it is a decent place to work.
9. _____ As much as possible, the parish strives to reflect a diversity of race, gender and age in its staff.
10. _____ The parish has written personnel policies.
11. _____ There is a parish grievance procedure in place that may be used by parish employees and parishioners.
Parish Facilities and Community Presence

12. _____ When contracting for new or major construction projects, our parish utilizes the Archdiocesan Construction Contractor process, which includes a questionnaire into the employment practices, working conditions, and environmental stewardship of bidding contractors.

13. _____ Our parish makes energy efficient and environmentally friendly upgrades to our facilities whenever possible (e.g. LED lighting, efficient boilers, native plants, solar, etc.)

14. _____ Parish facilities are accessible to the vulnerable, poor, elderly and persons with disabilities in the parish and local community.

15. _____ The parish has social events that are accessible to all parishioners, regardless of income status.

16. _____ The parish offers its facilities for events benefitting the local community.
SOCIAL MINISTRY

Parishes are called to reach out to the hurting, the poor, and the vulnerable in our midst in concrete acts of charity... Parishes need to promote a revived sense of political responsibility calling Catholics to be informed and active citizens, participating in the debate over the values and vision that guide our communities and nation... Many parishes are joining with other churches and groups to rebuild a sense of community in their own neighborhoods and towns... Parishes need to be bridge-builders, reminding us that we are part of a Universal Church with ties of faith and humanity to sisters and brothers all over the world.

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If unfamiliar, leave blank.

Overall Social Ministry Organization
1. The parish has a social ministry team(s) (e.g. Social Action Commission, Peace and Justice Committee, etc.), which is responsible for the promotion of Catholic Social Teaching and overseeing the organization of social action activities. Please circle:

YES  NO  If yes, continue with rest of this section. If no, skip to “Direct Service.”

2. _____ This group connects with the pastoral council.

3. _____ A parish staff person is assigned the responsibility of working in the area of social ministry, including supporting this team.

4. _____ This group communicates its efforts to the rest of the parish via bulletin, website, newsletters, etc.

5. _____ The group incorporates prayer into their meetings.

6. _____ Respect and support exist between respect life and social justice ministries.

Direct Service
7. Does the parish organize ongoing ministry groups to carry out direct service needs (e.g. St. Vincent de Paul, outreach team to a local agency, etc.)? If so, please list:

__________________________  ______________________
__________________________  ______________________
__________________________  ______________________

8. Does the parish organize any additional short-term, parish-wide projects to carry out direct service needs (e.g. Giving Tree, canned food drive, etc.)? If so, please list:

__________________________  ______________________
__________________________  ______________________
__________________________  ______________________
Advocacy

9. _____ Social ministry in our parish includes social action efforts, defined as working together to change unjust social structures (e.g. abortion, death penalty, immigration reform, lack of affordable housing, etc.).

10. _____ The parish social action group undertakes a process of identifying issues and setting priorities among them.

11. _____ The social action group studies issues in depth before initiating action, including having some personal experience with the issue or having an encounter with vulnerable people directly impacted by the issue itself.

12. _____ The social action group attempts to deepen its knowledge about the official social teaching of the church.

13. _____ The social action group participates in advocacy, such as letter-writing and meeting with legislators or corporate leaders. If this is the case, please list some advocacy activities within the last five years:

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

14. _____ The entire parish is invited to participate in advocacy efforts.

Community Organizing

15. _____ The parish or a parish team participates in the activities of a coalition of organizations to address local concerns (e.g. AMOS Project in Cincinnati, Communities United For Action, Cincinnati Interfaith Worker Center, Leaders for Equality and Action in Dayton, etc.). If so, please list some of the activities in which the parish participated in the last five years:

________________________________________________________________________________

16. _____ The parish participates in ecumenical coalitions on service projects or community issues.

17. _____ The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is strongly promoted in our parish.

18. _____ Parishioners participate in one of the multi-parish social action collaboratives in the Archdiocese, if available in our region. (i.e. Cincinnati Advocates for Justice; Dayton Weavers of Justice; Springfield Social Action Committee; St. Martin Deanery Catholic Rural Life; St. Marys/Sidney Deaners Catholic Rural Life or other local parish network.)

19. _____ Members of the parish participate on an Archdiocesan-level ministry or committee through the Catholic Social Action Office, Family and Respect Life Office, or Mission Office.
Solidarity

20. _____ The parish has an active “twinning” relationship with another parish community, recognized by the Archdiocesan Mission Office.

21. _____ Our parish participates in the Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl campaign.

22. _____ The social action group helps build a "solidarity economy" by promoting Fair Trade coffee or crafts and/or advocating for corporate responsibility.

Other

23. What other social ministry related initiatives are there in the parish which have not been covered by the above questions? Please list:
REFLECTION

One reason for doing an assessment is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your parish’s efforts. An appreciation of these insights can give direction to parish planning towards becoming “completely mission-oriented” (Pope Francis, Joy of the Gospel, no.26). Please take time to examine the findings of your assessment.

1. In view of the responses, what strengths do you see in your parish’s attempt to incorporate Catholic Social Teaching and social ministry throughout parish life?

2. In view of the responses, what improvements do you see as necessary for your parish’s attempt to incorporate Catholic Social Teaching and social ministry throughout parish life?

3. What might be some next steps in helping the parish both celebrate its successes and expand into new areas of social ministry?

Name of Parish ________________________________________________________________

Contact Person ______________________________________________________________

Phone ___________________  E-mail ________________________________

Parishes are encouraged to share the results of their assessment with:

Catholic Social Action | Archdiocese of Cincinnati: www.catholiccincinnati.org/socialaction
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