

Social Ministry – *optional or essential?*

Formation and education, prayer and worship, building maintenance, pastoral care, Bible study, youth ministry, and finances are essential to parish life. For some parishes our financial backs are to the wall in just taking care of our own needs, so wouldn't it be *reasonable* to cut back or maybe eliminate completely our social ministry or outreach? After all, "charity begins at home." Isn't it reaching out into the community, locally and globally, an option when we have so much happening in our parishes and perhaps not enough people volunteering? That's a reasonable question – devoid of faith. Faithful individuals - and faith communities – know that everything, including health and life itself, is a gift from God to be shared with others. Gratitude to God is the basis for our sharing of our time, talent and treasure. With our time, talent and treasure we must "yes" to social ministry!



In his first encyclical (12-15-2005) Pope Benedict wrote: "the Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the *Word of God*, celebrating the *sacraments*, and exercising the *ministry of charity*." Social Ministry is NOT OPTIONAL – the pope is saying it as **essential** as our preaching and the sacraments!

One of the passages in the New Testament that reminds us of what our Lord expects of us is the parable Jesus told about the rich man and the beggar Lazarus in Luke's (16:19) gospel. The only thing we know about the rich man is that he is wealthy – at least wealthier than Lazarus. He may have worked very hard to earn his "*purple linens and splendid feasting*." It doesn't matter to Jesus. The man is condemned to hell because he had the means to care for a needy neighbor and did nothing. He was guilty **only** of a sin of omission; but a sin so serious in the mind of God the he deserved to end up in "*this place of torment*."

Social Ministry is not frosting on the cake – it is **essential** to parish life. We "*are bound to come to the aid of the poor...and to feed the people dying of hunger because if we do not feed them we are killing them*." (Vatican II – Church in the Modern World) "**Whenever** women and men are to be found in need, Christian charity should search them out, comfort and care for them and give them the assistance which will relieve their needs. This **obligation** is especially binding on the more affluent individuals (parishes) and nations." (Vatican II – Decree on the Laity)

Genuine love for the poor, that "*preferential option for the poor*" to use a favorite phrase of Pope John Paul II, comes from the principle of solidarity – our God is the Creator of **one** human family, and therefore, rich and poor, intelligent and not so smart, gainfully employed or not,

criminal or law-abiding citizens really are sisters and brothers of Christ Jesus and one another.
Social Ministry? Our lives depend on it.



Points to Remember!

Social ministry is an **integral** part of evangelization, a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel, and essential part of the Church's mission.

1. **Constitutive Essentials** that make the Catholic Church – “Church”
 - Word*
 - Sacraments*
 - Service (social ministry)*
2. Social Ministry is as important to the living out of our faith as celebrating Eucharist. Eucharist becomes fulfilling only to the extent that those receiving are, in turn, inspired to go out into the worlds to love their neighbor.
3. Parish Social Ministry
 - a. Parishes have to be a place where social ministry is central, not fringe; where social ministry is integral, not optional; where it is the work of every believer, not just the mission of a few committed people or committees.
 - b. Parishes are crucial in the Church's social ministry, not specialized ministry, but an integral part of the entire parish
 - c. For too many parishioners, social ministry is an unknown tradition and seen as the task for a few, not a challenge of the entire parish