

# CATALYSTS & COLLABORATORS IN SOCIAL MINISTRY

Strategies for Parish Partnerships & Parish Social Ministry in Catholic Charities



Catholic  
Charities  
USA®





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## Acknowledgements

The development and production of this report was made possible through the dedicated efforts of many individuals. We especially want to recognize the following for their efforts:

- Rachel Lustig, director of parish social ministry, Catholic Charities USA, for her leadership in instigating the project and writing the report.
- Sister Brenda Hermann, MSBT, for her leadership on the project and oversight of the agency site visits, and Jean Beil, senior vice president of programs and services, Catholic Charities USA, for providing guidance and insights on the project and report.
- Members of the editorial board: Rich Fowler, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Stockton, CA; Andy Zampini, Catholic Charities Inc., Diocese of Wilmington, DE; Kathy Brown, Catholic Charities USA; Steve Bresnahan, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud, MN; Kathleen Walsh, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Raleigh, NC; Robert Gorman, Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, LA; Desmond Brown, Catholic Charities USA; Tricia Hoyt, Catholic Charities Community Services, Diocese of Phoenix, AZ; Esmeralda Cervantes, Queen of Peace, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, TX; Jane Stenson, Catholic Charities USA; Mary Marshall, Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of New York, NY; Pat Macy, St. John Vianney Parish, Diocese of Austin, TX – for their leadership and guidance during the drafting of this paper.
- The leadership and staff of our member agencies across the country, especially the parish social ministry professionals, who are working together with their diocesan colleagues and parishes to be animators of social ministry in their dioceses.
- The leadership and staff of our member agencies who hosted site visits: Catholic Charities, Diocese of Pittsburgh, PA; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, MD; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, TX; Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, OK; Catholic Charities Community Services, Diocese of Phoenix, AZ; Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN; Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, LA; Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, LA; Catholic Charities of the Diocese

of Rockville Centre; Catholic Charities Inc., Diocese of Wilmington, DE; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, CA.

- The Leadership Team of Catholic Charities USA's Parish Social Ministry Professional Interest Section for creating dialogue opportunities for Catholic Charities professionals and parish leaders as a part of this project.
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—especially the department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development, including the Catholic Campaign for Human Development – Catholic Relief Services, the Roundtable Association for Diocesan Social Action Directors and JustFaith Ministries for their partnership and leadership in social ministry.
- CCUSA staff, consultants, and volunteers for their contributions: Christina Baldera, Brian Stevens, Troy Zeigler, and Stan Fitzgerald for participation in the project and insights on the report; Anita Blumenthal for writing support; Ruth Liljenquist for editing the report; and Jim Canavan and Sheena Crews for creative design.

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## Foreword by Rev. Larry J. Snyder, President, Catholic Charities USA

During my first year at Catholic Charities USA, Pope Benedict XVI published his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. With this encyclical, I felt that he gave a gift especially to Catholic Charities. *Deus Caritas Est* is so relevant to our work that I am often drawn to the vision and grounding that it provides.

As I read through this report, *Catalysts & Collaborators in Social Ministry*, a passage from *Deus Caritas Est* came to mind:

Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety.<sup>1</sup>

Would Catholic Charities' increasing specialization in the charitable work of the church unintentionally relieve the faithful of their responsibility or could it call them to more active engagement in it?

As I read that passage, I couldn't help but wonder if Pope Benedict considered what it would look like to have a diocesan entity like Catholic Charities, the parishes, and the individual faithful all taking on the responsibility to act out our love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God. I wondered if he considered how they would share this responsibility. Could their ministry complement one another or would they grow disconnected? Would Catholic Charities' increasing specialization in the charitable work of the church unintentionally relieve the faithful of their responsibility or could it call them to more active engagement in it?

Catholic Charities has struggled with these questions for decades. When we came together to produce *The Cadre Study* and *Vision 2000*, we wrestled with these concerns and decided that Catholic Charities should strive to complement the efforts of the parish and the individual faithful in loving their neighbor and should call them to more active engagement and discernment in fulfilling their responsibility. These two excerpts from *The Cadre Study* and *Vision 2000* best summarize this commitment.

In *The Cadre Study*, we committed to ten goals, eight of which speak to our engagement with parishes and the individual faithful. We committed:

- To assist the Church and the Churches to respond more vigorously to the Christian message of love and justice through action;
- To facilitate in the Church the unfolding of genuine social progress, which is the development of a moral consciousness leading people to exercise a wider solidarity and opening themselves freely to others and to God;
- To discern and call attention to the social and historical dimensions of sin and to develop a more conscious awareness of the need of Gospel-liberation from them, and,

with the Church to respond to the need for participation in the ministry of compassion and reconciliation;

- To assist people in coming together to experience one another in joy and need and to reflect prayerfully upon this experience as a medium through which God makes Himself available to all;
- To assist the people of God, peoples of various religious, cultural, age, and ethnic backgrounds, to live in unity by pushing consciousness of the need to the deepest level possible;
- To urge the Church and the Churches with their rich tradition of social thought and teaching to a further involvement in the construction of a just social order;
- To convene forums on various levels of Church life by which the people of God may perceive the social, political, and economic contradictions about them, and thereby be motivated to work toward change; and
- To promote the growing sense of unity among Christian people and all of good will through cooperation in social action and community development on the international, national, regional, state and local levels. <sup>2</sup>

*Vision 2000* made its commitment more succinctly:

In fulfilling its own servant role, Catholic Charities must help the Church at large to fulfill its service mission. The services provided by Catholic Charities agencies were never intended to exonerate the faithful of the responsibilities of Christian discipleship and the need for a community of believers to be personally involved in caring for one another. If increased professionalization of our agencies has caused Catholic Charities to grow further apart from the mainstream of our parishes, *Vision 2000* calls Catholic Charities agencies to become more fully integrated into local parish communities, providing stimulus for leadership in nurturing faith, proclaiming justice, serving people and building community. <sup>3</sup>

We have made it our goal to become an animator and collaborator of the work of the Gospel with and through the church community in our dioceses.

As I reflect on these commitments made in *The Cadre Study* and *Vision 2000*, I see what a profound and challenging vision we have given ourselves. We have made it our goal to become an animator and collaborator of the work of the Gospel with and through the church community in our dioceses.

I am proud of what we have done in pursuit of this vision. As I read through *Catalysts & Collaborators in Social Ministry*, I got a better sense of the magnitude of our efforts to bring this vision to life. I was amazed to read how many agencies are involved in parish partnerships or parish social ministry, and I was impressed by the creativity and mutuality of the strategies that are being used. I was also pleased to see how agencies are working to provide formation opportunities as they help parishes start or grow their social ministry efforts.

At the same time, there is much room for improvement. Some agencies are struggling to get started, while others have a limited vision for parish partnership, rather than one of collaboration and animation. Some programs are having difficulty incorporating standards of accreditation that other Catholic Charities programs are required to uphold. And others are challenged by the need to educate and train new people drawn to the ministry.

When I was at Catholic Charities in St. Paul-Minneapolis, we were blessed with an established parish social ministry program, but even then, we had our share of challenges. Our program staff members, however, were able to connect with their peers across the country through Catholic Charities USA's Parish Social Ministry Section and through the Roundtable Association of Diocesan Social Action Directors to find solutions to our problems. If this hadn't been the case, I think we would have been intimidated by pursuing the full vision of parish social ministry.

To help CCUSA member agencies meet the challenges they face in parish social ministry, we have produced this report, *Catalysts & Collaborators in Social Ministry*, which offers a collection of effective strategies and valuable lessons, garnered from the expertise and experience of Catholic Charities directors and parish social ministry professionals across the country. We have analyzed their current programs, investigated how they developed and changed, and drawn from their successes and failures to provide the Catholic Charities network with strategies and resources for pursuing this critical component of our mission.

Whether your agency is starting to pursue the vision of parish partnerships and parish social ministry or whether you are seeking to continually improve, *Catalysts & Collaborators in Social Ministry* will provide you with new and effective ideas. In addition, the Web page that accompanies this report will connect you to resources used by various agencies and provide you a forum for discussion with your colleagues. We hope that *Catalysts & Collaborators in Social Ministry* will facilitate what Catholic Charities does best—learning from one another and growing together to usher forth the reign of God in our midst!





## INTRODUCTION

- How can we be a catalyst for social ministry in the church?
- How can our agency be connected to the parishes in our diocese?
- What is parish social ministry?
- Who has been successful in creating parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs?
- What strategies have worked in dioceses like ours?
- Can we use the resources that have worked in other dioceses?
- What challenges should we be aware of?
- Where do we start?
- How do we know that we are successful?

These are the questions that staff members of Catholic Charities agencies have asked of us at the Parish Social Ministry Office at Catholic Charities USA. In an effort to answer these questions in a comprehensive way, we undertook a major project to gather information about parish social ministry programs throughout our network. In this process, we spoke with agency staff members and other individuals across the country, people who act as catalysts and collaborators in social ministry in their dioceses.

Catholic Charities has a long history of connecting with parishes and supporting their efforts to live out the Gospel. After *The Cadre Study* in 1972, these efforts were integrated with renewed energy into the agency in the form of parish partnerships, agreements between parishes and Catholic Charities to work together on social ministry, and parish social ministry pro-

Because these partnerships and programs have grown organically within their own dioceses, one might suspect that they are quite different. We've seen, however, that there are similarities between these efforts, and that similar strategies have proven to be effective in different settings.

grams, leadership development programs that strengthen parish social ministry.<sup>3</sup> As a result, some Catholic Charities agencies have been building parish partnerships and running parish social ministry programs for more than 30 years. Because these partnerships and programs have grown organically within their own dioceses, one might suspect that they are quite different. We've seen, however, that there are similarities between these efforts, and that similar strategies have proven to be effective in different settings.

Catholic Charities agencies interested in creating or modifying parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs don't need to start from scratch. Over the last two years, Catholic Charities USA has worked in conjunction with parish social ministry professionals, agency executive directors and parish-based social ministers to gather together a wealth of information and expertise on parish social ministry. We have compiled this wealth in this report, which provides strategies, insights, valuable lessons, and resources to guide agency executives and staff as they direct and coordinate parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs.

We hope to achieve four goals through *Catalysts & Collaborators in Social Ministry*. First, we hope to provide Catholic Charities executives and staff with ideas and strategies that they can use to develop or improve their parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs. Second, we hope that the Web page that accompanies this report ([www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/PSMatCC](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/PSMatCC)) will become a forum for networking and sharing resources about building parish partnerships and supporting parish social ministry. Third, we hope that this report will foster discussion about why Catholic Charities is called to be a catalyst and collaborator in social ministry with parishes and people of good will in the diocese. And fourth, we hope that Catholic Charities agencies, parishes, and the faithful will continue to improve collaborative efforts so that we as a church community can better recognize the face of Christ in those in need and express God's love for more people on the margins of society.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2, "What is Parish Social Ministry?" gives a concise description of and reflection on parish social ministry. At its core, parish social ministry is quite simple. It is a way through which the community and individual believers exercise their faith in an imperfect world. This chapter explores how that exercise of faith is made compassionate, intentional, and strategic in parish social ministry.

Chapter 3, "Building Partnerships with Parishes," focuses on developing or improving partnerships that create synergy in caring for poor and vulnerable people and working for justice. It lays out a vision of partnership that recognizes the unique contributions of each partner and highlights mutually respectful, effective ways for parishes and agencies to support the efforts of the other. Secondly, the chapter identifies ways to implement the partnership through the creation of a plan and the implementation of strategies for building and institutionalizing the relationships between partners. Chapter 3 also explores the challenges of building partnerships and the lessons that have been learned over the years.

Chapter 4, “Strategies for Parish Social Ministry Programs” focuses on developing or improving parish social ministry programs that develop leadership in the parish to create intentional, strategic, and compassionate parish social ministries. This chapter examines the responsibilities of such parish social ministry programs, analyzes the strategies they use to accomplish them, highlights the skills needed to run successful parish social ministry programs, and explores the challenges and lessons learned that are unique to parish social ministry programs.

Chapter 5, “Moving Forward” identifies the trends that will challenge parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs in the near future. This chapter reminds us that we have been successful in dealing with challenges in the past by facing them, working together to overcome them, and staying grounded in our mission.





## WHAT IS PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY?

Parish social ministry is the action that the faith community takes to live out the Gospel we proclaim and to grow in love with God and neighbor.

In urban neighborhoods, in suburban communities, and in rural areas, parishes serve as anchors of hope and communities of caring, helping families meet their own needs and reach out to others, and serve as centers of community life and networks of assistance... Across our country, parishioners offer their time, their money, and their leadership to a wide variety of efforts to meet needs and change structures. Parishes are deeply involved in meeting their members' needs, serving the hungry and homeless, welcoming the stranger and immigrant, reaching out to troubled families, advocating for just public policies, organizing for safer and better communities, and working creatively for a more peaceful world. Our communities and ministries have been greatly enriched and nourished by the faith and wisdom of parishioners who experience injustice and all those who work for greater justice.<sup>5</sup>

In these phrases from *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*, the U.S. bishops powerfully acknowledge and celebrate the actions that parishioners take to protect the life and dignity of all of our neighbors. These actions are expressions of faith in an imperfect world; they are examples of parish social ministry.

Parish social ministry is the action that the faith community takes to live out the Gospel we proclaim and to grow in love with God and neighbor. This definition outlines the two critical endeavors of parish social ministry. All parishes, regardless of size and resources, can use these two endeavors to guide their parish social ministry efforts.

## Living Out the Gospel We Proclaim

To live out the Gospel we proclaim, we must respond as best we can to the diversity of needs and injustice that impact our world. In other words, we must be strategic. Needs may include emergencies, chronic ailments, and loss. Injustice may be found in the norms that govern societies, including cultural standards, government laws and policies, and international agreements. Needs and injustice impact people in the parish community and beyond, and they disproportionately impact those who are poor or vulnerable.

As Catholics, parishioners are called to respond in two ways: as individuals and as part of a community. As individuals, parishioners make choices in their family, work, citizen, and consumer roles that have the potential to impact the life and dignity of others. While these decisions may be made outside of the parish, the community can play a vital role in helping parishioners evaluate their choices in light of their faith and their pursuit of the common good.

The parish community is also called to work together to live out the Gospel. In *Communities of Salt and Light*, the U.S. bishops identify four ways through which parishes can do this: charity, solidarity, community organizing, and advocacy.<sup>6</sup> When there are instances of need in the community, parishes are called to act with charity through direct service or outreach. Across the country, parishes are doing this through intake and referral services, grief counseling, soup kitchens, and much more. When there are instances of need that exceed the capacity of the parish to respond, the parish can act with solidarity by raising awareness of the reality of people in poverty and vulnerable situations and by supporting organizations that are poised to respond, such as Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services. Parishes also show solidarity through activities such as selling fair trade coffee, responding to natural disasters, and donating to organizations whose values they share.

When there are instances of injustice in the community, parishes can get involved in community organizing, a strategy for building leadership among low- and moderate-income people so that they can address their own needs. Parishes can partner with or join local organizations that promote community organizing, come together to address their own needs, or contribute to the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. When instances of injustice impact people beyond the community, parishes can get involved in advocacy. The most common form is legislative advocacy. Parishes engage in this by participating in letter-writing campaigns or by connecting with organizations that have grassroots efforts, such as Catholic Charities USA's Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America.

## Growing in Love with God and Neighbor

The second goal of parish social ministry is to help parishioners grow in love with God and neighbor. This is not a goal of parish social ministry alone. The three essential tasks of the church—proclamation of the word, administration of the sacraments, and provision of ser-

vices—help parishioners develop a deeper relationship with God and neighbor. These tasks reinforce one another and help to transform the hearts and minds of the faithful and transform our world into the kingdom of God on earth, characterized by love, justice, freedom, and peace for everyone. Through parish social ministry, the parish can integrate the provision of services into the life of the church.

Parish social ministry reinforces the proclamation of the word by bringing Jesus' call to life. In the Gospels, Jesus calls on everyone to care for poor, vulnerable, and suffering people and to work for justice and peace. Through Catholic social teaching, the church makes this call relevant in our day by evaluating social justice issues through Gospel principles. Parish social ministry facilitates action on the word of God by providing opportunities to respond to Jesus' call. This helps to bring parishioners to a deeper understanding of the word of God.

Parish social ministry helps the faithful to grow in love with God and neighbor by drawing them to the side of the most vulnerable and asking them to be the presence of God's love.

Through the sacramental life of the church, the faithful come into contact with God in a deeper way and commit to bringing forth the kingdom of God on earth. The sacramental life of the parish reinforces parish social ministry by commissioning us to the Gospel through baptism and confirmation, sustaining us through the contact with God's healing love as experienced in the sacrament of reconciliation, and uniting us to one another through the Eucharist. Parish social ministry reinforces the administration of sacraments by providing opportunities for parishioners to act on the mission they are charged with.

Parish social ministry helps the faithful to grow in love with God and neighbor by drawing them to the side of the most vulnerable and asking them to be the presence of God's love. As Catholics, we must recognize that meeting immediate needs and correcting unjust systems alone are insufficient to live out the Gospel that we proclaim. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that greater than the physical need of people is “an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern.”<sup>7</sup> He encourages Catholics to go beyond fulfilling the physical needs of the person to becoming a sign of Christ's love to the person. A parish does this on its own when its own parishioners or community members are impacted by need or injustice. When needs and injustice are beyond its reach, however, the parish needs to support trusted organizations to be the sign of Christ's love on its behalf.

Parish social ministry is not easy, and a parish cannot leave the faithful alone in the process of becoming a sign of Christ's love. It requires leadership, intentionality, and a commitment of time, talent, and treasure from the parish. In addition, parishes must provide reflection on the word of God and Catholic social teaching, a supportive community, the encounter with God in the sacraments, occasions to stretch beyond one's comfort zone to protect the life and dignity of another, and opportunities to form and discipline one's conscience and prayer. This is parish life at its best! Bringing together the social ministry, sacramental, and prophetic tasks of the church into parish life creates the power to transform hearts, minds, and the world.



## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARISHES

Through economic boom or bust, one thing remains constant—there are more people experiencing need and injustice than Catholic Charities can help. At the same time, the faithful, parishes, and dioceses all have a responsibility to care for and stand with Christ in need in our midst. With these two realities, the following question inevitably arises: How can Catholic Charities and parishes work together for greater effect and complement each other's efforts?

Catholic Charities agencies and parishes are natural partners. First, their faith calls them to it. Catholic Charities agencies and parishes share a faith tradition that, as the U.S. bishops state, “place[s] our service to the poor and vulnerable and our work for justice at the center of Christian witness.”<sup>8</sup> Second, need exceeds capacity. The reality of poverty and injustice in our communities is greater than either the parish or agency can assume responsibility for alone. And third, Catholic Charities agencies and parishes bring unique and complementary strengths to the effort of caring for poor and vulnerable people and working for justice. For these reasons, it makes sense for parishes and agencies to work together to have a greater positive impact on the lives of people in need.

Parishes and Catholic Charities agencies have been working together for over a century. They create partnerships that create synergy to care for poor and vulnerable people and work for justice. Over 85 percent of Catholic Charities agencies are engaged in efforts to build partnerships with parishes. According to the 2007 CCUSA survey, of the 171 responding agencies, 155 are involved in building partnerships with the parishes in their diocese, and they currently have established active relationships with 44 percent of the parishes.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will assist Catholic Charities agencies interested in building partnerships of mutual respect with parishes by providing a vision for a synergistic partnership and strategies to help achieve that vision. To facilitate the creation of a vision for a parish-agency partnership in your diocese, we will outline what is possible by drawing from the initiatives utilized in the Catholic Charities network. By identifying existing partnership strategies, we hope that Catholic Charities professionals will be better able to identify partnership opportunities in their diocese, understand the potential of a partnership, and seek mutuality in it. We will then outline two critical steps for implementing a partnership with parishes and review the challenges and lessons learned in creating and sustaining parish-agency partnerships.

### **A Vision for Partnership**

The purpose of a parish-agency partnership is to create synergy by working together to care for more poor and vulnerable people and better advocate for justice, while helping the faithful grow in love with God and neighbor. To develop the most comprehensive vision, potential partners must start with a clear understanding of the value of each other's unique contribution to care for poor and vulnerable people and work for justice.

#### *Unique Contribution*

Catholic Charities agencies and parishes both have independent efforts that directly address poverty, promote life and dignity, and inspire the faithful to a deeper relationship with God. Depending upon the agency, Catholic Charities is involved in service, advocacy, and convening. Catholic Charities makes professional social services available to poor, vulnerable, and suffering people in the community. These services help to alleviate temporary suffering and facilitate people's transition to stability. Furthermore, Catholic Charities analyzes its experience of working with people in poverty through the lens of Catholic social teaching and uses this analysis to advocate for the rights of low-income people in order to ensure that morality and the reality of the most vulnerable are considered when policy decisions are made. Finally, the agency convenes the community to identify unmet needs and discuss the best solutions to achieve the common good.

A parish cares for people and work for justice through its social ministry. Depending upon the parish, its social ministry may include direct service, advocacy, solidarity, community organizing, and formation, as discussed in the previous chapter. Because parishes cover a geographic region within the diocese and are spread throughout the diocese (based on considerations like population density and the number of Catholics), they are able to provide direct services to people in locations convenient to their homes.



## Diagram I: Unique Contribution to the Social Mission



Diagram I depicts the contributions that Catholic Charities and parishes make to fulfill the Catholic social mission of caring for poor and vulnerable people and working for justice. Catholic Charities contributes through service, advocacy, and convening. The parish contributes through its social ministry.

Recognizing the value of each other's unique contribution helps to build respect between Catholic Charities and parishes and create a relationship of mutuality. It also facilitates the process of designing a partnership that will create synergy so that more people are cared for and the prophetic voice for justice is amplified.

### *Supporting the Efforts of the Other*

Catholic Charities agencies and parishes can support each other's efforts when they each recognize the strategic advantage potential that each partner has. When one organization is better at something or has access to resources, it utilizes that strategic advantage in the partnership. Catholic Charities has strategic advantages in its ability to provide service to people who live in the parish community, to facilitate a parish's engagement in advocacy, and to create a forum for parishes to share insights about the reality of poverty in their community. Catholic Charities can support parishes through each of these strategic advantages, as illustrated in the examples below.

Catholic Charities helps to provide service to people who live in the parish by:

- Providing funding to parishes to provide emergency services in areas where Catholic Charities is unable to offer services;

- Taking referrals for people with needs greater than the parish is capable of meeting or providing referrals to other services in the community when Catholic Charities is unable to meet their needs; and
- Holding itself accountable to the parish by providing services in the parish community and reporting on the number of people served in the area to parish leadership.

Catholic Charities agencies facilitate a parish's engagement in advocacy by:

- Creating a legislative network to disseminate action alerts and policy analysis from trusted organizations like Catholic Charities USA, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, or the state Catholic Conference; and
- Analyzing current social justice issues, especially those related to poverty, through the principles of Catholic social teaching and disseminating this analysis.

Catholic Charities agencies create a forum for parishes to share insights into the reality of poverty in their parish by:

- Reserving positions on the board of trustees for parish leadership;
- Convening pastors or parish leaders around issues of poverty; and
- Inviting parishes to attend community convenings.

These are not the only strategic advantages that Catholic Charities can bring to the partnership. *Parish Social Ministry: A Vision and Resource* recognizes that Catholic Charities can be a resource to the parish's social ministry.

During their long history of fulfilling the Church's social mission by providing services, calling together people of good will and advocating for a just social order, Catholic Charities agencies gained a wealth of knowledge and expertise which is available to assist parishes in pursuing the social mission of the Church.<sup>10</sup>

This expertise is channeled to the faithful through agency parish social ministry programs that provide leadership development and formation opportunities to strengthen the parish's capacity to do social ministry. Pat Macy, a parish social minister from St. John Vianney Catholic Parish in the Diocese of Austin, explained how Catholic Charities has played a vital role in helping her parish's social ministry, "I don't need to be connected to Catholic Charities to do parish social ministry. However, if I want to improve, to get better, to network, to be connected to convenings, to have access to formation and to learn how to integrate, I need Catholic Charities – to keep learning, to grow and to be challenged."<sup>11</sup> To meet the needs that Ms. Macy identifies, Catholic Charities parish social ministry programs:

- Promote formation on the Catholic social mission (e.g., supporting the JustFaith program in the diocese or giving presentations on Catholic social teaching);

- Raise awareness of parish social ministry (e.g., educating pastors and parish leadership on what parish social ministry is and why it is important);
- Coordinate Catholic Campaign for Human Development efforts or promote community organizing and economic development;
- Build capacity for parish social ministry (e.g., providing training or consultation on how to structure social ministry in the parish and engage the parish community);
- Facilitate networking between parish-based social ministry staff and volunteers in the diocese for best practices sharing, problem solving, community building, and spiritual development; and
- Coordinate Catholic Relief Services efforts or promote global solidarity.

Each of these efforts helps parishes care for poor and vulnerable people and work for justice by animating, strengthening, or complementing the parish's social ministry efforts.

On the other side of the partnership, parishes also bring strategic advantages which facilitate reaching the common goal. These strategic advantages include geographic reach, support, and insight into the community. Parishes have a presence throughout the diocese, which is an advantage in service delivery. Parishes are also able to provide support to the partnership through financial, spiritual, and in-kind contributions. Finally, many parishes and the parishioners who go to them have strong connections to their community. This helps parishes garner insights into the life of the community. Parishes can support Catholic Charities through each of these strategic advantages, as illustrated in the examples below.

Parishes capitalize on their presence throughout the diocese by:

- Providing services that utilize parish facilities, such as a parish nursing program or English as a Second Language classes; or
- Acknowledging their parish social ministry efforts as the work of the Catholic Church in that area of the diocese.

Parishes provide support by:

- Donating financially, either individually or through a collection, to support the programs of Catholic Charities;
- Praying for the success of Catholic Charities programs (e.g., parishioners make a formal commitment to pray for the agency) or by providing spiritual reinforcement to agency programs (e.g., parishes sponsor retreats for caregivers);
- Organizing parish volunteers to help Catholic Charities programs run at full capacity or by encouraging individuals to volunteer their time and expertise to Catholic Charities;

- Donating goods and services for agency programs; and
- Creating a unified voice on behalf of the poor and vulnerable people in the community by participating together with Catholic Charities legislative advocacy efforts.

Finally, parishes are located in communities throughout the diocese, and people are drawn to a place of worship for the communal experience. Parishes, especially through their pastors, often know the struggles of the people in their faith community and in the geographic region of the parish. Parishes can bring their insights about these struggles to the work of caring for the poor and reducing poverty in the diocese.

Diagram II illustrates how Catholic Charities supports the social ministry efforts of the parish through service, advocacy, convening, and a parish social ministry program. It also shows how the parish supports the service, advocacy and convening work of Catholic Charities through its reach, support, and insight.

**Diagram II: Creating Synergy in Our Shared Mission Through Partnership**



As this diagram illustrates, by working in partnership, Catholic Charities agencies and parishes can create a synergy that makes it possible to care for more people in need, work for justice, and provide opportunities for the faithful to grow in love with God and neighbor.

### Implementing the Partnership

In 2003, Catholic Charities USA sat down with more than 100 pastors from nine dioceses, in what was called the Pastor Project, to uncover strategies for building and sustaining fruitful relationships with pastors. We learned the following:

Ultimately, the pastors who responded to the Pastor Project expressed a desire to have Catholic Charities see them as partners in the mission of Jesus in the world. Because of their lack of training in the social teaching of the Church and its implementation, pastors expressed a desire that Catholic Charities provide guidance and organizational support for such a partnership.<sup>12</sup>

To engage parishes as partners in the ministry and to have an infrastructure that will support the partnership, two things must occur: relationships must be built and a plan for collaboration must be created.

### *Building Relationships*

The purpose of relationship building is to give each partner the opportunity to learn about the other—to become familiar with its realities and priorities—and to create a forum for communication and accountability over the course of the partnership. A good relationship will help ensure that respect and mutuality are preserved in the partnership.

The relationship needs to be organizational, that is, between the Catholic Charities agency and the parish, as opposed to a relationship between a Catholic Charities program staff member and an individual at the parish, even if that individual is the pastor. People come and go at agencies and at parishes. Organizational relationships are often reinforced by multiple representatives of both organizations. One person may act as a liaison for each organization, but many people or committees at both organizations participate in the partnership. To maintain this type of organizational relationship, the partners must create a systematic approach to building relationships.

The most effective, albeit time-intensive, approach is to designate a liaison to build relationships with the parishes in the diocese. This liaison uses the one-on-one meeting—a community organizing strategy—to develop the relationship by listening to the concerns, priorities, and successes of the parish and by sharing those of the agency. As the relationship develops, a liaison from the parish is designated to take responsibility for coordinating joint activities and facilitating communication between the two organizations. In most cases, the liaison for the parish will not be the pastor, nor will the agency representative be the executive director. However, it is important for both the Catholic Charities' executive director and the pastor to be involved in the partnership in some way.

The Catholic Charities liaison responsible for building relationships with the parishes will need to:

- Be assertive in seeking out and nurturing relationships with pastors and parish leaders in the diocese.
- Be effective in one-on-one meetings, so that both participants create fellowship where they can express their organization's concerns, strengths, and priorities in common language and learn those of the other organization.

- Create or utilize a system to facilitate follow up on the partnership.
- Be knowledgeable in Catholic social teaching and Catholic Church structure.

This approach can be applied regionally, with multiple Catholic Charities liaisons taking responsibility for a region of the diocese. The parish social ministry program of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rockville Centre has developed a regional liaison structure. (To learn more, see the *Spotlight on Rockville Centre* at [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1284](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1284)).

A second approach to building relationships is to convene groups of parish leaders, which provides an opportunity for Catholic Charities parish social ministry staff to listen to their shared concerns, priorities, and successes and to share those of Catholic Charities. The agency may convene the pastors as key stakeholders or ask that parishes designate a representative to attend the parish convenings. This designee takes responsibility for representing the interests of the parish and communicating the information gained at the convening with parish leadership. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington takes this approach and convenes parish leaders through its Parish Liaison Network. These convenings have a dual purpose: to engage the parishes as key stakeholders in the conversation about the work of Catholic Charities and to provide networking opportunities for the liaisons, who are often the parish social ministry leaders in their parishes.

Another relationship building strategy is for Catholic Charities to create a position (or positions) on the board of directors for pastors or parish leaders who represent the interests of parishes and facilitate communication with the parishes. Additionally, several agencies utilize a newsletter to keep parishes informed. While this is not an effective strategy on its own, it complements the other strategies quite well.

The advantage of these approaches is that they focus on creating a win-win situation for both the parish and the agency, and ultimately for the poor and vulnerable, by starting with a mutually beneficial relationship. Furthermore, these approaches ensure that the program that is created is based on both the priorities and the realities within the diocese.

The challenge of relationship building is that it is never complete. It begins at the outset of the partnership and continues indefinitely. Strong relationships that aim at institutionalizing a partnership are necessary if the program is to weather changes. This is especially important because people in the relationship change and new relationships are in constant need of nurturing.

### *Creating a Plan*

To develop a plan for a parish-agency partnership, the partners must work from a common understanding. One of the criticisms outlined in *Together in the Work for Justice* was that pastors found Catholic Charities initiatives irrelevant to the lives of their people. At the root of this

problem was a disconnect between the vision of Catholic Charities and the vision of the parish. Author Samuel Hose explains, “Many Catholic Charities’ agency personnel take their vision from a broad view of Catholic social teaching. Pastors tend to build their visions upon the realities of the lives of the people in their parishes. Between these two visions there often lies a gulf of lack of connection and misunderstanding.”<sup>13</sup> That gulf can only be overcome when effort is given by both parties to understand the other’s vision and to develop a plan together from that understanding. Hose suggests the following:

Start where [pastors] are. The parish vision must come from them. Talk to them. Listen to them. Try to learn what they see as important for the people of their parishes. All pastors have hearts for charity and justice. Let the pastor tell you how he would like to see those things developing within his parish community and start there in support of his vision.<sup>14</sup>

After starting with the vision of the pastor or parish, the partners should then consider the following in developing a plan:

- *The agency mission.* Does it articulate Catholic Charities’ role to be a catalyst in the community for social ministry? Does it identify a connection to the Church or parishes?
- *The vision of key players.* This includes the vision of the bishop, pastors, executive director, and board. What are their visions for the partnership? How do these visions come together?
- *The needs, resources, and capabilities of the parishes and Catholic Charities in the diocese.* Have you thought creatively and comprehensively about the strategic advantages of parishes and agencies? Have the right parish people been consulted to determine their strategic advantages?
- *The role of other diocesan offices in social ministry.* In some dioceses, there are several offices or organizations that support parishes in doing social ministry (e.g. Respect Life, St. Vincent de Paul, or the Catholic Campaign for Human Development) and have an interest in getting support and engagement from the parishes. Are they potential partners? Can we all partner in meaningful ways that help advance the Catholic social mission?
- *The input and capabilities of staff.* If the person who will be responsible for coordinating the partnership and/or directing the parish social ministry program is already on staff, what are his or her perspectives and strengths?
- *Infrastructure to support the partnership.* Catholic Charities agencies, parishes, and other diocesan offices may function very differently. What infrastructure (e.g. procedures, opportunities and written agreements) will make it possible to partner in meaningful, respectful ways?

Seeking these answers will provide direction to the process of creating a plan for a unique parish-agency partnership in your diocese. Don't underestimate the importance of seeking input and buy-in from parish leadership, clerical and lay, from the beginning.

If building a formal partnership between the parishes and the agencies is new, the two steps of relationship building and creating the plan should happen simultaneously. In initial conversations, the Catholic Charities agency should expect to spend time listening to the current initiatives and concerns of the parish related to its social mission and educating the parish on its initiatives and priorities. At the same time, Catholic Charities should be very clear about the process that they are going through to create a plan to formalize a partnership between the parishes and agency or to establish a parish social ministry program.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

Building partnerships with parishes is not without its challenges. Meaningful, effective collaboration is difficult. There are five main challenges to building parish-agency partnerships:

*Resource limitations.* While resource limitations are a reality for all Catholic Charities' programs, the lack of adequate funding is a particular concern for parish partnerships. The vast majority of parish partnerships are financed through funds that Catholic Charities receives from diocesan and church support. That contribution is precious because it is generally unrestricted funding, and unrestricted funding is often needed to supplement grants for other programs. Furthermore, diocesan and church support accounts for only a small percentage of the total agency budget, only four percent of total income in 2007.<sup>15</sup> With so little funding available for parish partnerships or parish social ministry programs, Catholic Charities agencies have creatively responded by successfully seeking funding from Catholic foundations to support efforts like establishing a parish social ministry program, as is the case with Catholic Charities of Little Rock, or through government grants made available through the Faith-Based Initiative to provide services in partnership with parishes, as was the case with Catholic Charities of Central New Mexico.

*Number of parishes and geographic size of the diocese.* No matter the size of the diocese, size is always mentioned as a challenge. While Catholic Charities of Idaho garners sympathy, size isn't the only challenge. Others include the number of parishes; the diversity among the parishes; the combination of rural, urban, and suburban parishes; the terrain, and so forth. The underlying concern is that building relationship takes time and a personal touch, and this is made more of a challenge when parishes are numerous, spread out, and diverse. The agencies who have made the most headway in building partnerships have taken a number of years to do so, and they have sought out the most receptive parishes first in order to build momentum.

*Organizational interest.* Both parishes and agencies are predisposed to meeting their own organization's needs, though the concerns that pull agencies and parishes away from a partnership



of mutuality are often legitimate. Parishes are responsible for the provision of sacraments, the proclamation of the word of God, and the communal life of the church in addition to parish social ministry. Catholic Charities agencies are responsible to clients, funders, government and social work professional standards, the bishop and a board of directors. Trying to balance all of these responsibilities can cause parishes and agencies to pull back on the partnership or to focus solely on how the other partner can help their efforts. This causes parishes and agencies to seek quick alternatives to collaboration. Hose noticed the impact of organizational interest from both parishes and agencies:

Many pastors report only an indistinct understanding of what Catholic Charities does in their dioceses. In addition, as with all diocesan offices, pastors see Catholic Charities as being there to support them in their work with parishes. However, as was reported almost universally, pastors perceive diocesan and Catholic Charities offices as seeking primarily to bring them into conformity, support and participation in their programs – programs mostly devised and implemented without input from or consultation with the very pastors who are expected to buy into them.<sup>16</sup>

This comment accentuates the difficulty of establishing partnerships of mutuality. They are time-intensive and need to be built on relationships and shared vision. Only when these things come together can the partnership support the organizational interest of both entities.

*Differing standard operating procedures.* The differing standard operating procedures of Catholic Charities agencies and of parishes can create challenges. Caring for each other and working for justice are becoming increasingly professionalized in Catholic Charities at a much faster rate than in parishes. Catholic Charities agencies are being held to increasingly tighter standards through improving social work practice and by meeting foundation, government, or accreditation requirements. Catholic Charities agencies receive, on average, 65 percent of their total income from government revenue.<sup>17</sup> This revenue comes with stipulations and requirements. In addition, foundation grants and accreditation standards are placing restrictions on how Catholic Charities agencies function. Parishes are also coming under increased scrutiny, especially related to financial management, but there continues to be more freedom for parishes than Catholic Charities. Further, parishes are looking to make meaningful contributions to the work of Catholic Charities, but as service delivery changes and as more agencies engage in advocacy, short-term, well-respected volunteer opportunities like helping in a soup kitchen are being replaced with long-term or complex opportunities like being a refugee sponsor family or a legislative advocate. Getting parish volunteers for the second category requires more recruitment and organization.

*Multiple diocesan social ministry organizations.* There are several diocesan ministries that derive their mission from the Catholic social mission, e.g. Respect Life, Peace & Justice, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, and St. Vincent de Paul. Each of these ministries needs support and engagement of parishioners for their programs. These min-

istries may be run by Catholic Charities or by other organizations, such as the chancery. When the social ministry efforts are run by different organizations, competition for parish support and engagement can occur.

Through experience gained over decades, Catholic Charities agencies have learned the following valuable lessons for dealing with these challenges:

- Keep grounded in the shared mission.
- Manage expectations by committing to only what you can complete and be flexible enough to accommodate legitimate requests from pastors or parishes.
- Make a long-term commitment—relationships are fundamental to success and take time and a personal touch to build.
- Seek a relationship with pastors, even though they will probably not be the liaison to the partnership.
- Write up an agreement which lays out the expectations of the partnership to ensure mutuality and accountability.
- Collaborate at the diocesan level with organizations that have similar missions so that efforts don't compete for parish time, talent, and treasure, but complement one another and help the parish to pursue its parish social ministry vision.
- When possible, separate the responsibility of building the relationship from other Catholic Charities functions (e.g. running a parish social ministry program, recruiting volunteers for Catholic Charities programs, raising money for Catholic Charities). It is difficult to stay true to the mutuality of the partnership while being responsible to specific program outcomes.

Every parish partnership or parish social ministry program is different, so these strategies need to be adapted to fit each situation.

In creating a parish partnership, it is important to remember that parishes are making a contribution to caring for the poor and working for justice in their own right, and that these efforts need respect and nurturing. Further, parishes have a vision for social ministry and this vision will need to be taken into special consideration while developing a plan for the partnership. And last, when partnerships between Catholic Charities and parishes are strategic, respectful, and systematic, they can be powerful agents for creating synergy that can protect the life and dignity of more people.



## STRATEGIES FOR PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY PROGRAMS

As we talked with parish social ministry professionals across the country, we found an abundance of successful parish social ministry efforts. In the Houma-Thibodaux Diocese in Louisiana, parish disaster response teams are critical partners in hurricane disaster response and recovery efforts. In New Hampshire, the Diocese of Manchester has kept hurricane victims in the hearts and minds of parishioners by organizing volunteer group trips to help in the demolition and reconstruction in the wake of the disaster. In the Archdiocese of Miami, parishioners, enlivened by the JustFaith program, support the efforts of the tomato pickers of Immokalee, who have carried out a successful national organizing campaign to gain better wages and working conditions for farm workers. In the Diocese of Rockville Centre, in New York, Catholic Charities was able to turn to parishes when a police bust uncovered several human trafficking victims in desperate need of solace. Parish social ministers from across the state of Texas came together with Catholic Charities to take angel food cakes to the state legislators with a simple message, “Be an angel, be mindful of those living in poverty.” Some parishes with sophisticated social ministry programs are providing in-take services to people in the community, while others are hosting difficult discussions and encouraging action on some of the most polarizing social justice issues of our time: abortion, immigration, war, racism, and health care.

One thing that each of these parish efforts has in common is the support of a Catholic Charities parish social ministry program. In this chapter, we will focus on what parish social ministry programs do and how they do it. We begin by looking at the responsibilities of parish social ministry programs. In the 2007 Catholic Charities Annual Survey, Catholic Charities agen-

cies identified the responsibilities of their parish social ministry programs. The following diagram is a list of those responsibilities and the number of parish social ministry programs that do them.

Diagram III: Responsibilities of a Parish Social Ministry Program

Responsibilities	Agencies
Build partnerships with parishes in your diocese	155
Promote formation on the Catholic social mission	112
Raise awareness of parish social ministry (e.g., educating pastors and parish leadership on what parish social ministry is and why it is important)	109
Coordinate Catholic Campaign for Human Development efforts or promote community organizing and economic development	96
Build capacity for parish social ministry (e.g., training or consultation on how to structure social ministry in the parish and engage the parish community)	94
Facilitate networking between parish-based social ministry staff and volunteers for best practices sharing and problem solving	94
Collaborate with the St. Vincent de Paul Society	94
Coordinate a referrals line for social services, specifically for people in need who come to parishes	93
Coordinate volunteer recruitment between Catholic Charities and parishes	88
Coordinate Catholic Relief Services efforts or promote global solidarity	74 <sup>18</sup>

Managing these responsibilities can be very challenging for parish social ministry programs, especially when they have additional responsibilities, such as running the Justice for Immigrants campaign, or are responsible for managing several components of the parish-agency partnership: recruiting volunteers or raising funds from the parishes. It can also be quite challenging when the staff members of parish social ministry programs are the directors of diocesan pro-

grams like the Catholic Campaign for Human Development or Catholic Relief Services. Each of these programs brings unique responsibilities and makes the program accountable to other constituencies.

Parish social ministry programs have found ways to deal with these challenges by creating strategies that enable them to accomplish several responsibilities through one approach. In our analysis of agency PSM programs, we found that there are four general strategies: education, mobilization, consultation, and convening. In some dioceses, the agency focuses on one strategy, while in others, the agency melds multiple strategies within an overall program.

### Education Strategy

The education strategy focuses on the formation, training, and development of parish staff and volunteers. A standardized curriculum is developed to educate parish staff and volunteers about the Catholic faith tradition's call to action on behalf of the vulnerable, the structure for parish social ministry within the parish, and the skills necessary for an effective social ministry. After completing the curriculum, parish staff and volunteers are encouraged to become the leaders of their parish's social ministry efforts.

Catholic Charities agencies utilizing the education strategy uses two principal approaches. In a formal approach, the parish social ministry program teaches a course open to all parishes. In some cases, the course is offered in conjunction with a local university or college, and those completing it become certified parish social ministers. In a more informal approach, Catholic Charities parish social ministry programs make available a course of study for small faith-sharing groups to utilize in a parish. For example, the Building Communities of Salt and Light program developed by Peggy Prevoznik Heins has been used for this purpose. These courses form parish staff and volunteers on the foundational Catholic teaching that provides the basis for parish social ministry and instruct participants on a vision for parish social ministry, a model for organizing parish social ministry, and the skills needed to be a parish social ministry leader. The JustFaith program is a variation of this informal approach. It focuses primarily on forming participants by helping them evaluate reality through the lens of Catholic social teaching.

The advantage of utilizing the education strategy is that it offers a consistent model of parish social ministry within the diocese, which promotes a common understanding and facilitates communication, coordination, and growth throughout the diocese. The courses offered through the diocese provide parish social ministers with an intense level of training, connect them with peers across the diocese, and give them resources for the future. The accreditation given for completing the course adds a level of professionalization that garners respect for the ministry. Also, the small group approaches have the advantage of uniting a group of people within the parish who have a common understanding of parish social ministry and a shared experience. It is from these groups that the leaders of parish social ministry often emerge.

There are two disadvantages of the education strategy. The course requires a large amount of time and resources to train relatively few people in the diocese, and the small groups don't always get sufficient direction needed to organize a parish social ministry.

See the *Spotlight on Galveston-Houston* for a vibrant example of the education strategy at [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1280](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1280).

### Mobilization Strategy

The mobilization strategy focuses on channeling the Catholic voice into addressing social issues and advocating for justice. The strategy's first step is to educate the laity in Catholic social teaching and help people to understand how it relates to current social justice issues. The mobilization strategy facilitates opportunities for collective action and provides instruction on how to advocate. This process amplifies the church's position on important issues in the legislative process or in community organizing.

The principal ways that Catholic Charities parish social ministry programs mobilize parishioners are by:

- Creating a legislative network consisting of leaders throughout the diocese. At times, these networks will promote creation of affinity groups that focus on mobilizing around a particular issue.
- Coordinating events for parishioners to learn about and discuss how Catholic social teaching relates to current events and social justice issues.
- Hosting a lobby day, during which parishioners learn about issues relevant to the church and then visit legislative representatives to discuss those issues.

The advantage of this approach is that it engages the laity in social change by focusing on the development of skills that individuals need in the public sphere. Significant attention can be given to helping people understand the implications of action and inaction, developing advocacy skills, and preparing for conflict.

The disadvantage of this approach is that it does not help develop a complete picture of social ministry in the parish community. It does not help a parish organize to meet the needs of people through direct service or global solidarity. This strategy is good to use when there is other support for charitable work or if parishes are doing a good job creating these efforts on their own. Further, forms of social ministry that engage people in social action, like legislative advocacy or community organizing, tend to engage fewer people in the work because of their political nature and the advocacy skills they require.

For an example of the effective use of the mobilization strategy, see *Spotlight on St. Paul-Minneapolis* at [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1283](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1283).

### Consultation Strategy

The consultation strategy focuses on providing assistance and resources to individual parishes or a parish cluster to develop social ministry. The result is a parish social ministry that is tailored to the parish's priorities and unique situation. Typically, the parish requests the assistance of the agency's parish social ministry staff members, who then meet with the pastor, parish council, or parish social ministry committee. During this meeting, or series of meetings, the parish social ministry staff members listen to the concerns, needs, and resources of the parish and then help parish leadership create a parish social ministry that reflects those concerns, needs, and resources. The PSM staff also connects the parish leadership to resources that can be used to help the parish meet its social ministry goals.

The consultation strategy is common where there are few parish social ministry program staff members or where there is a wide range of diversity among the parishes in the diocese. The consulting process requires that the parish social ministry program staff provide a clear and concise picture of parish social ministry, depict its purpose and centrality, facilitate a process to design a parish social ministry effort, and connect parishioners with information, programs, and resources that can help them meet their goals.

The advantage of this approach is that the parish determines its own priorities and structure, which leads to greater ownership of the effort.

The disadvantage of this approach is that there is no consistent model of parish social ministry within the diocese. A consistent model would promote common understanding, communication, coordination, and growth throughout the diocese.

For an example of the consultation strategy at work, see *Spotlight on Wilmington* at [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1282](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1282).

### Convening Strategy

The convening strategy focuses on bringing together the social ministry leaders in the diocese who are both parish and diocesan staff and volunteers. The parish leaders come together to:

- Develop skills for parish social ministry,
- Learn about resources available to them,
- Network and share best practices with other parish leaders and the diocesan social ministry staff who are able to support their ministry,

- Do social analysis on current events and social justice issues and learn how to create an environment for the parish community to have a similar dialogue, and
- Create a community of support and prayer.

The parishioners are sent back to their parishes better equipped and rejuvenated to be social ministry leaders. The convening strategy can be very effective as a collaborative effort between several diocesan social ministry offices. Diocesan leaders can create an opportunity to discuss with parish leaders their organizational initiatives and invite people to evaluate, join, and recruit for them. The diocesan leaders also gain a better understanding of the needs and capabilities of the parish social ministry efforts in the diocese.

Parish social ministry leaders can be convened in numerous ways. Some dioceses sponsor social ministry gatherings, which are targeted at parish social ministry leaders and people who are interested in learning more about parish social ministry. These gatherings often strive to meet all of the purposes listed above.

The Catholic Charities USA Parish Social Ministry Regional Training program subsidizes such gatherings for Catholic Charities agencies that work together with neighboring dioceses to sponsor a training of this type on the regional level. Diocesan leaders have found that consistency in these gatherings can be very helpful, and so many are holding these gatherings on an annual basis. For example, Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Wilmington conducts an annual social concerns and networking day.

Such gatherings can stand alone or work in conjunction with smaller meetings that are held more frequently and focus on one or two of the purposes. For example, the topic of one gathering might be Faithful Citizenship, while the topic of another might be dealing with emergency services as the weather turns colder and heating bills become a concern. Generally, these smaller meetings target a smaller audience, e.g. the parish social ministry leader of each parish in a specific diocese or deanery.

The convening strategy has three principal advantages. First, it helps to build a community through which people support and assist one another in the ministry. Second, the parish social ministry program director at Catholic Charities can rely on the expertise of the group or of an expert who is brought in to help meet the challenges of parish social ministry. Third, it facilitates collaboration between diocesan social ministry offices.

The disadvantage of this approach is that the convening becomes more effective only when there are multiple opportunities to come together; skill development is reinforced, community building is strengthened, and steep learning curves level as the group continues to come together. This is a challenge because many social ministry leaders are volunteers and are not able to attend as many functions as staff.



For examples of multiple convening activities, see *Spotlight on Trenton* at [www.catholiccharities-usa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1281](http://www.catholiccharities-usa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1281).

### Multiple Strategies

Most of the Catholic Charities agencies we visited used several strategies in their parish social ministry program. In that way, the program provides multiple opportunities for the parishes to engage in parish social ministry. Furthermore, modeling several strategies at the agency level may encourage parishes to pursue multiple strategies.



The following diagram summarizes and analyzes the strategies used by parish social ministry programs.

Diagram IV: Analysis of Parish Social Ministry Program Strategies

Strategy	Purpose	Advantage	Disadvantage
<b>Education</b>	Forms and trains leaders in Catholic social teaching and a standard model of parish social ministry	Offers a consistent model of parish social ministry in the diocese	Requires a lot of time and resources to train a few people and may result in participants not getting sufficient direction
<b>Mobilization</b>	Channels the Catholic voice to address social issues and advocate for justice	Engages the laity in social change by focusing on developing skills and social analysis	Neglects the direct service and global solidarity functions of parish social ministry
<b>Consultation</b>	Facilitates the process of a parish or parish cluster as they develop parish social ministry	Results in a program that meets the parish's own priorities and structure	Produces no consistent model of parish social ministry within the diocese
<b>Convening</b>	Brings together the social ministry leaders for training, spiritual development, networking, and community building	Builds community and facilitates collaboration	Can provide leaders with insufficient direction without ongoing support
<b>Multiple Strategies</b>	Utilizes multiple approaches to focus on different responsibilities	Builds community and facilitates collaboration	Can cause a program to overreach by pursuing too many strategies

### Parish Social Ministry Program Staff—Skills and Knowledge

Despite high expectations for building relationships and implementing program strategies, few programs have many parish social ministry staff. Catholic Charities agencies have a mean average of 4.6 PSM staff members and a median average of one staff person doing parish social

ministry per agency. There are a few programs with several staff; they are some of the network's most sophisticated and longest running programs.

Given this reality, it is critical that each staff member have the skills and knowledge necessary to build and maintain partnerships with parishes. It is also critical that they have the additional skills required by the different program strategies. The following are designed to spark ideas for Catholic Charities agencies looking to fill parish social ministry program positions.

All parish social ministry program staff need:

- Extensive knowledge of parish social ministry and the ability to promote and articulate its vision and theology in language that can be understood by multiple audiences.
- Knowledge of Catholic social teaching and Catholic Church structure.
- The ability to build partnerships within the agency, diocese, and community to support parish social ministry.

Because each of the parish social ministry program strategies requires a different set of additional skills, an agency must consider first which type of strategies it will pursue or define the specific role of the parish social ministry program staff person.

- Agency PSM programs using the Education Strategy should look for staff members that can:
- Create, modify, commission, and/or update curriculum for parish social ministry pertinent to the diocesan reality.
- In the case of a course, coordinate recruitment, speakers, integration of learning styles, and logistics of training.
- In case of a small group process, coordinate recruitment, distribution, and facilitator training and assistance.

Agency PSM programs using the Mobilization Strategy should look for staff members that have:

- Extensive knowledge of the legislative process and Catholic Church teaching on social issues.
- Knowledge of partner organizations that do legislative analysis and are supported by your local ordinary, e.g. Catholic Charities USA, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Agency PSM programs using the Consultation Strategy should look for staff members that can:

- Market training opportunities and best practices and resources.
- Assess the parish situation and support a process wherein the parish recognizes the most effective strategies it can take to promote parish social ministry.

Agency PSM programs using the Convening Strategy should look for staff members that can:

- Organize events that engage parish social ministers and assist in their work.
- Train parish social ministers on skill development and Catholic social teaching

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

Just as there are challenges in building partnerships with parishes, as addressed in the previous chapter, there are challenges in running parish social ministry programs. First, there isn't broad-based understanding or acceptance of Catholic Charities role to be a catalyst of social ministry in the diocese. Some Catholic Charities executives, boards, and employees find it difficult to understand why Catholic Charities is involved in a program that works with parishes rather than doing social service or advocacy. Others think the purpose of the parish social ministry program is to facilitate the partnership between parishes and agencies. Secondly, parish social ministry programs are leadership development programs. As such, they train parishes to develop their own priorities for parish social ministry, priorities that may not match those of the agency. Finally, with many responsibilities and limited staff and resources, parish social ministry programs run the risk of stretching too far to be effective.

Catholic Charities agencies have learned the following valuable lessons for dealing with these challenges:

- Ground the program in Catholic identity and teach employees, volunteers, and the board about the Catholic faith tradition to explain that caring for one another and working for justice are primarily a responsibility of the individual faithful. As a part of the church, Catholic Charities needs to support parishes and individuals in their effort to live out this mission, rather than to take on the responsibility for them or to act on the mission in isolation from them.
- Reinforce the importance of keeping a parish-agency partnership based on mutuality to the Catholic Charities staff person responsible for building the relationship and evaluate the person on outcomes that reinforce mutuality.
- Educate parishes on issues of importance to the church and facilitate opportunities for parishes to make a meaningful impact in those areas.
- Prioritize the parish social ministry program responsibilities and utilize fewer strategies that help the program meet the most important responsibilities most effectively.



## MOVING FORWARD

Catholic Charities will always be needed as a catalyst and collaborator in social ministry in the local church. The challenge for us will be to collaborate with people of good will and the parish in ways that recognize the unique contribution of each partner and that complement one another. Catholic Charities must continue to take care that it doesn't unintentionally relieve the faithful of their baptismal responsibility to stand with Christ in need. We will need to seek connections with one another continually and to reflect on our shared mission to live out the Gospel in continually changing circumstances. As we move forward, parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs can continue to be successful if we face the challenges that come our way, rely on one another for help, and stay grounded in our mission.

Two important trends are already beginning to impact Catholic Charities and parishes as they work together. The first trend relates to the sweeping changes in leadership and membership taking place today in the Catholic Church in the United States. The number of priests and religious is decreasing, even as the number of Catholics is increasing. Since 1965, the number of priests has decreased by 31 percent.<sup>19</sup> The number of religious is decreasing at even a more rapid rate. And there is no sign that this trend will slow. In fact, there were less than half the number of priestly ordinations in 2008 as there was in 1965.<sup>20</sup> During this same period, the Catholic population has grown 41 percent.<sup>21</sup> This significant growth can be explained in large part by immigration. Thus, as the Catholic population grows, it is diversifying. The impact of this trend is already being felt by most dioceses, with parish clustering and multi-parish pastoring becoming commonplace. Dioceses are adjusting to meet the sacramental needs of diverse populations by, for example, offering the sacraments in multiple languages each week.

As we move forward, parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs can continue to be successful if we face the challenges that come our way, rely on one another for help, and stay grounded in our mission.

How these sweeping changes in leadership and membership will affect the relationships between parishes and agencies is as yet unknown. We do know that the effects of these changes have been experienced within Catholic Charities for some time. With a declining number of priest and religious leaders, it has been more difficult to find leaders with the same level of theological formation. That being said, formation is not enough. A leader must also be trained for the role. Furthermore, in light of a diverse Catholic population and a young adult population that isn't as connected to the church, the leader must also create a welcoming space in which different ideas may be shared and in which people may develop.

Securing formed, trained, and welcoming leaders is a challenge that all church organizations share. Catholic Charities agencies, though, have decades of experience in empowering lay ministers to the work of the church. These leaders have taken on professional positions of authority and leadership and are leading some of the most diverse organizations in the church. With this experience, Catholic Charities has something extremely valuable to bring to the conversation about what it means to have the laity take on leadership roles within the church.

Catholic Charities does not, however, have broad experience with all of the implications of the change in leadership and membership in the church. Few parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs have experience with parish clusters, parish life coordinators, and multi-parish pastors. Progress has been slow in engaging minorities in leadership positions in parish social ministry and motivating youth and young adults in a way that inspires commitment to the faith. These are challenges that we will need to work on together.

The second trend relates to outcome measurements for parish social ministry. Parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs are increasingly being held to outcome based performance measurement requirements. Gone are the days when people donated without asking for results. Today, people invest their donations in an idea or a program that they believe will bring about the results that they want. Then they want evidence that these programs really work.

Measuring the performance of programs by assessing outcomes is not new to Catholic Charities agencies. Parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs, however, are some of the last programs to be required to meet performance measurement standards, primarily because outcomes management of these programs is more difficult. Partnerships and parish social ministry programs are long term and indirect in nature. They don't directly serve people in need or advocate for justice; they try to inspire people to act on the social mission and to build up the capacity of leaders to respond to need and injustice. In other words, there is an additional, time-consuming step in partnerships and parish social ministry programs that is not present for other social services. Furthermore, there hasn't been a broad-based need for reporting because most of the efforts are supported out of the general fund and because there are no reporting requirements, as there are for government or foundation funding.

Nonetheless, performance measurement strategies can be used to ensure that parish partnerships and parish social ministry programs are making progress toward their goals. In some dioceses, performance measurement is being used effectively to ensure that the programs are focused on achieving the intended result. Catholic Charities of Rockville Centre, for example, publishes an annual report that measures its parish social ministry program's performance. It measures outcomes like the number of parish social ministry programs, paid parish social ministry staff, and people served in the parishes in the diocese. Also, the Parish Social Ministry Office of Catholic Charities USA, which works with Catholic Charities parish social ministry programs as Catholic Charities programs work with parishes, reports to the Parish Social Ministry Professional Interest Section on the number and scope of parish social ministry programs throughout the Catholic Charities network.

The expectation for parish social ministry programs to show results will not end with donors and Catholic Charities agencies. It is likely that parishes will soon be held to similar scrutiny. Parishioners will want to know what their contributions are being used for and whether they are achieving the intended result. Catholic Charities will be able to show leadership to the parishes in its diocese if it has struggled with how to show the outcome for formation programs early.

To conclude, we want to emphasize the two most important strategies for success. These strategies are foundational to every idea in this report. Catholic Charities agencies will be successful in parish partnerships and parish social ministry if they follow them. First, Catholic Charities must stay committed to its vision to be a catalyst and collaborator of social ministry in the diocese. As a network of Catholic Charities, we must continue to come together as in *The Cadre Study* and *Vision 2000* to recommit to helping parishes and the individual faithful engage in the social mission of the Church. We must rediscover what this means for us as times change our relationship to one another and to the broader church. New generations of leaders will need to be formed and trained to take up the mantle in years to come.

Second, our greatest hope for adapting to changing realities will come as we continue to share and learn from one another. While this report must draw to a close, the discussion must continue, which is why we have created an interactive Web page to facilitate that discussion and sharing. Through this forum, we hope that parish social ministry professionals will share their ideas, challenges, and successes as we move forward.





## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love* (Vatican: Vatican Publishing House, 2005), 5.
- <sup>2</sup> *Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement* (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1992), 31. This document is more commonly referred to as The Cadre Study and was originally published in 1972 by the National Conference of Catholic Charities.
- <sup>3</sup> *Vision 2000* (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1997), 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Alexandra Peeler, *Parish Social Ministry: A Vision and Resource* (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 1985), xiii.
- <sup>5</sup> *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 2-4.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 2-4.
- <sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, 18.
- <sup>8</sup> *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children* (Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002), 2.
- <sup>9</sup> *Catholic Charities USA 2007 Annual Survey* (Washington, DC: Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2008), 110.
- <sup>10</sup> Alexandra Peeler, *Parish Social Ministry*, xxv-xxvi.
- <sup>11</sup> Pat Macy, interview by Rachel Lustig, December 10, 2007.
- <sup>12</sup> Samuel Hose, *Together in the Work for Justice: A Manual for Building and Sustaining Working Relationships with Pastors* (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 2005), 12.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 11.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 13.
- <sup>15</sup> *Catholic Charities Network at a Glance* (Alexandria, VA: Catholic Charities USA, 2008).
- <sup>16</sup> Samuel Hose, *Together in the Work for Justice*, 13.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 13.
- <sup>18</sup> *Catholic Charities USA 2007 Annual Survey*, 111.
- <sup>19</sup> *Frequently Requested Catholic Church Statistics* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2008), <http://cara.georgetown.edu/bulletin/index.htm#faq> (accessed October 13, 2008).
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.



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