

I. What is Parish Social Ministry?

The idea of Parish Social Ministry (PSM) was developed based on the USCCB document “Communities of Salt and Light” first published in 1994.

To put it simply, Parish Social Ministry (PSM) is the action that the faith community takes to live out the Gospel we proclaim and to grow in love with God and neighbor. By working with parishes, Parish Social Ministry aims to foster greater outreach and advocacy efforts, to educate parishioners to serve those who are poor and vulnerable, and to provide opportunities for spiritual growth.

PSM is deeply rooted in Scriptures, in our Sacraments, and in our rich tradition of our Church’s Social Doctrine. In *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), Pope Benedict XVI writes that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel” (no. 22). Proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity, he says, are “inseparable” (no. 25). In other words, there is an essential connection between our faith and the way we put love into action in the world. (Sacraments and Social Mission: Living the Gospel, Being Disciples)

Living our faith through service to others or perhaps seeing the face of Christ in our neighbors is not always easy. There can be many obstacles that stand in our path which can discourage us and weaken our resolve. A few obstacles may be:

- The need within our Parish and surrounding community seems too great. Where do we even start?
- We have an outreach committee,* but the volunteers have dwindled over the years to where only a select few are doing the work.
*Outreach committees can go by many names, examples would be; Peace and Justice, Social Concerns, Social Outreach, Outreach Committee, St. Vincent de Paul.
- We do a great job at providing charity to those in need within our local communities, but all our work seems to be only for the short term. It can be frustrating not seeing any lasting results.
- Our parish feels they are already doing enough and there is no need to learn more.

At Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, we want PSM to be a source of support for parishes, families, and individuals as they seek to live their faith. To live out the Gospel we proclaim, we must respond as best we can to the diversity of needs and injustices that impact our world, but to do this we must be strategic.

The PSM Toolkit is a resource for all parishes within the Archdioceses of Indianapolis to assist them in living out their baptismal call to love their neighbor. Included in the PSM Toolkit are ideas for how to start a new PSM Team or perhaps strengthen the parish outreach team that is already in place within your parish. There are resource ideas on how to invite more volunteers, on the importance of parish communication, and on how to structure a productive meeting that goes beyond just reporting numbers. This Toolkit also emphasizes the importance of ongoing spiritual formation, not only for the

“Parishes are the home of the Christian community; they are the heart of our Church. Parishes are the place where God’s people meet Jesus in word and sacrament and come in touch with the source of the Church’s life... But until now, we have not specifically addressed the crucial role of parishes in the Church’s social ministry... we are convinced that the local parish is the most important ecclesial setting for sharing and acting on our Catholic social heritage.”
(USCCB, Communities of Salt and Light, 1994)

PSM Team, but for the parish in general. It is through ongoing spiritual formation that we learn the reasons we are called to love, encounter and become a sign of Christ's love to each person we meet.

Pope Francis stated in his message on the First World Day of the Poor,

"We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our occasional volunteer work or of impromptu acts of generosity that appease our conscience. However good and useful such acts may be for making us sensitive to people's needs and the injustices that are often their cause, they ought to lead to a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a way of life"

(Pope Francis -Message for the First World Day of the Poor, n. 3).