

TWO FEET OF SOCIAL MINISTRY

(Not either – or, but both – and)

Institutional Change



Direct Service



When you are finished doing volunteer work in a Direct Service project, have your group sit down and do a Social Inquiry (analysis).

- Observe:**
1. Why are these people hungry (homeless, poorly educated, without medical insurance, in need of clothing, unemployed/underemployed)?
 2. What are the causes of this/these problems?
 3. What are the other facts or observations we need?

Judge: What can we do to empower these folks to remove some or all of these causes?

Act: What shall we do next, so that we are not just dealing with symptoms, but helping to make institutional (permanent, long-range) change?

“Christians...are called by God to be involved in the world in order to transform it according to the Gospel...these duties include positively contributing to the establishment of just laws and structures that foster human values.” Pope John Paul II, Nairobi, 1980

“Charity is no substitute for justice withheld.” St. Augustine

“The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church’s social doctrine does not exhaust one’s responsibility to the common good.” Pope Benedict XVI

It takes TWO FEET to walk; otherwise we lose our balance. It's not either – or, but both – and.

If we use direct service foot we could make matters worse by fostering dependency.

If we use only the institutional change foot, we might become too far removed from the realities of the situation. A true Christian lifestyle requires of us that we live in solidarity with those in need and come to their assistance in emergencies. We cannot isolate ourselves.

Direct Service can provide us with the data needed for institutional changes: extent and kind of need, workable solutions, a greater sense of urgency.

Direct service is sometimes called “charity.” Institutional change is “working for justice.” There can be no love without justice. If we really love someone, we want them to have what is rightfully theirs and to be all that God intended them to be. If we really love, we will work to change structures, systems, laws and policies which are harmful to people.

Empowerment of low-income people and self-determination is our goal wherever possible. Self-help is our priority, helping people to become self-sufficient whenever possible.

SOME OTHER FUNCTIONS OF PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

TO ACHIEVE POLICY CHANGE:

In rural parishes, promote National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC),
4625 N.W. Beaver Dr., Des Moines, IA, 50310, 515-270-2634, <http://www.ncrlc.com/>

Promote membership in and action with Pax Christi USA, an international Catholic peace movement, 532 W. 8th St., Erie, PA, 16502-1343, 814-453-4955,
<http://www.paxchristiusa.org/>

Promote membership in Bread for the World, which deals exclusively with institutional change to eliminate world hunger, 425 3rd Street SW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20024,
800-82-BREAD, <http://www.bread.org/>

Promote the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). Use CCHD educational materials; invite CCHD funded group leaders to speak at parish. 3211-4th St, NE,
Washington, DC, 20017-1194, (202) 541-3000 , <http://www.usccb.org/cchd/>

Participate with your state Catholic Conference to affect state legislation. Iowa Catholic Conference, 530 - 42nd St. Des Moines, IA 50312, 515-243-6256,
<http://www.iowacatholicconference.org/>

Participate in JustFaith, a program combining theology with study and action to develop people with hearts for social justice. P.O. Box 221348, Louisville, Kentucky 40252-1348, Tel: (502) 429-0865, <http://www.justfatih.org/>

A STORY: Once upon a time in a little parish built upon a river, the parishioners noticed human bodies floating down the river. They pondered several actions: moving the parish to get away from the problem; removing the bodies from the river and giving them a decent burial; setting up a clinic for those few that were still alive; or going to the head of the river to see what caused this tragedy and try to remove the causes. Which approach would you choose?

“Within the framework of your institutions...you will also want to seek out the structural reasons which foster or cause the different forms of poverty in the world and in your own country.”

Pope John Paul II, Yankee Stadium, October, 1979.