Parish Social Ministry Program

The Parish Social Ministry (PSM) program exists to provide education and advocacy for Catholic Social Teaching in parishes, schools, and local agencies. “The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.” The Church has a ‘threefold responsibility’ to proclaim the word of God, celebrate the Sacraments, and exercise the ministry of charity. “These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable” (God is Love - Pope Benedict XVI). These words from Pope Benedict tell of the need to put our faith into action, and this is the primary work of the PSM program.

The PSM program this past year was comprised of a team of three, which included the Director and two coordinators in the Worthington and Mankato Deaneries. The Director was responsible for the whole Diocese and oversight of the Coordinators. Last year was the first time there was a coordinator in the Mankato Deanery, while the position in Worthington has existed for many years. The Diocesan Social Concerns committee, formed five years ago, is a significant group in the work of PSM. There are currently nine members of this committee, which includes the PSM team. The Social Concerns Committee helps plot the direction of the work of PSM.

One of the primary focuses of the Social Concerns committee and the PSM team is to form small base communities at the parish level. Progress has been made in this area. At St. Catherine in Luverne, the Worthington coordinator expanded one bible study of about 10 people to four bible studies with a total number of 80. The Director has written two bible studies related to Catholic Social Teaching, which has been used by parishes in the Diocese. The bible studies are discussion based and focused on putting faith into action.

The Director formed a Social Concerns Committee, which is another example of a small base community, in his parish last year. The Coordinator in the Worthington Deanery helped form the group “Luv 1 Luv All” in Luverne, to create opportunities to help people move out of poverty by using issue teams covering various facets of poverty. The PSM team is available for any small groups who need direction and formation.

In February the Parish Social Ministry office coordinated the promotion and organization of the state wide event, “Catholics at the Capital.” This event was a great success with 184 Catholics from the Diocese of Winona-Rochester joining Catholics throughout Minnesota at the State Capital to be formed as advocates on issues important to Catholics. The numbers from our Diocese exceeded the goal of 170 set by the Minnesota Catholic Conference.

The Parish Social Ministry Office in consultation with the Social Concerns Committee organizes regional events in the Diocese. Last year with the coming election, a town hall meeting was held in Owatonna, with the focus on immigration. Two candidates for the U.S. Senate were on
the panel. A Town Hall meeting was held in April focused on the Driver’s License Bill for undocumented immigrants. The PSM office held 5 presentations in different parishes on Life and Dignity of the Human Person this past year. Both of the Deanery Coordinators hosted regional events bringing in speakers and leading groups in various areas of Catholic Social Teaching.

The Director is the contact person for the Rice Bowl collection, and for the funds held locally from that collection. These funds are distributed to local St. Vincent De Paul groups and other agencies for help to individuals who can’t pay utilities and other related financial issues. The Director is the contact for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) campaign that holds its collections in November. CCHD returns 25% locally to the “Works of Justice” fund. Six organizations in the Diocese were awarded funds in the past year.

Disaster Recovery falls under the jurisdiction of PSM. A payout was made to one household affected by the flash flood in June of 2018 of $1,000.

The Winona County Warming Center also falls under the jurisdiction of the PSM Director, who gives oversight of the Coordinator of this program. The Warming Center is an overnight shelter open during the winter months from November 1 until March 31 each year. The Warming Center provided overnight shelter to 53 different guests. The Warming Center, staffed by volunteers, was open every night, including the holiday season. There were 200 volunteers who logged 3,700 hours. There were many nights where the Center went above the capacity of the 10 it was set up for with the City’s permission. Next season we will operate at a capacity of 20, and additional staff will be hired to meet the needs of the growing numbers.