

Putting Faith in Action

Tom Parlin

Director of Parish Social Ministry

Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota

“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**)

In this excerpt from “God is Love,” we are given a mission to put our faith into action. Attending to the word and sacraments without putting our faith in action, means something is missing in our lives as Catholics. Conversely, attending to issues of social justice must be accompanied by a life of prayer, sacraments and the word of God.

The work of Parish Social Ministry in the Diocese of Winona is to be an advocate for and educator of Catholic Social Teaching. Catholic Social Teaching requires us to give particular attention to those in poverty, the refugee, and others who are in the margins of society. This excerpt from the Letter from James illustrates this point: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James: Chap 2: 14-16)

This past year, the Parish Social Ministry program has engaged in a number of activities within our diocese to put faith into action. Three examples are outlined below.

On September 27, 2017, Pope Francis launched the two year campaign entitled “Share the Journey” to bring into focus the plight of the refugees and immigrants. He encouraged the faithful to enter into an “encounter” with the displaced people in our society.

An encounter means to not only think of the refugees and immigrants in abstract terms as a population we need to help, but as individuals who we meet in person, who we might befriend. This year our Parish Social Ministry program sponsored immigration retreats in Iona (in the Worthington area) in August and in St. Charles in October. Our next immigration retreat will occur at St. Theodore’s Parish in Albert Lea on March 10. By bringing together Hispanic and Anglo persons we move from the abstract to the real. We encounter each other as persons. We share our stories and perspectives; and in doing that we gain understanding.

Our faith requires us to enter into the political arena to affect change that is socially just. To that end, the Minnesota Catholic Conference advocates for issues at the state capital that advances

Catholic Social Teaching. In our diocese we are forming networks of active Catholics to lobby our local politicians on important issues. District leaders, faithful Catholics throughout our diocese, have been appointed to form teams of other Catholics to meet with their state representatives and senators to advance our Catholic positions. District leaders need other Catholics to join in this work. Contact our office if you would like to be put in touch with your District Leaders.

It is important to be educated in Catholic Social Teaching in order to engage in activities that help us live our faith. To that end, the Parish Social Ministry office has written an eight week Bible study on Catholic Social Teaching. During Lent the Bible studies are being piloted in Winona for St. Mary's, St. Casimir's and Cathedral, in Mankato at Sts. Peter and Paul, and Cotter Catholic High School in Winona. This Bible study is now available free of charge for other parishes and Catholic Schools who would like to engage in this study, with support and training from the Parish Social Ministry office. Contact our office if you would like to know more about this opportunity.

The work of Parish Social Ministry in advocacy and education in the area of Catholic Social Teaching is challenging and is never finished. Jesus' call from Matthew chapter 25 that says, "What you did to the least of these little ones you did for me," is a challenge and call to reach beyond our comfort zones and help the "least" in the kingdom of God.