

To: Father Daniel Greenleaf
From: The Social Justice and Peace Commission
Re: Update on work of the Commission

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) reminds us that "...at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centered on charity."(177) "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid." (187) In all places and circumstances, Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor...." (191)

With this in mind the Commission on Social Justice and Peace accepts the responsibility of serving as an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor. The Commission has been given responsibility by the pastor of the Parish of the Holy Eucharist to assist the needy where possible and appropriate. To date our work with the poor has usually been around the issues of shelter, heat, water, food and transportation. We recognize that additional needs may also be present, for example mental health issues, but have found that other agencies are better equipped to handle those needs. The Commission works with other Social Service agencies in the area, whenever possible, when addressing requests.

At times the Commission is notified of a need because someone contacts the Parish Office or the pastor for help. At other times the Commission may be notified by a parish member, community member or another agency of a need or a request may come from a community or state office (General Assistance for instance), or another church group (Catholic or non-Catholic). Our Commission seeks to be proactive in learning of the needs of our own parishioners by reaching out to our parishioners to let them know that help is available for themselves or others who are in need. Our support of Catholics in need has extended to other parishes in our Diocese and beyond. Our greatest effort being our outreach to our sister parish in Haiti. Believing in "life in community and engagement with others", we have also assisted non parish members in our surrounding communities and supported other organizations and agencies that provide direct support to the needy.

Desperation of need determines priority. All requests are reviewed and evaluated in terms of worthiness. A recommendation is made and information is provided to the Pastor (or designee) who makes the final decision as to what type/amount of help will be provided. Action will be then taken by the Finance Office to make payment. The assessment is done by a Commission member and/or other parishioner. The

action/recommendation is always reported to the Commission Chairperson. Specific details --name, address, circumstances-- will be held in confidentiality within the Commission/Parish group. It will be shared with others only when necessary for a proper evaluation. At this time (September 2015), Linda Morrisette of the Commission is the principal person responsible for this activity.

The financial reserves available to the Social Justice and Peace Commission are divided into four categories and are labeled in the budget as fuel assistance, needy assistance, Haiti Project and Social Justice and Peace Commission operating account . **At present we do not provide funds directly to individuals (other than gift cards for specific needs). We pay for services. We do not limit an amount given to any one person. The amount provided depends on the circumstances.** In the past fuel monies have been spent on heating assistance and insulation/weatherizing. Our general assistance monies are used for all other purposes (other than Haiti). It is felt by Commission members that it is important that there be transparency in the Parish as to how monies are spent. To that end we feel that Parish members should be given an accounting (while protecting the privacy of recipients) of how monies are used. Commission members would like to recommend that in the future when undesignated funds are received from the parish for charitable work that they be deposited in a General Needy Account (combination of the present needy and fuel accounts). At present most donations that are made are done so in the name of fuel assistance (a limited category). Parish members would need to be informed that in the future money collected for the needy will be used for a variety of purposes.

The procedure presently followed, with regard to financial requests, involves initially a request for parish assistance. These funds (Fuel and Needy accounts) are derived mainly from donations by parishioners. They may be offered directly to the pastor or donated through the offertory. Haiti money comes to us through monthly collections made at all four churches, individual donations and from support provided by a Foundation. The Commission receives approximately \$600.00 each year from the Finance Council to be used for any purpose deemed appropriate by the Commission to do the work of the Commission. The Finance Office provides timely information on these balances to the Commission. The Commission accepts and disburses this money as designated funds. If money is received from the Fuel Account it is used to make a payment for heating oil, natural gas, propane, or electricity (when used for the purpose of providing heat) or for firewood or other wood-based compounds. It is our understanding that weatherizing of homes can no longer be included in this category. Needy Assistance funds are usually used to pay rent (threat of eviction), pay electrical power bills (possible shut off), purchase food, provide basic items for health, comfort or daily functions needed for a person to earn a living or to provide safety for children. These items include (but are not limited to) clothing, household necessities, medication, and fresh food to supplement supplies available at Pantries. Assistance may be given for repair of a vehicle or for car insurance when a car is essential for holding a job. It

can also be used to purchase gas cards. In case the fuel fund is depleted, money from the needy fund can be used to cover heating expenses.

Recommendations:

When undesignated funds are received from the parish for charitable work it is our recommendation that they be deposited in a General Needy Account (combination of the present fuel and needy accounts). At present most donations that are made are done so in the name of fuel assistance (a limited category). With a General Needy Account it is our hope that we would be able to once again include weatherization projects. Parish members would need to be informed (under the new plan) that money collected for the needy will be used for a variety of purposes.

Our general assistance monies are used for all other purposes (other than Haiti). It is felt by Commission members that it is important that there be transparency in the Parish as to how monies are spent. To that end we feel that Parish members should be given an accounting (while protecting the privacy of recipients) of how monies are used.

The Commission also would like the pastor and the Parish Finance Council to consider the possibility of becoming a tithing parish.